

THE
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE
VERY REV. H. D. M. SPENCE, D.D.,

DEAN OF GLOUCESTER;

AND BY THE
REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

WITH
INTRODUCTIONS

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PSALMS.

Exposition
BY REV. G. RAWLINSON, M.A.,
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Homiletics
BY REV. E. R. CONDER, D.D.,
AND
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Homilies by Various Authors.
REV. W. FORSYTH, D.D. REV. S. CONWAY, B.A.
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THE BOOK OF PSALMS.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LVI.

THIS and the following have been called "twin psalms." They begin with the same words, are nearly of the same length, and have each a refrain which divides them into two portions. Formally, the chief difference between the two is that Ps. lvi. has an epilogue, or appendix (vers. 12, 13), after the second refrain, to which there is nothing correspondent in Ps. lvii. Both psalms were written under circumstances of great distress, and the tone of thought in them is very similar. Each begins with complaint, and earnest prayer for deliverance, while each ends with praise and triumph.

The present psalm has a very complex heading, or "title." First, it is addressed, like most of the other psalms of this book, "to the chief musician," or "precentor." Then it is said to be "On the silent dove of far-off regions." Thirdly, it is called "Michtam of David," which some explain as "a golden psalm composed by David." And fourthly, the occasion of its composition is declared to have been "the seizure of David by the Philistines in Gath." David's authorship may readily be accepted, for the psalm is, as Ewald says, "one of the most beautiful in the Psalter." And the occasion is not to be lightly set aside; since, although no seizure of David by the Philistines of Gath is mentioned in 1 Samuel, such an event is quite conceivable; while no compiler or editor of a late date would have ventured to interpolate such a fact into the accepted history of David. The "silent dove" is, no doubt, David himself,

PSALMS—II.

who had wished for "the wings of a dove" (Ps. lv. 6), and was compelled to be silent while he was in captivity.

Ver. 1.—*Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; literally, man panteth after me*—like a wild beast after his prey. The contrast is sharp between "man" (*enosh*, "weak man") and God (*Elohim*, "the Mighty One"). *He fighting daily oppresseth me; rather, all the day long is he fighting and oppressing me.*

Ver. 2.—*Mine enemies; literally, my watchers*—those who keep a continual guard over me. If David had been seized and made a prisoner by the Philistine lords, this expression would be very appropriate. *Would daily swallow me up; rather, pant after me all day.* For they be many that fight against me. The "lords of the Philistines" were, doubtless, "many;" they seem to have, all of them, opposed themselves to David (1 Sam. xxix. 2—9). *O thou Most High.* This rendering is now generally abandoned, since *márom* (מָרוֹם), "height," is nowhere else used in this sense. Dr. Kay, Hengstenberg, and the Revised Version render "proudly;" Professor Cheyne, "with high looks."

Ver. 3.—*What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee; literally, the day when I am afraid.* When the day comes that I feel fear stealing over me, by an act of will I (even I, weak as I am) will put my trust in thee (comp. Pss. vii. 1; xi. 1; xviii. 2, etc.).

Ver. 4.—*In God I will praise his word; rather, through God; i.e. "with God's help, by his grace,"* I am ready to praise whatever sentence he pronounces, whatever fiat goes forth from him. *In God I have put my trust* (so again, ver. 11). This is at once the refrain and the key-note of the psalm. In all dangers, in all troubles, whatever happens, whatever seems to be impending, the

B

psalmist will never relinquish his trust in the Almighty. I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. This is the true martyr spirit. Compare our Lord's words, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell" (Matt. x. 28).

Ver. 5.—Every day they wrest my words; rather, *all the day long they wrest (or, torture) my words*. They seek to give my words an evil meaning, and so to misrepresent me to Achish, their king. As Canon Cook says, "This description is singularly applicable to David's position among the envious nobles at the court of Achish. . . . Still, it does not speak of his having been actually arrested, and does not, therefore, seem to have suggested the inscription." All their thoughts are against me for evil. They are entirely bent on doing the psalmist some hurt. What they really seek is his life (ver. 6); but, short of that, they would gladly do him some mischief.

Ver. 6.—They gather themselves together, they hide themselves; or, "they gather themselves together; they set an ambush." They mark my steps, when they wait for my soul; literally, *they, even they, mark my steps*; i.e. they themselves, grand as they are, condescend to be spies, and track my footsteps.

Ver. 7.—Shall they escape by iniquity? Shall they escape God's judgments, the psalmist asks, by their iniquity? Assuredly not. God will prevent such an escape. In thine anger cast down the people, O God; literally, *the people*; i.e. the heathen generally, to whom David's enemies, the Gittites, belong. Though assured that they will not escape, the psalmist, to make assurance doubly sure, prays that they may not.

Ver. 8.—Thou tellest my wanderings; i.e. thou, O God, takest account of my wretched wandering life (1 Sam. xxi.—xxx.), and notest each occasion when I am forced to move from one city, or cave, or wilderness to another. Put thou my tears into thy bottle. Take also note of my tears—let them not pass unheeded. Rather, gather them drop by drop, and store them, as costly wine is stored, in a flask. The thought, thus dressed in a metaphor, was,

no doubt (as Professor Cheyne observes), "Store them up in thy memory." Are they not in thy book? i.e. hast thou not anticipated my request, and entered an account of every tear that I have shed, in thy book of records (comp. Ps. lxi. 28; cxxxix. 16)?

Ver. 9.—When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me; literally, *in the day that I call upon thee*.

Ver. 10.—In God will I praise his word; rather, *through God* (see the comment on ver. 4). In the Lord (rather, *through the Lord*) will I praise his word. Professor Cheyne looks upon this as "a feeble Jehovistic interpolation, which interrupts the refrain." But other commentators see in it a certain force.

Ver. 11.—In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Repeated word for word from ver. 4 (see the comment on that passage).

Vers. 12, 13.—The psalm ends with an expression of thankfulness to God for the deliverance, which is so confidently expected, that it is looked upon as assured, and even spoken of as past (ver. 13).

Ver. 12.—Thy vows are upon me, O God. The psalmist, under his affliction, has made vows to God; i.e. promises of thank offerings if God would come to his aid, and save him from his enemies. These vows he considers to be now due, and himself to be under the obligation of paying them. Accordingly, he announces his intention of speedily discharging his obligation—I will render praises (rather, *thank offerings*) unto thee.

Ver. 13.—For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling; rather, *hast thou not delivered?* (Revised Version); or, *surely thou hast delivered* (Professor Cheyne). The psalmist views his entire deliverance as accomplished; nothing remains to be asked for. That I may walk before God in the light of the living; i.e. that henceforth I may be free from trouble, and walk before God in the clear daylight, no longer dwelling in darkness, but in "the light of life" (comp. Job xxxiii. 30; John viii. 12).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 4, 10, 11.—*The expression and the result of faith.* "In God I will praise his word," etc. This is not a vain repetition or a mere poetic burden. The meaning is enlarged and strengthened. In ver. 4 that Divine name is used which speaks of the Almighty Creator, "God." In ver. 10 this is repeated, but that personal name is added which speaks of God's covenant and faithfulness, "in the Lord" (equivalent to "Jehovah"). Again, in ver. 4 the psalmist speaks of man in his weakness—"flesh;"

but in ver. 11—"what *man* can do"—man in his utmost strength is defied to hurt one of God's refugees. Here is (1) the expression of faith; (2) the result of faith.

I. THE EXPRESSION OF FAITH. "In God will I praise his word." The word of God is everywhere in Scripture the special object of faith, for this reason—that it is by his word, viz. his commands and his promises, that God *enters into moral relations with us*, and enables us to enter into such relations to him. Hence room not for mere vague faith, such as we might have in the Creator of the universe, the Almighty Ruler, the Author of our being; but direct *personal trust*, accepting and grasping God's word. The name "Jehovah" warrants this faith. The word of *promise* is chiefly meant. This faith is in contrast to all the causes and circumstances of fear and peril (vers. 1, 2).

II. THE RESULT OF FAITH. "I will not fear." As love casts out the slavish fear of God—the fear which would drive or keep us from him (1 John iv. 18)—so faith casts out the fear of man. Let the arrows fly like hail; behind "the shield of faith" (Eph. vi. 16) we are safe, not only from what "flesh and blood" can do, but from our spiritual foes (Eph. vi. 12). Illustrate from such passages as Gen. xvi. 1; John vi. 20. Courage, therefore, is a duty. The courage of self-reliance belongs only to the strong, but the courage of reliance on God is within reach of the weakest. Man of the world, canst thou look the future in the face and say, "I will not fear"?

Ver. 13.—*The experience of God's mercy a ground for hope.* "Thou hast delivered," etc. (Authorized Version). The Revisers have filled up the ellipsis in the Hebrew, "Hast thou not delivered?" instead of "Wilt thou not deliver?" The Hebrew has simply "not," with a word expressing a question. It is one of many cases where the instructed English reader may judge for himself, as well as the Hebrew scholar. Certainly the Authorized Version gives a much more full and harmonious sense, and accords with the analogy of ver. 8—prayer founded on experience, following praise. Thus therefore we will take it—the experience of God's redeeming mercy a ground for hope, and a plea in prayer.

I. HERE IS THANKFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF GOD'S GREAT GOODNESS. The title, though no part of the psalm, gives (as in other cases) an ancient Jewish tradition as to the special danger from which David had been delivered (see 1 Sam. xxi. 10—xxii. 1). David had carried a dangerous trophy with him to the court of Gath—the sword of Goliath. The Philistine chiefs were prompt to point out who this fugitive was. A word from Achish would have avenged the giant's death. But "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord" (Prov. xxi. 1). David was soon breathing the free air of the desert, and looked back with a shudder of horror, but with an overwhelming sense of thankfulness (ver. 3). Some of us can take up these words in their literal sense. You remember when the icy breath of death seemed to chill your blood; the gate of death seemed just ready to roll back on its noiseless hinges, and shut behind you. But God locked it fast. The good Shepherd led you through the dark valley, out into the sunshine. You are the living, to praise him. Others have no such special experience. But what is life but a series of escapes? What is health but the perpetual warding off of death; safety, but hourly deliverance?

"Strange that a harp of thousand strings
Should keep in tune so long!"

The unfailing, unsleeping care of God's Fatherly providence does not strike and amaze us as do miracles; but it is no less wonderful (Lam. iii. 22, 23). Every real Christian can read in these words a deeper and higher meaning. Deliverance from the death that parts soul and body is but a reprieve—perhaps brief. Death remains to be faced; and behind death, all that makes it indeed terrible. But to the believer in Christ the character of death is wholly changed. The outside show remains; dust must return to dust; the earthly tabernacle must be taken down. But the sting, the terror, the power, of death are gone. Christ has "abolished death" (2 Tim. i. 10) for every one who can say, "Christ liveth in me." The coming of the last enemy shall be as though an executioner, axe on shoulder, entered the cell of a condemned prisoner. The axe is lifted—it falls, but only on the chain. The dark visitor takes the prisoner by the hand, and leads him into air and sunlight; and, lo! he drops his mask and jailor's

garb, flings aside his blunted axe—he is the messenger sent to lead the pardoned offender into the King's presence. "Death!" the Christian may say; "grim sentinel at the gate of immortality; silent porter at the door of my Father's house; my flesh shudders at thee, but my spirit fears thee not. Jesus has conquered thee for me. Because he lives, I shall live also!"

II. PAST DELIVERANCE THUS THANKFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED FURNISHES AN ARGUMENT FOR HOPE, AND A PLEA IN PRAYER. "Wilt thou not," etc.? "I beseech thee to do so: I am sure thou wilt." It is an argument from the greater to the less; like St. Paul's in Rom. viii. 32. A remarkable and powerful argument, because based on the faithfulness of God's character and the continuity of his dealings. Can he awaken hope only to disappoint? If he has raised a soul from death, reconciled a sinner to himself through the death of Jesus, taught him by his own Spirit to pray, trust, love,—can he forget to be gracious? Impossible! Is it, then, impossible for a believer to fall—for a soul once saved to perish? Not only possible, but inevitable, *if left to himself*. But surely that is the wrong question to put. *Will the Saviour forsake a soul that wholly trusts him?* Christ's answer is given (John x. 28—30; 2 Tim. i. 12). This logic of faith the psalmist turns into the rhetoric of prayer. The arrows of prayer, feathered with praise for blessings already received, fly swift and sure: because those blessings are the earnest of others, failing which they would be useless (Phil. iv. 6). May we apply this argument to temporal, earthly blessings as well as spiritual? Assuredly; provided always we bear in mind the ruling aim of God's Fatherly guidance. We are travellers, not tourists; our route must be chosen mainly, not for the pleasure of the scenery, but as the right road to our home. But when God led his people through the wilderness, he did not forget the daily manna and the water-springs, the cloud by day and the fire by night (Matt. vi. 31—33).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—13.—*Fear and deliverance.* Taking this psalm as David's, we may use it to illustrate two great truths.

I. "THE FEAR OF MAN BRINGETH A SNARE." (Prov. xxix. 25.) The best of men are but men at the best. David was a man of splendid courage and generosity; but there were times when he grievously erred (1 Sam. xxi. 10—15). It was said by Dr. Arnold, "The fear of God makes no man do anything mean or dishonourable, but the fear of man does lead to all sorts of weakness and baseness." We may see here how the fear of man leads to failure *in truth*. When the thought of self is uppermost, we are apt to resort to our own devices. God's ways are too slow, so we turn to our own way. Children, through fear, will tell lies. We pity them and forgive. But, alas! we do not ourselves wholly put away childish things. Abraham prevaricated. David practised deceit. Peter denied his Lord. The fear of man also leads to the sacrifice of *independence*. Imagination working through fear exaggerates our danger. We become restless and impatient. Instead of bravely facing our foes, we shrink from the path of duty.

"He is a slave who will not be
In the truth, with two or three."

But, worse still, the fear of man may lead to failure in *justice and generosity*. We are apt to put ourselves first. To save our miserable lives is the chief thing. Rather than that we should suffer, we would let others suffer. Rather than that we should be put to shame, we would have our opponents "cast down." This is the mean, selfish spirit which Satan recognized as so strong in human nature, when he said, "All that a man hath will he give for his life."

II. GOD DELIVERETH HIS SERVANTS THAT TRUST IN HIM. (Dan. iii. 28.) How naturally David turned to God in trouble! Circumstances moved him, but there was more—love constrained him. His heart went forth in clinging trust to God. Faith is the true antidote to fear. It lifts us out of the dust. It places us by the side of God. It fills our soul with peace and hope. Through trust we gain courage to face the foe (ver. 6). Further, we obtain resolution to continue the conflict (vers. 7—9).

Taking hold of God's strength, we wax strong. All that is deepest and truest in our hearts calls upon us to be brave, and to quit ourselves like men. We are in the way of duty, and are able to say, like the king in the story, "Come on, come all; this rock shall fly from its firm base as soon as I." The experience of the past and the sure word of promise raise our hopes. We look to the future with confidence. In all our wanderings God watches over us. In all our weaknesses and sorrows God stands by us with tender compassion for our weaknesses, and with loving consolations for our sorrows. The victory will be with the right (vers. 10—13). If God has begun a good work in us, he will carry it on to the end. He who has been our Refuge in the past will not fail us in the future. Therefore let us go forward bravely in the path of duty, not counting our lives dear unto ourselves, so that we may be found faithful to him who hath called us, and finish our course with joy.—W. F.

Ver. 12.—*Vows.* The first time we read of vows in the Bible is in Gen. xxviii. 20, where it is said, "And Jacob vowed a vow." Sometimes vows were made at special times and for special purposes; but, in the deepest sense, God's people felt that to them life was a vow; at every moment and through all changes they were under the law of consecration to God. The words of the psalmist may be held as appropriate to the period of entering upon a new year. This is a fitting time—

I. FOR THANKFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD'S MERCIES. The eye is upon the past, and as the memory calls up God's deeds of love, the heart glows with gratitude. "I will render praises unto thee." How just and reasonable!—"For thou hast delivered my soul from death."

II. EARNEST PRAYER TO GOD FOR SPIRITUAL HELP. The future has its dangers. The biographies of good men, our own experiences, and the circumstances of our lot, warn us that we are liable to fall. In our weakness and fear we cry to God, "Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling?" Falls are hurtful to ourselves and to others. Therefore our cry should be the more urgent to him who is "able to keep us from falling" (Jude 24). The deliverances of the past are a strong plea for deliverance in the future. As Cowper has said of gifts, we may say of deliverances—

"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."

III. RENEWAL OF OUR COVENANT ENGAGEMENTS. "Thy vows." It is well for us to consecrate ourselves afresh to God. 1. *To walk before God.* 2. *In the light of the living.* Christ is the Living One (Rev. i. 18). The saints are the living (1 Thess. v. 4—10). It is in the light of Christ, and in fellowship with his people, that we can best fulfil our course here, and best prepare for the services of eternity. How sweet the light instead of the darkness! and how blessed life instead of death!—W. F.

Vers. 1—13.—*The struggle and victory of faith.* The contents of this psalm may be summed up as the *struggle* and the *victory* of faith.

I. THE STRUGGLE OF FAITH. He is in great fear and danger on account of the plots and wickedness of his enemies. They fight against him with the most dangerous weapons they can command. He does not seek to defend himself with counter-plots such as they employed. What are his weapons? The one mighty weapon of *trust in God*. 1. *In the merciful protection of the Almighty One.* (Ver. 1.) In the power of God as contrasted with the weakness of man. 2. *In the word of God's eternal promise.* "When I am encompassed with fear, then do I trust and praise his faithful word" (vers. 3 and 4). 3. *In God's retributive justice.* (Ver. 7.) That he will overturn and punish all evil-doers. 4. *In the tenderness and strength of the Divine sympathy.* God counts his sighs, put his tears in his bottle, and records them in his book of remembrance.

II. THE VICTORY OF FAITH. (Vers. 9—13.) 1. *And will put his enemies to flight when he calls upon him.* (Ver. 9.) Of this he is triumphantly assured, even against all present appearances. 2. *He knows that God is on his side.* (Ver. 9.) God always on the side of the righteous, to protect them from all real harm. "If God be for us,

who can be against us?" 3. *He sees his salvation as an already accomplished fact.* (Ver. 13.) Faith sees the future in the present, and the distant in the near (Heb. xi. 1). 4. *He is thus filled with the spirit of praise and fidelity.* (Ver. 12.) Will perform his vows and render thanks. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith."—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LVII.

THIS psalm—the "twin psalm" with the last—has also an elaborate "title," which runs thus: "To the precentor (or chief musician): destroy not; David's; Michtam; when he fled from Saul; in the cave." The meaning of the second and fourth headings is doubtful. Some explain the second as "musical;" others as an allusion to David's words when he bade Abishai not to kill Saul. The last two clauses give the place and occasion of the composition. It was written "in the cave"—probably the cave of Adullam (1 Sam. xxii. 1)—when David was flying from Saul. No valid reason can be urged against these statements.

The psalm is divided by its refrain (vers. 5, 11) into two parts, which are further subdivided by the pause-mark, "Selah." The initial strophe (vers. 1—5) is a mixture of prayer and complaint; the concluding one (vers. 6—11) begins with complaint (ver. 6), but almost immediately changes into "a strain of exulting and triumphant confidence," so exulting and triumphant as to cause its selection by our Church for recitation on Easter Day.

Ver. 1.—*Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee* (compare the preceding psalm, vers. 1 and 4). *Yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge* (see the comment on Ps. xvii. 8; and comp. Ps. xxxvi. 7; lxi. 4; lxiii. 7; xci. 4). The metaphor is first used in Deut. xxxii. 11. Until these calamities (rather, *these wickednesses, or these malignities*) be overpast. That they will pass away the psalmist has no doubt. What he needs is support while they endure.

Ver. 2.—*I will cry unto God most High.* In the original, "unto *Elohim 'elyon*"—an expression which only occurs here and in Ps. lxxviii. 56. *El 'elyon*, however, occurs in Ps. lxxviii. 45; as in Gen. xiv. 18, 19, 22, and *Jehovah 'elyon* in Ps. vii. 18. *Unto God that performeth all things for me* (comp. Ps. cxxxviii. 8). God "accomplishes" for his saints whatever is good for them.

Ver. 3.—*He shall send from heaven, and*

save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. The two clauses stand unconnected in the original, which runs, "He shall send from heaven and save me—my pursuer reproaches—God shall send," etc. The second clause is really parenthetical, and, as Dr. Driver says ('Hebrew Verbs,' § 163), "circumstantial," noting the circumstances under which God would take action. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth. His mercy, to relieve the psalmist; his truth, to confound the psalmist's enemies.

Ver. 4.—*My soul is among lions* (comp. Ps. vii. 2; x. 9; xvii. 12; xxii. 21, etc.). And I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men—literally, *I lie on firebrands, sons of men*—whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. David occupies the cave (of Adullam?), while around him prowl lion-like men, whose fury is like that of firebrands, who threaten to devour him with their sharp teeth, and to pierce his soul with their cruel tongues.

Ver. 5.—*Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; or, exalt thyself, O God, above the heavens;* i.e. show forth thy might in such a signal way that the heavens (i.e. the angels) may stand to gaze at it. Let thy glory be above all the earth. Let thy exaltation equally draw the attention of the whole earth.

Vers. 6—11.—The strophe of "triumphant confidence" now begins, but with an echo from the strophe of complaint. The enemy is still at work, still plotting against the psalmist, still seeking to do him a mischief; but the efforts made are in vain. They only bring the enemy himself into trouble (ver. 6), and cause the psalmist to pour forth a song of joy (vers. 7—11).

Ver. 6.—*They have prepared a net for my steps* (comp. Ps. ix. 15; x. 10; xxv. 15; xxxi. 4; xxxv. 7). These metaphors from the chase are peculiarly appropriate at the time when Saul was "hunting David upon the mountains" (1 Sam. xxvi. 20). *My soul is bowed down;* rather, *they have bowed down my soul;* literally, *he has bowed down;* but the alternate use of the singular and the plural, without any real change of subject, is very common. *They have digged a pit before me* (comp. Ps. vii. 15; cxix.

85). Into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Here is the first note of triumph—a very familiar note (Pss. vii. 15; ix. 15; xxxix. 8; cxli. 10), but one always sounded with marked satisfaction.

Ver. 7.—*My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; or, my heart is steadfast*—it does not doubt or waver, it is firm in its trust on thee. I will sing and give praise. Sing to thee, *i.e.*, and praise thy Name.

Ver. 8.—*Awake up, my glory; i.e.* “my soul” (comp. Pss. xvi. 9; xxx. 12). The psalmist stirs his soul to earnest, heartfelt devotion. *Awake, psaltery and harp; i.e.* awake, my musical instruments and my musical powers, which have slept, as it were, while I was in affliction. I myself will awake early; or, “will awaken the dawn” (comp. Ovid, ‘Metaph.’ xi. 597, “Vigil

ales evocat auroram;” and Milton, “Cheerly rouse the slumbering morn.”

Ver. 9.—I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people (rather, *peoples*); I will sing unto thee among the nations. The psalmist’s joy is too great to be confined within any narrower limits than those of the entire earth. He will have his hymn of praise go forth to all “peoples,” “nations,” and languages. Michaelis notes that his desire has had a full accomplishment.

Ver. 10.—*For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. “Thy mercy, thy truth”* (comp. ver. 3).

Ver. 11.—*Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth* (compare the comment on ver. 5, with which this verse is identical).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—11.—*One of God’s rescues.* The Bible is full of records of deliverances, not only deliverances of nations, but rescues of individuals. These things are “written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. xv. 4). We have in this psalm the story of one of God’s rescues. We see—

I. RESCUE SORELY NEEDED. The enemies of the soul are represented as strong, crafty, and merciless. They are savage as “lions.” They use guile and deceit, and “hunt every man his brother with a net” (Micah vii. 2). Though they wound body and soul, this is not enough. Blood is what they want. If they had their will, they would cast the Joseph of their hate into the “pit,” caring not if he perish miserably. In this world of sin and sorrow and temptation, we are always in danger; but there are times when peril comes closer, and “calamities” crowd on every side, leaving no way of escape. Happy are we if, in our helplessness and fear, we “flee for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us”!

II. RESCUE EARNESTLY SOUGHT. (Vers. 1—3.) Here is a difference between the ungodly and the godly. The ungodly seeks deliverance by his own devices; the godly seeks deliverance from God. He cries for rescue, not in his own way, but in the way that accords with God’s character and will. When it comes, it must be in the line of “mercy and truth.” What God was, he is. What God has done is earnest of what God will do. What God undertakes, he will carry out. Man promises more than he performs. God performs more than he promises. The nearer we get to God, the more clearly we see things in God’s light. Our faith gains force and our hopes grow stronger. If dangers press, we cry with the more urgency for help. God is “able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. iii. 20).

III. RESCUE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED. (Vers. 7—11.) Religion is for the whole of life, but there are times when special services are proper. Deliverances wrought for us by God are not to be kept secret, but to be openly acknowledged. Our gratitude should be sincere, hearty, and demonstrative. Like the woman of Capernaum, who was healed of the issue of blood, we should yield to the gentle solicitings of love, and declare unto our Lord, before all the people, what he has done for us. Like the Samaritan cured of his leprosy, though alone, we should come with a full heart to God, and to give thanks for his goodness and wonderful works (Luke viii. 47; xvii. 18). How inspiring and comforting it is to read of the great deliverances which God wrought for David and the prophets, and for the saints of every land and tongue! When we remember these things, our hearts burn within us; for this God is our God, this Saviour is our Saviour. Nay, more; in thought of what God is and has done, we rise to the sight of the things not yet seen, and to the vision of the latter day when the kingdom shall not be limited to Israel, but the glory of the Lord shall fill the whole earth.—W. F

Ver. 3.—“*Mercy and truth.*” I. MARK GOD’S CHARACTER. When God proclaimed his Name to Moses, he put “mercy” in the forefront: “The Lord God merciful;” but “truth” had also its place, for it is added, “abundant in truth” (Exod. xxxiv. 6). The same order is observed in the Psalms. Thus it is said (Ps. lxxxvi. 15), “Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and *plenteous in mercy and truth*” (cf. Ps. lxxxix. 2).

II. SHINE FORTH IN GOD’S JUDGMENTS. What God does shows what he is. His works express his character. “Mercy and truth” are, so to speak, the rails on which his judgments travel (Pss. xxv. 10; ciii. 17).

III. CHARACTERIZE GOD’S DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE. They need “mercy,” and unto the Lord “belongeth mercy” (Ps. lxii. 12). They need “truth,” and God is “the God of truth” (Ps. xxxi. 5). In the salvation which God has wrought, both are blended in beautiful harmony (Ps. lxxxv. 10). As has been quaintly said, “Mercy and truth are but the transverse arms of the cross of Christ. Righteousness and peace are but its upper and lower limbs. The one springs out of the earth, the other has looked down from heaven, and they have kissed each other, in token of God’s love and of his reconciliation with the sons of men.”

IV. FOUNDATION OF HOPE TO THE CHILDREN OF MEN. Mercy and truth are the two outspread wings of God. Under them there is sure shelter and peace (Pss. xxxvi. 7; lxi. 1—4). Here there is hope for the sinner (Pss. xxxiii. 18, 22; lxxviii. 7; cxlvii. 11). Here there is comfort for the troubled in heart (Ps. lvii. 3—10). Here there is inspiration for all who are minded to serve God (Pss. lxix. 13; xcvi. 3; cxv. 1). Here there is earnest and foreshadowing of the everlasting rest (Pss. lxi. 7; lxiii. 7; cxxxviii. 8).—W. F.

Vers. 1—11.—*Expectation and assurance of deliverance.* In many respects this psalm is very like the previous one. May be regarded under two general aspects. As expressing—

I. THE PSALMIST’S EXPECTATION OF DELIVERANCE FROM DANGER. (Vers. 1—6.) Founded: 1. *Upon his trust in God’s tender protection.* (Ver. 1; Deut. xxii. 11, 12.) This faith in the tender love of God “has no parallel in heathen literature.” 2. *God would not fail to perform or complete the work he had begun for him.* (Ver. 2.) “He who hath begun a good work in you,” etc. God does not abandon his own work. 3. *God’s retributive justice must give the victory to the righteous.* (Vers. 3, 4, 6.) The designs of wicked men recoil in the end upon themselves, and ensure their own destruction. This is true, in the long run, of God’s providence.

II. THE JOYFUL, INWARD ASSURANCE OF DELIVERANCE. (Vers. 7—12.) 1. *His heart is steadfast with fearless confidence in God.* (Ver. 7.) The psalm records the gradual progress of his mind towards the highest rejoicing in the Divine deliverance. 2. *He calls upon himself to celebrate the praise of God in the highest strains.* (Ver. 8.) “His glory,” equivalent to “his soul.” He will wake the dawn with his earnest, fervent songs. 3. *He will make his praises to sound forth among the heathen.* (Ver. 9.) Not only among his own people. 4. *He calls upon heaven to unite with earth in praising the glory of God.* (Ver. 12.) His triumph in God over his enemies has now reached its culminating point.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LVIII

A PSALM of condemnation on unrighteous judges. Some suppose the judges to be superhuman beings, entrusted with the government of the earth (Cheyne). Others suggest heathen rulers of Israel, in Babylonia, during the time of the Captivity. But the language is not stronger than that addressed often to native judges (see Isa. i.

16—25; x. 1—4; Jer. v. 26—29; Micah iii. 9—12, etc.). And there is no reason for rejecting the statement of the “title,” that the psalm was written by David. It may either belong to the early years of David’s reign, or to the time immediately preceding Absalom’s rebellion.

The psalm consists of two strophes and a conclusion. The first strophe is one of five verses, and lays down the grounds of com-

plaint (vers. 1—5). The second, which is one of four verses (vers. 6—9), passes sentence, describing the coming punishment. The conclusion (vers. 10, 11) expresses the righteous man's satisfaction at the result.

Ver. 1.—Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? The rendering of *elem* (עֵלֶם) by "congregation" is contrary to all analogy, and quite untenable. It must either mean "dumb ones," or be a corruption of *elim* (עֲלִים)—"mighty ones" (comp. Ps. xxix. 1). In either case it is an epithet applied to the judges of the people, and not to the congregation. Do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men! Both questions are asked in bitter irony, as is clear from the context.

Ver. 2.—Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; literally, *wickednesses*, or *iniquities*. These ye first devise in your heart, and then (see the next clause) carry out with your hands. Ye weigh (or, *weigh out*) the violence of your hands in the earth. Instead of carefully meting out justice to men, after accurately weighing it in the balance of right and equity, you weigh out to them mere wrong and "violence."

Ver. 3.—The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. This is the language of hyperbole, and is certainly not the profession of the doctrine of original sin. What the psalmist means is that those who ultimately become heinous sinners, for the most part show, even from their early childhood, a strong tendency towards evil. He implies that with others the case is different. Though there may be in them a corruption of nature (Ps. li. 6), yet, on the whole, they have good dispositions, and present a contrast to the ungodly ones whom he is describing.

Ver. 4.—Their poison is like the poison of a serpent (comp. Ps. cxl. 3; Song of Sirach xxv. 15). They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear. The "adder" was supposed to be "deaf," on account of its being very difficult to charm. It was thought obstinately to set itself against the charmer, and, as it were, stop its ears against him.

Ver. 5.—Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers. Serpent-charmers are alluded to in Eccles. x. 11 and Jer. vi. 17. They have at all times been common in the East, as they are still in India; and it is with reason suspected that the magicians of Pharaoh employed the art in their contest with Moses and Aaron. Charming never so wisely; literally, *though they bind their spells skilfully*.

Vers. 6—9.—"Description passes into imprecation, with an 'Elohim' emphati-

cally placed first" (Cheyne). Metaphors are accumulated. Menace follow menace. The wrath of God is first invoked upon the evil-doers (vers. 6—8); then (ver. 9) coming judgment is announced.

Ver. 6.—Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth. Serpent-charmers sometimes, when they have caught their snake, proceed to beat out the poison-fangs with a stone or stick (Geike, 'The Holy Land and the Bible,' vol. i. p. 245). The psalmist, in the first clause, seems to allude to this practice; in the second, he changes the metaphor, reverting to his favourite image of the young lion (*kephir*). Break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord. The "cheek teeth" (Joel i. 6), or principal fangs on either side, are intended.

Ver. 7.—Let them melt away as waters which run continually; i.e. "let them waste away, and go to naught, like water, that runs off and accomplishes nothing." When he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces; i.e. "let the arrows be as though snapped in two, or headless."

Ver. 8.—As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away; or, "let them be as a snail, which melteth and passeth away" (Revised Version). Snails in Palestine, during dry seasons, often shrink, shrivel up, and disappear from their shells (Tristram, 'Natural History of the Bible,' p. 296). Like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun; rather, *that hath not seen the sun* (Professor Cheyne, Revised Version); i.e. "let them be as an abortion" (comp. Job iii. 16).

Ver. 9.—Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away as with a whirlwind, both living, and in his wrath. This "difficult and obscure verse" has been variously explained. Professor Cheyne translates, "Before your pots can feel the thorns, and while your flesh (i.e. the flesh in the pots, on which you are about to feast) is still raw, the hot wrath of Jehovah shall sweep it away." The Revised Version gives the following: "Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them [i.e. the thorns] away with a whirlwind, the green [thorns] and the burning alike." Dr. Kay, "Before your caldrons have felt the thorn-fire, even as raw flesh, even so, shall hot fury sweep him away." The general meaning seems to be that before the wicked judges can enjoy the fruits of their wickedness, the fierce wrath of God will come upon them like a tempest, and sweep both them and the produce of their villainy away (comp. 2 Sam. xxiii. 6, 7).

Vers. 10, 11.—In conclusion, the psalmist

expresses the satisfaction of the righteous at the punishment of the unjust judges.

Ver. 10.—The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance. As the good man is pained when he sees the ungodly prosper, so he cannot but feel a certain satisfaction and pleasure when punishment overtakes him. Dante says—

“O Signor mio, quando sarò io lieto
A veder la vendetta, cho nascosa
Fa dolce l'ira tua nel suo segreto?”
(‘Purg.’, xx. 94—96.)

He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 24; Isa. lxiii. 3).

It is observable that David, personally, was too indulgent, rather than too severe, towards offenders.

Ver. 11.—So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous. God's righteous judgment being seen in the punishment of the wicked, men will no longer doubt of the ultimate reward of the godly. God must, by his very nature, be more inclined to reward goodness than to punish wickedness. Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth; rather, verily there is a God, etc. (see Revised Version). *Elohim* is joined with a plural here, because the speakers are men generally, not only Israelites.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—11.—*Unjust judges.* There is a contrast in this psalm between the unjust judges of the earth, and God the righteous Judge of all men (vers. 1, 2, and ver. 11). “Do ye really, O ye gods, speak righteousness? Do ye in uprightness judge the children of men? Nay, in heart ye work iniquities, in the land ye weigh out the violence of your hands” (Delitzsch). This indignant protest is just. Judges have often been false to their trust. They have prostituted their power to selfish ends. They have increased instead of diminished the evils of society, and made confusion worse confounded by their wicked deeds. There are signal examples of this in the Bible, and though the lines have fallen unto us, in these last days, in pleasant places, our fathers, in the days of Bonner and Jeffries and Claverhouse, and in days of persecution, suffered grievously. But how different is it with God the Judge of all the earth! His judgments are all righteous. Even the wicked cannot complain. In their punishment they only receive, as their own consciences testify, “the just reward of their deeds.” Our attention is specially concentrated on the wicked.

I. THEIR CHARACTER IS PORTRAYED. (Vers. 1—5.) Character is a growth. No man becomes of a sudden either very bad or very good. There is gradation—“first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.” We are shown wickedness in its *germ*. It has its source in a bad heart—a heart not right with God. From within it works toward without. Evil may for a time be concealed or held in check, but it is sure to show itself. People may be worse than they seem. God only knows the evil that lies hidden and rooted in the heart. Then we see wickedness in its *development*. It has been said that “tongue sins are our first transgressions.” But how quickly do we proceed from “lies” to other and more flagrant forms of wickedness! The more the will of the flesh is indulged, the stronger it becomes. The poison spreads through all the veins.

“The soul grows clothed by contagion,
Imbodies and imbrutes, till she quite lose
The Divine property of her first being.”
(Milton.)

Then cometh the *consummation*. All checks and warnings and remonstrances are in vain. Men become “more deaf than adders to the voice of true decision.” Like Saul, they choose the evil instead of the good. Like Rehoboam, they persist in their sins. Like Ahab, they sell themselves to work iniquity. Like Israel, they harden their hearts against all teaching and rebuke, till in the end there is no remedy (2 Chron. xxxvi. 16).

II. THEIR JUDGMENT IS PREDICTED. (Vers. 6—11.) God is long-suffering and merciful. How excellent his counsels! how tender his rebukes! how gracious his calls to repentance! But when evil men knowingly and obstinately persist in their evil ways, judgment must be done. The psalmist adds image to image to strengthen the argument, and to set forth the more vividly the awful doom of the wicked. 1. *Judg-*

ment is required in the interests of humanity. In all good governments there are laws for the protection of society. If evil-doers will not repent, they must be restrained. Their power to do injury must be stopped. 2. Besides, judgment is demanded in accordance with righteousness. There is nothing arbitrary in the procedure. Even evil must be dealt with fairly. 3. Judgment also is necessary for the vindication of God's truth. There is a moral necessity why it should be "ill with the wicked." "God is not a man, that he should lie."

"But evil on itself shall back recoil,
And mix no more with goodness, when at last
Gather'd like scum, and settled to itself,
It shall be in eternal restless change,
Self-fed and self-consumed; if this fail,
The pillar'd firmament is rottenness,
And earth's base built on stubble."

(Milton.)

W. F.

Vers. 1—11.—*A bold protest against unrighteous judges.* I. THE INVETERATELY WICKED. (Vers. 1—5.) 1. *Wicked within and without.* (Vers. 1, 2.) In heart and deed. 2. *Wicked by nature and by habit.* (Ver. 3.) Go astray all their lives. 3. *Incorrigible.* (Ver. 4.) Like the adder that will not be turned by the voice of the charmer.

II. THEIR PUNISHMENT. (Vers. 6—11.) 1. *They shall be rendered powerless in their designs.* (Vers. 6—9.) All the figures in vers. 6—9 mean this. 2. *They shall become the objects of God's righteous vengeance.* (Vers. 9, 10.) 3. *The victims of their wickedness shall see their overthrow, and rejoice in it.* (Vers. 10, 11.) They shall rejoice that there is a God that judgeth among men.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LIX.

LIKE Pss. lvi. and lvii., this is a cry for deliverance out of great peril, with a final expression of confidence (vers. 16, 17) that the deliverance will be granted. From the psalm itself there is some difficulty in determining who are the enemies against whom aid is sought, since, while the bulk of the allusions suggest domestic enemies, there is distinct mention of the "heathen" in two places (vers. 5, 8). Hence it has been argued by critics of note that the entire complaint is against foreign foes, and the complainant either the nation (De Wette), or a late king of Judah (Ewald), or a Maccabean leader (Hitzig), or a poet of the time of Nehemiah (Köster). But the whole character of the psalm is Davidic, and the "title" must be regarded as having more intrinsic weight than the conjectures of critics, especially of critics who are so wholly at variance one with another as these. The title lays it down that the psalm is David's, and assigns, as the occasion of its composition, Saul's sending emissaries to watch the

house where David was, with the intent to kill him. The reference is clearly to the narrative in 1 Sam. xix. 11—18. And the psalm itself, when carefully considered, will be found to agree well with this time and occasion.

It is generally agreed that the composition divides into four portions, two of them closed by the pause-mark, "Selah," and the other two by a refrain. It thus consists of four strophes, the first of five verses (vers. 1—5), and the other three of four verses each (vers. 6—9, 10—13, and 14—17).

Ver. 1.—*Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God.* This is David's almost constant cry (see Pss. vii. 1; xvii. 13; xxii. 20; xxv. 20; xxxi. 1, 2, 15; xxxv. 17; xl. 13; xliii. 1; lxi. 18; lxx. 1, 4; cix. 21, etc.). He has enemies, both domestic and foreign. In his early youth Saul becomes his enemy out of jealousy; then most of Saul's courtiers espouse their master's quarrel. He has enemies at the court of Achish; enemies in his family, even among his sons, as Absalom; enemies among his counsellors, as Ahithophel; foreign enemies on all sides of him—Philistines, Edomites, Moabites,

Ammonites, Amalekites, Syrians, Mesopotamians, etc. Against all of them he invokes God's aid, and by God's aid he triumphs over all. **Defend me from them that rise up against me; or, set me on high above them** (Kay, Revised Version). David's domestic foes "rose up against him," no less than his foreign foes; made war on him; sought to seize his person, and put him to death.

Ver. 2.—Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men. Foreign enemies are never reproached with being "bloody men," since war is their trade, and it is their business to wound and slay.

Ver. 3.—For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul. The emissaries of Saul were sent to David's house "to watch him, and to slay him in the morning" (1 Sam. xix. 11). This seems to be the "lying in wait" intended. Warned by his wife, Michal, Saul's daughter, David fled from his house during the night through a window, and so saved himself (1 Sam. xix. 12). **The mighty (or, the strong ones) are gathered against me; not for my transgression, nor for my sin, O Lord.** Not in consequence of any wrong that I have done. It is noted, as characteristic of David's early psalms, that he protests his absolute innocence in them.

Ver. 4.—They run and prepare themselves without my fault; or, "establish themselves"—"take up their position" (so Hengstenberg, Kay, and Professor Cheyne). Awake to help me (see the comment on Ps. xlv. 23). **And behold; i.e. "see how things are—how innocent I am; how unjust and cruel are my enemies!"**

Ver. 5.—Thou therefore, O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel (comp. Ps. lxxix. 6, also "a psalm of David"). **Awake to visit all the heathen.** "All" is emphatic, and means not only those without the covenant, but also those within—the wicked *Israelites*. It is noted that Saul's instruments consisted of two classes—actual heathen, such as Doeg the Edomite; and irreligious *Israelites*, as the Ziphites and others, who were no better than heathen. **Be not merciful to any wicked transgressors.** "The Hebrew words denote treachery and faithlessness" (Cook). They are scarcely applicable to open foreign enemies.

Vers. 6—9.—"Here a new stanza begins" (Cheyne). The "enemies" of ver. 1 and the "workers of iniquity" of ver. 2 are more elaborately portrayed. First they are represented as "dogs"—such hideous, half-wild dogs as frequent Eastern cities, which sleep during the greater part of the day, and rove about in packs at night—unclean, horrid, loathsome animals (ver. 6). Then

they appear as men—abusive, slanderous, godless (ver. 7). In conclusion, appeal is made to God against them. He will "laugh them to scorn" (ver. 8); and he is a sure Defence against all their efforts (ver. 9).

Ver. 6.—They return at evening. Having traced David to his house, they disperse for a time, but "return" again at evening, and take up their watch (1 Sam. xix. 11). **They make a noise like a dog; i.e. snarl and growl, quarrelling more or less among themselves during the night-time. And go round about the city.** Either wander vaguely about, as dogs do for prey, or patrol the walls and gates to see that David does not quit the city, and so escape them.

Ver. 7.—Behold, they belch out with their mouth. All night long they keep uttering abuse and execrations and threats (comp. Ps. xciv. 4). **Swords are in their lips** (comp. Ps. lvii. 4). **Speeches that wound and cut to the heart. For who, say they, doth hear?** (comp. Pss. x. 11—13; lxiv. 5; lxxiii. 11; xciv. 7). They think themselves irresponsible for their words. No one will hear or know what they say.

Ver. 8.—But thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them (comp. Ps. ii. 4). **Thou shalt have all the heathen in derision** (see the comment on ver. 5, and particularly the explanation there given of "all the heathen").

Ver. 9.—Because of his strength. There is no "because of" in the original, and the reading, "*his strength*" (wy), is doubtful. Several manuscripts have "*my strength*" (wy), and this reading was followed in all the ancient versions. Most modern critics prefer it, and translate, *O my strength*, as in ver. 17. **Will I wait upon thee; rather, I will wait upon thee.** For my God is my Defence; or, *my High Tower* (Revised Version).

Vers. 10—13.—The enemies are still the main subject. Their pride, their cursing, their lying, are denounced (ver. 12). The psalmist trusts to "see his desire" upon them (ver. 10). First he begs that they may not be slain, but only "scattered abroad," so that they may remain as examples of God's vengeance for the warning of others (ver. 11). Then, forgetting this wish, he pleads for their capture and their utter destruction, without which God's glory will not be fully vindicated (vers. 12, 13).

Ver. 10.—The God of my mercy shall prevent me; or, according to another reading, God with his mercy shall prevent (i.e. anticipate) me. God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies (comp. Ps. liv. 7).

Ver. 11.—*Slay them not, lest my people forget; i.e. my true people—faithful Israel.* The psalmist's "first thought is, that by lingering on in life for a while the wicked may be more edifying monuments of the Divine anger" (Cheyne). (For a parallel, see Exod. ix. 16.) *Scatter them by thy power; or, make them wanderers* (comp. Gen. iv. 12, 14). It has been often noted that David's curse seems to have passed on to the entire nation of the Jews. *And bring them down, O Lord our Shield; i.e. "cast them down from their honourable position—bring them into misery and disgrace—O Lord, who art our Defence and Shield"* (comp. Ps. iii. 3; xviii. 2; xxviii. 7).

Ver. 12.—*For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips; rather, the sin of their mouth is each word of their lips* (Hupfeld, Cheyne); or, *O the sin of their mouth! O the word of their lips!* (Ewald, Kay, Canon Cook). Let them even be taken in their pride. Saul's special emissaries (1 Sam. xix. 11) would, of course, be proud of their mission. *And for cursing and lying which they speak* (comp. Ps. x. 7; and, for an example, see 2 Sam. xvi. 5—8).

Ver. 13.—*Consume them in wrath, consume them; or, "make an end of them"—"bring them to naught."* That they may not be; or, "that they be no more." *And let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth.* The frustration of their plans, and their signal punishment, will cause the God of Israel to be recognized widely as the King of the whole earth. Compare the words of David to Goliath, "I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; *that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel*" (1 Sam. xvii. 46).

Vers. 14—17.—David here turns back from the future fate of his enemies to their

present condition, and repeats ver. 7 *verbatim*. He thus reminds himself of his existing danger; he is still being sought—they are still in quest of their prey, and will continue so till morning comes (ver. 15). But in the morning he will be gone—he will have escaped them. Upon this thought occurring, he raises a renewed thanksgiving to God (vers. 16, 17).

Ver. 14.—*And at evening let them return; rather, they return,* as in ver. 6. *And let them make a noise like a dog; rather, they make a noise.* *And go round about the city.* Keeping their watch upon me.

Ver. 15.—*Let them wander up and down for meat; rather, they wander up and down for meat.* David himself was the prey which they desired. They kept guard around his house, wandering, no doubt, up and down. *And grudge if they be not satisfied; rather, as in the margin and in the Revised Version, and if they be not satisfied, they will stay all night.* This they appear to have done from 1 Sam. xix. 11—15.

Ver. 16.—*But I will sing of thy power; rather, of thy strength*—the same word as that used in vers. 9 and 17. *Yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning.* When the morning came, David had escaped (1 Sam. xix. 12), and could "sing of God's mercy" securely at Ramah, where he had joined Samuel. *For thou hast been my Defence and Refuge in the day of my trouble; or, my High Tower,* as in vers. 9 and 17.

Ver. 17.—*Unto thee, O my Strength, will I sing: for God is my Defence; or, Strong Tower* (comp. ver. 9, which, if we read *my* for *up*, is so far, excepting in the verb, identical). *And the God of my mercy; i.e. "the God who showeth mercy upon me"* (comp. ver. 10).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—17.—*Waiting upon God.* There are expressions in this psalm which sound harsh and cruel, and which Christians would shrink from using. But, on the other hand, there is much here that comes home to our experience, and that is helpful and comforting in the great trials of life. It is something to know that good men have suffered affliction before us—that they have been falsely accused and foully wronged, that they have felt the pangs of grief and the bitterness of disappointment, and that they have had to bear much and wait long before deliverance came. The lesson is clear. It is—*Wait upon God.* This is the refrain, which comes so sweetly at the middle (ver. 10), and then with increased force and emphasis at the end (ver. 17). The figure seems that of a sentinel on his tower. He is set there to watch. He must be vigilant and patient. There is much to try him, but not till morning breaks will he find release.

I. WAITING UPON GOD ASSURES DELIVERANCE. Waiting implies faith and hope. "The husbandman waiteth for the harvest." The physician waits for the effect of his

remedies. The father waits for the time when his son is educated, and fit to take his place in the world. So we are to have faith, to hold ourselves still, in patient expectancy, till God's will is made known. Waiting does not preclude personal effort. On the contrary, it implies it. God will not do for us what he has made us able to do for ourselves. Our duty is to work, and wait upon God for his blessing. We must do our part, if we expect God to do his part. But there are times when we have, so far as we know, done all in our power, when we have exhausted all lawful efforts, and yet our condition is not bettered, but rather grown worse. Our straits are great. Our needs are urgent. Our enemies press us on every side, and shout as if sure of their prey. What comfort it is, at such a time, to commit ourselves to God, and to wait patiently for him from whom our salvation cometh! Remember what God is, and what he has done. He is our "Strength" and our "Defence." God *in us* is our Strength—our strength made perfect in weakness. We *in God* is our "Defence"—our Strong Tower to which we run and are safe.

II. WAITING UPON GOD AWAKENS PRAISE. (Vers. 14—17.) Here is a sweet strain of thanksgiving. The rage and malice of the enemy still continue, but it is malice that is defeated, and rage that is balked of its prey. The "morning" brings deliverance, and, instead of the shrieks of the victim, there are the songs of the victor. God has saved his servant who trusted in him. How often has the same thing come true! God's people, waiting upon him in the day of their trouble, have found "defence" and "refuge." God's power has delivered them from their enemies; God's "mercy" has brought joy and peace to their hearts. Therefore they, with renewed ardour, say, "Unto thee, O my Strength, will I sing: for God is my Defence, and the God of my mercy."—W. F.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LX.

IN the case of this psalm, the "title" is again our best guide, both with respect to the author and to the occasion of the composition. The title is unusually full, and contains such a number of minute particulars, as a later compiler or commentator would scarcely have ventured upon. The history involved in the title—reconcilable on the whole with the accounts in 2 Sam. and 1 Chron.—is certainly not contained in those accounts. It implies an author, writing from his own knowledge of facts—an author who, if not David himself, must have been a contemporary.

The psalm itself has every characteristic of the Davidic style—liveliness, rapid transitions, terse yet comprehensive language, strong metaphors, intense feeling, hopefulness. It belongs to the time when, after his first Syrian campaign (2 Sam. viii. 3—4), David was engaged in a war with Edom of a most sanguinary character (2 Sam. viii. 13; 1 Kings xi. 15, 16; 1 Chron. xviii. 12)—marked by striking vicissitudes, and at least one grievous defeat of the forces of Israel (vers. 1—3, 12)—but terminating in a glorious victory, and in the subjugation

and occupation of the country (2 Sam. viii. 14; 1 Chron. xviii. 13). The psalm is written after the great defeat, and before the fortune of war has turned. God is pleaded with (vers. 1—5), reminded of the promises which he has made (vers. 6—8), exhorted in the strongest terms to give his help (vers. 9—11), finally pronounced a sure Helper, through whom Israel is certain to obtain complete victory (ver. 12).

There are three strophes in the psalm—the first of five verses (vers. 1—5); the second of three (vers. 6—8); and the third of four (vers. 9—12).

Ver. 1.—O God, thou hast cast us off, thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased (comp. Ps. xliv. 9—11). The expressions used imply a signal defeat, which, though not mentioned in the historical books, harmonizes with the account given in 1 Kings of the severe treatment of Edom by Joab. From the fact of the defeat the psalmist infers the ground of it—God's displeasure. O turn thyself to us again; rather, O restore to us (i.e. make restoration to us) again (see the Revised Version).

Ver. 2.—Thou hast made the earth (rather, the land) to tremble. The blow struck convulsed the whole land—i.e. the people in it. It is not really an earthquake, but a panic fear, that is intended. Thou hast broken it;

or, *rent it*. The imagery of an earthquake is kept up. Heal the breaches thereof; for it shaketh. The panic fear still continued.

Ver. 3.—Thou hast showed thy people hard things; literally, a hard thing, or harshness; i.e. severity. Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment; or, of trembling (as in Isa. li. 17, 22); comp. Ps. lxxv. 8; Jer. xxv. 15—17; xlix. 12; Ezek. xxiii. 32—34; Zech. xii. 2. The outpouring of Divine vengeance is represented under the figure of presenting a cup, which the doomed man is forced to drink.

Ver. 4.—Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. So most commentators. But the ancient rendering, recently revived by Professor Cheyne, is perhaps preferable. According to this, the meaning is, "Thou hast indeed given a banner to them that fear thee (see Exod. xvii. 15), but only that they may flee before the bow" (*τοῦ φυγεῖν ἀπὸ προσώπου τόξου*, LXX.). On the last occasion that the banner had been lifted, it had seemed to be, not so much a rallying-point, as a signal for dispersion.

Ver. 5.—That thy beloved may be delivered; save with thy right hand, and hear me; rather, *hear us*. From complaint (vers. 1—4) the psalmist abruptly turns to prayer, thus closing the first strophe with a gleam of hope.

Vers. 6—8.—Appeal is next made to God's promises. Some suppose that a Divine oracle had been recently given to David himself, and that he here records the words of it. But, in that case, it is difficult to account for the despondent tone of vers. 1—4. Hengstenberg's explanation seems preferable, that David now encourages himself by a "reference to the general aspect of the assurances given in the Pentateuch in regard to the possession of the land of Canaan in its widest extent, and to victory over hostile neighbours," and that he has his eye especially on the blessing of Jacob (Gen. xlix.) and the blessing of Moses (Deut. xxxiii.). If these assurances are to be depended on, Israel cannot now be about to succumb to Edom.

Ver. 6.—God hath spoken in his holiness; or, *promised by his holiness* (comp. Ps. lxxxix. 35). As God is holy, he cannot falsify his promises. I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth; i.e. I will distribute Canaan among my people—both the western region, of which Shechem was the chief town (1 Kings xii. 25), and the eastern, which contained

"the valley of Succoth" (Gen. xxxiii. 17). God, having assigned the whole land to his people (Gen. xiii. 14, 15), "meted it out" through Joshua, his servant, and gave to each tribe its inheritance.

Ver. 7.—Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine. Gilead was an old name for the territory beyond the Jordan (Gen. xxxvii. 25), especially the more northern portion of it. Manasseh had a portion of this territory assigned to him (Numb. xxxii. 39—42; Josh. xvii. 1). But Manasseh had also a large inheritance on the western side of Jordan (Josh. xvii. 7—11). It is not quite clear whether the divisions of Manasseh, or the eastern one only, is here intended. Ephraim also is the strength of mine head. Ephraim was the most important of the tribes next to Judah, and held the central position in the western region, forming the main strength of the northern kingdom after the separation under Jeroboam (see 1 Kings xii. 25; and comp. Isa. vii. 2, 5, 9, 17; ix. 21; Hos. iv. 17; v. 7—14; vi. 4—10, etc.). Judah is my lawgiver (comp. Gen. xlix. 10; Numb. xxi. 17); i.e. "my ruling tribe"—the tribe to which I have committed the government of my people" (see 1 Sam. xvi. 1; 2 Sam. ii. 4; v. 1—3; Ps. lxxviii. 68).

Ver. 8.—Moab is my washpot. A term of extreme contempt (see Herod., ii. 172). The subjugation of Moab was prophesied by Balaam (Numb. xxiv. 17), and effected by David (2 Sam. viii. 2). Over Edom will I cast out my shoe. The reference to Ruth iv. 7, 8, which is commonly made, is very doubtful. Probably no more is intended than that Edom will be a slave of so low a rank as only to clean the shoes of its master. The subjugation of Edom, like that of Moab, had been prophesied by Balaam (Numb. xxiv. 18). Philistia, triumph thou because of me. The context will not allow of this rendering, since Philistia, like the other enemies of Israel, must be triumphed over, and not triumph. Translate, *over Philistia is my triumphing* (comp. Ps. cviii. 9).

Vers. 9—12.—Rehearsal of God's promises has raised the psalmist out of despondency, and he can now confidently call God to his assistance. Edom is to be conquered, for so God has promised (ver. 8). But how? Who will lead out Israel's armies? Will God, who has lately "cast Israel off"? If not, it must be man. But "vain is the help of man" (ver. 11). So the call is made that God will give help in the trouble—and with the call comes full confidence—and the triumphant cry goes forth, "Through God we shall do valiantly; for

he it is that shall tread down our enemies" (ver. 12).

Ver. 9.—Who will bring me into the strong city! The "strong city" of Edom was Sela, "The Cliff"—now Petra. And it was a city of enormous strength, rock-hewn in the main, and guarded by frightful precipices. Who will conduct me through its strong natural and artificial defences, and give me possession of the place? Who will lead me into Edom? Who will even bring me into the country? The Edomites, flushed with their recent victory, will, of course, dispute my entrance. Who will enable me to overcome their resistance?

Ver. 10.—Wilt not thou, O God, which hast cast us off? rather, *Hast not thou, O God, cast us off?* Can we expect thee to lead us, when thou hast so lately cast us off, and, as we hear it said on all sides, dost not go out with our armies? A reference, perhaps, to Ps. xlv. 9.

Ver. 11.—Give us help from trouble. Faith combats doubt, and, overcoming it, finds an utterance—"Give us help now, whatever thou hast done in the past." Our trouble is great. "Help us from it." For vain is the help of man. We have, therefore, no hope but in thee.

Ver. 12.—Through God we shall do valiantly. No miracle is expected or asked for. Let God look upon us favourably—let his light shine into our hearts, and then "we ourselves shall do valiantly"—we shall gain the victory—we shall accomplish the prophecy of Balaam (Numb. xxiv. 18); and Edom shall pass into our possession. (For the fulfilment, see 2 Sam. viii. 14; 1 Chron. xviii. 13.) For he it is that shall tread down our enemies (comp. Ps. xlv. 5), which has the same meaning, "Through thy Name will we tread them under that rise up against us." (For the extent to which Edom was trodden down, see 1 Kings xi. 15, 16.)

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—12.—*Despondency and its antidote.* There are heights and depths in the Divine life. We may pass quickly from the one to the other. When at the height of triumph we may be brought low. When in the depths of despondency we may be raised up. This psalm speaks of despondency. We see—

I. HOPE RISING IN THE MIDST OF DESPONDENCY. (Vers. 1—4.) We are apt to fix our mind on our trials. They bulk large. They press us sorely. We dwell upon their grievousness. We shrink from their effects, bewildered and dismayed (ver. 3). Besides, we are too ready to think of our trials as judgments. Our sins make us afraid. God seems to be visiting us in wrath, instead of mercy. But this is our infirmity. As we turn to God with humility, hope rises in our hearts. God is not against us, but for us. If he visits us with trials, it is for our good. His banner over us is still the banner of love.

II. FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISES SUSTAINING THE SOUL IN DESPONDENCY. (Vers. 5—8.) The words of Moses, Samuel, and Nathan had sunk deep into the psalmist's heart. He remembered them, and was comforted. How much more reason have we to say, "God hath spoken in his holiness"! We have not only the words, that David had, but many words besides—not only the words of prophets and apostles, but the words of him of whom it was said, "Thou hast the words of eternal life." The Holy Scriptures are rich in promises (2 Pet. i. 3, 4; 2 Cor. i. 20). We may take one and another to the throne of grace, and say, "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction" (Ps. cxix. 49, 50). Two rabbis, it is said, approaching Jerusalem, observed a fox running up the hill of Zion. Rabbi Joshua wept, but Rabbi Eliezer laughed. "Wherefore dost thou weep?" asked Eliezer. "I weep because I see what is written in the Lamentations fulfilled: 'Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it'" (Lam. v. 18). "And therefore do I laugh," said Eliezer; "for when I see with my own eyes that God has fulfilled his threatenings to the letter, I have thereby a pledge that not one of his promises shall fail, for he is ever more ready to show mercy than judgment."

III. PRAYER TO GOD GAINING THE VICTORY OVER DESPONDENCY. (Vers. 9—12.) There are great things promised, but how are they to be performed? If we had to do with man, we might have doubts and fears. But we have to do with God, and he is both able and willing to fulfil his word. Remembering his character and his works, we rise above all desponding and depressing influences. Committing ourselves

to the keeping of the Lord of hosts, we go forth to the fight with brave hearts. "Jehovah-Nissi" is our watchword, and we are able to say, "Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. xv. 57).—W. F.

Vers. 1—12.—*Assurance in prayer.* I. THE PRAYER OF THE REJECTED FOR RESTORATION. (Vers. 1—5.) The grounds of the prayer are: 1. *Their great need.* Felt themselves as if cast off—the very earth trembling with their calamity. They had been reduced to the helplessness of one overcome with wine. 2. *The faithfulness of God to his promises was their banner.* (Ver. 4.) They could pray because they carried this banner. 3. *They could hope and pray on account of their relation to God.* (Ver. 5.) They were beloved of God, and could urge the claim of affection.

II. WHATEVER LOSSES WE SUFFER WE HAVE VIRTUALLY UNIVERSAL POSSESSIONS. (Vers. 6—8.) "As having nothing, and yet possessing all things." "All things are yours: things present, and things to come," etc.

III. THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF GOD MUST LEAD US INTO THE NATURAL POSSESSION. 1. *God alone can comfort us in trouble.* (Ver. 11.) 2. *God alone can give us the victory over our strongest foes.* (Ver. 12.) "If God be for us, who can be against us?"—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXI.

THIS short psalm is one of much beauty, and was sung daily at Matins in the earliest ages of the Church. It is, however, somewhat obscure, especially in its later portion, where a king is spoken of (ver. 6), who may be David, or may represent David's house, or may be the Messiah, the "King" of Ps. ii. 6. The Davidical authorship, asserted in the "title," is probable, though some contend for a captive exile of a later date. The psalm consists of an earnest prayer (vers. 1, 2), followed by expressions of trust and confidence (vers. 3—7), and by a burst of praise in conclusion (ver. 8). Metrically, it consists of two strophes of four verses each, separated by the pause-mark, "Selah."

Ver. 1.—Hear my cry, O God (see the comment on Ps. xvii. 1). The word *rinnah* expresses a shrill, piercing cry, but one which may be of joy or of lamentation. Attend unto my prayer; i.e. "hear and answer it."

Ver. 2.—From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee. Eastern hyperbole may call the Trans-Jordanic territory "the end of the earth," but certainly the expression would be more natural in the mouth of an exile in Assyria, Media, or Babylon. When my heart is overwhelmed; or, "when my heart fainteth" (comp. Ps. cvii. 5). Lead me to the rock that is higher than I; rather, *that is too high for me*—that I cannot reach unaided. Some regard the "rock" as Mount Zion; but others, more reasonably,

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explain it as "God himself" (see Ps. lxii. 2, 6, 7). "Let thy grace lead me to thee" (Kay).

Ver. 3.—For thou hast been a Shelter for me. In the past thou hast often been my "Shelter" or my "Refuge" (comp. Ps. xviii. 2; xlvii. 7, 11; xlviii. 3, etc.); be so once more. And a strong Tower. A *migdal*—a fortress, like the great fortress of the south (Exod. xiv. 2)—the Magdolum of Herodotus (ii. 149). From the enemy. If the psalm is David's, "the enemy" is probably Absalom.

Ver. 4.—I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever. As the psalmist is in exile, at "the end of the earth" (ver. 2), the literal "tabernacle" cannot be intended. A spiritual abiding in the heavenly dwelling, whereof the tabernacle was a type, must be meant (comp. Ps. xviii. 11). I will trust in the covert of thy wings (comp. Ps. xvii. 8; xxxvi. 7; lvii. 1; lxiii. 7; xci. 4). The origin of the metaphor is hardly to be sought in the outspread wings of the cherubim on the mercy-seat; rather in the brooding wings of birds protecting and defending their young (Deut. xxxii. 11; Matt. xxiii. 37).

Ver. 5.—For thou, O God, hast heard my vows. Thou hast heard me so often in the past, thou hast granted so many of my prayers, accepted so many of my vows, that I am emboldened to make further requests. Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy Name. All the blessed inheritance of thy saints thou hast made mine, and, included in it, boldness to approach the throne of grace in full assurance of faith, and to present to thee my petitions.

Ver. 6.—Thou wilt prolong (or, *mayest thou prolong*) the king's life. The question arises—What king? Some answer that

David prays for the extension of his own life; or, if not exactly of his own life, then for the prolongation of his dynasty upon the throne (Hengstenberg); others suggest that a distant exile, perhaps in Assyria, prays for the life of the reigning King of Judah, Josiah probably ('Four Friends,' p. 117); but the Messianic interpretation is perhaps the best. The writer, lifted up above himself and above sublunary things, abiding, as he does, in the spiritual tabernacle under the shelter of God's wings (ver. 4), prays for long continuance of days for the true King, the ideal King, Messiah, of whom David and his house are types: "Mayest thou add days to the days of the King," and make his years as many genera-

tions; or, as generation and generation; i.e. eternally continuous.

Ver. 7.—He shall abide (or, may he abide) before God for ever: O prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him; literally, appoint that mercy and truth may preserve him. Let "mercy and truth," the highest of thy attributes, preserve him, and keep him in life for ever.

Ver. 8.—So will I sing praise unto thy Name for ever. This, if thou doest, then I, for my part, so long as I have my being, will praise thy Name, thus performing day by day what I have vowed. The writer's continuance in life, and retention of consciousness, though not actually asserted, is implied.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The power of prayer in trouble.* "My cry." Every one has his own needs. Think how it is this day. In how many lands, by what various voices, with what manifold emotions, the cries of men are uttered! What sighs of pain, what plaints of desire, what passionate prayers for help, go up to heaven! Who but God could "attend" to them all? Moses groaned under "the burden of all the people" (Numb. xi. 11). Paul was oppressed with "the care of all the Churches" (2 Cor. xi. 28). But increase the "burden," and multiply the "cares" ten thousand times, and what is it all compared with what falls upon God? What mind but the eternal mind of God could attend to all? What love but the infinite and unchanging love of God would not grow weary by the continual comings and the countless importunities of such multitudes of suppliants? But God bends his ear to all. Not one, not the humblest or the poorest, is neglected. Wherever we are, however great and sore may be our troubles, though weak and sinful and unworthy of the least of God's mercies, yet if we call upon him he will hear us; if we commit our cause to him, he will bring us deliverance. The psalm illustrates the power of prayer in trouble.

I. PRAYER SPRINGING FROM FAITH IN GOD. Like an exile, we may be far off from friends, solitary and sad. But God is always near. Though all help from man should fail, God is with us to deliver us. The enemy may be coming in like a flood. There may seem to be no way to escape. But God will, when we cry to him, stretch forth his mighty arm from above, and lead us to "the Rock" where we shall find safety and peace.

II. PRAYER SUSTAINED BY THE MEMORY OF PAST MERCIES. (Vers. 3—5.) We trust our friends. The remembrance of their kindness in the past emboldens us to confide in them for the future. How much more should we trust in God! "Thou hast been a Shelter for me" is a strong plea. Our past life is not lost. It is gone, but it has left its lessons and its memories. Looking back, we can see the hand of God. Our memories may be turned to hopes. Our remembrance of God's gracious dealings may be converted into inspiration and guidance for the future.

III. PRAYER RISING TO THE HEIGHTS OF ASSURANCE. (Vers. 6, 7.) When we are sincere in our prayers, we feel that we have not only pledged ourselves to God, but that God has pledged himself to us. He will not only give us "the heritage" of his people, but the "life" that will enable us to enjoy it. His white-robed angels of "mercy and truth" will go with us and preserve us, and we shall "abide before God for ever."

IV. PRAYER CULMINATING IN JOYFUL CONSECRATION TO GOD. (Ver. 8.) Prayer ends in praise. True praise is not in words only, but in the free and joyous devotion of our lives. Religion will be a daily duty. Our service here will be a preparation for our service hereafter—for ever and ever.—W. F.

Vers. 1—4.—*A cry from the wilderness.* I. THE HEART BECOMES "FAINT" WHEN IT IS CONSCIOUS OF BEING FAR FROM GOD. (Ver. 1.)

II. WHEN THUS OVERWHELMED (OR FAINT), OUR DIFFICULTIES ARE TOO GREAT FOR US. (Ver. 2.)

III. WE ARE THEN DRIVEN FOR HELP TO GOD, WHO ALONE CAN ENABLE US TO SURMOUNT THEM. "Land me upon the rock that is too high for me."

IV. PAST EXPERIENCE WARRANTS US TO EXPECT THE INTERPOSITION OF GOD. (Ver. 3.)

V. TO DWELL NEAR GOD ALWAYS AND CONSCIOUSLY IS THE GREATEST BLESSEDNESS. (Ver. 4.)—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXII.

THIS psalm, like so many, is the cry of an afflicted one—a man of high position, whom his enemies seek to destroy, or, if that be not possible, to thrust down from his dignity (vers. 3, 4). He himself is full of trust in God, and calmly confident that his enemies cannot succeed (vers. 1, 2, 5—7). The confidence which he feels he tries to impart to his people (ver. 8). In conclusion, he warns his enemies that they are likely to provoke God's powerful anger (vers. 9—11), and encourages his friends by the thought of God's mercy, and of his goodness in rewarding those who faithfully serve him.

It is evident that the psalm contains nothing but what is suitable to the character of David, to whom the "title" assigns it; and further, that it accords well with his circumstance, when the revolt of Absalom was imminent. In further proof of the Davidical authorship may be urged "the earnestness of thought, the depth and force of religious feeling," and "the vigour and sublimity of the language" (Canon Cook).

The psalm divides into three stanzas, each of four verses, the break between the first and second and between the third and fourth being notified by the usual pause-mark, "Selah."

Ver. 1.—Truly my soul waiteth upon God; rather, *my soul waiteth only upon God* (Revised Version). The initial word, *ah* (78), which occurs six times in this psalm (vers. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9), is best translated "only" in every instance. It always intensifies the word or phrase to which it is attached—"only upon God"—"only he"—"only from his excellency"—"only vanity." From him cometh my salvation (comp. Ps. xxxv. 3; xxxvii. 39; lxxv. 5, etc.).

Ver. 2.—He only is my Rock (comp. Ps. lxi. 2, and the comment *ad loc.*). And my Salvation (so Ps. xviii. 2; xxvii. 1; cxviii. 14, 21). He is my Defence; or, *my High Tower*, my Strong Hold. I shall not be greatly

moved. Comp. ver. 6, where, with still greater confidence, the writer declares, "I shall not be moved," *i.e.* not moved, or shaken in my faith, at all.

Ver. 3.—How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? rather, *How long will ye assault (or, set upon) a man?* Attack him, that is—seek to do him grievous hurt, as ye are attacking me. Ye shall be slain all of you; rather, *that ye may crush him, all of you together.* The hope of the conspirators under Absalom was in their united strength. As a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence. The words supplied in the Authorized Version should be omitted. It is David who is viewed by his enemies as a bulged wall (see Isa. xxx. 15) or a tottering fence, which it requires only a strong push to throw down.

Ver. 4.—They only consult to cast him down from his excellency; *i.e.* they have no other thought but this—to cast me down from my high station, while I have no other thought but to trust in God, and to look to him for support and protection (vers. 1, 2, 6). They delight in lies. Some indication of the "lies" circulated against David at this time is given in 2 Sam. xv. 3—5; xvi. 7, 8. They bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly; literally, *they bless with his mouth*, which may be explained as meaning either, "They bless, each of them, with his mouth" (Kay, Cheyne), or "they bless through the mouth of their leader"—*i.e.* Ahithophel (Canon Cook).

Vers. 5—8.—From the thought of his bitter enemies and their wicked machinations against him, the psalmist returns to expressions of his own full confidence in God—first falling back on almost the identical words of his opening stanza (comp. vers. 5, 6 with vers. 1, 2); then slightly varying them (ver. 7); and finally commending trust and confidence to the remnant of the people who continue faithful to God and to his anointed (ver. 8).

Ver. 5.—My soul, wait thou only upon God. Compare the opening words of the psalm, which are nearly identical. For my expectation is from him. "Expectation"

here takes the place of "salvation" in ver. 1. Otherwise there is no difference. The God who has given salvation in the past is the Being from whom it is expected in the future.

Ver. 6.—**He only is my Rock and my Salvation**; he is my Defence; I shall not be moved. Identical with ver. 2, except in the omission of the single word "greatly." The psalmist's confidence has increased. He feels now that, whatever his enemies may attempt, he will not be shaken at all.

Ver. 7.—**In God is my salvation and my glory.** The last phrase is new. The psalmist feels that the God who saves him, at the same time sheds on him glory and honour. **The Rock of my strength, and my Refuge,** is in God (comp. Pss. ix. 9; lvii. 2; xciv. 22, etc.).

Ver. 8.—**Trust in him at all times, ye people.** It is characteristic of David to join the "people" with himself in all his fears and in all his hopes. Even at the worst times, God had always some faithful ones in Israel—a "remnant" (Isa. i. 9); and men of this sort clung to David through all his perils, and were sufficiently numerous to constitute a "people" (see 2 Sam. xviii. 1—6). **Pour out your heart before him** (comp. Pss. xlii. 4; cxlii. 2, etc.): **God is a Refuge for us** (comp. ver. 7).

Vers. 9—12.—"Here the psalmist becomes didactic" (Professor Cheyne). He encourages the faithful, and warns the wicked, by the declaration that men of every sort "are but vanity"—have no strength, no permanence—while power belongs only to God. Those who "oppress" and "rob" are, consequently, not to be feared—there is no strength in riches—God alone determines the issues of things. Unto him belongs mercy, or loving-kindness—a quality which leads him not only to forgive men their transgressions, but to "reward" them, when,

by his assisting grace, they have done good works.

Ver. 9.—**Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie**; rather, *only vanity—or, nought but vanity—are men of low degree*; common men, as we call them—mere sons of Adam. This is too evident for dispute; but, in the view of the psalmist, this is not the worst. "Men of high degree" (*beney ish*) are no better—they are "a lie"—an uncreality—a fading, false illusion. **To be laid in the balance**; rather, *in the balance, they go up* (Hupfeld, Ewald, Hitzig, Revised Version). **They are altogether lighter than vanity**; or, *altogether made out of vanity* (Kay); i.e. there is no substance, no solidity, in them.

Ver. 10.—**Trust not in oppression** (comp. ver. 3). The class that supported Absalom was the class of oppressors in Israel, whom David kept under and restrained as far as possible. The writer warns them against trusting in their power to oppress, since such strength as they have is not their own, but lent them by God. **And become not vain in robbery**; or, *rely not vainly on robbery* (Kay). Do not suppose that God will allow you to continue oppressing and robbing. Such a belief is a vain illusion. **If riches increase, set not your heart upon them.** Even when wealth accumulates naturally, and not as the result of ill-doing, it is not a thing to be trusted or set store by.

Ver. 11.—**God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this** (comp. Job xxxiii. 14). When a thing is spoken twice, then assurance is made doubly sure. **That power belongeth unto God.** God, i.e., is the only ultimate Source of all power.

Ver. 12.—**Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy**; or, *loving-kindness*. "Of Divine power all nature speaks; the knowledge of God's mercy rests mainly on revelation" (Kay). **For thou renderest to every man according to his work.** When God rewards well-doing, it is still of his mercy, since no man can claim that he *deserves* reward.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—12.—This is a *psalm of testimony*. It includes two things.

I. AN EXPRESSION OF PERSONAL CONFIDENCE IN GOD. Some trust in themselves; others in their fellow-men; others, in the laws of nature. All this is so far good. It is well to be self-reliant. It is well to take advantage of the wisdom and help of others. It is well to act in the line of law, and in dependence upon the settled order of things with which we are connected. But there is something higher and better. The true way is to trust in God. Trust in God puts things in their right places; inspires courage and fortitude; ennobles and satisfies our whole being (vers. 5—7).

II. AN EARNEST EXHORTATION TO ALL MEN TO PUT THEIR TRUST IN GOD. (Vers. 8—12.) All men have their trials. There will come times when they are troubled and perplexed, when they must look out of themselves anxiously for help. They are tempted. They are in danger of putting their trust in objects that are vain and

worthless. If disappointed, they are apt to get soured and hardened in sin. The remedy counselled is twofold. 1. *Trust*. God is the true and only Being worthy of supreme trust. There is everything in him to inspire confidence and hope. "At all times." In the darkness and in the light, in adversity as well as prosperity; when he hides his face as when he makes his countenance to shine upon us. 2. *Prayer*. We are always free to come to God. We may tell him all that is in our hearts. What a joy in this trust! What a comfort in this unbosoming of ourselves! God will not only hear, but have pity. He will not only answer, but magnify his "power" and his "mercy" in our deliverance. Who so fit to give this counsel—as to trust and prayer—as the man who is speaking from the depths of his own experience, and from the abiding convictions of his own heart (2 Cor. iv. 13; 1 John i. 1—3)!—W. F.

Ver. 1.—*Waiting*. "Silent unto God"—so the word "waiteth" may be interpreted. Take this in connection with the word "only" repeated with such emphasis and meaning, and we may understand the silence as deeply expressive.

I. SIGN OF FAITH. The soul says, "I can trust and wait."

II. RECORD OF CONFLICT. There has been a struggle. Peace has not been won without a hard fight, and "strong crying and tears." We must sacrifice self before we can say, in the silence of our hearts, "All is well."

III. EXPRESSION OF THE SOUL'S COMPLETE ACQUIESCENCE. There may have been disappointments from men, but there is hope in God. He is to be trusted at all times. His will is holy and good, and all our "expectation is from him." Hence there is the stillness of content (vers. 5—8).

IV. FORESHADOWING OF VICTORY. "Power belongeth unto God," and that power is pledged in behalf of his people. How God may work we cannot surely tell, but we wait for light. There is a time to "stand still" (Exod. xiv. 13); and there is a time to "go forward" (Exod. xiv. 15). When we do as the Lord commands, we shall "see the salvation of God."—W. F.

Ver. 6.—*Steadfastness*. "I shall not be moved." We are susceptible to influence. We may be "moved." The word here is not a boast, but an expression of confidence in God. Peter said, in effect, "I shall not be moved," and he was put to shame (Mark xiv. 29, 30). But if we trust in God, then our strength will not fail. We shall stand "steadfast and immovable" in the surges of the waves and the violence of the storm. There is the—

I. CONSCIOUSNESS OF RIGHTNESS.

II. THE SENSE OF BEING BACKED BY THE POWER OF GOD.

III. THE OVERMASTERING FORCE OF LOVE.

IV. THE EXULTING PROSPECT OF FINAL VICTORY. Paul said, "None of these things move me" (Acts xv. 24). So all strong in the love of God and in the confidence that right must triumph in the end, will suffer rather than sin, and die rather than be false to Christ (Heb. xii. 1, 2).—W. F.

Ver. 9.—"*Laid in the balance*." I. RANK. Precedence among men does not depend on moral worth. It is a matter of etiquette. The man of "low degree" before men may be of "high degree" before God. The man who gets the "lowest place" in the great houses of this world may sit in the highest place in the kingdom of God. "Knighthoods and honours borne without desert are titles but of scorn" (Shakespeare). The true honour is that which cometh from God only.

II. RICHES. Most people would like to be rich. In this, as in other matters, there is a right way and a wrong way. It is hinted (ver. 10) that if riches increase, it may be by "oppression" and "robbery." But though they should be obtained lawfully, they bring great responsibilities and risks, and often prove a delusion and a mockery (1 Tim. vi. 9). The true riches are not in the hand, but in the heart; not in the abundance of things outward, but in faith and love and good works—in being "rich toward God" (Luke xii. 21).

III. REPUTATION. What others think of us is of importance. It so far settles our place and our influence in society. But the judgment of men is not the judgment of God. In the world, in society, in the Church, our reputation may stand high, but if

our reputation and our character—which is what we are really and in the sight of God—do not agree, we are but hypocrites and liars. “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of God” (Matt. v. 20).—W. F.

Ver. 11.—*Omnipotence*. “Power belongeth unto God.”

I. EXCLUSIVE POSSESSION. All around us we see evidences of power. Much of it can be traced to man. But besides, mark the forces that are continually at work, in the earth and in the heavens,—and behind all these is God. He is the Force of all forces. Even with man, in sight of all his works, boasting is excluded. What have we that we have not received? “In God we live and move and have our being.”

II. EMPLOYED FOR THE HIGHEST INTERESTS OF MEN. Power in bad hands is a curse. But in good hands it is a blessing. God alone is capable of using power in the wisest manner, and for the best and holiest ends. It is true that, as God works by means, he of necessity limits himself. He has established a certain order of things, and by this he is pleased, so far, to bind himself in his actions. But in everything we may see his mercy and truth. In the material, the mental, and the spiritual world he is ever working, animating, upholding, and controlling all things for the advancement of his own holy ends and for the highest good of his creatures.

III. SECURING THE ETERNAL BLESSEDNESS OF THE GOOD. Power without love is brutality. Love without power is weakness. God's power is in Christ—for our redemption (Rom. i. 4; Acts x. 38; Eph. i. 19; Matt. xxviii. 18; John xvii. 2). This power is quickening (Eph. ii. 1), regulating (Acts ix. 1—9), energizing (Phil. iv. 19), elevating (Eph. i. 19), consoling (2 Cor. xii. 9). It rests as a beneficent influence on God's people, for time and for eternity.—W. F.

Vers. 1—12.—*Danger and safety*. The psalmist, like a mighty eagle, poises himself on the wings of his faith at a great height above the dangers that threatened him, and feels safe. Three things claim consideration.

I. DANGER. 1. *His kingly dignity was threatened*. (Ver. 4.) The position of the Christian is in constant danger. 2. *His life was in danger*. (Ver. 3.) His enemies rushed upon him to overthrow him as if he were a bowing wall or a tottering fence. Our spiritual life is in danger from numerous foes.

II. SAFETY THE MOST ABSOLUTE. 1. *He silently trusts in God as Salvation*. Does not pray, but confidently trusts, as a child in his father. Heaps epithet on epithet, denoting the sense of safety. “High Tower, Rock,” etc. The perfection of trust in God. 2. *He exhorts others to the same perfect trust*. “At all times.” God is the common Refuge and Salvation for all who will trust him, because he “careth” for all.

III. THE REVELATION ON WHICH HIS TRUST WAS GROUNDED. (Vers. 11, 12.) 1. *That God has universal power*. If we need strength, we are to seek it, not in robbery or riches, but in God, who is Almighty. 2. *That God is filled also with loving-kindness*. “Power without love is brutality, and love without power is weakness;” but when both are combined they are the guarantee of righteous rule, and that God will “reward every man according to his work.”—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXIII

A PSALM of one absent from the sanctuary, and longing to return to it (vers. 1, 2), pursued by enemies who seek his life (ver. 9), but confident in God's protection (vers. 7, 8), and, indeed, full of joy and praise and thankfulness (vers. 3—6 and 11). Near the close he lets fall a word, which shows him to be a king; and there is some reason to think that he is passing through a “dry

and thirsty land,” literally as well as figuratively (ver. 1). All these indications agree exactly with the statements in the “title,” that the poem was composed by David as he fled through the wilderness of Judæa towards the Jordan on the revolt of Absalom (2 Sam. xv. 16—30; xvi. 1—14).

The psalm is made up of five short stanzas—the first four consisting of two verses each, and the last of three.

Ver. 1.—*O God, thou art my God; or, my strong God (Eli)*—my Tower of strength. Early will I seek thee. The song was, perhaps, composed in the night watches, and poured forth at early dawn, when the king woke “refreshed” (comp. vers. 5, 6; and 2 Sam. xvi. 14). *My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee; or, pineth for thee* (the verb occurs only in this place). Soul and body equally long for God, and especially desire to worship him in the sanctuary (ver. 2). In a dry and thirsty (or, *weary*) land, where no water is. This is figurative, no doubt; but it may also contain an allusion to the literal fact (2 Sam. xvi. 2; xvii. 29).

Ver. 2.—*To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.* This is the form which the longing takes—to see God once more worshipped in the sanctuary in all the “beauty of holiness,” as he had so often seen him previously (comp. 2 Sam. xv. 25).

Ver. 3.—*Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.* The complete resignation of the psalmist, his sense of God’s “loving-kindness,” and his desire to “praise,” not to complain, are, under the circumstances, most wonderful, most admirable, and furnish a pattern to the Church in all ages.

Ver. 4.—*Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy Name* (comp. Ps. civ. 33; cxlvi. 2). The purpose of man’s creation, the end of his being, his main employment throughout eternity, is the praise of God.

Ver. 5.—*My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness.* The “marrow and fatness” of the sacrificial feasts caused a delight to worshippers, which was no doubt partly sensuous. The memory of them occurs to the psalmist, but only as the shadow and emblem of the far deeper joy and satisfaction which he finds in the spiritual worship of the Most High, and especially in the offering of praise and thanksgiving. *And my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; or, while my mouth praiseth thee* (see the Prayer-book Version, which brings out the true sense).

Ver. 6.—*When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.* David had doubtless done this during the long and anxious night which followed his first day in the wilderness of Judæa (2 Sam. xvi. 14).

Ver. 7.—*Because thou hast been my help.* God had already delivered David out of so many dangers and troubles, that he felt all the more confidence for the future. Therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice (see the comment on Ps. lxi. 4).

Ver. 8.—*My soul followeth hard after thee; or, clingeth close after thee* (Kay, Cheyne); “*Tibi adhæret teque sequitur*” (Gesenius)—longs to come as near to thee as possible; while, on thy part, thy right hand upholdeth me; i.e. with a reciprocal action, thou pultest forth thy right hand to sustain and support me, drawing me to thee, and holding me, as it were, in thy embrace.

Ver. 9.—*But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth.* Professor Cheyne notes that “the psalmist has no sense of any incongruity between deeply spiritual musings and vehement denunciations of his enemies.” And this is certainly true. But it is to be remembered that he views his enemies, not merely as his own foes, but as the foes of God and of Israel. As the servant of God, he must hate those who are opposed to God; as the King of Israel, he must hate those who seek to injure and ruin his people. He does not, however, desire for them suffering or torment; he only asks that they may be removed from this sphere into another world. (On David’s conception of the lower world, see the comment upon Ps. xvi. 10 and lxxxvi. 13.)

Ver. 10.—*They shall fall by the sword; i.e. in battle—the natural end of those who stir up civil strife. They shall be a portion for foxes; rather, for jackals* (see 2 Sam. xviii. 6—8).

Ver. 11.—*But the king shall rejoice in God.* The “king,” thus suddenly introduced, cannot be an entirely new personage, unknown to the rest of the psalm, and, therefore, must be the composer, speaking of himself in the third person (comp. Ps. xviii. 50; lxxii. 1). Every one that sweareth by him (i.e. by God) shall glory; or, shall triumph (Kay). Those who swear by the Name of God show themselves to be believers in God, and will be upheld by him in time of danger (see Deut. vi. 13; Isa. lxx. 16). But the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped. (On the falsehoods told by David’s enemies, see 2 Sam. xv. 3; xvi. 7, 8; and comp. Ps. xxxviii. 12; xli. 5—8.)

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*An invocation and a vow.* “O God . . . seek thee.” Rightly understood, these are the sublimest words human lips can utter. “My God!” To claim God as his own with joyful, adoring intelligence and absolute faith, is the highest act of which

our nature is capable. It is melancholy to think that these same words may denote the degradation of our nature instead of its glory! The Prophet Isaiah, with holy indignation, restrained only by pity from utter scorn, depicts the idol-worshipper falling down before his wooden image, and saying, "Deliver me, for thou art my god!" (Isa. xlv. 14—17). Perhaps we need not go far to find even a lower depth. These words, "My God!" constantly slip from thoughtless, profane lips, as an unmeaning exclamation, with no trace of religious feeling. The poor heathen, who has some dim sense of an invisible spiritual power behind his image, may look down with wonder and pity on the educated Englishman who is devoid of all sense of worship, all consciousness of relationship to the Father of spirits. We have here (1) an *invocation*; and (2) a *purpose or vow*.

I. DAVID'S SUBLIME DECLARATION. "O God, thou art my God!" 1. *The expression of worship.* Our English word "God" is one of those ancient words whose original meaning is unknown. The Hebrew word for which it stands in the Bible primarily means "mighty." The object of true worship is the omnipotent, self-existent Creator. Yet observe that mere *power* is never set forth in Scripture as the sole or chief reason for worship,—that would be heathenish. God's wisdom, righteousness, truth, holiness, bountiful loving-kindness, and pardoning mercy are everywhere regarded as his claim to our worship, obedience, trust, and love. Underneath, like the solid rock on which the temple stood, is this foundation-truth of his almightiness. Worship is bowing down before God, but it is also looking up. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The more abasing the sense of our weakness, ignorance, sin, need, the more glorious and joyful a thing it is to look out of ourselves to him with whom is "the fountain of life," and say, "O God, thou art my God!" 2. *The expression of the sense of personal relationship.* "My God!" Worship is much, but it is far from being the sum of religion. No small proof that the Bible is God's Word to man—a message from our Father to his lost children, is this—that its practical aim throughout is to awaken and appeal to this sense of personal relationship to God; to show us how sin has put us in a wholly false, unnatural relation to him; to bring us back to our right place and character—"children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." 3. Accordingly, this is *the utterance of faith*—reasonable, happy, unlimited trust. Nature, brilliant with the glory of its Maker, ruled by the awful harmony of his unswerving laws, impresses us with the distance between the Creator and the creature. Sin adds to the sense of distance that of *estrangement* and fear. In Ps. li. David says, "Thou God of my salvation!" but does not venture to say, "My God!" But when faith sees "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," and grasps his plighted word, the shadow of guilt is chased away by the joy of pardon. Love casts out fear. The soul that was "far off" is "brought nigh by the blood of Christ." Experience comes in to help faith, and the language of faith becomes also the language of adoring gratitude and exulting certainty: "O God, thou art my God!"

II. DAVID'S PURPOSE AND VOW. "Early will I seek thee." Our Revisers have happily kept this beautiful word "early," which an overstrained scholarship seeks to get rid of. The Hebrew word is the same with the word for "dawn." We have a similar figure in Ps. cxxx. 6, a very natural and forcible image to a nation of early risers (comp. Alexander on Isa. xvi. 9). This yearning of the spirit after God—heart-hunger, soul-thirst for his presence, love, likeness, is the very voice of his Spirit in the soul. Desire, hope, quest, perseverance, are all included here (see vers. 2—5). And they who thus seek shall find, for "the Father seeketh such" (John iv. 23). Some sincere Christians may feel this intense yearning after God an experience they would fain reach, but scarcely dare claim. Take courage; he is God of the valleys as well as of the hills. The prayer of the humble is his delight. Why not make David's words your own—with better right than he? For the ancient saint came and claimed his privilege only on the ground of God's covenant; we claim our birthright through him who said, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God" (John xx. 17; cf. Rom. viii. 16). We are met for worship, yet there may be those to whom worship is but a dead form, who have never aspired, never cared to say, "O God, thou art my God!" You pity and despise the poor Hindu idolater. Which is really on the lower platform—he in his rude, dim, maimed, yet sincere fashion, expressing his sense of dependence on a higher and invisible power, "feeling

after God ; " or *you*, with the light of nineteen Christian centuries shining full on you with the open Bible, with the music of God's message of reconciliation filling the air, yet with man's noblest aspiration, the quest of God ; man's deepest, purest affection,—the love of God ; man's sublimest capacity,—the worship of God, dead or slumbering in your soul ? Alas ! you do not dream what a glory, power, joy, meaning, would come into your life if from this hour you learned to say, " O God, thou art my God ; early will I seek thee."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—11.—*Soul-thirst*. We may imagine the psalmist in the wilderness. It is night. He stands at his tent door. The light of moon and stars falls on a sandy waste stretching into dimness and mystery. He is lonely and sad. The emptiness of all around and the memory of better times breed a great longing in his soul. It is not as if it were something new and strange, rather it is the revival of the deepest and strongest cravings of his heart, that as he muses gather force and intensity, and must express themselves in song. The key-verses seem to be vers. 1, 5, 8.

I. THE SOUL'S LONGING. (Vers. 1—4.) When we "thirst for God," we naturally look back and recall the times when we had the truest and fullest enjoyment of his presence. We think of "the sanctuary." It was not the outward glory ; it was not the splendid ritual ; it was not the excitement of the great congregation ; but it was the vision of God that then brought peace and joy to the soul. And that is what is craved again—more life and fuller : "To see thy power and thy glory." There are often circumstances which intensify and strengthen our longings. When we come to know God, not only as God, but as our God and our Redeemer, we feel that it is a very necessity of our being, that it is our life, to see him and to serve him, to love him, to worship him, to rejoice in him as all our Salvation and all our Desire.

II. THE SOUL'S SATISFACTION. (Vers. 5—7.) What alone can satisfy the soul is the vision of God ; not God afar off, but nigh ; not God in nature, or in the Law, or in the imagination of our hearts, but God in Christ. Here is true and abiding satisfaction, infinite truth for the mind, eternal righteousness for the conscience, perfect love for the heart. Philip said, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us ;" and the answer of our Lord was, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." The more we meditate on this possession, the more we rejoice and give thanks. We cannot but praise. "As the spirit of the whole Book of Psalms is contracted into this psalm, so is the spirit and soul of the whole psalm contracted into this verse" (Donne). "Because thou hast been my Help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice" (ver. 7).

III. THE SOUL'S RESOLUTION. (Vers. 8—11.) There is mutual action. The soul cleaves to God, and God cleaves to the soul. There is a double embrace—we both hold and are upheld. The result is invigoration—the quickening glow of life through all our being, the free and joyous resolve to cleave to God, and to follow him in love and devotion all our days. Our needs are constant, and God's love never fails. When we are weak, his strength makes us strong ; when we are weary, his comforts sustain our fainting souls ; when we are ready to sink in the waters, his voice gives us courage, and his strong arm brings us salvation. God ever comes to those who want him. Desire on our part is met by satisfaction on his part. More and more as we love and serve we enter into the joy of our Lord. Our heart is prophet to our heart, and tells of vanquishment of the enemy, of the coming glory and the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore.—W. F.

Vers. 1—8.—*Sublime things*. Chrysostom says, "That it was decreed and ordained by the primitive Fathers that no day should pass without the public singing of this psalm."

I. THE GRANDEST CONVICTION THE CREATURE CAN HAVE. (Ver. 1.) That God is ours, and that we are God's.

II. THE GRANDEST LONGING OF BODY AND SOUL. (Ver. 1.)

III. THE GRANDEST VISION OF LIFE. (Ver. 2.) To see the power and glory of God.

IV. THE GRANDEST SONG. (Ver. 3.) The loving-kindness of God better than life "in all the fulness of its earthly meaning."

V. THE MOST ABUNDING SATISFACTION OF THE SOUL. (Ver. 5.)

VI. THE SUREST AND SAFEST PROTECTION. (Ver. 7.)

VII. THE MOST UNFAILING SUPPORT. (Ver. 8.)—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXIV.

At a time of great danger from domestic enemies, who threaten insurrection (ver. 2), the psalmist first complains to God, and entreates his aid (vers. 1-6); after which he boldly denounces his foes, and threatens them with discomfiture (vers. 7, 8). Finally, he draws a lesson from their fate, of warning to men in general (ver. 9), and of encouragement to the righteous (ver. 10). The author is probably David, as asserted in the "title," and the time that a little preceding the open revolt of Absalom.

Two strophes of four verses each (vers. 1-4, 7-10) are separated by one of two verses (vers. 5, 6).

Ver. 1.—*Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer; rather, in my complaint* (Cheyne, Revised Version); see Ps. lv. 2. *Preserve my life from fear of the enemy.* David already feels that it is not his deposition only, but his life, that is sought (comp. 2 Sam. xv. 14; xvii. 2).

Ver. 2.—*Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity.* The first danger is from secret plots, which David knows to be going on against his authority (2 Sam. xv. 1-12). The second, and greater danger, will be from open insurrection (2 Sam. xvii. 1-14).

Ver. 3.—*Who whet their tongue like a sword* (comp. Ps. lv. 21; lvii. 4; lix. 7). And bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words (comp. Ps. xi. 2; lvii. 4). Calumny was what David especially feared, and what actually brought about his downfall (see 2 Sam. xv. 2-6). The "bitterness" of his enemies is further emphasized by the speeches and curses of Shimei (2 Sam. xvi. 5-13).

Ver. 4.—*That they may shoot in secret at the perfect; or, in their hiding-places.* David does not scruple to call himself "perfect," using the word in the sense in which it is used of Job (Job i. 1; ii. 3), meaning a sincere and upright man. Suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not. They are not afraid, though it is "the anointed of the Lord," whom to attack is not only rebellion, but sacrilege (see 2 Sam. i. 14).

Ver. 5.—*They encourage themselves in an evil matter; or, in an evil scheme*—the plan of making David unpopular, and then raising the standard of open revolt against him (2 Sam. xv. 1-12). *They commune of laying snares privily.* The ungodly continually set traps for the righteous, who are so simple that they often fall into them. We do not know the exact proceedings of his enemies against David at the time, the narrative of 2 Sam. xv. being so brief; but it was probably by some trickery that David was induced to quit the stronghold of Jerusalem, and so yield the seat of government, and many other advantages, to his rival. *They say, Who shall see them?* (comp. Ps. x. 11; lix. 7; xciv. 7). It is an inveterate folly for men to imagine, either that God will not see their actions, or that he will pay no heed to them. A spurious humility is brought into play in the latter case—How can it be supposed that God will note the doings of such worms as men?

Ver. 6.—*They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search; rather, they devise iniquities.* *We have accomplished (they say) a well-devised device.* So modern critics generally (Hengstenberg, Kay, Cheyne, Canon Cook, Revised Version). Both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep. Therefore the righteous man is in great danger from them, unless God interpose.

Ver. 7.—*But God shall shoot at them with an arrow.* But God will interpose. As they have shot with their arrows at the righteous (ver. 3), so with his arrow shall God shoot at them. Suddenly shall they be wounded. The first word, "suddenly," may belong equally well either to the preceding or to the following clause. The result is all that is important. Not the righteous, but they themselves, shall receive the wound; literally, *their wound shall be*.

Ver. 8.—*So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves; rather, so shall they be made to stumble; their own tongue shall be against them.* The tongue, which they "whetted like a sword," shall be the principal means of bringing them into trouble (see 2 Sam. xvii. 1-23). All that see them shall flee away; rather, shall wag the head (Cheyne, Revised Version) in derision.

Ver. 9.—*And all men shall fear, and shall*

declare the work of God. The fate of David's enemies shall cause widespread fear and alarm. Men shall perceive God's hand in it, and shall be led, in consequence, to declare "God's work." The tragic ends of Ahithophel and Absalom were certainly well calculated to impress the minds of men generally, and to strike awe into the hearts of those who had looked with indifference, or even, perhaps, with satisfaction, on the political troubles. For they shall wisely consider of his doing; rather, for they shall understand his operation. They shall understand, *i.e.*, that God is on the side

of the righteous, and, when danger presses, will interpose on their behalf, to the terrible discomfiture of the wicked.

Ver. 10.—*The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and shall trust in him.* The righteous, delivered from their imminent peril, naturally "rejoice in the Lord," *i.e.* rejoice in God's goodness to them, and feel their confidence in him increased. And all the upright in heart shall glory (comp. Ps. xxxii. 11; lviii. 11). A thrill of joy passes through the whole of God's people, whether they were involved in the danger escaped or not.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 3.—*"Bitter words."* Of the *ten* commandments, *two* are directed against *sins of speech*—one against profane words concerning God; the other against slanderous words concerning our neighbours. No sins are apt to be thought more lightly of than sins of the tongue; yet no sins are more severely and constantly denounced in Scripture. Probably no class of sins does more mischief in the world. Our words are spoken of as the special object of Divine knowledge (Ps. cxxxix. 4). *The sinfulness of "bitter words"* is seen (1) in their *source*—they flow from a bitter fountain in the heart; (2) in their *utterance*—they have a bitter taste in the mouth; (3) in their *results*—they infuse bitterness into life.

I. IN THEIR SOURCE. St. James compares the heart to a fountain, and notes the unnatural anomaly that from the same source should flow sweetness and bitterness, blessing and cursing, praise and slander (Jas. iii. 8—12). If the heart harboured no envy, malice, anger, pride, uncharitableness, ill-natured censorious judgments, how sweet and refreshing would the flow of speech be (Eph. iv. 29—32; Matt. xv. 18)!

II. IN THEIR UTTERANCE. Our Lord speaks of the good man bringing forth what is good from "the good treasure of his heart," and the evil man, that which is evil "out of the evil treasure" (Matt. xii. 35). Solomon marks it as one great difference between a wise man and a fool, that the former knows how to hold his tongue (Prov. x. 19; xxix. 11). A good man may be aware of envious evil, uncharitable thoughts; but he is very careful how he gives them vent in *bitter words*. His prayer is, "Keep the door of my lips" (Ps. cxli. 3). Some people not merely find a pleasure in uttering all the sharp unkind things that occur to them; they persuade themselves it is a duty. No matter how bitter the word may be, out it comes, on the plea, "I must be honest; I must always speak my mind." Why *must* you? It is not honesty; it is want of self-control, of sympathy, good feeling, Christian and Christ-like consideration for others.

III. IN THEIR RESULTS. The word once spoken, like the bolt overshot, cannot be recalled. But the deadliest arrow can hit but one mark; the bitter word may fly from lip to lip, growing as it flies, and inflict a thousand wounds before it is forgotten. David suffered much from bitter words. He counts it a great instance of God's goodness when he defends his servants "from the strife of tongues" (Ps. xxxi. 20; cf. vers. 13, 18). Unjust, slanderous, cruel words are compared to arrows, swords, spears, razors, serpents' teeth, burning coals (Pss. lii. 2—4; lv. 21; lvii. 4; lviii. 4; cxx. 4; cxl. 3).

Bitter words were no small part of the bitter cup which our Saviour drank for us, and of which he warned his disciples they must taste. Spoken by the unbelieving world, "falsely for his sake," they are the Christian's glory (Matt. v. 11; x. 25); but spoken by Christians of Christians, they are weapons put into the hand of unbelief. The bitterness of controversy has perhaps been a greater hindrance to truth than the assaults of atheism. Wherever this *Marah* flows—in the Church, the home, the social circle, the nation—it poisons life. Seek to cast into it the healing branch (Col. iv. 6).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—10.—“Man’s inhumanity to man.” I. DRIVING THE GODLY MAN TO PRAYER. We see many evils we cannot remedy. They move our pity, they stir our indignation. Perhaps we argue and remonstrate; perhaps in a moment of generous impulse we may try our hand at redress. But how little can we do! and our best efforts not only fail, but may even bring ourselves and others into greater trouble (Exod. ii. 11—14). In our grief and despair we turn to God; his ear is ever open to the cry of the poor; his arm is ever ready to bring help to the oppressed. Into his great, fatherly heart we can pour all our woes; and under his sheltering wings we may ever find sweet security.

II. DEPLORED AS A SORE EVIL UNDER THE SUN. There are differences. Inhumanity breaks forth more furiously at times. Some men see and suffer vastly more than others. It has been said of poets that “they learn in suffering what they teach in song,” and this was the experience of the psalmist. Inhumanity is characterized by *secrecy*. Men who do evil hate the light. By *combinations*. Sin is weakness. Hand had to join with hand so as to give power. Co-operation for good is praiseworthy; but men banded together for evil are branded with infamy. *Inveterate malice*. There is no relenting, no mercy. The heart grows hardened in selfishness. *Utter godlessness*. (Ver. 5.) ‘The more men indulge in sin, the blinder they become; the more persistently they break the second great commandment, the more indifferent they grow to the first. The thought of God troubles them, and they put it away. If it returns, they still reject it. By-and-by it will cease to come. Their hearts are set in them to do iniquity. How distressing it is for the man who fears God to behold all this! He thinks how different it might have been; he grieves over the waste and, worse still, the awful misapplication of human power; he confesses with shame and sorrow of heart the sins that have brought such terrible woes into the world; and mourns the guilt of which he must bear his share.

III. DOOMED TO THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD. Even here, where we know but in part, we cannot but see that it is ill with the wicked. In spite of their vauntings, they are not at peace. Though they call their lips their own, they are in reality held in by bit and bridle; though they boast of their successes, their rejoicing is vain and futile; retribution will in the end surely come upon them. So it was with Pharaoh and Sennacherib and Herod; so it was with Ahab, who thought to escape by disguising himself; but a certain man drew his bow at a venture, and smote him between the joints of his harness, and he died. God’s arrows never miss their mark.

Learn three great lessons. 1. That to do right is always best. 2. That we can only overcome evil with good. 3. That vengeance belongeth to God alone.—W. F.

Vers. 1—10.—Danger and faith. The psalm was probably written by David at the court of Saul.

I. DANGER. (Vers. 2—6.) 1. *To character*. From slander. 2. *To life*. (Ver. 1.) From secret plots and conspiracies.

II. FAITH IN GOD. 1. *Expressed in prayer for protection*. 2. *That God will destroy the plots of his enemies*. (Vers. 7, 8.) “The Divine judgment is now painted as if actually fulfilling itself before the very eyes of the psalmist.”

III. THE SALUTARY EFFECTS OF GOD’S RETRIBUTIVE PROVIDENCE. 1. *Upon the companions of the wicked*. (Ver. 8.) They shake the head, or flee away, so that they become separate and scattered. 2. *Upon men generally*. (Ver. 9.) They shall declare the work of God, and consider his doings. 3. *Upon the righteous*. They shall trust, rejoice, and glory in the Lord, in his righteousness and goodness.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXV.

THIS is a song of unmixed praise and thankfulness. God is first praised for his moral

qualities: (1) as Hearer of prayer (ver. 2); (2) as Pardoner of sin (ver. 3); (3) as Giver of blessings in his courts (ver. 4); and (4) as Deliverer of his people from their enemies

(ver. 5). Next, God is praised for his might and majesty in nature (vers. 6—8). Lastly, he is praised for his goodness and bounty in connection with the harvest (vers. 9—13). Metrically, the psalm seems to consist of three strophes, the first and second of four verses each, the third of five.

The Davidical authorship, though asserted in the "title," is somewhat doubtful. The mention of the temple, and especially of the "courts" of the temple, seems to imply a later date than David's. And the psalm cannot be said to be in his manner, since it is too easy, flowing, and equable. The conjecture which places the date soon after Sennacherib's invasion (Delitzsch) is plausible, but still quite uncertain.

Ver. 1.—Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion; literally, *there is silence-praise* (equivalent to "silent praise") *for thee, O God, in Zion*. There was, for the most part, a hushed silence in the tabernacle and temple, amid which silent prayer and praise were offered to God by the priests and Levites, and any lay persons who might be present (comp. 1 Sam. i. 13). And unto thee shall the vow be performed. When there was any special outpouring of praise in the temple, there would almost always be a performance of vows. Both depended on some deliverance, or favour having been granted.

Ver. 2.—O thou that hearest prayer. A necessary and inalienable attribute of God. Calvin rightly observes on the passage: "God can no more divest himself of his attribute of hearing prayer than of being." *Unto thee shall all flesh come*. "All flesh" might certainly, in a psalmist's mouth, mean no more than "all Israel" (so Ewald and Hitzig). But the context (especially in vers. 5 and 8) shows that in *this* psalm the writer is universalist in his ideas, and embraces all mankind in his hopes and aspirations (comp. Ps. xxii. 27, 28; lxxxvi. 9; Isa. lxvi. 23; Jer. xvi. 19; Joel ii. 28).

Ver. 3.—Iniquities prevail against me. Not so much, perhaps, his own iniquities, as those of his nation. Compare the expression, "*our transgressions*," in the next clause. As for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away; or, *cover them*.

Ver. 4.—Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth. The "choosing" intended is certainly not that of the seed of Aaron (Lev. viii. 1), or of the seed of Levi (Numb. xviii. 21—23), but that act by which God "chose" Israel out of all the nations of the earth to be "a special people unto himself" (Deut. vii. 6), and gave them a distinct position, and peculiar privileges. And

causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts. Among the peculiar privileges, one of the greatest was that of approaching God's presence in his holy temple, and entering his "courts" and worshipping there. This all Israelites were not only permitted, but commanded to do, at least three times in the year, while the dwellers in Jerusalem, privileged above the rest, had constant opportunities of attending, and using to the full the means of grace provided for them in the sanctuary. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple. In "the goodness of God's house" the psalmist includes, not only the delights there experienced, but also all the blessings which God gives to those who devoutly worship him there—"from the forgiveness of sins to outward, temporal mercies" (Hengstenberg).

Ver. 5.—By terrible things in righteousness (*i.e.* "by terrible acts of righteous judgment upon our enemies") wilt thou answer us. This is a sequel to ver. 2. As God hears prayer and answers it, so when his people cry to him for protection and deliverance from their foes, the result can only be righteous judgments of a fearful character upon the persecutors. O God of our salvation; *i.e.* God through whom we obtain salvation. Who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth (see the comment on ver. 2, and comp. ver. 8). And of them that are afar off upon the sea; literally, *and of the sea of those afar off*. The reading is, perhaps, corrupt.

Vers. 6—8.—God having been praised for his moral qualities, is now further eulogized in respect of his doings in nature. The mountains set forth his majesty and permanence (ver. 6); the seas and waves, his power to control and subdue (ver. 7); the outgoings of the morning and evening—sunrise and sunset—his gracious loving-kindness (ver. 8).

Ver. 6.—Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains (comp. Ps. xxxvi. 6; xcv. 4; Amos iv. 13). The mountains are an emblem of God's strength and firmness and fixedness. They stand up in still and silent majesty; they seem as if they could never be moved. He who created them must be girded with power (comp. Ps. xciii. 1).

Ver. 7.—Which stilleth the noise of the seas. The power of God, as set forth in his control of the sea, is a favourite topic with the sacred writers (see Job xxxviii. 8; Prov. viii. 29; Isa. i. 2; li. 10; Jer. v. 22, etc.). Being so entirely beyond his own control, it seems to man one of the greatest of marvels that there should be any force

capable of subduing and taming it. Hence the admiration excited by our Lord's miracle (Matt. viii. 26, 27). The noise of their waves (comp. Isa. xvii. 12). And the tumult of the people. This clause may seem a little out of place in a passage which treats of God's power over nature. But, after all, humanity is a constituent part of nature.

Ver. 8.—They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid of thy tokens; i.e. they see thy tokens—indications of thy mighty power—and are filled with awe. Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening (or, *the portals of morn and eve*—the gateways through which the sun comes forth each morning and retires each evening) to rejoice; i.e. to gladden mankind, to spread joy and gladness over the earth. The splendour of sunrise and sunset are in the poet's mind.

Vers. 9—13.—In conclusion, the psalmist praises God for his bountiful providence with respect to the harvest. According to some, the whole poem is essentially a harvest thanksgiving, and the poet now “comes at last to the point aimed at from the first.” He traces the whole process by which the glorious termination is arrived at. First, the “early rain,” descending from “the river of God,” or the reservoir for rain which God guards in the heavens (Job xxxviii. 37), moistening the furrows, softening the ridges, and preparing the land for the seed-corn. Then the sowing, which, being man's work, is but just touched on (ver. 9, *ad fin.*). After that, the “latter rain”—the gentle showers of March and April—which cause the grain to burst and the blade to spring, and the ear to form itself, and turn the dull fallow into a mass of greenery (vers. 10, 12). At last, the full result—pastures clothed with flocks; valleys, the “long broad sweeps between parallel ranges of hills,” covered over with corn; all nature laughing and shouting for joy (ver. 13).

Ver. 9.—Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it (comp. Job xxxvi. 27, 28; xxxvii.

6; xxxviii. 26—28; Ps. cxlvii. 18; Jer. v. 24; Matt. v. 45). Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God. There is no “with” in the original; and the two clauses are better taken separately. Translate, *Thou greatly enrichest it; the river of God is full of water.* By “the river of God” is to be understood God's store of water in the clouds and atmosphere, which he can at any time retain or let loose. Thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it; rather, *when thou hast so prepared her* (the earth). By thus preparing the earth for the sowing, God prepares for men the corn which they ultimately obtain at the harvest.

Ver. 10.—Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; rather, *the furrows* (Hengstenberg, Kay, Cheyne, Revised Version). Thou settlest the furrows thereof; rather, *thou smoothes down its ridges.* So covering up the grain, and bringing the rough ploughed land to a comparatively smooth surface. Thou makest it soft with showers: thou bleesest the springing thereof. The whole ground being softened with warm showers, the springing of the blade begins under God's blessing.

Ver. 11.—Thou crownest the year with thy goodness. As God had begun, so he goes on to the “crowning” of the whole. And thy paths drop fatness. As he moves about, visiting the earth (ver. 9), there drop from him fertility and abundance.

Ver. 12.—They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness; rather, *the pastures of the wilderness drip with it*; i.e. with the “fatness” which is shed from God's presence. And the little hills rejoice on every side; literally, *are girded with joy.*

Ver. 13.—The pastures are clothed with flocks; or, *with their flocks*; i.e. the flocks befitting them. The valleys also are covered over with corn. The great open sweeps between the ranges of hills are completely covered over with grain crops, wheat, barley, millet; and the result is that they seem to shout for joy, they also sing. This is better than the rendering of Ewald and Delitzsch, “Man shouts for joy; he sings.” All the poets personify Nature, and make her sympathize with human kind (comp. Isa. xiv. 8; xxxv. 1; lv. 12; Virg., *Eclog.*, v. 62; *Georg.*, iv. 461).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*The privilege and duty of prayer.* “Thou that hearest prayer.” All practical religion rests on this fact—that God hears prayer. A God who could not or would not hear prayer, an almighty Creator with whom we could hold no converse, would not be God to us. We could not say, “O God, thou art my God!” There would be no impiety in the question, “What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?” The Epicureans, who taught that there are gods, but that they do not concern themselves with human affairs, were practically atheists. Prayer is the one *conscious* link

(there are many unconscious) between the seen and the unseen worlds. A prayerless life is a godless life—shut up, imprisoned in the narrow sphere of “things seen” and temporal. A prayerful life transcends these barriers, takes hold on “things unseen” and eternal; walks with God; endures as seeing him who is invisible.

I. THE GLORIOUS CERTAINTY OF THE FACT THAT GOD HEARS PRAYER. By *hearing prayer* is meant in Scripture taking account of our requests and answering them (1 John v. 14, 15). This involves all that is most glorious in God’s revealed attributes. His infinite knowledge, which not the most timid or rapid desire, or speechless lifting up of any heart, escapes. His wisdom to discern whether, when, how, to grant our requests. Foreknowledge—for long preparation may have been needful, though the prayer be uttered and granted in a moment. Righteousness, to grant no petition, however fervent, which it would not be *right* to grant. Love—to take fatherly interest in our childish ways, small needs, and often ignorant and impatient desires; and to care for our best welfare. And almighty power—to carry out all that wisdom, righteousness, and love direct, and to make “all things work together,” etc. (Rom. viii. 28). The *certainty* that God hears prayer rests on his faithfulness and the *promises* which fill the Bible; on the *commands* which lay on us the duty as well as confer the privilege of prayer; on the *examples*, still more abundant in Scripture than these commands and promises of prayer answered (including our Saviour’s own example); on the daily experience of God’s Church. If any truth in the scope of human knowledge rests on a firm foundation of experience, it is this.

II. THE TRANSCENDENT PRIVILEGE AND BLESSING OF PRAYER. It would be a great thing were we permitted (as the Romish creed teaches) to invoke the aid and counsel of angels and glorified saints. But we pass through their shining ranks and come with boldness to the very throne of God (Heb. x. 19; iv. 16). Whatever help angels can render will be given under orders from their Lord and ours (Heb. ii. 14; 1 Pet. iii. 22). We measure blessings often by their loss. Let us imagine this privilege of prayer withdrawn or limited. Suppose a day in each week (a sort of *anti-sabbath*) on which prayer was forbidden—or but one in a month or year. Who would choose that day for any enterprise? Who would not fear to die on such a day? When its cheerless dawn broke we should say, “Would God it were evening!” and when midnight chimed we should thank God the lips of prayer were again unsealed. Or a region of earth where prayer was forbidden; if men cried to God, they were warned it would be vain. Let its valleys teem with plenty, its hills with precious ore, climate and scenery be the finest in the world,—would you care—would you dare—to dwell in that accursed spot? Or if there were one human being to whom God’s voice had said, “Ask not; for thou shalt not receive!” with what horror we should look at this outlaw from Divine mercy! how giddy would be for him heights of prosperity! how cheerless the dark days of trouble! how dreadful the hour of death—the plunge into an unknown eternity! And yet there are those (perhaps here) for whom every day is a day without prayer; from whose home no voice of prayer ascends; self-exiled from God!

III. THE CORRESPONDING DUTY. “Men ought always to pray” (Luke xviii. 1). “This is the will of God” (1 Thess. v. 17, 18). Prayer is one of the great laws of God’s moral government. He has ordained that we should *ask* in order to receive (Luke xi. 9, 10). This is the reply to all those plausible objections to prayer drawn from God’s superior and infinite wisdom, the unchangeableness of his laws, the unreasonableness of thinking that our will can bend his, and so forth. Plausible; but nugatory in the face of the fact that God has commanded us to pray. He has given us his only begotten Son as our Intercessor; his Holy Spirit, to teach us how to pray; has pledged his word to hear prayer; and daily and hourly answers the prayers of his children. To regard prayer *only* as a duty is fatal to life, freedom, joy in prayer. It would lead to mechanical formalism. But duty is, after all, the *backbone* of life. You do not feel at all times in a right frame of mind for prayer. If you had no guide but feeling, you would say, “Another time will be more suitable.” Or when pressed and hurried, you would say, “I must attend to urgent duties; and leave the enjoyment and refreshment of prayer to a time of leisure.” But duty stands guard at the door (Matt. vi. 6). And as in other cases, it brings its own reward. Perhaps at the very time when you have set yourself to pray with a cold heart, because you know you *ought* to pray and *must*, you have come from your chamber with beaming countenance,

ready to say with Jacob, Gen. xxviii. 16, 17. This applies to public and social, as well as private, prayer.

Ver. 11.—*The lessons of harvest.* "Thou crownest the year," etc. Men see what they have eyes to see. The farmer looks on the field of golden grain, ripe for the sickle, and sees the reward of his toil and return for his capital. The painter sees a glorious subject for a picture. The economist thinks of prices, averages, national prosperity. The devout Christian sees God's hand opening to answer the prayer for daily bread. Now, it is one leading characteristic of the Scripture writers that they see God in everything. In this light let us try to read *the lessons of harvest.*

I. **THANKFULNESS.** Literal rendering in margin, "Thou crownest the year of thy goodness," which some take to refer to some special year of remarkably bountiful harvest. Perhaps rather the thought is that God's unceasing goodness runs through the whole circle of the seasons, though the harvest is the crowning manifestation (Matt. v. 45; Acts xiv. 17; 2 Cor. ix. 10). Grace at meals should be no dead form, but the welling-up and outpouring of new thankfulness for fresh goodness. God's hand spreads the daily table for all creatures. As the secret spring of life is in him, so all that nourishes and maintains life is from him. Hence our Saviour makes the gift of daily bread the image of himself—"the Bread of Life" (John vi. 33, 35, 48—51).

II. **OBEDIENCE TO LAW.** God works according to those unchanging laws which he has ordained—unchanging as long as the present order of the world continues (Gen. viii. 22). Human labour is profitable only as it conforms to those laws. He who would reap in harvest-time must sow in seed-time. The natural is the image of the spiritual order (Gal. vi. 7—9).

III. **PATIENCE.** (Jas. v. 7.) Here also our Lord bids us see the spiritual order (Mark iv. 26—29). Do not expect ripe ears in January. *Be patient* with your children, your scholars, your hearers; yea, let the Christian even be patient with himself.

IV. **CO-OPERATION.** The ploughman, sower, reaper, must join their toil; and the ploughman did not make his plough, the sower his basket, the reaper his sickle. Other hands built the garner. Who can reckon how many hands have combined their labour to place on our table a single loaf (Rom. xiv. 7)?

V. **HOPE.** Under dark wintry skies, beneath frost and snow, the grain is growing, which summer suns shall ripen. The worst harvest that was ever reaped kept alive the germs of all the harvests that have since grown or ever will (1 Cor. xv. 58). And note, that as long as the grain is stored, it *preserves* life (even for centuries), but *produces* none. It must be flung away and buried, and, as *grain*, must perish, for the hidden life to burst forth. Hence our Lord makes it the image of his life-giving death (John xii. 24), and St. Paul of resurrection (1 Cor. xv. 35—38).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—13.—*Harvest thanksgiving.* The three great Jewish feasts had reference to the harvest. The Passover was kept early in the year, when the barley harvest was begun, and a sheaf of the firstfruits was offered as a thank-offering (Lev. xxiii. 10). Fifty days later came Pentecost, when the wheat was ripe; and then two loaves of the new corn were presented (Lev. xxiii. 17). Last of all was the Feast of Tabernacles, when the fruits of the earth had been gathered in, and the people gave thanks and rejoiced before the Lord with "the joy of harvest" (Lev. xxiii. 40; Deut. xvi. 13—17). This psalm is a song of thanksgiving to God for the harvest.

I. **THE RIGHT STANDPOINT.** Israel was a people near to God. They had been separated from other nations. They enjoyed special privileges and blessings. "Zion" was to them the great centre of unity. Thither the tribes went up. There the people, with their rulers, assembled to worship God. As with them, so with us. Our worship must be ruled by God's will as revealed to us. We can only come before him with acceptance when we come through Jesus Christ. Our standpoint also is "Zion" (Matt. xviii. 20; Eph. ii. 11—18; Heb. ii. 22—28).

II. **THE SPIRIT IN WHICH WE SHOULD DRAW NEAR.** 1. *With unfeigned faith.*

"Waiting" expresses quiet confidence. It is both "praise" and "prayer." 2. *With assured hope in God's mercy.* Sin meets us when we come before God. It fills our hearts with shame and apprehension. But when we look to Christ we are comforted. In him we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins. It is as sinners pardoned that we should praise God. All God's gifts are enhanced in value when we take them from the hands of the Crucified. 3. *With adoring thanksgiving.* Relieved of sin, our hearts rise in joy to God (ver. 4). God in Christ is the true home of our souls. Here we reach peace. Here we are made glad in the light of our Father's face, and enriched out of the fulness of his grace and truth. Nay, more. Remembering God's "great love," and "the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us" (Eph. ii. 7), and realizing the power of Christ, we can rejoice in hope of the blessedness of the coming time when the "God of our salvation" shall be the Confidence of all the ends of the earth, and the people of every kindred and tongue shall sing his praise.

III. THE SUBJECTS WHICH SHOULD SPECIALLY ENGAGE OUR ATTENTION. The world is not a dead world, a mere piece of mechanism, subject to cold material laws. It is God's world, and is ruled by God's laws. Looking back, we should recall the great events of the year. We may consider what is *general*—national, social, and religious blessings common to all. Not only mercies, but chastisements; for every chastisement is, when rightly received, a blessing. How comforting to know that the same God who "by his strength setteth fast the mountains" is the God "who heareth prayer;" that the same God "who stilleth the noise of the seas and the tumult of the people" is the "God of our salvation"! In *particular* we should consider God's goodness in the harvest (vers. 8—13). How vivid and beautiful is the picture! We see the various stages, from the sowing of the seed onward to the reaping-time; from the sweet greenness of spring to the golden glow and manifold glories of harvest. All this is of God. "He worketh hitherto." During all the ages of the past he has blessed the labours of the husbandman, and every year we see new proofs of his faithfulness, and enjoy richer manifestations of his love and bounty. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest . . . shall not cease" (Gen. viii. 22), and as often as the harvest comes round God's Name will be praised.—W. F.

Ver. 3.—*Defeat and victory.* I. Here is a CONFESSION OF DEFEAT. When we look within we find that, instead of all being right, all is wrong. This alarms us. We rouse ourselves to action. We resolve to live a new life of love and holiness. But the more we try the less we succeed. Our strength is weakness. Our purposes are broken off. Our best endeavours end in defeat. Instead of overcoming evil, we are overcome of evil. Instead of gaining purity and freedom, our case grows worse, and we groan in misery as the bond-slaves of sin. Confused and confounded, our cry is, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?"

II. THANKSGIVING FOR VICTORY. Though we despair of ourselves, we must not despair of God. We know what God is, and what he has done for us, and therefore we turn to him with hope. Casting ourselves simply upon his mercy in Christ, we are able to grasp the gracious promise, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." God's love to us is a personal love. God's work in us is designed to make us pure from sin, and he will perfect it in the day of Christ. While we say, therefore, with grief and pain, "Iniquities prevail against me," let us with renewed hope proclaim, "As for our transgressions, *thou shalt purge them away.*"—W. F.

Ver. 9.—*Thanksgiving for corn.* "Thou preparest them corn."

I. BECAUSE IT IS THE SPECIAL GIFT OF GOD TO MAN. It came from God at first. It is renewed year by year. Wherever man dwells it may be cultivated in some form or other. "How it stands, that yellow corn, on its fair taper stems, its golden head bent, all rich and waving there! The mute earth at God's kind bidding has produced it once again—man's bread" (Luther).

II. BECAUSE IT IS INDISPENSABLE TO THE WELFARE OF MAN. Corn is not only valuable, but necessary. Individuals may live without it, but for man, on the broad scale, it is indispensable. The worth is known by the want. When there is a scarcity of corn, all the markets of the world are affected. Bread is the staff of life. It is because of its worth and its suitableness to human needs that corn is constituted the

symbol of the highest blessings. It stands for the Word of God. It figures the great redemption (John xii. 24). It foreshadows the glory of the resurrection (1 Cor. xv.).

III. BECAUSE IT DEPENDS FOR ITS CONTINUANCE ON THE LABOUR OF MAN. Many gifts come to us irrespective of our own efforts, but corn is not one of them. Its enjoyment is conditional. It is an annual. It has not an independent existence. It does not live and propagate itself by its own seed. It requires the care of man, else it would soon die out and be lost. In order to be preserved it must be sown by man's own hand in ground which man's own hand has tilled. The land must be prepared for the corn, as well as the corn for the land. manifold blessings result from this arrangement. Thrift is good. Labour is a healthful discipline. Providing for the wants of ourselves and others binds us more closely together as brethren. If there be famine in Canaan, there is corn in Egypt; and this leads to commerce and friendly intercourse between nations. Besides, in the fact that year after year we must sow in order to reap; that each season's supply is but a measured quantity, never much in excess of what is required for food; and that the powers of heaven must work together with the powers of earth to secure a bountiful harvest;—we are taught in the most impressive manner our dependence upon God, and our obligations to praise him for his goodness and his wonderful works.—W. F.

Vers. 1—13.—*Reasons for praising God.* "Can hardly doubt that this psalm was composed on the occasion of an abundant harvest, and was intended to be sung as a hymn of thanksgiving by the whole congregation gathered before God in Zion." God is praised under three aspects.

I. AS THE GOD OF THE CHURCH. (Vers. 1—5.) "Whom thou choosest, and causest to approach." 1. *He is the Hearer of all true prayer.* (Ver. 2.) "Unto thee doth all flesh come" in dependence and prayer. 2. *He pardons iniquity and transgression.* (Ver. 3.) Pardons those who become conscious of their sins, and are persistent. 3. *Satisfies the desires of those whom he draws to himself.* (Ver. 4.) God inspires the worship he rewards with such satisfying blessings. 4. *Manifests his righteousness in the salvation of his people.*

II. AS THE GOD WHO REVEALS HIMSELF IN NATURE. (Vers. 6—8.) 1. *His work in nature manifests omnipotence.* (Ver. 6.) "Setteth fast the mountains," etc. 2. *He overrules the greatest disturbances of nature and the nations.* (Ver. 7.) 3. *Man and nature both ultimately subject to him.* 3. *Man is afraid, but nature sings of God in the morning and in the evening.* (Ver. 8.) The ignorant heathen are afraid, not those who know God.

III. AS THE GOD OF THE HARVEST. (Vers. 9—13.) 1. *God is the great Husbandman.* (Vers. 9, 10.) He prepares and enriches the soil to receive the corn. 2. *He makes the wilderness and the hills to rejoice with their abundance.* (Vers. 11, 12.) 3. *God is the great Shepherd of the earth.* (Ver. 13.) The pastures are clothed with flocks.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXVI

THIS is another song of thanksgiving, and is connected with a special deliverance (vers. 10—12). The composer is about to offer a sacrifice to God in his holy place, in performance of a vow which he had made when he was in trouble (vers. 13—15), and has prepared the psalm as a liturgical formula to be used on the occasion. It is an ode in four strophes: an opening one of four verses—a simple rendering of praise (vers. 1—4); then a short strophe of three verses, celebrating God's might against his enemies

(vers. 5—7); next a statement in general terms of the deliverance experienced, and a description of the sacrifices to be offered for it (vers. 8—15); and finally an address to the people, calling on them to "hearken"—together with a protestation of sincerity, and an appeal to God as witnessing to it (vers. 16—20). The psalm, not being ascribed to David in the "title," and having no especial traces of his manner, is generally assigned to a later Judæan king, as Asa, Jehoshaphat, or Hezekiah.

Ver. 1.—*Make a joyful noise unto God, all*

ye lands; literally, *all the earth*—an invitation to the whole world to join in the joy of Israel, wherein they too are interested (comp. Ps. lxxv. 2, 5).

Ver. 2.—Sing forth the honour of his Name; rather, *the glory of his Name*. Make his praise glorious; or, recognize his glory in your praise of him; i.e. do not merely thank him for his kindness to you personally, but magnify him for his greatness and majesty.

Ver. 3.—Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! rather, *How terrible are thy works!* God's deliverances, while rejoicing the persecuted, are "terrible" to the persecutors. Through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee. God's enemies, compelled against their will, have to submit themselves, but it is a feigned submission (comp. Ps. lxxvi. 12).

Ver. 4.—All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy Name (see above, ver. 1, and compare the passages quoted in the comment *ad loc.*). Dr. Kay notes that "the universality of the Church is clearly contemplated" in all the psalms from Ps. lxxv. to Ps. lxxviii.

Ver. 5.—Come and see the works of God. Contemplate, i.e., the terrible "works of God," spoken of in ver. 3. See how, to save his people, he has to smite their enemies. Truly, on such occasions, he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men (compare the next verse for an example).

Ver. 6.—He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot; there did we rejoice in him. The passage of the Red Sea at the time of the Exodus was one of the most wonderful of God's works. To the Israelites it was altogether a matter of joy and rejoicing (see Exod. xv. 1—21). But how terrible a thing was it to the Egyptians! "The waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them" (Exod. xiv. 28).

Ver. 7.—He ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold (or, observe) the nations. God keeps perpetual watch upon the heathen nations, whose general attitude is that of hostility to his "peculiar people," lest his people should suffer at their hands. Although they may professedly be submissive (ver. 3), their submission is not to be depended on. Let not the rebellious exalt themselves. At any time rebellion may break out, his people be attacked, and "the nations" endeavour to "exalt themselves." All such attempts, however, will be in vain, since "by his power God ruleth for ever."

Vers. 8—15.—Here we reach the heart of

the psalm. The people are called upon to praise God for a recent deliverance from a long period of severe affliction and oppression at the hand of enemies (vers. 8—12), and to join in the sacrifices which are about to be offered to God in payment of the vows made during the time of trouble (vers. 13—15). As the writer ascribes to himself both the making of the vows and the offering of the sacrifices, he must have been the leader of the nation at the time of the oppression and of the deliverance.

Ver. 8.—O bless our God, ye people; literally, *ye peoples*—but the plural form here can scarcely point to the "nations," who have just been called, not *'ammim*, but *gôim* (see ver. 7). And make the voice of his praise to be heard (comp. Ps. xxxiii. 3; cl. 5). The heartiness of the soul's devotion was made apparent by the loudness of the voice.

Ver. 9.—Which holdeth our soul in life; rather, *which setteth (or, hath set) our soul in life*—implying a previous condition of great danger. And suffereth not our feet to be moved. In allusion, perhaps, to a threatened captivity.

Ver. 10.—For thou, O God, hast proved us. The calamity had been sent as a trial, to prove and purify (comp. Ps. vii. 9; xi. 5). Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried (comp. Ps. xii. 6; Prov. xvii. 3; xxv. 4; Isa. i. 22, 25; xlviii. 10; Zech. xiii. 9; Mal. iii. 3). Silver, according to ancient methods, required a prolonged process of refining before it could be pronounced pure. The calamity under which Israel had suffered had been of long duration.

Ver. 11.—Thou broughtest us into the net. Professor Cheyne translates "into the dungeon." But *m'tsudah* has nowhere else this meaning. It is always either "a net" or "a stronghold." Thou laidst affliction upon our loins; or, a sore burden (Revised Version). The meaning is, "Thou crushedst us down under a heavy weight of oppression."

Ver. 12.—Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads. See the Egyptian and Assyrian sculptures *passim*, where the king in his chariot gallops over the bodies of his dead and wounded enemies. We went through fire and through water; i.e. through dangers of every kind—a proverbial expression (comp. Isa. xliii. 2). But thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place; or, "a place of refreshment" (εἰς ἀναψυχήν, LXX.). Dr. Kay renders, "a place of rich comfort;" Professor Cheyne, "a place of liberty" (comp. Ps. xxiii. 4 and Jer. xxxi. 25).

Ver. 13.—I will go into thy house with

burnt offerings; I will pay thee my vows. In the old world the strict performance of vows was always held to be one of the main obligations of religion. A vow was of the nature of a compact with God, and to break it was an act of flagrant dishonesty, from which men shrank. The Mosaic Law sanctioned vows of various kinds, as the vowing of children to the service of God (Lev. xxvii. 1—8; 1 Sam. i. 11); the vow of the Nazarite (Numb. vi. 2—21); and vows of clean or unclean animals (Lev. xxvii. 9—13, 27—29), etc. Clean animals, when vowed, must be either redeemed or sacrificed. The importance of performing vows is borne frequent witness to by the psalmists (see Pss. xxii. 25; i. 14; lvi. 12; lxi. 8; lxx. 1; cxvi. 14, 18; cxxxii. 2).

Ver. 14.—Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. Vows were commonly made in a time of trouble, or, at any rate, of difficulty (see Judg. xi. 30, 31; 1 Sam. i. 11).

Ver. 15.—I will offer unto thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings; i.e. of fatted beasts (comp. 1 Sam. xv. 9; 2 Sam. vi. 13; Ezek. xxxix. 18). With the incense of rams; i.e. the smoke, or savoury odour of rams. I will offer bullocks with goats; literally, I will prepare—i.e. dress for sacrifice (see 1 Kings xviii. 23, 26).

Vers. 16—20.—In conclusion, the psalmist calls on all pious Israelites to “hearken,” while he explains to them how it is that his prayers and vows have been so effectual. It has been because his prayers and vows proceeded from a sincere and honest heart, one which was free from “iniquity” (ver. 18). As Hengstenberg points out, this portion of the psalm is didactic, and inculcates the lesson “that there is no way of salvation except that of well-doing.” God, by answering the psalmist’s prayer, and giving the deliverance for which he had entreated, had set his testimony to the fact of the psalmist’s integrity (vers. 19, 20).

Ver. 16.—Come and hear, all ye that fear God. The address is scarcely to all that have any sense of religion anywhere, as Professor Cheyne suggests, but rather to the religious section of his own nation—the “righteous” or “godly” of other psalms. They are invited to draw near, and be received into the psalmist’s confidence. And I will declare what he hath done for my soul. What God had done for the psalmist was to give him confidence and assurance. He knew that his prayers would be ineffectual unless his heart was pure. God heard him, and then he became sure that he was free from the “great transgression” (Cheyne).

Ver. 17.—I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue; rather, and praise was under my tongue; i.e. I was so confident of being heard that a song of praise was already in my mouth, on the point of bursting forth.

Ver. 18.—If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. This is the inward conviction of every simple, unsophisticated soul. It is confirmed by numerous passages of Holy Writ (Job xxvii. 9; xxxi. 27; Prov. xv. 29; xxviii. 9; Isa. i. 15; Zech. vii. 13; John ix. 31, etc.).

Ver. 19.—But verily God hath heard me. The psalmist’s prayer had been answered so unmistakably, so directly, that he could not doubt of the result, which had been brought about, being the consequence of his vows and supplications (vers. 13, 14). He hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Strange as it might seem to be that God had attended to the voice of a man (Job vii. 17; Psa. viii. 4; cxliv. 3; Jas. v. 14—18), yet so it was: the psalmist did not and could not doubt it.

Ver. 20.—Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me. The psalm of thanksgiving appropriately concludes with a special blessing of God by the psalmist, who felt that such especial mercy had been shown to himself (vers. 16—20).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 5.—*Holy fear a reasonable element of true spiritual worship.* “Come and see,” etc. Joy and terror seem so diverse and contrary, that one might seem to shut out the other. Yet this psalm, which opens with a note of exultant joy, follows it with a note of terror (vers. 1—3). So in Ps. ii. 11, “Rejoice with trembling.”

I. AS INSPIRED BY GOD’S CHARACTER AND GLORY. “Perfect love casteth out fear.” “Ye have not received,” etc. (1 John iv. 18; Rom. viii. 15; 2 Tim. i. 7). But there is a fear which love does not cast out, which is not tormenting or slavish, but salutary and akin to “a sound mind.” To contemplate the infinite greatness, majesty, power, wisdom, and eternal unchangeableness of God, and the fact that we and all creatures live, move, and have our being in him, with no emotion of profound awe and sacred

fear, argues rather clodlike insensibility than childlike confidence. Hence in so many passages, "the fear of the Lord" stands for the whole of true piety. The word here (vers. 3, 5) translated "terrible," and in very many other passages, is elsewhere rendered "reverend," or "to be had in reverence" (Pss. cxi. 9; lxxxix. 7).

II. GOD'S DEALINGS. "Terrible things in righteousness" (Ps. lxxv. 5). These especially referred to here (vers. 3—5). As the cloud which gave light to Israel in their flight was darkness to their pursuers, so the redemption of Israel involved the destruction of their tyrants. They trembled as they rejoiced (Exod. xiv. 30, 31). God's holiness must needs have a severe side of justice, as well as a gracious side of redeeming mercy. The cross reveals both. Christ would not have "died for our sins," but that "the wages of sin is death." As the psalmist says of the Egyptian plagues, the Red Sea and Sinai, so we, of the cross, and of the place where the Lord lay, "Come and see!"

III. THE SENSE OF OUR OWN UNWORTHINESS AND SIN. (See Job xlii. 5, 6; Isa. vi. 5; Luke v. 8.) To this is sometimes added *personal experience* of troubles in which faith and joy find it hard to stand ground against terror and despair (vers. 10—12; 2 Cor. i. 8, 9). Yet the outcome is to be *joy in God*. "There did we rejoice" (ver. 6); or, as margin of Revised Version, "let us rejoice." This is the strict translation, but has been set aside because of supposed difficulty as to meaning. But "Faith makes the past as well as the future her own" (Perowne). What the greatest heathen historian wished his work to be (Thuc., i. 22), is incomparably truer of the record of God's mighty works for his Church—it is "a possession for ever."

PRACTICAL. 1. Holy fear must not lose its place in our religion. 2. But must not eclipse joy in God. 3. Faith must call memory to her aid, and joy and gratitude.

Ver. 18.—*Prayer hindered by allowed sin*. "If I regard iniquity," etc. If we read the text as in the margin of Revised Version, "If I had regarded . . . God would not hear [or, 'have heard'];"—this makes no practical difference. It only substitutes a special for a general statement. The lesson taught is the same—*Sin allowed in the heart a fatal hindrance to our prayers being answered*.

I. SIN CONSCIOUSLY INDULGED DISABLES FROM PRAYER. Inconsistent with that sincerity essential to the reality of prayer (1 John iii. 19—21). One has known men who were afterwards discovered to have been living in secret a wicked life, fluent in the language of what seemed fervent prayer. But such prayer is "abomination" (Prov. xxi. 27; xxviii. 9). It is a fearful aggravation of guilt.

II. EVEN SINS IGNORANTLY, OR WITH PARTIAL KNOWLEDGE, indulged, put the spirit out of tune for prayer; grieve and quench the Holy Spirit, by whose teaching alone we can pray aright; put coldness between the heart and God.

III. SIN INDULGED HINDERS THE ANSWERS TO PRAYER. 1. By rendering us incapable of *spiritual* blessing. As long as David refused to confess his sin to God, forgiveness and spiritual joy were impossible (Ps. xxxii. 3—5). 2. By rendering it often unwise for God to grant the *temporal* blessings we ask. God could not grant David's prayer for the life of his child, even after he had repented, because of the scandal his crimes had brought on religion (2 Sam. xiii., etc.). All David's great after-troubles sprang from his sin. A Christian who has sinned, repented, and been forgiven is not to regard his troubles as *punishment*—except, indeed, that they may be sin's inevitable fruit and consequence. But they may be a wise and needful, though merciful, *chastisement* (1 Cor. xi. 31, 32).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—20.—*God in history*. It has been said that "History is philosophy teaching by example;" but we are taught in the Psalms to take a higher view, and to recognize God in history. It is only as we do this that we can rejoice and give thanks.

I. GOD'S HAND SHOULD BE SEEN IN HISTORY. First there is the *call* (vers. 1, 2). Then the *reason* is given (ver. 3). We are brought face to face with God. We are confronted with the awful manifestations of his power. The world is not a world of

confusion and misrule, where we see only the working of human passion. Behind all is the hand of God. So it is still. Our Lord said, "My Father worketh hitherto." If men everywhere were brought to this faith, that this is not a forsaken and fatherless world, but a world under the benign rule of God, they would bow their hearts in worship, and rejoice to sing praise to the Most High (ver. 4).

II. GOD'S SPECIAL DEALINGS WITH NATIONS SHOULD BE SEEN IN HISTORY. (Vers. 5—7.) It is said of the ungodly, that "the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands" (Isa. v. 12). But the psalmist was of a different spirit. He had seen much that had thrilled his heart with admiration and delight, and he would have others to enter into his joy. "Come and see the works of God" (ver. 5). Israel may be called the model nation. As "a city set on a hill," Israel has been set on high for the instruction of other nations and peoples (1 Cor. x. 11). The principles and laws by which God governed and judged Israel are the principles and laws according to which he deals with his people everywhere, in all times and in all lands. God changes his methods, but not his laws. His dispensations alter, but he himself is the same. Hence his judgments of Israel and of the nations are full of instruction to us. Israel was the chosen people, "unto whom were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. iii. 2). God is represented as keeping guard over them. He was their Watchman, and his eye was ever on "the nations" (ver. 7) around, ready to warn and defend his own people. Let us be sure that in like manner he is now standing in watch over the interests of truth and righteousness, and that he will overrule all things for the advancement of the kingdom of his Son (Ezek. xxi. 27).

III. GOD'S GREAT MORAL PURPOSES SHOULD BE SEEN IN HISTORY. (Vers. 8—20.) 1. First, we are called upon to bless God for our *preservation*. If one is taken and the other left, it is not without a reason. It is God that keeps both nations and individuals alive. 2. Further, we are taught that *all trials are part of God's discipline*. (Vers. 10—12.) Even in the injustice, the oppression, and cruelty of men, we should discern the purposes of God. We are being educated by trial. When we see God's love behind and over all, we learn to be patient and to hope to the end (Deut. viii. 1). The outcome of Israel's trials was Canaan; and "there is a rest that remaineth for the people of God." 3. Lastly, we are admonished *how God works to bring us ever nearer to himself in love and service*. What the psalmist did is an example to us. (1) There should be *renewed consecration*. (Vers. 13, 14.) (2) There should be *grateful and thorough obedience*. (Ver. 15.) (3) There should be *open and manly testimony*. (Ver. 16.) (4) There should be more of *prayer and more of praise*. (Vers. 18—20.)

"New mercies, each returning day,
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

"Only, O Lord, in thy dear love
Fit us for perfect rest above;
And help us, this and every day,
To live more nearly as we pray."
(Keble.)

W. F.

Ver. 16.—*The best evidence for Christ*. It has been said that "the evidence for Christianity is not the evidences." This may be true of much that is technically called "evidences;" but it is not true of the evidence brought before us here. Facts are facts. Effects must have sufficient causes. Godliness can only be rightly accounted for by being traced to God. Christianity witnesses for Christ. Wherever you find a man saved by Christ, there you have the best evidence for Christ.

I. THIS EVIDENCE IS THE MOST ACCESSIBLE. Like the facts of science, it is before our eyes. If you want to know the truth, "come and see." As St. Paul argues, "the works of the flesh are manifest," and a black catalogue he gives of some of them. But the works of the Spirit are also manifest; and they are so contrary to the works of the flesh, that when a man changes his life, to walk, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit, the evidence is conclusive as to the transcendent and beneficent

power of Christ. The great conversions of St. Luke, as recorded in his Gospel and in the Acts, are evidences of the highest kind; but they are but samples. From that time down through the ages there is an ever-increasing cloud of witnesses. There is much evidence that is only accessible to the learned, and to such as have leisure and capacity for investigation; but here is evidence open to all—clear, relevant, and unmistakable.

II. THIS EVIDENCE IS THE MOST CONVINCING. It is so to the individual Christian himself. There may be arguments you cannot answer, and difficulties and doubts you cannot remove; but if you have felt the power of Christ for good, you have proof which is better than all else, that Christ is from God (1 John v. 10). You know the Bible to be true. You know salvation to be a reality. It is not something you have heard of or seen in others, but something which God has done for your own soul. Like the man who had his sight restored, you can say, "Whereas I was blind, now I see." Or like the woman healed of the issue of blood, you can, solicited by love, bear witness, even "before all the people" (Luke viii. 47), as to the great things which Christ has done for you. This evidence is the most convincing to others besides ourselves. When we find a real change of mind, a transformation of character, a life made beautiful by self-denial and virtue where formerly it was otherwise, and self ruled instead of Christ, we cannot but confess the hand of God (Gal. i. 23; Acts iv. 13; 2 Cor. iii. 1; 1 Cor. xiv. 21).

III. THIS EVIDENCE IS THE MOST ENDURING. It is not limited to one time; it runs through the ages. Here is the true apostolic succession, and it has never been broken. In spite of all opposition and hostility, Christianity lives and prevails. At home and abroad, in every department of business and in every kind of society, it has its witnesses. Wherever we go, we may find brethren in Christ; and when, like Paul, we meet them, perhaps, when we are in trouble or in unexpected places, let us thank God, and take courage (Acts xxviii. 14). Let us also, in our several places, see that we are found faithful. If we are called of God, it is that we may live for God. If we have been enlightened by Christ, it is that we may let our light shine where he has given us our lot. What an honour to be a witness for Christ! The more closely we imitate him by holy living, by faithful work, by loving service to the poor and needy, the greater shall be our power with God and men, and the greater our reward in heaven (John xx. 21; Matt. xix. 28).—W. F.

Vers. 1—4.—*Worship.* The psalm would seem to have been composed on the occasion of some special deliverance; but the expressions used are too general to indicate the time or the occasion of its being written.

I. THE WORSHIP OF GOD SHOULD BE JOYFUL AND FERVENT AS WELL AS SOLEMN. (Ver. 1.) Love and reverence are the perfection of worship.

II. THE GLORY OF GOD'S NATURE IS THE INSPIRATION OF ALL TRUE WORSHIP. (Ver. 2.) His name is his nature; and the glory of his nature is his greatness and goodness.

III. GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL WORK IN HISTORY COMPELS THE RELUCTANT HOMAGE OF EVEN HIS ENEMIES. (Ver. 3.) "Thine enemies feign allegiance unto thee" (see marginal reading).

IV. THE WHOLE EARTH IS THE TEMPLE OF GOD, WHEREIN HIS PRAISES ARE CELEBRATED. (Ver. 4.) Prediction of faith, that not only in Zion, but in the whole world, the praises of God should be uttered.—S.

Vers. 5—12.—*An invitation to study God's marvellous works towards men.* I. WE SHOULD STUDY THE PHYSICAL WONDERS OF THE WORLD. (Ver. 6.) He turns the sea into dry land still, and the dry land into sea.

II. WE SHOULD STUDY HIS PROVIDENTIAL RULE IN THE HISTORY OF NATIONS. How he humbles and overthrows those who rebel against his will, and exalts and establishes the people who obey his laws.

III. WE SHOULD STUDY GOD'S WORK OF SALVATION IN THE WORLD. (Vers. 8, 9.) "Who putteth [not 'holdeth'] our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved."

IV. WE SHOULD STUDY GOD'S METHODS OF TRIAL AND DISCIPLINE FOR MAKING US

SPIRITUALLY RICH. (Vers. 10—12.) “We went through fire and through water; but thou broughtest us out to abundance.”—S.

Vers. 13—20.—*Vows fulfilled and experiences related.* I. **VOWS FULFILLED.** (Vers. 13—15.) 1. *When we are in trouble we make solemn vows of amendment and service.* As the psalmist had done in his distress. 2. *The fulfilment of our religious vows will often call for great sacrifices.* Not burnt offerings from us, but the more costly sacrifices of the heart and spirit. “The sacrifices of God are a broken heart and a contrite spirit.”

II. **EXPERIENCES RELATED.** (Vers. 16—20.) He proclaims what God had done for him in answer to his praises and prayers. 1. *It is only those who fear God that have any sympathy with spiritual experience.* Only these would care to listen. 2. *Only those who are conscious of integrity of heart expect any answer to prayer.* (Ver. 18; Job xxvii. 8, 9.) 3. *God will assuredly answer and bless those who call upon him in sincerity and in truth.* The psalmist knew from experience that God had heard him and manifested his loving-kindness towards him. His faith in God had the warrant of his experience, and was not an unfulfilled expectation.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXVII.

ACCORDING to some, this psalm, like Ps. lxxv., is a harvest thanksgiving (Hengstenberg, Cheyne). But the single expression (in ver. 6) on which this view is grounded seems insufficient to support it, more especially as that expression may well be understood figuratively (see Ps. lxxxv. 12; Jer. viii. 20; Hos. vi. 11; Joel iii. 13; Matt. ix. 37, etc.). The real idea of the psalm appears to be an aspiration after the general conversion of the world, to be effected by God's special manifestation of his mercy upon Israel. This will draw all nations to him. The psalm is one of three stanzas, consisting respectively of two, two, and three verses. The second and third stanzas have the same initiatory refrain (vers. 3, 5). In the first stanza the “selah” is a pause of reverence, not a break in the sense.

Ver. 1.—**God be merciful unto us, and bless us.** An echo of the priestly blessing (Numb. vi. 24, 25), but not necessarily uttered by a priest. The substitution of *Elohim* for *Jehovah* is natural, considering the universalist character of the psalm. And cause his face to shine upon us; literally, *with us*. “With us” especially, as the people of God; but not “with us” exclusively, as the whole psalm makes manifest.

Ver. 2.—**That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.** God is besought to bless his people Israel (ver. 1), in order that so his “way” may become known to all the earth, his “saving health,” or his “salvation,” to all (heathen) nations. The idea is not

raised of any compulsory empire, but of one which will gradually extend itself, by winning the heathen over to it through the sight of Israel's blessedness (comp. Isa. xlix. 18—23; lx. 3, 4).

Ver. 3.—**Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee; rather, the peoples,** in both clauses. In the second clause the prayer is intensified by the addition of the word *cullam*, “all of them.”

Ver. 4.—**O let the nations be glad and sing for joy.** There could be no greater blessing to the nations than their attraction into God's kingdom; nor, consequently, any event more worthy to be hailed with joyful acclaim, with songs of joy and thanksgiving. **For thou shalt judge the people (rather, the peoples) righteously, and govern the nations upon earth.** The main advantage of the change would be the bringing of the heathen into that kingdom of perfect righteousness, wherein God (in the Person of Christ) would dispense justice unerringly, and rule all men with perfect and absolute equity.

Ver. 5.—**Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.** A repetition of ver. 3 without any change.

Ver. 6.—**Thou shalt the earth yield her increase; literally, the land hath given her increase**—a quotation from Lev. xxvi. 4, but probably in a metaphorical sense. An abundant spiritual harvest is seen by the psalmist as the result of the entrance of the Gentiles into the Church—an immense “increase” in the fruits of righteousness hitherto yielded—and this is spoken of as a result already obtained, through the perfect assurance of the writer that his prayers are granted and the result determined on in the Divine counsels. And God, even our own God, shall bless us. “Our own God”

must certainly be Jehovah; but the writer, in his broad universalism, will not use the expression.

Ver. 7.—God shall bless us; or, “may God bless us” (Kay, Cheyne); but the form

is identical with that used in ver. 6. And all the ends of the earth shall fear him. One day the earth shall be full of the knowledge and fear of the Lord “as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. xi. 11).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—“*God be merciful,*” etc. No wonder this beautiful little psalm has been enshrined so prominently in the worship of the Christian Church. Its most remarkable character is its world-wide breadth of sympathy, hope, and prayer. It is like a beam from the unrisen sun of Christianity. The more one studies the intense narrow national sentiment of the Jews, the more plain is it that strains like these could be inspired only by the Spirit of God. The psalm is Hebrew of the Hebrews—sung probably for ages in the temple. Yet its aspirations can be fulfilled only by the gospel and kingdom of Christ.

I. THE MEANING OF THIS PRAYER. “That thy way may be known”—“thy saving health.” 1. *God’s way* is: (1) The revelation he has made of himself in his dealings with mankind. In its widest sense this includes his universal providence (Acts xiv. 17; Prov. viii. 22; Isa. lv. 8, 9). (2) The revealed path of man’s duty (Ps. xxv. 9; Matt. xxii. 16). (3) The way of salvation; of return, reconciliation, access to God (Acts xviii. 26; John xiv. 6). 2. God’s “saving health” is salvation (simply another translation of the same Hebrew word). Not simply “the way of salvation”—the knowledge of the gospel, and provision for our salvation; but actual experience of deliverance from sin, pardon, peace with God, strength for holiness. Salvation, in the Scriptures, means both *safety* and *health*. Illust.: Matt. viii. 25; Luke xviii. 42; vii. 50.

II. THE SCOPE OF THIS PRAYER. “On earth;” “among all nations.” St. Paul says that *the gospel was preached beforehand* to Abraham, in the promise that in his offspring *all nations* should be blessed. We are apt to take too narrow a view both of the gospel and of salvation. We think and speak of “saving souls.” That is the beginning; for there is no reconciliation to God but by *personal* repentance, faith, turning to God. But *nations* have their life; their collective action, righteousness, guilt, growth, decay, prosperity, ruin. Knowledge of God’s truth, and obedience to God’s law, are the conditions of national welfare. We have a message to “all nations” as well as to “every creature.” We are to labour as well as pray, that God’s will may be “done *on earth*, as it is in *heaven*.”

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7.—This is a *song of salvation*. It teaches that—

I. SALVATION IS FROM GOD. Hence God’s mercy is specially invoked. It is as God causes his face to shine upon us in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. iv. 6) that his “way” is made known, and his “salvation” enjoyed (vers. 1, 2).

II. SALVATION IS THE HIGHEST BLESSING FOR MAN. When the high priest blessed the people, he spoke for God (Numb. vi. 22—27). Salvation is “saving health.” Man is corrupt. There is no “soundness” in him. But God brings healing. Salvation is to be restored to health in body and soul and spirit (1 Thess. v. 23).

III. SALVATION IS IMPARTED THROUGH HUMAN AGENCY. God works by means. He uses man to help man. “The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John i. 17; cf. Rom. v. 12—15). When we believe on Christ, we may say, with Simeon, “Mine eyes have seen thy salvation” (Luke ii. 30). And what Christ has won for us he would have us make known to others. All Christians are missionaries. “God does with us as we with torches do.” Every lamp that is lighted is lighted in order to shine. We are to receive and reflect the light (1 Thess. i. 6—8; Matt. v. 16).

IV. SALVATION IS DESTINED TO SPREAD AMONG ALL NATIONS. It was not limited to Israel. There is no exclusiveness in the gospel. There is no brand of reprobation

on any man's brow. The salvation of Christ is for all people—the Jew first, but also for all men. "The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Rev. xxii. 2). This we have seen in part, and greater fulfilments are near. Paul could say (Rom. xv. 19), "From Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." But how great has been the advance since then! Nations that Paul never knew have heard the joyful sound, and the most distant isles of the sea have been blessed in Christ.

V. SALVATION WILL ULTIMATELY FILL THE EARTH WITH JOY AND PEACE. Harvest is the time of joy. The great harvest-home of the world is coming (Isa. ii. 2, 3; Zeph. iii. 9; Zech. xiv. 16).—W. F.

Vers. 4.—*Universal joy.* "Let the nations be glad."

I. GOD IN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD RECOGNIZES THE EXISTENCE OF SEPARATE NATIONS.

II. GOD IN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD ADAPTS HIS METHODS TO THE NECESSITIES OF NATIONS. (Amos ix. 7.)

III. GOD IN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD WORKS THROUGHOUT FOR THE HIGHEST GOOD OF NATIONS. His object is to bring all men everywhere to serve him. He would have them, through the power of Christ, be enlightened, sanctified, and blessed. It is true of nations as of individuals, "The nation that will not serve him shall perish" (Isa. lx. 12). It is as nations forget God that they decline and fall. It is as nations become penetrated and ruled by Divine truth that they become truly free and strong and prosperous.—W. F.

Vers. 1—7.—*A missionary psalm.* The psalmist prays "that the favour of God towards the chosen people may become visible, in order that, by its splendour, it may lead the heathen to the hope of sharing in it." The salvation of the heathen is here felt to depend upon the following conditions:—

I. THE SALVATION OF THOSE WHO CLAIM TO BE HIS CHURCH. (Vers. 1, 2.) If it is God's "way" to save any, he must be able and willing to save all. And if his face shone upon them, his "saving health" would be made manifest to all peoples. This is the force of the prayer here used.

II. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUS GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD. (Ver. 4.) 1. *God, as the experience of Israel shows, governs men upon righteous principles.* The psalm was most probably written after the Exile—a terrible part of their history, which taught them how God punishes sin. 2. *God is leading the world forward upon a Divine course.* (Ver. 4.) He "governs" or leads the nations as a shepherd leads his flock. To this truth the Hebrews bore emphatic testimony.

III. GOD'S BOUNTY TO THE EARTH IS HIS BOUNTY TOWARDS MAN. (Ver. 6.) "The earth yields her increase; God, our God, blesses us." But the harvest is only a single, though a splendid, instance of God's goodness towards men; he blesses them in a thousand ways, which, when considered, are adapted deeply to impress the heathen mind.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXVIII.

THIS psalm is one of triumphant praise and jubilation, the crown and gem of the Second Book. Professor Cheyne calls it "a patriotic and religious ode of wondrous range and compass, and in the grandest style." He also notes that it was a favourite with the Huguenots, who called it "The Song of Battles," and that it was chanted by Savanarola and his brother monks as

they marched to the trial of fire in the Piazza of Florence. While some critics assign it to the post-Captivity period (Ewald, Cheyne), the greater number, and the most acute (Bötticher, Hitzig, Hengstenberg, Kay, Dean Johnson, etc.) see in it one of the earliest, as well as the most beautiful, specimens of Hebrew poetry. The ascription to David, which we find in the "title," is by these critics accepted as fully borne out by the contents. The

antique language, the impressive descriptions, the fresh powerful tone of the poetry, the lyric emotion which pervades the ode, and makes it live, are all worthy of the "sweet psalmist of Israel," and of him alone among known Hebrew composers of hymns. Whether it can be probably assigned to any special period in David's life is disputed, but Hengstenberg's suggestion that it celebrated the final victory in the Ammonitic war, and the capture of Habbah (2 Sam. xii. 26—31), seems to deserve mention.

The psalm has been variously divided, but may best be considered as consisting of five portions: 1. An introduction (vers. 1—6), in which God is praised on general grounds. 2. Praise of God for his doings at Sinai and in the wilderness (vers. 7—10). 3. Praise of God for the conquest of Canaan, and the series of victories terminating in the full establishment of David's rule (vers. 11—23). 4. Praise of God in connection with his sanctuary (vers. 24—27). 5. Prophetic announcement of future triumphs (vers. 28—35).

Ver. 1.—*Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered; let them also that hate him flee before him.* Compare the chant with which the ark set forth in the wilderness, "Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee" (Numb. x. 35). Both utterances are expressions of confidence, that, whenever God arises, his enemies will be scattered and dispersed before him. Neither refers to any one special occasion.

Ver. 2.—*As smoke is driven away, so drive them away.* As clouds of smoke are dispersed and driven away by the wind, and totally disappear, so let God, whenever his enemies congregate, scatter and disperse them, and reduce them to nothingness. *As wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.* As smoke vanishes, so wax entirely melts away and disappears before a hot fire (comp. Pss. xxii. 14; xcvi. 5).

Ver. 3.—*But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice.* When the wicked are destroyed, the righteous receive relief, and cannot but rejoice at God's goodness to them (comp. Pss. lii. 6; lviii. 10; lxiv. 7—10, etc.).

Ver. 4.—*Sing unto God, sing praises to his Name* (comp. Ps. lxiv. 4): *exult him that rideth upon the heavens.* This passage is now generally translated, *Cast up a highway for him that rideth through the*

deserts (Hengstenberg, Kay, Dean Johnson, Professor Cheyne, Revised Version). The image is that of a king travelling through a waste, for whom a way was made beforehand (comp. Isa. xl. 3; xlix. 11). By his name *Jah*; rather, *Jah is his Name*. "*Jah*"—the shortened form of "*Jehovah*"—occurs first in the Song of Moses (Exod. xv. 2). It is repeated here in ver. 18, and recurs in Isa. xxvi. 4. Dr. Kay suggests that "it represents the concentration of God's redeeming power and love." And rejoice before him (comp. ver. 3).

Ver. 5.—*A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God.* A defender, i.e., of the oppressed and downtrodden (comp. Isa. i. 17). In his holy habitation. The heavenly and not the earthly dwelling-place—whether tabernacle or temple—seems to be intended. God from his holy seat in the highest heaven pours down his grace and mercy, his defence and protection, on all those who specially need his aid.

Ver. 6.—*God setteth the solitary in families; or, in a home; i.e. gives "solitary ones"—outcasts, wanderers—a home to dwell in.* The reference is to the settlement of the nomadic Israelites in Canaan. *He bringeth out those which are bound* (see Ps. cxlvi. 7, "The Lord looseth the prisoners;"), and compare the many references to the "bondage" of Israel in Egypt). The Exodus is glanced at, but not exclusively. God "brings men out" from the tyranny of worldly oppressors, of ghostly enemies, and of their own lusts and sins. *With chains; rather, into prosperity* (Hengstenberg, Kay, Cheyne, Revised Version). But the rebellious dwell in a dry land. Rebels against God are not "brought out." They are left to dwell in the "dry land" of their own impenitence and self-will (comp. Numb. xiv. 29—35).

Vers. 7—10.—In the central portion of the psalm, from ver. 7 to ver. 28, God is praised for his doings in connection with the history of Israel; and, first of all, in the present passage, for his doings at Sinai and in the wilderness.

Ver. 7.—*O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people* (see Exod. xiii. 20—22). The present verse and the next are an echo of the Song of Deborah (Judg. v. 4, 5), "Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchdest out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water; the mountains melted from before the Lord, even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel." *When thou didst march through the wilderness.* The entire march from Etham to Pishgah is in the poet's mind; but he can

touch only certain features of it. And first, the scene at Sinai.

Ver. 8.—The earth shook, the heavens also dropped, at the presence of God (see Exod. xix. 16—18; Deut. v. 22, 23). The “dropping” of the heavens was the descent of a thick thunder-cloud upon the mount, which rested upon it, and spread around a dense and weird darkness. Even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God; literally, *yonder Sinai*, as if it were in sight, and could be pointed at. The God of Israel. Our God, who did all these great things for us.

Ver. 9.—Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain. Not a literal rain, but a shower of blessings—manna, quails, water out of the rock, protection against enemies, victories, etc. Whereby thou didst confirm (or, *establish*) thine inheritance (see 2 Sam. vii. 13). When it was weary. The wandering in the wilderness must have been inexpressibly dull and wearisome, especially to those who had left Egypt with the hope of a quick march through the waste, and a speedy entrance into “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. iii. 17). The “establishment” in Palestine under Joshua was a blessing that could not but be highly valued after well-nigh a century of cruel bondage in Egypt, and forty years of aimless wandering in the Sinaitic peninsula.

Ver. 10.—Thy congregation hath dwelt therein; thy troop, or thy host (see 2 Sam. xlii. 11, 13). The word used (חַיִּל) is an unusual one. Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor; or, thou, O God, didst in thy goodness make preparation for the poor. “The poor” are the Israelites, brought low by their sufferings in Egypt and the wilderness; the preparations those by which their conquest of Palestine was facilitated (Exod. xxv. 28; Josh. xxiv. 12).

Vers. 11—23.—From God’s mercies to his people at Sinai and in the wilderness, the psalmist goes on to consider those connected with the conquest of Canaan, and the establishment of David’s widespread rule. The passage is difficult and obscure, perhaps from its embodying fragments of the earlier Hebrew poetry. It is also full of curious transitions, and of ellipses which make the meaning doubtful.

Ver. 11.—The Lord gave the word. The reader naturally asks—What word? Commentators answer variously: “the watch-word” (Cheyne); “promise of victory” (Kay); “the word of command” (Dean Johnson); “announcement of an actual victory gained” (Hengstenberg). I should rather understand a sort of creative word,

initiating the period of strife (comp. Shakespeare’s “Cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war!”). Great was the company of those that published it; literally, *great was the company of the women that heralded it*. The reference is to the female choirs which took a prominent part in the war-songs of ancient days (see Exod. xv. 20, 21; Judg. v. 1; 1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7).

Ver. 12.—Kings of armies did flee apace; literally, *did flee—did flee*; i.e. fled repeatedly before Israel (see Josh. vii. 19—22; x. 19, 20; xi. 8, 9; Judg. iii. 10, 29; iv. 14—16; vii. 19—25; viii. 11, 12; xi. 29—33; xv. 14—16; 1 Sam. vii. 10, 11; xi. 11; xiv. 47, 48; xv. 7, 8; xvii. 52; 2 Sam. v. 17—25; viii. 1, 2, 4, 5, 13; x. 6—18, etc.). And she that tarried at home divided the spoil. The wives of the conquerors shared in the spoil when it was brought home (Judg. v. 28—30).

Ver. 13.—Though ye have lien among the pots; rather, *Will ye lie down among the sheepfolds?* Will ye, O ye laggards of Israel, like the Reubenites in the war against Sisera, instead of going out to war with your brethren, “abide among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks” (see Judg. v. 16)? Yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. It is certainly wrong to supply, “yet shall ye be” before “as the wings of a dove.” There can be no promise of good made to these laggards. Probably the meaning is, “Will ye be,” or “Will ye seek to be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers of yellow gold?” i.e. Will ye abide in your prosperity and your riches, decked in gorgeous apparel, resplendent with silver and gold, while your brethren are bearing the brunt of battle, with all its ghastly sights and sounds, in your and the land’s defence?

Ver. 14.—When the Almighty scattered kings in it; i.e. “in the land” (comp. ver. 10). Most of the defeats of kings, referred to above (see the comment on ver. 12), took place within the limits of Palestine. It was white as snow in Salmon. The present text has only the two words which mean, “it snows on Salmon;” whence it is concluded that something must have fallen out. Professor Cheynes supplies *לָבַן*, “like snow,” and understands the passage to mean that, when the kings were scattered, “it was like snow when it snows on Salmon”—the ground was all covered with glistening arms, armour, and garments. Salmon was a wooded hill near Shechem (Judg. ix. 48).

Ver. 15.—The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; rather, *a mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan*. A sudden transition, and perhaps a quotation from an ancient poem. The special object of the psalmist’s

thought is not Bashan, but Mount Zion; and what he is about to celebrate is Jehovah's choice of Mount Zion for his dwelling-place, and his establishment on it. But he prefers to introduce the subject by a contrast with the great range of Canaan. Bashan, he says, is truly "a mountain of God"—i.e. a very great mountain (see the comment on Ps. xxxvi. 6)—"one which seemed in an especial degree to show forth creative power." It is also an high hill; or rather, a *mountain of peaks*, containing numerous pointed summits. Yet God did not choose one of these for his habitation.

Ver. 16.—Why leap ye, ye high hills? rather, *Why look ye askance, ye mountains of peaks?* In jealousy at not being chosen. This is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; rather, *on the mountain which God desireth to dwell in*—a continuation of the preceding sentence. The mountain intended is, of course, Mount Zion, a comparatively low elevation. Yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever; i.e. make it his permanent, not merely his temporary, habitation, like Sinai.

Ver. 17.—The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels. Another abrupt transition. The psalmist sees God move from Sinai, where he had represented him as present in ver. 8, into the sanctuary of Mount Zion. He is, of course, accompanied by his angelic host. This is described as a host of chariots (comp. 2 Kings vi. 17)—twenty thousand in number, and "thousands of repetition"—or thousands multiplied by thousands, as Hengstenberg understands the phrase (comp. Dan. vii. 10). The Lord (Jehovah) is among them; or, "in their midst." As in Sinai, in the holy place; rather, *Sinai is in the sanctuary*. The glories of Sinai are, as it were, transferred thither.

Ver. 18.—Thou hast ascended on high; i.e. ascended into the sanctuary, Mount Zion—gone up with the ark when it was transferred thither (see 2 Sam. vi. 12-19; 1 Chron. xv. 11-28). Thou hast led captivity captive; i.e. thou hast made many captives—or enabled us to take many prisoners. Thou hast received gifts for men; rather, *among men*. Tribute from Israel's enemies is probably intended (see 2 Sam. viii. 2; comp. 1 Kings iv. 21). Yea, for the rebellious also; literally, *yea, rebels also*; i.e. enemies, that when reduced have rebelled, and then submitted to pay tribute a second time. That the Lord God (*Jah Elohim*) might dwell among them; "That God, after the nations had been subdued and submitted themselves, might rest quietly thenceforth in Zion."

Ver. 19.—Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation; rather, *blessed be the Lord day by day; he will bear (our burden) for us, (he is) the God of our salvation*.

Ver. 20.—He that is our God is the God of salvation; rather, *God is to us a God of saving deeds* (Kay), or *of deliverances* (Revised Version); i.e. not of salvation only in the abstract (ver. 19), but of deeds by which we are saved. And unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. It is through God only that, when death threatens, men escape it.

Ver. 21.—But God shall wound the head of his enemies; or, "yet surely God will smite," etc. Though he gives escape from death, yet he will not do so always. On the contrary, he will assuredly smite and destroy his enemies, wounding them where a wound is fatal. And the hairy scalp of such a one as goeth on still in his trespasses. "The hairy scalp," says Dr. Kay, "points almost certainly to Absalom." Others take it as merely indicating the young and strong.

Ver. 22.—The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea. Our translators' interpolation of the words, "my people," is unhappy. The psalmist means to represent God as threatening his enemies, not as encouraging his faithful ones. Though his enemies (ver. 21) fly to Bashan and bury themselves in its woods, or though they even hide themselves in the depths of the sea, he will search them out, and "bring them back," that vengeance may be taken on them (see ver. 23).

Ver. 23.—That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies; i.e. "I will bring them back for thee, my people, to dip your feet in their blood." The same metaphor is used in Isa. lxiii. 1-3; but it is God himself who, in that passage, has his feet reddened in his enemies' blood. And the tongue of thy dogs in the same. The Authorized Version has omitted one word of the original here. Translate, *And that the tongue of thy dogs may have its portion from the same* (comp. 2 Kings ix. 35; Jer. xv. 3).

Vers. 24-27.—Again we find a transition. The conquest of Canaan is complete—God is gone up into his sanctuary. The nations are led captive or put to tribute. Rebels are crushed; the last remnants of them sought out, brought back, and delivered into the hands of Israel. Now we have a description of God's "goings in the sanctuary" (ver. 24). Some critics suppose a particular occasion to be pointed at; but the expression "goings" rather indicates something habitual, or, at any rate, recurring. God is from time to time glorified in his sanctuary by ceremonies which the poet describes.

Ver. 24.—They have seen thy goings, O God; i.e. men have seen—friends and foes alike—even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary. God is at once both Israel's God and Israel's King. The monarchy has not wholly destroyed the theocracy.

Ver. 25.—The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after (comp. 2 Sam. vi. 15; 1 Chron. xv. 16—28). In Assyrian musical processions the players on instruments precede the singers ('Ancient Monarchies,' vol. i. p. 542). Among them were the damsels playing with timbrels; rather, *in the midst of the damsels*, etc. The damsels are represented, not as intermixed with the (male) singers and players on instruments, but as encircling them. (On the use of "timbrels" (tambourines) by Israelite maidens, see Exod. xv. 20; Judg. xi. 34.)

Ver. 26.—Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, from the fountain of Israel. This is probably the refrain of the hymn sung (comp. Exod. xv. 21; 2 Chron. v. 13; Ezra iii. 11). By "the fountain of Israel" is no doubt meant the sanctuary on Mount Zion—"the ever-living fountain of praise" (Kay).

Ver. 27.—There is little Benjamin with their ruler. "With" is wrongly supplied by our translators. "Little Benjamin"—the "smallest of the tribes of Israel" (1 Sam. ix. 21)—is called "their ruler," as having furnished the first king, and the one who began the conquests celebrated in vers. 11—23. If the psalm is to be accounted as David's, we may note it as a graceful act on his part that he places Saul's tribe first. The princes of Judah and their council. Again "and" is wrongly supplied. "The princes of Judah" are called "their council," or "their bulwark" (Kay), as holding the most important position in Israel at the time. The reading, however, is doubtful. The princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali. Four tribes only are mentioned, not because no more than four took part in the processions, but as representatives of the whole number. The tribes selected for mention are from the two ends of the land—the extreme south and the extreme north. Zebulun and Naphtali were the most important of the northern tribes (see Judg. iv. 6, 10; v. 18), as Judah and Benjamin were of the southern ones.

Vers. 28—35.—The psalmist now turns to the future. First, he prays that God will complete the work which he has begun by continually strengthening Israel (ver. 28). Then he rises to prophecy. Kings and princes shall bring presents to Zion; empires shall prostrate themselves; Egypt and

Ethiopia shall hasten to bow down; all the kingdoms of the earth shall ultimately "sing praises unto the Lord." Israel and the God of Israel will thus be glorified exceedingly.

Ver. 28.—Thy God hath commanded (or, *ordained*) thy strength. It is fixed in the Divine counsels that Israel shall be strong. This was determined long ago, and is in course of accomplishment. But more is needed. The psalmist therefore prays, **Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us.** Complete thy work; "strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees;" weaken also and bring down our enemies (ver. 30).

Ver. 29.—Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee. So Ewald, Kay, and the Revised Version, though critics generally doubt whether *min* can have this meaning. If *min* has its usual sense of "from," we must regard the kings as having entered the temple courts, and from thence stretching out their hands, and offering their gifts, to God, who is in the holy of holies. (On the offering of gifts by heathen kings, see Isa. xlix. 23; ix. 16; and comp. Ps. lxxii. 10.)

Ver. 30.—Rebuke the company of spearmen; rather, *the wild beast of the reeds*; i.e. the crocodile or the hippopotamus, either of which may well symbolize the empire of Egypt, the mightiest of the heathen powers in David's time. The multitude of the bulls represents other heathen powers, Assyria perhaps especially, which had the human-headed and winged bull for its principal emblem. **With the calves of the people; rather, of peoples**—an obscure phrase, perhaps meaning inferior powers. Till every one submit himself with pieces of silver; literally, (each) *submitting himself to thee with pieces of silver*. This is given as the result of the rebukes. When the various earth-powers have been "rebuked" or chastised by God, then they will submit to bring gifts, or pay tribute, to Israel (comp. ver. 18). Scatter thou the people that delight in war. This is exegetical of the first clause—rebuke these various world-powers that delight in war by "scattering" them, or putting them to flight before their enemies.

Ver. 31.—Princes shall come out of Egypt. Then shall princely ambassadors come to Zion out of Egypt, and make submission (comp. Isa. xliii. 3; xlv. 14). Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God. The Ptolemies, in their wars with Syria, often sought the favour of the Jews. Christian Churches at an early date were established both in Egypt and in Abyssinia, and some of the most promising mission fields to-day are in Africa.

Ver. 32.—Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord. All the world-powers having submitted to the Church, all the kingdoms of the earth can be called upon to join in the praise of God.

Ver. 33.—To him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens (comp. ver. 4; and for the expression "heavens of heavens," see Deut. x. 14; 1 Kings viii. 27). Which were of old. In which God dwelt from all eternity—long before he created the "heavens" of Gen. i. 1. Lo, he doth send out his voice, and that a mighty voice. A voice that is heard and obeyed in every part of creation.

Ver. 34.—Ascribe ye strength unto God;

or, "might," "power"—that which makes him *Shaddai*, "the Almighty." His excellency is over Israel; or, "his majesty" (Kay). And his strength is in the clouds. Not in earth only, but in heaven also.

Ver. 35.—O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places. "Terrible," *i.e.*, in the things that thou accomplishest out of thy holy places," as Sinai, Zion, heaven. (On the "terribleness" of God, see Deut. vii. 21; x. 17; Job xxxvii. 22; Pss. xlvii. 2; lxi. 3, 5; Jer. xx. 11; Zeph. ii. 11; Neh. i. 5; iv. 14; vi. 32; Heb. xii. 29.) The God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people (comp. ver. 28). Blessed be God. A worthy ending to this glorious hymn of praise.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 3, 4.—*Joy in God*. "Let the righteous be glad," etc. The Bible, like human life, has its dark as well as bright side. Rather say, shows human life thus double-sided—half in light of happiness, knowledge, goodness; half in night of weeping. And as the earth in her path round the sun makes her own night, rolling into her own shadow; so the darkness of life results from man's turning away from God, the source of light, life, joy. No depths of sorrow so dark as those the Bible reveals. No heights of joy so bright. Almost the first page records the incoming of sin and death. Almost the last page, the forecast of doom. But before the record of sin, the declaration that man was created in God's image; and that all which God had made was good. After prophecy of judgments, the promise of new heavens and earth—the unclouded glory of the heavenly city. The text, in harmony with large part of Psalter, brings before us the *bright side of life—joy in God*.

I. GROUNDS OF THIS JOY. 1. Deepest and highest of all reasons for joy in God—his character: righteousness, truth, mercy, or (as same word beautifully translated) loving-kindness; eternal opposition to evil, and delight in good. All this is summed up in two words: "holiness," "love." These do not *divide* God's character; each describes the whole. In regard to his own perfection—pattern and fountain of all goodness—*God is holy*. In regard to his creatures, *God is love*. Peculiar inalienable glory of Bible—it lays this moral spiritual basis for religion. *Worship*, which regards the infinite greatness and glory of the Creator; *obedience* ("the fear of God"), which regards his authority and power as Lord of all;—these are everywhere inseparably joined with *faith* (trust), which goodness alone can command or warrant. The more we disinter the relics of ancient religions (inscriptions, sacred books, etc.), the more evident how widely the knowledge of the true God was once diffused; how gradually the darkness swallowed up the light (Rom. i. 1). We meet with wonderful and beautiful settings-forth of Divine glory. Yet the contrast with religious teaching of Bible only grows more marked. One reason—nowhere else do we find a practical revelation, even the very notion or pretence, of *God's character* by continuous course of dealings and messages, parallel with human history. Nowhere else any hint, much less full unfolding, of a Divine message to the whole human race, "God so loved the world;" to every individual, "Be ye reconciled to God." 2. Second ground of joy—our *personal relation to God*. New Testament full of this. "Children of God" (Gal. iii. 26; 1 John iii. 1). Modern heresy of substituting what is called "the universal Fatherhood of God" for message of gospel, substitutes a *general* for a *personal* relation. Throws back religion into Genesis. Each Hebrew, under Law of Moses, was brought into personal relation to God: (1) by the covenant at Sinai, to which "his Name *Jah*" (equivalent to "*Jehovah*") referred; (2) by sacrifices, which had direct reference to his own sins. Conversion to God cannot be more truly described than as coming consciously, joyfully, trustfully, though penitently, into personal relation with God, in and through Christ. The vital question for every one is, "On what footing am I

with the Father of spirits?" Is it possible—not even *on speaking terms*? Or, if not so bad as that, yet so that you cannot, dare not, say, "*My God; my Father*"? Then you cannot rejoice in God. 3. Third reason for joy in God—*his unchangeableness*. This is what gives value to all past revelations; trustworthiness to promises; security for the future; for eternity. 4. Fourth reason—the *assured triumph of right over wrong*; good over evil, because God reigns. A severe side to this. Perfect goodness cannot but have its severe side, in world swarming with injustice, cruelty, falsehood, lust. Powerful tendency of present day to ignore this; look only on soft side of goodness. But perfect love *must* include perfect hatred of all that debases and ruins human life. Illust.: Father sees child maimed or blinded, through carelessness or cruelty; Christian meekness represses *desire of vengeance*; but not to feel righteous anger would be monstrous insensibility. And welfare of society may demand exemplary punishment. God's character assures us that he has "no pleasure in the death of a sinner;" but equally, that "the wages of sin is death."

II. INFLUENCE OF THIS JOY IN GOD. Suppose the agnostic right; revelation an illusion; faith a blind conjecture flung out into void of ignorance. Even so, it would remain true that the believer has spring of unselfish motive, inspiration of pure, lofty aim, fount of comfort and joy, the world cannot give or take away. But "we have not followed . . . fables." If deprived of this wonderful Book of Psalms, of whole story of God's dealings and messages down to nineteen hundred years ago, this would not alter glory or certainty of fact that "*God was in Christ* reconciling the world to himself."

Ver. 9.—"*A plentiful rain.*" Closely rendered, "A rain of free bounty didst thou shed forth, O God! Thine inheritance, when weary, thou strengthenedst it." In the poetic Hebrew phrase, the land suffering from drought is said to be "weary;" as if exhausted and thirsting for the rain. If the reference here (as commonly supposed) be to the manna and other blessings, even including spiritual blessings, bestowed by God on Israel; yet the image is drawn from nature. Nothing is more delightful to every sense than an abundant rain after scorching drought. None of God's works is more full of usefulness, beauty, or spiritual symbolism than the rain. Take some of its lessons.

I. THE RICHES OF GOD'S BOUNTY. As its uncounted millions of drops fall from the sky, they vividly remind us that "every good gift is from above." All life, of man and lower creatures, hangs on those tiny drops. In wells, springs, storage reservoirs, they furnish the life-giving draught; which lacking, intolerable torments of thirst would presently end in death. At the roots of grass, corn, trees, plants of divers kinds, they are food for man and beast; and not food only, but clothing, habitation, fuel, inexhaustible material of industry. Gathered in streams and rivers, or vanishing again in steam, they are motive power, slaves of traffic, builders of homesteads and of cities. Truly does another psalm say, "Thou greatly enrichest it." Our wealth and luxury, as well as food and drink, descend in the "plentiful rain."

II. THE GENTLENESS OF DIVINE POWER. The silent softness with which the rain-drops fall conceals the tremendous strength stored up in them. Now and then waterspouts, floods, hailstorms, show how easily the rain may become the minister of ruin and death, instead of nourishment and growth. God's gentleness makes us great. A drop of rain from a mile high will not hurt a child's hand. An ounce of ice from the same height would kill a giant.

III. GOD'S FAR-WORKING POWER AND ALL-EMBRACING WISDOM. The provision for rain—in the seas and oceans covering so large a proportion of our globe; in the heat which raises the vapour, the winds which bear the clouds, the forces by which the rain-drops are formed and fall—presents a network of contrivance encompassing the whole globe; one of the most wonderful and beautiful examples of creative design. No wonder the references in the Bible are so numerous: *St. Paul*, to the idolaters of Lystra (Acts xiv. 17); *Amos* (v. 8); *Jeremiah* (xiv. 22); our *Saviour* (Matt. v. 45). The general laws according to which this prime necessary of life is supplied are simple and uniform, and there are regions in which they work with monotonous regularity; but in the countries chosen for the principal education of the human race there is a wide margin of mystery and apparent irregularity, which seems specially intended

to give scope for the discipline of providence and for prayer (Amos iv. 7, 8; Jas. v. 17, 18).

IV. THE RAIN IS THE IMAGE OF SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS, ESPECIALLY OF DIVINE TRUTH AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. (Isa. lv. 10, 11; xlv. 3, 4; Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26.) And as the rain falls in vain on the sea and on the sandy waste, so the truth and grace of God are offered in vain to thankless, unbelieving hearts (Heb. vi. 7, 8; 2 Cor. vi. 1).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—35.—*The ark and Christ.* It is said that “the testimony of [or, ‘concerning’] Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. xix. 10). This is specially true of this psalm. It might be called a song of the ark. As Moses spake of the setting forward and resting of the ark (Numb. x. 35, 36), so the psalmist sings of the glorious march of Messiah at the head of his Church—onward from victory to victory—to the final rest. We may bring out much of its spiritual significance by marking some points of resemblance between the ark and Christ.

I. THE LAW OF GOD WAS PLACED WITHIN THE ARK. The Law was the “testimony” to God’s character and will, and the foundation of his “covenant” with Israel. That this might be kept in perpetual remembrance, the Law was put in the ark as the most sacred place (Deut. x. 1—5). Therefore the ark was called “the ark of the testimony” and “the ark of the covenant” (Exod. xvi. 34; Deut. xxxi. 26; Heb. ix. 4). The ark was thus a figure of him that was to come, of whom it was written, “Thy Law is within my heart” (Ps. xl. 8; cf. Isa. xlii. 21; Matt. v. 17; John iv. 34; xvii. 4; Rom. x. 4; Rev. xi. 19).

II. THE ARK WAS SET IN THE FOREFRONT OF ISRAEL IN ALL THEIR GOINGS. It was always at the head. When it moved, Israel moved. When it rested, Israel rested. In the wilderness, at the passage of the Jordan, and on during the conquest of Canaan, the ark always went before, as showing that they were under the guidance of God, and that in all their doings they must have regard to the will of God. The Law within the ark was to be the Law of Israel (ver. 7; Numb. x. 33; Josh. iii. 3). So it is with Christ, as saith Isaiah, “Behold, I have given him for a Leader and Commander to the people” (Isa. lv. 4). We see this beautifully illustrated in our Lord’s earthly life. He was the good Shepherd, of whom it is said, “He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out;” “He goeth before them, and they follow him” (John x. 3, 4). The word of the Lord to his disciples is always, “Follow me.” What was said of the twelve is true of all others. “They were in the way going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus went before them” (Mark x. 32).

III. THE ARK WAS THE MEETING-PLACE BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE. (Cf. Exod. xxv. 22, “There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony.”) What was here in shadow we have now in substance. Christ is the meeting-place between God and man (2 Cor. v. 19). “Through him we have access unto God the Father” (Eph. ii. 18). He is Immanuel, God with us (Matt. i. 23; 1 John i. 3; Heb. iv. 16).

IV. THE ARK WAS ASSOCIATED WITH THE GREAT EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL. Some of these are recorded in this psalm. So Christ has been with his people from the beginning. Their life, their conquests, their achievements, have all been through him. And he promises to be with them to the end (Matt. xxviii. 20).

V. THE ARK WAS ENTHRONED WITH THE HIGHEST HONOURS IN THE HOUSE OF GOD. There had been many trials and conflicts, but at last there was victory. The ark was carried in triumph to Jerusalem, and set in glory on Mount Zion. Afterwards it was removed, and placed in the most holy place in the temple on Mount Moriah (vers. 18—31). All this may be said to have been typical of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, when he was received into heaven, and seated in glory on the right hand of God (Ps. xxiv.; Eph. iv. 11; Heb. ii. 9, 10; x. 12, 13). But there are certain differences. The ark was carried by human hands, but Christ conquered and ascended in his own strength (Heb. ix. 11). The ark was set in an earthly tabernacle,

but Christ "is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens" (Heb. viii. 1, 9, 24). The ark was but a temporary thing, a symbol that served its purpose and has long since passed away. Christ is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." The Gospels set forth his glory; we see his royal progress in the Acts of the Apostles; and the Revelation of St. John bears witness to his continued triumphs, till the end come, when he shall be hailed by Jew and Gentile as "the King of kings and Lord of lords."—W. F.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Comfort for the desolate.* I. EARTHLY CROSSES. What significance in the terms "fatherless" and "widows"! They tell of death, of war and pestilence and famine, of desolated homes and broken hearts and innumerable sorrows. Then in "the solitary," all the ills of life seem gathered up.

II. HEAVENLY COMFORTS. It is a great comfort to believe that there is a God who made the world, and cares for the world that he has made. But there is much more here. God is represented as not only great, but kind; not only as mighty, but merciful; not only as ruling over all his works in righteousness, but as making the weak and the sorrowful his special care. There are three great comforts here. 1. *God's Fatherhood.* (Jer. xlix. 11.) 2. *The brotherhood of man.* 3. *The blessedness of home.* "God setteth the solitary in families." This is in part fulfilled here. Perhaps "the solitary," like Moses in the desert, finds a home. Instead of wandering alone, he is blessed with a wife and children, and the sweet joys of family life. Again, "the solitary" may have friends raised up to him. In the Church and in society he finds true companionships and healthy occupation, and walks no more with aimless feet. Or it may be that God works such a change in his heart that he rises superior to circumstances. There are "spiritual presences" with him. Though alone, he is yet not alone, because God is with him (Acts viii. 39; 2 Tim. iv. 17). But the highest fulfilment is to come. Heaven is the eternal home. There is no "solitary" there. It is the house of God, of many mansions, of happy families, and of endless fellowships and joys. While the text shows the Divine origin and the manifold blessings of "the family," it hints also at its immortality. It has withstood the greatest shocks of time, and it may, in some higher way, survive in the eternal world (Prov. xii. 7; cf. Eph. iii. 15, Revised Version).—W. F.

Ver. 9.—These words may be taken as symbolizing *God's love-gifts to his people.* What he did to Israel in the wilderness, he will do to his Church to the end of the world. He is the great Sender, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and evermore the thought of his love awakens gratitude and praise. His gifts are characterized by—

I. SWEETNESS. They are sweet in themselves as the "rain," but they are sweeter still as sent from God. They have the impress of his hand. They are the tokens of his love (Acts xiv. 17; Deut. xxxii. 2).

II. COPENESS. Rain may be slight, partial, or temporary. Here it is "plentiful." It is like that which came on Carmel at the prophet's call—"abundance of rain" (1 Kings xviii. 41). It is a "rain of gifts"—large, generous, widespread, meeting the needs of all, reaching to the furthest part of the dry and parched land.

III. TIMELINESS. God does nothing in an arbitrary way. It is when his people are "weary" that he visits them with "times of refreshing." They are "weary" from toil, or conflict, or suffering, or long and anxious waiting; and their hearts are like the "parched ground" crying for "rain." God hears. When "rain" is most needed it is best appreciated. God promises "to pour water on the thirsty" (Isa. xlv. 3).

IV. REFRESHMENT. "Confirm." This implies renewal of strength, invigoration of faith and hope and love. As the "rain" quickens and calls forth the life in the earth, so that the grass flourisheth and the corn ripens, so it is with God's people when he visits them with the outpouring of the Spirit. It is as if Pentecost were come again. Let us pray and wait. Let us turn new vigour to right use.

"As torrents in summer, half dried in their channels,
Suddenly rise though the sky is still cloudless,
For rain has been falling far off at their fountains;

So hearts that are fainting grow full to o'erflowing,
And they that behold it marvel and know not
That God at *their* fountains far off has been raining."
(Longfellow.)

W. F.

Ver. 18.—Consider *the Ascension* in three aspects.

I. AS A FACT. "Thou hast ascended." What was shown in figure is now fulfilled. What was a faith is now a fact (Acts i. 2—9; Eph. iv. 7). While there is much that is strange, there is nothing that is incredible. The marvellous thing was not Christ's ascent, but his descent. Believe in the Incarnation, and all beside, down to the glorious ascent from Olivet, becomes not only credible, but natural.

II. AS A POWER. Christ ascended as a conqueror. His entrance into heaven was a triumph. His power is seen not only in victory over his enemies, but in blessings to his friends. Power over matter is great, but power over mind is greater. Christ's power is moral and beneficent. The work he did on earth was the earnest of the work he carries on in heaven. His "gifts" are not only kingly, but they are bestowed in the most kingly manner. "The rebellious" are not excluded. There is mercy for the greatest sinner, as there is grace to the uttermost for all the saints. Christ's "gifts" are not only precious, but permanent. As long as there is need on earth there will be supply from heaven (Heb. iv. 14—16).

III. AS A PROPHECY. Christ was the first, but not the last, to ascend. He has "opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers." His ascent is the pledge of his people's ascent. "Where should the living members be but with their living Head?" His ascent is the sure prophecy of his second coming, and of the everlasting glory of his kingdom (Acts i. 11; Col. iii. 4; Heb. ix. 28). "In his blessed life we see the path, and in his death the price, and in his great ascent the proof supreme of immortality."—W. F.

Ver. 19.—*God's gentleness*. "Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burden" (Revised Version).

I. HERE IS A SWEET PICTURE OF GOD. It is sometimes said that the God of the Old Testament is a God stern and implacable, more to be feared than to be loved. This is to err. The picture here is very different. It is tender and winning. We see the Lord here stooping down in love, to help the weak, to relieve the weary, to bring deliverance to the oppressed. This is in accordance with his character. Thus he has dealt with his people, with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and countless others, in the time of their need. The thought of what God is and has done excites endless gratitude. Daily mercy calls forth daily praise. "Blessed be the Lord."

II. HERE IS A BRIGHT FOREGLEAM OF THE GLORY OF CHRIST. It may be said that we have the gospel preached here in a figure. Take this word as a test, and Christ's life is the comment. See how he came down to us. See how he bore the burden of our sins and weaknesses. See how gently he dealt with his first disciples, and so gave token of the way he would deal with his disciples to the end of the world. His love never faileth. From day to day, with unwearied patience and mercy, he bears our burden. Hear his voice ringing sweetly through the ages, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." What Christ does for us we should endeavour to do, so far as lieth in us, for others. We should help one another (Gal. vi. 1, 2).

III. HERE IS A BEAUTIFUL REPRESENTATION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. What we cannot do for ourselves, Christ will do for us. We are not alone, Christ is with us. We are not called to face the trials and to bear the burdens of life in our own strength; Christ is our Burden-bearer. Our sins, which would have crushed us down to hell, he has already borne, and the lesser burdens, also too heavy for us, he will bear for us. He may not take them off us, but if not, he will enable us to carry them. He will make his grace sufficient for us. Every day brings to us its burden, and every day we need anew the help of Christ. Though we can do nothing without him, we can do all things through his strength. Thus our path is onward. We go from strength to strength. Nearer and nearer comes the time when we shall lay our burdens down for ever, and enter into the rest of God.—W. F.

Vers. 1—6.—The subject of this grand hymn is *the entry of God into his sanctuary on Zion*. “These introductory verses contain the praise of God as the Almighty Destroyer of the wicked and the Deliverer of the just, and the exhortation to praise him as the Helper of all the miserable.”

I. GOD SOMETIMES SEEMS TO SIT INACTIVE, AND NOT TO INTERFERE WITH HUMAN AFFAIRS. At such times wicked men and wicked nations seem to triumph over righteous men and righteous nations, and good men are filled with doubting and despondent thoughts. Hence they pray, “Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered.”

II. BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN GOD SHOWS HOW WEAK IS THE STRONGEST WHEN ARRAYED AGAINST HIM. The wicked then flee before his face as smoke is driven before the wind, or as wax melts before the fire. Then good men are filled with rejoicing, and are confirmed in their highest thoughts of God. National revolutions and national growths are full of God’s activity.

III. WHEN GOD ARISES TO WORK ANY GREAT CHANGE, WE HAVE TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR HIS COMING. (Ver. 4.) “Cast up a highway for him who rideth through the deserts,” alluding to the custom of Eastern monarchs, who sent pioneers to prepare the route which they intended to follow; *not* “extol him that rideth upon the heavens.” Here the preparation is evidently the joyful expectation of his coming to go before his people, and of the mighty deeds which he will work. By faith and joyful work we prepare God’s way; and he goes before us to prepare our way. Both ideas here.

IV. GOD IS TO BE PRAISED NOT ONLY FOR HIS GREAT VICTORIES, BUT FOR HIS COMPASSION TO THE MISERABLE. (Vers. 4, 5.) He helps those most to be pitied, while the great earthly potentates respect only the rich and the noble. 1. *He helps and comforts the widow and the fatherless*. 2. *He gives homes to the outcast and homeless*. 3. *He gives liberty to the captive*. Only the rebellious abide in a land of drought.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXIX.

THIS is the cry of one suffering severely from men, partly on account of his own sins (ver. 5), but mainly for the sake of God (vers. 7—9). It is said to be “written in the style of Jeremiah” (Cheyne); but the resemblance to several Davidical psalms, especially Ps. xxii., xxxv., and xl., is admitted; and the expression, “*Al Shoshannim*,” in the “title,” connects it also with Ps. xlv. Moreover, the “title” distinctly assigns it to David, as does St. Paul (Rom. xi. 9); and there are no arguments of any weight to set against these testimonies. As for the time in David’s life to which it belongs, there is no very distinct evidence; but Dr. Kay’s conjecture, that it was written at the time of Adonijah’s rebellion, is not improbable.

The psalm divides into five unequal portions, consisting respectively of four, eight, nine, eight, and seven verses.

Vers. 1—4 contain a pathetic complaint, expressed first in figurative language (vers. 1—3), but (in ver. 4) plainly connected with the wicked designs of human enemies,

Ver. 1.—*Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul*. This is a common, perhaps, we may say, a proverbial, expression for any great distress (comp. Ps. xviii. 4; xlii. 7; lxxxviii. 7, 17; and Job xxii. 11; xxvii. 20).

Ver. 2.—*I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing*. “Mire” and “clay” are metaphors for dangers and difficulties, which entangle a man and incapacitate him from exertion (comp. Ps. xl. 2). *I am come into deep waters* (comp. ver. 15; and see also Ps. cxiv. 4, 5; cxxx. 1). *Where the floods overflow me*; i.e. “I am utterly overwhelmed by my misfortunes.”

Ver. 3.—*I am weary of my crying*; i.e. “I have cried to God for aid, until I am weary of so doing.” No reply comes, no aid is given. *My throat is dried*. Parched—unable to cry out any more. *Mine eyes fail while I wait for my God* (comp. Ps. cxix. 82; Deut. xxviii. 32). “I have waited and looked for God, till I can look no more.”

Ver. 4.—*They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head* (comp. Ps. xxxv. 14; and for the simile, comp. Ps. xl. 12; both of them Davidical compositions). *They that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty*. Joab and Abiathar, who supported the rebellion of Adonijah (1 Kings i. 7), and were “mighty” men, certainly were David’s

enemies "wrongfully." And the same may be said of Absalom and Ahithophel. Then I restored that which I took not away. Dr. Kay supposes David's quasi-abdication of a crown which he had not placed on his own head (2 Sam. xv. 14—17) to be alluded to.

Vers. 5—12.—David follows up his complaint by a confession of sin (ver. 5), which shows that his sufferings are, at any rate, in some measure, deserved; but, at the same time, he pleads that, as his enemies are really persecuting him for his righteous deeds and his adherence to God (vers. 7—11), God is bound to come to his aid, in order that his own honour may be vindicated, and that the godly may not be put to shame on his (David's) account.

Ver. 5.—O God, thou knowest my foolishness (see Ps. xxxviii. 5). According to the teaching both of the Old Testament (*Proverbs*, *passim*) and of the New (Mark vii. 22; Rom. i. 21, 22; Gal. iii. 1, etc.), folly is a form of sin. And my sins are not hid from thee. The rebuke of Nathan and the death of his child (2 Sam. xii. 7—19) had fully convinced David of this. Thenceforward his sins were ever before him (Ps. li. 3), continually confessed by him, and felt to be as well known to God as to himself. Compare the opening of Ps. cxxxix., "Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether" (vers. 1—4).

Ver. 6.—Let not them that wait on thee (or, *hope in thee*), O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake; or, *through me* (Revised Version); *on my account* (Kay)—as they would be if I, although thy faithful worshipper, were delivered into my enemies' hands. Let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel. One of the many places where the second clause is a simple echo of the first.

Ver. 7.—Be cause for thy sake I have borne reproach. The real secret of the enmity which David provoked, both on the part of Saul, of Absalom, of Joab, and of other ungodly men, was his own piety and devotion to God's service. Irreligious men hate those who are religious, whose conduct shames them by its contrast with their own evil courses. They revenge themselves, sometimes by scoffing at the religious observances of the pious (ver. 10), sometimes by insinuating that all profession of religion is

hypocrisy. Shame hath covered my face. I have been made to feel shame at the charges which have been brought against me (see 2 Sam. xv. 3; xvi. 7, 8).

Ver. 8.—I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children. The preference of David over all his elder brethren was calculated to arouse their jealousy (1 Sam. xvi. 6—13); and Eliab's hostile feeling is distinctly shown in 1 Sam. xvii. 28. We may gather from Ps. xxxviii., as well as from the present passage, that the alienation continued, and was not confined to Eliab.

Ver. 9.—For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. David's "zeal for God's house" was shown, first, in his establishment of the tabernacle on Mount Zion (2 Sam. vi. 12—19); next, in his earnest desire to build a permanent and magnificent dwelling for the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. vii. 2; Ps. cxxxii. 2—5); then, in his careful collection of materials for the building which he was forbidden to erect himself (1 Chron. xxviii. 11—18; xxix. 2—5); and finally, in the directions that he left to Solomon with respect to it (1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 10, 20). It was also shown, if we take "house" in a wider sense, by his careful government of the land and people, the kingdom and household of God, for forty years. And the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me. David may either mean that every reproach uttered against God was as keenly felt by him as if it had been directed against himself, or that, when men reproached him, they really meant to reproach God (i.e. religion) in him.

Ver. 10.—When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach. David's practice of fasting appears both here and also in Pss. xxxv. 13; cix. 24; 2 Kings xii. 16, 22. As fasting was not enjoined by the Law, he might be reproached for over-righteousness, and perhaps also for ostentation, on account of it.

Ver. 11.—I made sackcloth also my garment (see Pss. xxx. 12; xxxv. 13); and I became a proverb to them; or, a *byword*, as the same word, *māshāl*, is rendered in Ps. xli. 14.

Ver. 12.—They that sit in the gate speak against me; rather, *talk about me* (Revised Version)—*make me their theme* (Cheyne). The gates, where the chief business was done, were no doubt also places of gossip. And I was the song of the drunkards (comp. Job xxx. 9); literally, *of the drinkers of strong drink*.

Vers. 13—21.—The psalmist now betakes himself to earnest prayer—he has sufficiently represented his condition, though he still adds a few words respecting it (vers. 19—21),

and the immediate need is relief. He therefore approaches God in what he hopes is "an acceptable time" (ver. 13), and humbly entreates for mercy (vers. 14—18).

Ver. 13.—But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time (comp. Ps. xxxii. 6; Isa. xlix. 8). Professor Cheyne asks, "How has it been revealed to the psalmist that this is an acceptable time?" We can only answer—Perhaps it has not been revealed; he may express a hope rather than a full assurance. Or it may have been revealed to him in the way that other things were. O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me; or, "in the greatness of thy mercy;" i.e. as thy mercy is so great. In the truth of thy salvation. "In the exercise of that fidelity which secures the salvation of all that trust it" (Professor Alexander).

Ver. 14.—Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink (comp. ver. 2, with the comment). Let me be delivered from them that hate me (see ver. 4). And out of the deep waters (comp. vers. 1, 2).

Ver. 15.—Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. The reference is still to vers. 1, 2; and the prayer is for deliverance from the dangers and entanglements there spoken of.

Ver. 16.—Hear me, O Lord, for thy loving-kindness is good (comp. ver. 13). Turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies. The psalmist implies that God's face had been for some time turned away from him, and begs to be restored to favour.

Ver. 17.—And hide not thy face from thy servant (comp. Ps. x. 1; xlii. 1; xxii. 24; xxvii. 9, etc.). For I am in trouble; literally, for there is trouble to me. On the probable nature of the "trouble," see the introductory paragraph. Hear me speedily (comp. Ps. xxii. 19; xxxi. 2; xxxviii. 22; lxx. 1, etc.).

Ver. 18.—Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it. David often complains that God is far from him (Ps. x. 1; xxii. 19; xxxviii. 21; lxxi. 12, etc.), and prays that he will "draw nigh," the sense of distance and alienation being intolerable. Deliver me because of mine enemies; i.e. because of their plots and machinations (see ver. 4).

Ver. 19.—Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour (comp. vers. 7—12). Whatever David has suffered at the hands of his enemies has been fully known to God, who has at any rate permitted it. Having seen and known, God will not forget. My adversaries are all before thee. Thou hast seen my adversaries also, and still hast them in thy

sight. Thou beholdest their insolence and audacity.

Ver. 20.—Reproach hath broken my heart. (comp. vers. 7, 9, 19). Some of his enemies' reproaches were, no doubt, based on David's old misdoings. These, which he could not rebut, would cause him the severest pain. And I am full of heaviness; or, "full of sickness;" "very sick" (Kay); "sick to death" (Delitzsch). And I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. It is questioned whether David was ever without friends to pity and comfort him, and suggested that at this point he passes from narrative to prophecy, and describes, not his own condition, but that of the Messiah, whom he typified, speaking as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. Jesus was certainly left without pity or comfort, when "all the disciples forsook him, and fled" (Matt. xxvi. 56).

Ver. 21.—They gave me also gall for my meat. Here, at any rate, the psalmist is inspired to be Messianic, i.e. to use words which, while they can only be applied to himself metaphorically and loosely, are in the strictest and most literal sense applicable to Christ. Gall was actually mingled with the drink which was given to Christ just before he was crucified, and which he tasted, but would not swallow (Matt. xxvii. 34). And in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. Similarly, when upon the cross Christ uttered the words, "I thirst," those who stood by "filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost" (John xix. 29, 30); comp. Ps. xxii. 16—18, where little facts, not true of David, but true of Christ, are recorded of an afflicted one, who partly represents David, partly his great Descendant.

Vers. 22—29.—The imagination of the cruelties to be inflicted on his innocent Descendant works up the psalmist to a pitch of passionate resentment, which finds vent in a series of bitter imprecations, very distasteful to many. They are less startling, however, than some to be found elsewhere, as in Ps. cii. We may view them either as an outpouring of righteous indignation upon the enemies, not of David only, but of God; or as a series of prophetic denunciations, whereby the wicked of David's time were warned of the consequences of such wickedness as theirs, and stimulated to repentance.

Ver. 22.—Let their table become a snare

before them. It is not very clear *how* their table was to ensnare them: perhaps by encouraging them to gluttony and sensuousness, and bringing upon them the diseases which those sins breed; perhaps by leading them to an ostentatious display of wealth and luxury (comp. Ezek. xxiii. 40, 41). And that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let them be trapped by the good things of their table, like a wild beast by a bait.

Ver. 23.—Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not. This may be taken either literally, "let blindness come upon those who have so misused their eyes;" or metaphorically, "let their understandings, which they have partially blinded, be wholly darkened." And make their loins continually to shake. Deprive them of the strength whereof they have boasted, and which they have misapplied.

Ver. 24.—Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. At any rate, be angry with them, and show thine anger in some way or other. Let them not escape scatheless. A general malediction, after which the writer returns to particulars.

Ver. 25.—Let their habitation be desolate; literally, *their encampment*. *Tirah* (טִּירָה) is the circular enclosure of a nomadic tribe, within which it kept its cattle or took refuge itself (Gen. xxvi. 16; Numb. xxxi. 10). Nomadic expressions remained in use after nomadic habits had ceased (see 1 Kings xii. 16). And let none dwell in their tents. A duplication of the preceding clause.

Ver. 26.—For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten. This would apply equally to David, and his great Antitype. It is an aggravation of cruelty when men persecute one who is already suffering affliction at God's hand. And they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded; rather, *they talk of the grief of those*, etc. They speak of it mockingly, or, at any rate, unsympathetically.

Ver. 27.—Add iniquity unto their iniquity. Either "let them fall from one wickedness to another," as the clause is rendered in the Prayer-book Version; or "add to the record of their sin in thy book, a further record of other sins, as they commit them." And let them not come into thy righteousness; i.e. let them not receive the gift of thy justifying grace, and so be counted among thy righteous ones.

Ver. 28.—Let them be blotted out of the book of the living. God is supposed to have a "book of the living" in his possession, which contains the names of all those on whom he looks with favour, and whom he will bless both in this world and beyond the

grave (comp. Exod. xxxii. 32; Ps. lxxvi. 6; Ezek. xiii. 9; Dan. xii. 1). From this list, as from any register of earthly citizenship, the names of the unworthy may be erased. David prays for the erasure of the names of those unworthy ones against whom his imprecations are uttered. And not be written with the righteous; i.e. not remain written in the book side by side with the names of the righteous. The New Testament, no less than the Old, tells of this book (see Luke x. 20; Phil. iv. 3; Rev. iii. 5; xiii. 8; xx. 12; xxi. 27).

Ver. 29.—But I am poor and sorrowful; let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high. The psalmist adds to his list of imprecations, by way of contrast, an invocation of blessing on himself. As his present condition is in strong contrast with that of his ungodly enemies, as he is "poor and sorrowful," while they are prosperous and self-satisfied, so let their future conditions be. While they are depressed and disgraced, let him be "set up on high."

Vers. 30—36.—In conclusion, the psalmist bursts out into praise. Confident of receiving the deliverance for which he has prayed, he anticipates it by at once offering thanksgiving (ver. 30). He then calls on others to rejoice with him, first on the poor and humble (vers. 32, 33), then on heaven and earth and their inhabitants generally (ver. 34). Finally, he delivers a confident prophecy of the continued prosperity of Judah and Jerusalem (vers. 35, 36).

Ver. 30.—I will praise the Name of God with a song. (For praise of the Name of God, see Pss. vii. 17; ix. 2; xxix. 2; xxxiv. 3; lxvi. 1; lxxviii. 4, etc.) And will magnify him with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving had already, in Ps. l. 13, 14, been set above sacrifice.

Ver. 31.—This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs; i.e. that is fit for legal sacrifice—of full age, and clean.

Ver. 32.—The humble shall see this, and be glad. The meek—God's people—see David's deliverance, and are glad—rejoice in their heart, and unite with him in thanksgiving. And your heart shall live that seek God (comp. Ps. xxii. 26).

Ver. 33.—For the Lord heareth the poor. The "poor in spirit" are probably meant (comp. ver. 29). And despiseth not his prisoners. Those who suffer for his sake.

Ver. 34.—Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and everything that moveth therein (comp. Ps. xvi. 11). As Job calls on heaven and earth to sympathize with him in his distress (Job xvi. 18, 19), so

David would have them to partake in his joy at his deliverance.

Ver. 35.—*For God will save Zion.* It is not necessary to suppose that Jerusalem was in any immediate danger. The psalmist merely means that the same God from whom he now confidently expects deliverance will always watch over his city, over his people, over his inheritance, and *whenever* danger threatens, will exert his protecting power and save. Prophecies of this kind are always conditional, and thus Zion, when she rejected God for idols (2 Chron. xxxvi. 14), and again when she rejected him for Barabbas (Matt. xxvii. 21), forfeited the promised blessing of continuance, and

brought about her own destruction. And will build the cities of Judah; i.e. maintain them, keep them from decay and ruin. That they may dwell there; i.e. continue to inhabit the cities. And have it (i.e. Zion, or Jerusalem) in possession.

Ver. 36.—*The seed also of his servants shall inherit it.* Nor shall the city alone—the mere walls and buildings—continue to exist. “The seed of God’s servants”—his people Israel—shall continue to inhabit it. And they that love his Name shall dwell therein. When the earthly Zion fell away and forfeited the promises, they passed to the heavenly Zion (Heb. xii. 22)—the Church of God, the true Israel.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—13.—*The psalmist in three aspects.* I. AS A MAN TO BE PITIED. The sufferings described are many and great. They threatened to be overwhelming. Without, there was no escape; within, there was no peace. Crying for help brought no rescue, and waiting upon God brought no deliverance. Hope deferred made the heart sick. Disappointment only called forth more bitter scorn from enemies, and made the ills that multiplied more and more hard to bear. Besides, there was the distressful feeling that the evils that had come were in large part unmerited, and that the hate of enemies was as unjust as it was unprovoked. When we find a man in such a case, we cannot but sympathize with him. He may be too magnanimous to crave our pity, but all the more our heart goes out to him in compassion, and our prayers are joined with his for deliverance (Job vi. 14; xix. 21; 1 Pet. iii. 8). It is one of the advantages of suffering that, while it may be a salutary discipline to the sufferer, it becomes a means of calling forth brotherly kindness and manly help from beholders.

II. AS A SINNER TO BE CONDEMNED. There are some who resent any condemnation of the psalmist. They say he was inspired, that he was one of the “holy men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” This is true, but all the same, he speaks of himself as a sinner, and we are more likely to deal truly with him by taking him on his own judgment than by setting him up as if he were perfect, and as if his confessions of sin and folly were made in some non-natural sense. Besides, there are evident proofs here of the working of sin, of the flesh lusting against the spirit, of the struggle which all good men have to make against the rise of unholy passions in time of temptation. If we are to take the language (in vers. 22—28) just as we find it, and if we are to understand it as used by a man of undoubted but of imperfect piety, we cannot but regard it as highly culpable. There is more here than just indignation. The life of the psalmist had been made bitter by the rancour and hate of his enemies, and he seems to give way to wrath, and to hurl back upon his foes the curses which they had so cruelly heaped upon himself. But be this as it may, it is plain that we should guard against indulgence in such language. It is not for us to judge others; it is not for us to return evil for evil. Christ has taught us that they greatly erred who said, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour, but hate thine enemy” (Matt. v. 43—45). Rather we are to love our enemies. And what our Lord taught us by word he illustrated in his life. Even of those whose hands were red with his blood, he said, “Father, forgive them;” and his return for all the hate and malice and cruelty of the wicked Jews was to send them first of all the gospel of peace (Luke xxiii. 24; xxiv. 47). If we indulge in resentment, we not only hurt ourselves, but we wrong our brother, for, however badly a man may use us, he is still our brother, and we should not put a greater barrier between him and us by wrath, but rather try to bring him to a better mind by love and mercy (Rom. xii. 19—21).

III. AS A SAINT TO BE IMITATED. The very fact that we cannot and dare not follow the psalmist in all that we find here, is evidence of his imperfection. We are

bound to use our reason—to examine things by the standard of God's Law and the Spirit of Christ. We should only imitate what is good, and what commends itself to our consciences and hearts as good (1 Cor. xi. 1; Eph. v. 1, 2). But if we consider, we shall find much here to admire, and therefore to imitate. It would be well for us, like the psalmist, to call upon God in the day of trouble. We may be in straits, but he can help. We may be repulsed on all sides, and lonely, but he will not cast us off. We should also learn from the psalmist not to plead our own merits, but to cast ourselves on God's mercy. God knows what is best. Above all, we should do what the psalmist could only do imperfectly, in the dim light of the days before the gospel—we should look to Christ, and learn of him how to behave ourselves in times of suffering.—W. F.

Vers. 30—36.—*Praise*. I. GRANDEST THEME. "Name of God." Take Exod. iii. 14, where God is called the "I am;" or the next verse, where as "the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," he says, "This is my Name for ever." Or take Exod. xxxiv. 6, or some of the great titles given to God: Jehovah-jireh (Gen. xxii. 14); Jehovah-tsiddkenu (Jer. xxxiii. 16); Jehovah-shalom (Judg. vi. 24); Jehovah-nissi (Exod. xvii. 15). What a glorious subject, with endless variety of charm!

II. NOBLEST INSPIRATION. "Thanksgiving." This implies in the singer a right relation and a right spirit. We can only praise God aright as we know him as God, and as our hearts glow with love to him as our God and our Redeemer.

III. TRUEST POPULARITY. It is not what pleases the people that stands highest, but what pleases God. He looks to the heart. He distinguishes between the form and the spirit. The sacrifice which is acceptable to him is that which is offered in faith and love. The two mites of the humble widow far transcend the splendid gifts of the proud Pharisees.

IV. THE MOST POWERFUL ARGUMENT. (Ver. 33.) "For." Reference is made to God's love of the poor; God's rescue of the oppressed, his "prisoners," from Joseph in Egypt, down to John at Patmos; God's promotion of righteousness and mercy and peace.

V. THE MOST DELIGHTFUL CONCLUSION. (Vers. 34—36.) True in part of Judah and Zion, but finding its highest fulfilment in him who is the true King of men, and whose rule alone can unite Jew and Gentile, and bring joy to heaven and earth.—W. F.

Ver. 32.—Here are *three greatest things*. I. THE GREATEST THING IN MAN. The "heart." It is the heart that marks *character* (Prov. xxiii. 7); that settles *worth* (1 Sam. xvi. 7); that *determines destiny* (Rom. x. 9, 10; Prov. iv. 23). Even among men, the man who has "no heart," whatever else he may have, is despised; whereas he who has a kind heart, though he may have many failings, is beloved (cf. Nabal and David).

II. THE GREATEST WORK FOR MAN. "Seek God." This implies that, though man is separated from God through sin, there is a possibility of return. God has drawn near to us, and we may draw near to God. Christ is the true Mercy-seat. In him God and man meet and are reconciled. The chief object of life is to seek God (Ps. xxvii. 8; Isa. lv. 6). In his works and in his Word, in the Person of his Son and in doing his will by the Spirit, he is evermore to be found of those who truly seek him (Isa. xlv. 19; Amos v. 8).

III. THE GREATEST BLESSEDNESS FOR MAN. "Live." Life is the greatest boon—but only when it is the life of the heart.

"We live by admiration, faith, and hope,
And ever as these are well and wisely fixed,
In dignity of being we ascend."

(Wordsworth.)

It is in Christ that we find our true life and our highest blessedness (cf. Demas and Paul, 2 Tim. iv. 10; 2 Cor. vi. 11; 1 John iii. 1).—W. F.

Vers. 1—18.—*Suffering and prayer.* “The psalm is a prayer and complaint of one suffering severely from men for the sake of God.”

I. GREAT SUFFERING. (Vers. 1—4.) 1. *Exposing him to great danger.* (Vers. 1, 2.) He is in peril of his life. “The floods overwhelm him.” 2. *Entailing great bodily exhaustion.* (Ver. 3.) Weary of crying, parched throat, failing eyes. 3. *Arising from the unjust hatred of his enemies, who are numerous and strong.* (Ver. 4.) They that hate him without a just cause and wrongfully, are numberless and mighty.

II. GREAT SUFFERING FOR THE SAKE OF GOD AND THE RIGHTEOUS CAUSE. (Vers. 5—12.) 1. *Awakens a sense of personal unworthiness.* (Ver. 5.) All suffering tends to this. 2. *The sin of his enemies was sin against God.* (Vers. 7—9.) 3. *Intimate relatives and friends as well as strangers join in the persecution of his enemies.* (Vers. 8—12.)

III. THE GROUNDS OF HIS PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE. (Vers. 13—18.) 1. *Others who trust in God will be put to shame if he is left to perish.* Go back to ver. 6 for this. Faith in God is at stake. 2. *His great misery is his argument for salvation.* (Vers. 14, 15—17.) We may well use this plea. 3. *The greatness of the Divine loving-kindness and mercy.* (Vers. 13—16.) This is the argument which is fullest of hope to those who have known God in all ages, but especially to those who have known God in Christ.—S.

Vers. 29—36.—The psalm closes with *joyful hopes and vows of thanksgiving for salvation.* These consequences flow from his confidence in God’s salvation.

I. HIS OWN PERSONAL GRATITUDE AND SERVICE. 1. *The thanksgiving of a grateful heart will show itself in song and service.* (Ver. 30.) 2. *Spiritual service is more acceptable to God than ceremonial.* (Ver. 31.)

II. HIS SALVATION WILL STRENGTHEN THE FAITH OF ALL RIGHTEOUS SUFFERERS. (Vers. 32, 33.) 1. *The humble, the afflicted, will see in it the pledge of their own deliverance.* (Ver. 32.) God will make a difference between all the righteous and the wicked. 2. *The experience of the righteous warrants the utmost trust in God.* (Ver. 33.) “For the Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners.” That is a truth of experience as well as of faith and hope.

III. ZION AND THE CITIES OF JUDAH SHALL BE REBUILT. The revelations of God to his own experience gave him the hope of a wide and general deliverance; and in the distinction made by God between him and his enemies, security for the victory of the whole Church of God. He calls upon the heavens, the earth, and seas to praise God on this account (vers. 34—36).—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXX.

THIS psalm is a detached fragment of Ps. xl., separated off, probably, for liturgical purposes. Except in the last clause, the name “Elohim” is substituted for “Jehovah.” A few omissions are made, and one alteration which affects the sense.

Ver. 1.—*Make haste, O God, to deliver me.* In Ps. xl. 13 we find, “*Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me;*” and this would seem to be the right way of supplying the ellipse here. **Make haste to help me, O Lord.**

Ver. 2.—*Let them be ashamed and confounded.* Ps. xl. 14 adds, “together.” That seek after my soul. Ps. xl. adds, “to destroy it.” Let them be turned backward, and put to confusion, that desire my hurt. Identical with Ps. xl. 14, and translated more literally.

Ver. 3.—*Let them be turned back for a reward of their shames.* Ps. xl. 15 has, “Let them be desolate,” but this difference seems to arise from a corruption. That say, *Aha, aha!* Ps. xl. 15 has, “that say to me, *Aha, aha!*” which is better.

Ver. 4.—*Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: and let such as love thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified.* Ps. xl. 16 has, “Let the Lord be magnified.”

Ver. 5.—*But I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God.* Instead of this last clause, Ps. xl. 17 has, “Yet the Lord thinketh upon me;” which cannot be ascribed to a corruption, but must be an alteration made deliberately. Thou art my Help and my Deliverer; O Lord, make no tarrying. Identical with Ps. xl. 17, except that here once more “Jehovah” replaces “Elohim.”

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—“*Help!*” This is the cry of many. By sea and land, in times of peril, this call is made. That gun “booming loud” is the signal of a ship in distress. That flag held up from the boat is a silent appeal. That cry, rising loud and shrill, above the turmoil of storm, tells of “some strong swimmer in his agony,” who still hopes for succour. And as brother cries to brother, so the soul cries to God. There are cases when we can help ourselves. There are other cases where friends and brethren can help us. For this we should thank God and take courage. The more the Spirit of Christ prevails, the more there will be both of self-help and mutual help. But there are other cases when God alone can help. Let us turn to him. There is every reason to hope that we shall not seek him in vain. He has power (2 Chron. xxv. 8). He has the disposition (Isa. xli. 10; xlii. 2). He has pledged his word (Hos. xiii. 9). Well, therefore, might the psalmist say, “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help” (Ps. cxlvi. 5)! This psalm is entitled, “To put God in remembrance;” and it is rich in light and comfort to all who make their prayer to God for help. Mark—

I. THE CRY. “*Help!*” It is the sign of weakness and of fear. God seems to delay. The peril increases, and therefore the cry becomes more urgent. Soon it will be too late. “*Make haste!*” Who is there who has not felt the pain of need, and the greater pain of anxiety and fear. The more grievous our straits, the more earnest should be our prayers.

II. THE RESPONSE. The chief pleas are three, and God’s answer always meets our necessities. 1. *The malice of foes.* Men are to be found who actually take pleasure in pain, and especially when the pain falls upon those they hate. The more of trouble, the greater their joy. This is the very spirit of hell. Such as persist in this kind of life must perish. God will disappoint the malice of the wicked by his deliverance of the good. 2. *The benefit of God’s people.* The good delight in good. Happy themselves in God, they would have all others share in the same happiness. Especially have they sympathy with all of like spirit with themselves (1 Cor. xii. 26). Hence when the godly conquer their troubles by bearing them patiently, or are rescued as by the hand of God, their hearts are refreshed. What is done to others is as if done to themselves. 3. *Personal necessity.* God looks to individuals. None are so “poor” that he will despise them. None are so “needy” that he cannot satisfy their wants. He delighteth in mercy. Each one of us may put himself in the place of the psalmist, and cry, as he did, with lively hope, “*I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God!*” When we thus trust in God, hope rises to assurance. We feel as if what we asked was given, as if what we sought was done. “*Thou art my Help and my Deliverer.*” But still, so long as we are in distress, and God has not yet perfected that which concerneth us, we urge the prayer, “*Make no tarrying.*”—W. F.

Vers. 1—5.—This psalm is substantially a repetition of the last five verses of Ps. xl. (which see). It was most likely detached and altered for a special occasion.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXI.

Ps. lxxi. is, like so many others, a psalm divided between complaint and praise. It is comparatively wanting in originality, being, to a very great extent, an echo of other psalms, especially Pss. xxii., xxxi., xxxv., and xl. Complaint, mingled with prayer, occupies the first half (vers. 1—13); praise and thanksgiving the second (vers. 14—24). The authorship of the psalm is very doubtful, as it has no “title,” and few

marked characteristics. Kay and Hengstenberg, however, regard it as Davidical, the former assigning it to the time of Adonijah’s attempt, the latter to that of the rebellion of Absalom. Metrically, it is thought to divide into seven short stanzas, each of either three or four verses.

Vers. 1—3 are almost identical with the opening verses of Ps. xxxi. They express a firm trust in God, but combine with the expression of this trust an urgent prayer for deliverance.

Ver. 1.—In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion; rather, as in Ps. xxxi. 1, “let me never be ashamed;” or, *let me never be put to shame* (Cheyne).

Ver. 2.—**Deliver me in thy righteousness.** Identical with the last clause of Ps. xxxi. 1. **And cause me to escape.** The danger seems to be pressing, and such as characterized Absalom’s rather than Adonijah’s rebellion. **Incline thine ear unto me, and save me** (comp. Ps. xxxi. 2).

Ver. 3.—**Be thou my strong Habitation;** literally, *be thou to me for a Rock of habitation*; i.e. a rock upon which I may take up my abode. **Whereunto I may continually resort.** Exegetical of the preceding clause, “a rock of habitation.” **Thou hast given commandment to save me.** It is in thy counsels that I am to be helped and saved—not left to the will of my enemies (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 28). This conviction lies at the root of the psalmist’s faith and trust. **For thou art my Rock and my Fortress** (comp. Pss. xlviii. 2; lxi. 2, 3, etc.).

Ver. 4.—**Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand (rather, grasp) of the unrighteous and cruel man.** It is characteristic of David to single out from his adversaries an individual man, from whom he especially asks to be delivered (comp. Pss. xlii. 2; xvii. 13; xviii. 17, 48; xxv. 8; xli. 6, 9, 11; lv. 13, 14, etc.).

Ver. 5.—**For thou art my Hope, O Lord God** (comp. Ps. xxxix. 7; Jer. xiv. 8; xvii. 13; 1. 7). **Thou art my Trust from my youth** (comp. Ps. xl. 4).

Ver. 6.—**By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother’s bowels** (comp. Ps. xxii. 9, 10, of which this is plainly an echo or reminiscence). **My praise shall be continually of thee** (see vers. 14—16, 22—24).

Ver. 7.—**I am as a wonder unto many; or, as a portent, a prodigy**—something monstrous. Some explain, “as an object of God’s singular favour from his youth” (Kay, Cheyne); others, “as a marvellous example of God’s punishments” (Schultens, Hengstenberg, Professor Alexander, Canon Cook). The latter explanation is supported by Dent. xxviii. 46, and, on the whole, seems preferable. **But thou art my strong Refuge** (see above, ver. 3, *ad fin.*).

Ver. 8.—**Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day.** Praise alternates with complaint and prayer, even in this first portion of the psalm, preparing the way for the sustained praise of the second portion.

Ver. 9.—**Cast me not off in the time of old age.** This expression, combined with the allusion to old age and grey hairs in ver. 18, indicates that the writer was drawing

near to the natural term of human life, and already felt the infirmities of old age creeping upon him. This note of date suits better the time of Adonijah’s rebellion than that of Absalom’s. **Forsake me not when my strength faileth.** An appeal to the Divine compassion. If God was his “Rock and Fortress” (ver. 3), his “strong Refuge” (ver. 7), when he was in his full vigour, much more will he support and befriend him when he is weak and helpless.

Ver. 10.—**For mine enemies speak against me.** The psalmist’s weakness encourages his enemies to make their attacks. They begin by *speaking against him*—calumniating him (2 Sam. xv. 3, 4), and shortly they will proceed to acts. **And they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together; or, “they that watch for my soul”** (Revised Version).

Ver. 11.—**Saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him.** Compare the words of Ahithophel, “Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night; and I will come upon him while he is *weary and weak-handed*; and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only” (2 Sam. xvii. 1, 2). It no doubt appeared to Absalom’s party generally, as it did to Shimei, that God had “forsaken” David, and turned against him (2 Sam. xvi. 8).

Ver. 12.—**O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help** (comp. Pss. xxii. 19; xxxv. 22).

Ver. 13.—**Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul; let them be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek my hurt** (comp. Pss. xxxv. 4; xl. 14; lxx. 2).

Vers. 14—24.—Regarding his prayers as heard, and their fulfilment as certain, the psalmist now betakes himself to praise and thanksgiving. He will never cease to hope; he will praise God more and more (ver. 14). He will spend the whole day in telling of God’s righteousness and salvation (ver. 15). The mighty acts of the Lord shall form his theme, together with the righteousness of God, and of none other (ver. 16). As God has enabled him to declare his praise in the past (ver. 17), so he trusts to be still upheld and enabled to proclaim the same to the new generation (ver. 18). God’s righteousness is “very high,” and there is none like him (ver. 19). When he brings men into trouble, it is only to “turn again and comfort them” (vers. 20, 21). In conclusion, the writer promises that his hymns of praise

shall not only be said, but sung, and accompanied with the melody of music (ver. 22). His lips and soul shall both rejoice together (ver. 23); and the praise of God shall employ his tongue without ceasing (ver. 24).

Ver. 14.—*But I will hope continually; literally, but as for me, I will hope, etc.* The phrase, "as for me," almost always marks a transition. And will yet praise thee more and more; literally, *I will add to all thy praise*; i.e. "I will add to all my past praises of thee further praises in the future."

Ver. 15.—*My mouth shall show forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day.* Salvation is inseparable from righteousness. It is as being righteous himself that God accepts the righteous, and as faithful to his promises, which is a part of his righteousness, that he pardons penitents. *For I know not the numbers thereof* (comp. Ps. xl. 5). God's acts of pardoning mercy, by which he brings about the salvation of penitents, are innumerable.

Ver. 16.—*I will go in the strength of the Lord God; literally, I will come with the mighty acts of the Lord God* (Revised Version); i.e. I will bring these acts forward, and make mention of them in my songs of praise. I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only. I will attribute my deliverance to no strength, or efforts, or righteousness of my own (see Ps. xx. 7; xlv. 3, 6), but to thy righteousness—i.e. thy faithfulness and truth—only.

Ver. 17.—*O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works.* Hitherto, i.e., have I always had thy guidance and instruction, and hitherto have I always had occasion to praise thy Name. Hence I am confident with respect to the future.

Ver. 18.—*Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not.* Surely, thou wilt not forsake me when my youth has fled, and my time of weakness and decay has arrived, so that I need thee all the more. At the time of Adonijah's rebellion, David was "old and stricken in years" (1 Kings i. 1)—nearly, if not quite, seventy years of age (2 Sam. v. 4). Until I have showed thy strength (literally, *thine own*) unto this generation, and thy power

to every one that is to come. The psalmist calls on God to sustain him in his old age, not for his own sake, but that he may impress on the rising generation God's might and marvellous acts.

Ver. 19.—*Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high; or, reaches to the height* (comp. Ps. vii. 7; x. 5; xviii. 16, etc.). *Who hast done great things: O God, who is like unto thee!* (comp. Ps. xxxv. 10; lxxxix. 6, 8).

Ver. 20.—*Thou, which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again; or, according to another reading, which hast showed us—shalt deliver us.* The change of number may be ascribed to the desire of the psalmist to unite his people with himself in the hopes of deliverance which he is expressing. And shalt bring me up again (rather, *shalt bring us up again*) from the depths of the earth. The "depths of the earth" is a metaphor for the extreme of misery and depression (comp. Ps. lxxxviii. 6; cxxx. 1).

Ver. 21.—*Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.* The psalmist feels that the trial now laid upon him is the last—that henceforth his greatness and majesty will increase instead of diminishing, and that God will turn and comfort him (comp. 1 Chron. xxix. 28).

Ver. 22.—*I will also praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God: unto thee will I sing with the harp, O thou Holy One of Israel.* (On the psaltery, and its use as a devotional instrument, see the comment on Ps. xxxiii. 2.) The conjunction of the psaltery and harp seems to imply that the "praise," of which the writer here speaks, is to be public praise in the sanctuary, accompanied by the usual sacred music.

Ver. 23.—*My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed. Not my mouth only, but my heart and spirit, will "rejoice," or "sing unto thy praise"* (Cheyne), when the time comes, and my "redemption," or deliverance, has been accomplished.

Ver. 24.—*My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long.* The musical utterance of praise can only be occasional, but the tongue can "talk" of God continually (see ver. 15). For they are confounded and brought unto shame, that seek my hurt (comp. Ps. xxxv. 4; xl. 14; lxx. 2).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 16.—*Strong confidence.* "I will go," etc. Since these words were written, almost everything in the world capable of change has changed. Empires, nations, languages, religions, have died, and new ones grown up in their stead. The centre of civilization has moved westward. Discovery and invention have so revolutionized man's relation to his surroundings, that he seems to live in a new world. The form of revealed religion has undergone a no less marvellous change. The priesthood, sacrifices, sanctuary, laws,

which seemed to a pious Israelite an integral part of true religion, have waxed old and vanished away. But "the Word of the Lord abideth for ever." Faith, hope, love, based on God's promises, are the same in all ages—in Watts or Wesley, Calvin or Luther, Paul or John, as in David and Isaiah. Across that wide gulf of time which has swallowed so much deemed imperishable, we join hands with this ancient saint, and feel that he is our brother. His experience holds the mirror to our own. The Spirit who inspired him is promised to us also. Let us take note of his *resolve*, his *humility*, his *confidence*.

I. THE PSALMIST'S FIXED RESOLVE AND PURPOSE. "I will go." He speaks as one who knows. The Revisers give a different sense. But they render the same Hebrew word (which commonly means "come") "go" in Gen. xxxvii. 30; Numb. xxxii. 6; Jonah i. 3. And the word for "strength" (plural in Hebrew) is so rendered, and cannot be otherwise rendered, in Ps. xc. 10. The vigorous Authorized Version is much the more apt and intelligible. Whether he is bound, and what he needs for the journey. Some lives can hardly be likened to either a journey or a race. No fixed purpose rules them; no high aim inspires; no goal shines in view. They veer and drift with the changing current of fashion and circumstance. There is something very noble and admirable in fixed indomitable purpose, even when it does not rest on the highest motives. We admire the courage of the great Roman, who said to the trembling pilots in view of the tempest, "It is not necessary for me to live, but it is necessary for me to go" (Plutarch's 'Life of Pompey the Great'). But we find a grander courage in St. Paul (Acts xxi. 13). Or in Luther, after two hours spent in intense prayer, "If there were as many devils in Worms as tiles on the house-tops, I would go." The one is the firmness of human will, defying circumstances to bend it. The other, of human weakness taking hold on almighty strength.

II. Therefore note secondly, THE PSALMIST'S HUMILITY. He is not vaunting his own strength, or trusting to it. "In the strength of the Lord God." All strength is God's. He nerves the arm that is raised against his law; kindles the light of reason in the mind that denies him. Let but a tiny clot of blood press on a thread of nerve, and the strongest arm will be paralyzed, the keenest brain unconscious. Hence Scripture strongly condemns the *worship of human power* and greatness (Isa. ii. 22). A view to which men are always prone. A great blemish on the writings of one of our most powerful writers, Thomas Carlyle. It is wonderful how much people pardon in a conqueror! Such judgment is false. "God resisteth the proud." Illust.: Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. iv. 30, 31, etc.). Humility is true wisdom; since it is simply acknowledging what is fact.

III. THE PSALMIST'S CONFIDENCE. "I will go," etc. A confidence resting in blind presumption, "I will go, come what may, hinder who dare!" is mere self-delusion. On the other hand, mere sense of weakness, "I cannot go!" is miserable, fatal to all success. Faith solves the paradox of combining the humblest sense of weakness with the boldest courage, most strenuous effort, most assured hope (1 John v. 4, 5; John xv. 4, 5; 2 Cor. xii. 9). Nothing but this courage of humility, this confidence of faith, can warrant, in any sane mind, a fearless outlook, even as concerns earthly life. For the strongest is not strong all round; and the strain may come at the one weak point. To climb the mountain is one thing; to breathe the rare air at the top is another. The dash which carries the soldier against the enemies' ranks will not sustain him through the dark, cold hours of the sentinel's lone watch. The athlete may fail at the desk. The man whom no labour could over-task, whose resource, quickness, energy, promptly met every emergency in action, may helplessly break down in adversity. The man whom adversity could neither break nor bend may lose self-control in prosperity, and make shipwreck in a smooth sea. Yet more is this true of the spiritual life. Illust.: Peter (John xiv. 37, 38; xviii. 10, 17, 25, 27). *Have we the right to exercise this confidence anew?* We cannot *over-trust God* (Phil. iv. 13). Suppose a farmer has lowly meadows along the course of a river, which he can irrigate at will. It is no presumption in him to say, "My land can never suffer drought"—*if he opens the sluices*. Prayer opens the sluices which let the full river of God's grace, wisdom, strength, peace, flow into the soul. How can you bear to face the unknown possibilities, or the *certainties*, of the future without this "strength of the Lord God"? What *may* happen any minute? "No use," you say, "to think

of that." No; I know it is no use: does that make things better? How can you help thinking of it, unless you can *take hold of God's strength and be at peace with him?*

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—24.—*Godly old age.* Solomon has said, "The beauty of old men is the grey head" (Prov. xx. 29). But he tells also of a nobler beauty, "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Prov. xvi. 31). Old men are few, but godly old men are fewer still. Rarity signalizes the "beauty," and enhances the "glory." This psalm may well be called, "The Old Man's Psalm." Would that the portrait were more common! It is pleasant to look at in poetry; it is far more delightful to behold in fact. In this portrait of a godly old man, we may mark—

I. **HIS SUBLIME FAITH.** "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust" (ver. 1). Here is the secret of his character. "Trust" gave strength to his heart, and unity and completeness to his life. In this he was in sympathy with others who had gone before (cf. Ps. xxxi. 1—3).

II. **HIS EARNEST PRAYERS.** The godly are ever given to prayer. It is their great resource. It is the never-failing means of obtaining mercy and grace. They learnt to call upon God at their mother's knee (cf. Ps. cxvi. 16; 2 Tim. i. 5), and all through life they have found the virtue and the blessedness of prayer. In old age the cry of the godly is, "I must pray more."

III. **HIS VARIED EXPERIENCES.** Often, when looking back, there is dimness, or many things have fallen out of sight, or there is a confusion in the perspective; but events that have made a deep impression stand out clearly. Memory goes back to the time of youth, and traces life onward, with all the great changes, the dangers and adventures, the attempts and the achievements, the joys and sorrows. There are grateful recollections of kindness and help from many; but above all, there is praise to God for his goodness and wonderful works (vers. 5, 6; cf. Isa. xli. 4).

IV. **HIS SETTLED CONVICTIONS.** Experience is a great teacher. The man who has seen many days has learned much, and is able to bear witness as one that speaketh with authority (Job xxxii. 7; Lev. xix. 32; 2 Pet. i. 13). One thing that the godly old man testifies is that God is worthy of trust; another thing is that the Word of God is not a cunningly devised fable, but truth; another thing is that religion is not a delusion, but a reality—the power of God unto salvation; another thing is that the most pleasant memories are of loyalty to God, and of good done to men, even to enemies, and that the saddest thoughts are of times when self prevailed over love and duty, and opportunities were lost from neglect and sloth.

V. **HIS UNFALTERING RESOLUTION.** The old have their regrets. They have also their times of trial and weakness. In another place the psalmist says, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken" (Ps. xxxvii. 25), and yet here he seems just for a moment to falter; but if he trembles at the thought of being a "castaway," as Paul also did (1 Cor. ix. 27), he renews his strength by prayer (vers. 17, 20). Then having gained courage, he pledges himself with fresh ardour to be true to God. Instead of wavering, he will press on. Instead of keeping silence, he will testify, by word and deed, to the strength and power of God. This was beautifully seen in Polycarp, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never wronged me; and shall I forsake my God and my Saviour?"

VI. **HIS GLORIOUS PROSPECTS.** For the old the end is near. They know that soon they must die, and have no more to do with anything under the sun. This seems a dismal condition. But for the godly there is not only hope in death, but the bright prospect of a blessed immortality. "The end of that man is peace," yea, more, far more, the future is glorious.—W. F.

Vers. 1—13.—*The suffering righteous man in his old age.* An introduction (vers. 1—3) borrowed from Ps. xxxi. The prayer is shortly expressed in the fourth verse, and is succeeded in vers. 5—8 by the basis on which it rests, and after that the

prayer is expanded in vers. 9—13. The second half of the psalm contains the *hope* and the *thanks* of the writer.

I. THE PRAYER OF THE PSALMIST. 1. *For deliverance from the power of evil-doers.* (Ver. 4.) We have need to pray for deliverance from the dangers that imperil the safety of the soul. 2. *For special protection in his old age.* (Ver. 9.) When his natural strength had begun to fail. This was the prayer for spiritual strength—that he might not be abandoned to physical infirmity, and so be unable to contend with his foes. 3. *For immediate help and rescue.* (Ver. 12.) “Make haste to help me.” He was in a pressing emergency, and needed instant deliverance. “Be not far from me.” He prayed for the signs of God’s presence with him.

II. THE GROUNDS OF HIS PRAYER. 1. *God had been his Hope and Confidence from infancy.* (Vers. 5, 6.) And he had confidence that he might still lean upon God for help, and still have cause to praise him. 2. *The greatness of his sufferings.* (Ver. 7, “I by the greatness of my sufferings drew upon myself the astonishment and wonder of man.”) Great suffering leads us to God with a cry to which he will always listen; for “Like as a father pitieth his children,” etc. 3. *He is a constant and devoted worshipper of God.* (Ver. 8, “My mouth is full of thy praise,” etc.) God will not refuse help to those who serve him; if he gives help to any, he must help those who honour him. 4. *He wants it to be proved to his enemies that God has not forsaken him.* (Vers. 10, 11.) He is jealous of God’s honour, and wants it to be seen that God is unchangeable in his goodness as his Deliverer. Good men have always been concerned that God’s righteousness should be manifest and invincible.—S.

Vers. 14—24.—*Persistent hope and increasing praise.* Upon these the psalmist resolves in this second half of the psalm. Let us distinguish the topics of his hope and praise.

I. GOD’S WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARE INNUMERABLE. (Ver. 15.) They cannot be reckoned up. All his works are right, both in nature and towards man.

II. GOD’S WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARE MIGHTY WORKS. (Ver. 16.) “I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord”—“unto the temple, with all the great and mighty deeds which God has done on my behalf, as my subject of grateful praise.” What a tale each life-history could tell!

III. GOD’S WONDERFUL WORKS HAVE BEEN THE THEME OF HIS YOUTH, AND SHALL BE OF HIS OLD AGE. (Vers. 17, 18.) He has been taught them from his youth, and now that he is old he will tell them to the coming generation. We should be wise teachers in old age, having the experiences of a whole life to draw from.

IV. GOD IN HIS WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS AN INCOMPARABLE BEING. (Ver. 19.) None like unto the infinite and eternal Being. His righteousness is perfect and exalted.

V. THE AFFLICTIONS WHICH GOD SENDS ARE TO HAVE A QUICKENING AND EXALTING EFFECT. (Vers. 20, 21.) By such means God increases our greatness, and manifests himself to us as the comforting God.

VI. UPON THESE GROUNDS HE WILL PRAISE GOD BY ALL THE MEANS HE CAN COMMAND. (Vers. 22—24.) With the lute and the harp; his lips shall shout for joy, and his soul and his tongue shall talk all day of his righteousness which has caused him to triumph over his foes. “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.” This will be the eternal song of the redeemed creation of God.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXII.

THE “title” attributes this psalm to Solomon, and the contents of the psalm are very favourable to his authorship. The prayer in vers. 1—4 is an echo of that recorded in 1 Kings iii. 9. The stress laid upon “peace”

(vers. 3, 7—16) accords with the peaceful reign (1 Kings iv. 20—25) of “the peaceful one.” The local allusions (vers. 10, 15) suit the circumstances of Solomon’s time. The tone, cheerful, equable, and objective rather than subjective, is Solomonic. The psalm is thought to have been composed

early in Solomon's reign for liturgical purposes. It is a prophetic prayer for a blessing on the king and on his reign, which is represented in colours and with circumstances, that make it typical of the reign of Messiah (see especially vers. 8, 11, 17). The concluding verses (18, 19) are a doxology, marking the end of the Second Book (compare the comment on Ps. xli. 13).

Ver. 1.—Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. God had established in Israel, in the person of David, hereditary monarchy (2 Sam. vii. 12-16), such as was usual in the East, and suited to Oriental notions. In speaking of himself, not only as "the king," but also as "the king's son," Solomon makes appeal to the sentiment of respect for hereditary royalty. Compare the inscription of Mesha, "My father was king over Moab thirty years, and I became king after my father" (line 1). In praying God to give him "his judgments," he is desiring a "spirit of judgment" which will enable him to deliver decisions as righteous as God's.

Ver. 2.—He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. Then will he have wisdom to judge thy people aright. The wish is in the closest possible agreement with the prayer in 1 Kings iii. 6-9.

Ver. 3.—The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. Through the general establishment of "righteousness" shall "peace" overpread the land, well represented by its "mountains" and "hills"—certainly its most prominent features.

Ver. 4.—He shall judge the poor of the people. Not exclusively, but especially. The unjust rulers and judges of Israel neglected this duty: "They judge not the fatherless . . . and the right of the needy do they not judge" (Jer. v. 28; see also Isa. i. 23; Zech. vii. 10). **He shall save the children of the needy.** He shall preserve them, i.e., from oppression and wrong. **And shall break in pieces the oppressor.** (On God's hatred of oppression and oppressors, see Exod. iii. 9; Lev. xxv. 14; Job xxvii. 13; Ps. xii. 5; Isa. xvi. 14, etc.)

Ver. 5.—They shall fear thee (i.e. God) as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. The righteous government of the king shall spread abroad the "fear of God," and establish pure religion in the land, while the world continues. Here the psalm first becomes distinctly Messianic, passing on from the reigning monarch to the ideal king whom he typifies.

Ver. 6.—He shall come down like rain

upon the mown grass; i.e. softly and gently, bringing refreshment (comp. Deut. xxxii. 2; Isa. lv. 10, 11; and perhaps 2 Sam. xxiii. 4). **As showers that water the earth.** The same idea as in the preceding clause (comp. Hos. vi. 3).

Ver. 7.—In his days shall the righteous flourish. In Messiah's days, when his kingdom is fully established, the righteous will flourish and prosper, since the wicked will not be suffered to hinder them (comp. ver. 4; and see Butler's 'Analogy,' pt. i. ch. iii.). **And abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth; literally, till there be no longer a moon** (comp. ver. 5).

Ver. 8.—He shall have dominion also from sea to sea. It does not appear that any particular seas are meant, as in Exod. xxiii. 31 and Num. xxxiv. 3, 6; rather, the idea is that the earth is set in the midst of the sea, and that Messiah's dominion will reach from shore to shore. **And from the river (i.e. the Euphrates) unto the ends of the earth.** Israel's promised dominion extended only as far as the great river (Gen. xv. 18), which was also the boundary of Solomon's kingdom eastward (1 Kings iv. 21, 24); Messiah's was to reach indefinitely beyond the river to the world's end.

Ver. 9.—They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him (for the meaning here assigned to *tsiyyim* (צִיִּיִּם), see Ps. lxxiv. 14; Isa. xxiii. 13). The wild tribes of the Syrian and Arabian deserts are probably intended (comp. Isa. lx. 6, 7). **And his enemies shall lick the dust; i.e. prostrate themselves at his feet with their faces in the dust.** See the Assyrian representations of Oriental prostrations ('Ancient Monarchies,' vol. i. pp. 266, 502).

Ver. 10.—The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents. "Tarshish" here is probably Tartessus in Spain, so well known to the Israelites in the days of Solomon (1 Kings x. 22; 2 Chron. ix. 21). According to Herodotus, Tartessus, when it first became known to the Greeks, was governed by kings (Herod., i. 163). By "the isles" are to be understood the coasts and islands of the Mediterranean generally. All these have, at one time or another, paid homage to Christ. **The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.** "Sheba" and "Seba" are distinguished by the writer of Genesis (Gen. x. 7), and appear not even to have been very near the one to the other. Sheba was in South-Eastern Arabia, and was known to the Greeks and Romans as the country of the Sabæans (Diod. Sic., iii. 45; Strabo, xvi. 4, § 19; Pliny, 'Hist. Nat.,' vi. 23). Seba was in Africa, on the Middle Nile, and the Sebæans (Σαβᾶι) are closely connected by Isaiah with Ethiopia and Egypt (Isa. xliii. 3; xlv. 14).

Ver. 11.—Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him (comp. Isa. xlix. 7, 23; lx. 3—14). This prophecy has not yet been fulfilled in the letter; but it may one day be exactly accomplished. Or it may not have been intended to be understood literally. General truths are often expressed by the sacred writers universally.

Ver. 12.—For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper (comp. ver. 4); rather, and the poor who has no helper. Two classes of persons are spoken of, not three (comp. Job xix. 12).

Ver. 13.—He shall spare the poor and needy; or, the weak and needy. And shall save the souls of the needy. He shall not merely deliver them from their cruel oppressors in this life (ver. 4), but also give health and life to their souls.

Ver. 14.—He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence. Messiah's especial tenderness towards the poor and lowly is a main feature in all descriptions of his kingdom (see Isa. xi. 4; xxix. 19; xli. 17, etc.), and was emphasized by our Lord when he came upon earth (Matt. xi. 5; Luke iv. 18). And precious shall their blood be in his sight. Worth, therefore, a mighty ransom (comp. Ps. cxvi. 15).

Ver. 15.—And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba. He (i.e. Messiah) "shall live"—shall live on, and reign on, in his everlasting kingdom; and men shall bring to him of the gold of Sheba (1 Kings x. 10; Ezek. xxvii. 22), giving him of their best and rarest, in grateful acknowledgment of his goodness and protection. Prayer also shall be made for him continually. His subjects shall offer prayer for him continually, as Christians do when they pray, "Thy kingdom come" (Hengstenberg). And daily shall he be praised; rather, all day long shall they praise him.

Ver. 16.—There shall be an handful of corn in the earth; rather, as in the Prayer-book Version, *an heap of corn*; or, *abundance of corn* (Revised Version). "Abundance of corn" is put for general prosperity. Upon the top of the mountains. In flourishing times of agriculture, the very tops of the mountains were cultivated all

over Palestine, as appears by the remains of terraces. The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon. Canon Cook's seems to be the best exposition: "The ripened corn on the heights shall rustle in the wind like the foliage on Lebanon." And they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. "They of the city" are the inhabitants of the "New Jerusalem" (Rev. xxi. 2), the citizens of Messiah's kingdom.

Ver. 17.—His Name shall endure for ever (comp. Ps. xlv. 2, 6; cii. 12; Isa. ix. 7). "The eternity of the Name is based upon the eternity of the kingdom" (Hengstenberg). His Name shall be continued as long as the sun (comp. ver. 5); or, his Name shall be renewed—shall spring again to fresh life. Dr. Kay compares an expression of Renan's, "Son culte se rajeunira." And men shall be blessed in him; literally, *men shall bless themselves in him* (comp. Gen. xxii. 18; xxvi. 4). All nations shall call him blessed. With these words the psalm, properly speaking, ends. The doxology (vers. 18, 19) and the note (ver. 20) were probably appended by the arranger of the book.

Vers. 18, 19.—Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel (compare the other doxologies, which begin similarly (Ps. xli. 13; lxxxix. 52; cvi. 48). Who only doeth wondrous things (comp. Ps. lxxxvi. 8, 10; and Job v. 9). And blessed be his glorious Name for ever (comp. Ps. xxix. 2; xxxiv. 3; lxi. 2; lxix. 30; cxiii. 2, etc.). And let the whole earth be filled with his glory. The whole earth can no otherwise be filled with the glory of God, than by men everywhere glorifying him, and bowing down in adoration before his Son. The promise had been made that so it should one day be (Numb. xiv. 21); and the psalmist anticipates the fulfilment of the promise. Amen, and Amen (comp. Ps. xli. 13; lxxxix. 52; cvi. 48).

Ver. 20.—The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended. This is a note appended, either by the collector of the first two Books of the Psalms, or by the collector of the Third Book, who thus marked the difference between the previous collection and his own, the former containing sixty psalms ascribed to David in their titles, and the latter one only (Ps. lxxxvi.).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 17.—*Messiah's reign.* "Men shall be blessed in him." This great promise looks back to the glorious and amazing assurance thrice given to the Patriarch Abraham (and repeated to his son and grandson, Gen. xii. 3; xviii. 18; xxii. 18). St. Paul says the gospel was thus "preached before" (Gal. iii. 8). In the third of these passages, and in the text, the Hebrew word is strictly "bless themselves" (margin,

Revised Version); but the sense is governed by the other two passages (so Gen. xxvi. 4 compared with xxviii. 14). As we are said to *wash ourselves* in water, though it is the water that cleanses; or to *feed ourselves*, though it is the food that nourishes; or to *rest ourselves*, though it is the resting-place which yields us rest; so we *bless ourselves* when we take the blessings God gives us, and find cleansing, food, rest, in Christ. Ancient Hebrew expositors took this glorious psalm as a prophecy of Messiah. Modern Christian critics have spent great learning and ingenuity in dethroning Christ, and leaving Solomon in his stead. If Solomon really wrote this psalm concerning himself, it must be pronounced such a piece of self-glorification, with such Eastern exaggeration, as we nowhere else find in Scripture. Yet we may regard the peaceful glory of Solomon's reign, unlike anything before or since, as an earthly and typical fulfilment, in part, of this majestic, prophetic picture, taking it to refer not to Solomon personally, but to David's royal line, crowned and consummated in Christ (so of Abraham's line St. Paul says, "which is Christ," Gal. iii. 16).

I. GOD'S WORD PROMISES BLESSING IN WHICH ALL NATIONS ARE TO SHARE. This wondrous chain of promises, stretching across thousands of years, holds out a hope which has no root but in the Bible—the universal equal happiness of all nations of mankind. Men may discard the Bible, and yet cling, in the name of progress and civilization, to this splendid hope. But whence did it spring? National happiness or welfare, or, in the strong Bible word, "blessedness," depends on six things—justice, freedom, virtue, knowledge, distribution of wealth, peace (Ps. cxliv. 15). 1. *Justice* is the first office and object of government (Rom. xiii. 1—5), the first condition of national welfare (Deut. iv. 8). Great Charters, Petitions of Right, Declarations of Independence, and the like, are the outcry of oppressed peoples for this prime necessity of national life. 2. *Freedom* is really implied in justice, the only real guardian of right and nurse of true virtue. 3. *Virtue* is no less essential to real national happiness and greatness. Fraud, intemperance, impurity, covetous greed, wild love of pleasure, sloth, cowardice, suck the vitals and sap the roots of national life. 4. *Knowledge* is the parent of all progress. Not mere labour, but wisely directed labour, is the source of wealth. The mind that invents and foresees must guide the hand which toils. 5. *Right distribution of wealth* is the most urgent national problem of our own day in our own and all civilized nations. No nation is blessed in which immense wealth stagnates in a few hands, and the toiling millions are wretched and joyless. 6. *Peace* is the fence and crown of all the other elements of national welfare. War is a short name for all calamities, cruellest of misfortunes, if necessary and just; if unjust, avoidable, the greatest of crimes.

II. ALL NATIONS ARE TO BE BLESSED IN CHRIST. 1. *Possibility and reasonableness of this*. It is not open to question that if even the bulk of a nation, its rulers, legislators, and individual citizens became real Christians, such as may be found by thousands, loving God truly and their neighbour unselfishly, hating vice, dealing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God,—that nation would soon be the envy of all nations. Let every nation undergo such a transformation, and war would be impossible; slavery and tyranny would be things of the past; social problems would be solved, not by legislation, but by every one's sense of what is due to others; mutual help would take the place of fierce competition; labour would become faithful, and wealth beneficent; even secular knowledge of all kinds would receive a mighty impulse from the new value given to each human life and the high moral tone of society. These things the gospel can certainly do, if only all men would believe. 2. *Hopelessness of such a condition, except from the kingdom of Christ*. Human nature has not in itself the tendency to produce such a state of things. Knowledge and progress do not change human nature, do not *give life*; Christ alone *gives life* (John x. 10). 3. *Hopefulness of this prospect*. (1) God has provided for nothing less. What the gospel effects on a small scale it is equally fitted to effect on the largest scale. What Jesus Christ is actually doing for every sinner who believes in him, every disciple who truly follows him, he is able to do for mankind. (2) God has promised no less. In the Lord's Prayer we pray for the coming of his kingdom "*on earth*" (Ps. li. 8; Isa. ii. 4),

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—20.—*The glory of Christ's kingdom.* It is written that Satan took our Lord "up into an exceeding high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" (Matt. iv. 8); but they had no charm for him. In this psalm we are, so to speak, taken up by the Spirit, and shown the kingdom of Messiah; and as its glory opens to our sight our hearts are thrilled with admiration and delight. With renewed ardour we cry, "Thy kingdom come." Consider some things testified here as to the glory of Christ's kingdom.

I. THE GREATNESS OF THE SOVEREIGN. David and Solomon were in some respects great kings; and their greatness, so far as it was real, arose from their feeling their dependence upon God, and that it was their first duty to rule themselves and their people according to God's Law. We know how in many things they offended. But here is a King spoken of whose greatness is of a nobler kind, and who comes short in nothing of God's glory. As respects his nature, his character, his relationships, he is supremely fitted to rule. In him "righteousness" and "judgment" are found as in God. The will of God, on the one hand, and the welfare of his people are his highest ends. "God is light;" and this King saith, "I am the Light of the world." "God is love;" and this King's advent was proclaimed by angels as the Saviour who should bring down love to men: "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will to the children of men."

II. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE ADMINISTRATION. (Vers. 2—4.) David, in his last words, describes Messiah's manner of government (2 Sam. xxiii. 1—4). It is characterized by justice; there is no respect of persons; friends are not unduly favoured, nor enemies unfairly punished (Isa. xi. 4, 5); the condition and interests of all are considered, and the poor are specially regarded; but justice is blended with mercy. It is the glory of Christ's government that it provides for the return of the rebellious, and for the restoration of the fallen.

III. THE HAPPINESS OF THE PEOPLE. (Vers. 6, 7.) The laws of the kingdom are not only adapted to the nature and necessities of man, but designed for the welfare of those who obey them (Deut. xxxii. 47; Isa. xlviii. 18); they are not arbitrary, but founded in truth; they are not alterable, but eternally fixed. Earthly governments so far regulate their laws according to circumstances, and there may be improvements made and reforms carried out from time to time for the greater advantage of the people; but the laws of this kingdom do not need improvement—they are perfect as God is perfect. We see the result in the character and privileges of the people (Isa. xliii. 21; Matt. v. 1—10). They are enlightened, contented, law-abiding; they strive to mould their lives according to the will of their King, and in loyalty and devotion to him they find their highest honour and their highest happiness. In this kingdom alone can liberty, equality, and fraternity, in the truest sense, be enjoyed.

IV. THE FUTURE TRIUMPHS THAT MAY BE CONFIDENTLY EXPECTED. This kingdom is destined to grow from more to more; it has an unlimited power of expansiveness (vers. 8, 13); it is also marked by stability. Earthly kingdoms have their rise and fall; but this kingdom is unshakable and eternal. It begins on earth, but is carried up to heaven. Other kings may have successors, though often the direct succession fails; but this King has no successor, but will reign for ever and ever.—W. F.

Ver. 15.—*Christ on the throne.* If it may be said of the twenty-second psalm that it lets us see Christ on the cross, it may be said of this that it shows us Christ on the throne. Instead of humiliation, there is exaltation; instead of the mockery of "the purple robe," there is the homage of angels; instead of the wicked cries of envious priests and a deluded people, "Crucify him!" there is the joyful song of the redeemed, "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" The saints on earth, as well as the saints in heaven, are partakers of this joy; they know whom they have believed, and they have had experience of his benign and righteous rule. We learn here—

I. THAT WHERE CHRIST REIGNS THERE IS LIFE. He is the Source and the Giver of life. Where the waters that Ezekiel saw came, there was life; and so where the gospel of Christ comes, there is life. The mind that before was dark has the life of truth; the conscience that before was dormant has the life of righteousness; the heart

that before was dead in sins is quickened to the new life of love and holiness. Christ's rule ever tends to the well-being of his people.

II. **THAT WHERE THERE IS LIFE THERE WILL BE PRAYER.** The first sign of infant life is breathing; and the first sign of the soul's life is the breathing of prayer to God. The life within expresses itself in accordance with its nature and needs. The mind that has light cries for more light; the conscience, awakened to a sense of sin, seeks deliverance; the heart that has been touched with the love of God yearns for more love and nearer fellowship. So it was with Paul. "Behold, he prayeth!" and so onward, through all the toils and struggles of his noble life, he continued instant in prayer.

III. **THAT WHERE THERE IS PRAYER THE SUPREME DESIRE WILL BE THE GLORY OF CHRIST.** Self will be lost in love. Concern about ourselves will be merged in concern for the glory of Christ our Lord. "Prayer shall be made for him." 1. *For his cause.* What interests him will interest us; what lies nearest his heart will be nearest ours. There is unity of life. 2. *For his people.* He identifies himself with them. He regards what is done to them as done to himself. When "prayer was made of the Church" for Peter, they were, in a sense, making prayer for Christ. Our sympathies should be as broad as the sympathies of Christ. 3. *For his second coming.* His first coming was the hope of Israel; his second coming is the hope of the Church of the gospel (Rev. xxii. 20; Titus ii. 13). "Prayer for Christ" increases our love to him, binds us in closer union with the brethren, and enables us to transmit the blessed hope to future generations. Think of the prayers made every Lord's day! What cause for thankfulness and joy! Yea, "daily" prayer shall be made till prayer is consummated in praise.—W. F.

VERS. 1—7.—The effect of the anger of a perfectly righteous King. Most probably put into form by Solomon, even if David suggested the substance of it. It is the portrait of an ideal King, never yet realized completely by any earthly monarch, and finds its perfect fulfilment only in Christ and his kingdom. Solomon did not fulfil it. It shows the effects of the reign of a perfectly righteous King such as Christ.

I. **HE PROCLAIMS AND ADMINISTERS ONLY RIGHTEOUS LAWS AND JUDGMENTS.** (Vers. 1, 2.) In opposition to the injustice of the despot. But the true King has a passion for justice.

II. **THE REIGN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BRINGS IN THE REIGN OF PEACE.** (Ver. 3.) "Mountains and hills are mentioned as being characteristic features of the country." Peace is always spoken of in the Scriptures as the fruit of righteousness—in public and in private.

III. **IT UPHOLDS AND VINDICATES THE RIGHTS OF THE POOR AGAINST ALL OPPRESSION.** (Ver. 4.) Those who are born to poverty are more or less regarded by an unrighteous government as having no rights. Christianity expresses the cause of the poor, and vindicates their rights against all injustice and selfishness.

IV. **RIGHTEOUS RULE TEACHES THE PEOPLE THE FEAR OF GOD.** (Ver. 5.) Corrupt government encourages licentiousness and irreligion among the people.

V. **RIGHTEOUS GOVERNMENT QUICKENS AND FERTILIZES ALL THE AFFAIRS OF A NATION.** (Ver. 6.) As rain quickens and fertilizes the dry earth.

VI. **GOOD MEN PROSPER AND HAVE PEACE UNDER RIGHTEOUS GOVERNMENT.** (Ver. 7.) But are mostly persecuted and despoiled of their liberty and rights under a tyrannical rule. It is the office of a righteous king to defend the righteous; but it is Christ's work to make men righteous by fashioning their minds anew by his Holy Spirit.—S.

BOOK III.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXIII.

THIS is the first of the "Psalms of Asaph," whereof the present book contains eleven. They are characterized by a preponderating use of the name "Elohim" over that of "Jehovah," by a great calmness and solemnity of tone, and by a pervading melancholy. The present psalm has for its subject the well-worn problem of the prosperity of the wicked (Job xxi. 7—15; Ps. xxxvii. 1—38; Jer. xii. 1—3, etc.). The writer has been troubled with respect to it, and has well-nigh fallen away from God in consequence (ver. 2); but, after a severe struggle (vers. 13—16), his eyes have been enlightened on the subject, and he has found an explanation which is satisfactory to him (vers. 17—20). He contrasts his former state of perplexity and danger with his present satisfaction and security (vers. 21—24); and concludes by expressing an unqualified trust in the ultimate salvation of the righteous and destruction of the wicked.

Metrically, the psalm seems to fall into eight stanzas; the first and last of two verses each, the remaining six each of four verses.

Ver. 1.—**Truly God is good to Israel; i.e.** verily, in spite of appearances to the contrary, which had for a time made the writer doubt. It is suggested that the triumph of Absalom may have been the circumstance that shook Asaph's faith. Even to such as are of a clean heart; i.e. to the pious in Israel, who are the true Israel. God is really on their side, though he may seem for a time to favour the wicked. (On the need of a pure heart, see Ps. xxiv. 4.)

Ver. 2.—**But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped.** The psalmist had doubted God's goodness and righteousness, on account of the prosperity of the wicked. He feels now that his doubt had been a sin, and had almost caused him to give up his confidence and trust in the Almighty. He had well-nigh slipped from the rock of faith into the abyss of scepticism.

Ver. 3.—**For I was envious at the foolish,**

when I saw the prosperity of the wicked (comp. Ps. xxxvii. 1). To envy the wicked because they prosper is to make more account of the good things of this life than of God's favour—to prefer physical good to moral. It is also to doubt that God governs the universe by the strict rule of justice. The word translated "foolish" means rather, "vain arrogant boasters." Such the wicked commonly become when they prosper (comp. Ps. v. 5).

Ver. 4.—**For there are no bands in their death; or, no sufferings** (*δυσωδαιαι*, Aquila; "torments," Cheyne); comp. Job xxi. 13, "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave;" and ver. 23, "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet." Such deaths often happen, and are a severe trial of faith to those who have no firm conviction of the reality of a hereafter. But their strength is firm; literally, *their body is plump* (Cheyne). But the Authorized Version probably gives the true meaning. They drop into the grave while their strength is still undiminished.

Ver. 5.—**They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men** (comp. Job xxi. 8—10). There is, no doubt, something of Oriental hyperbole in this representation, as there is in the account given by Job (*l.s.c.*), which he afterwards qualifies (Job xxvii. 13—23). But still a certain immunity from suffering does seem often to attach to the wicked man, whom God does not chasten, because chastening would be of no service to him.

Ver. 6.—**Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; or, is as a chain about their neck** (Revised Version)—makes them stiffen their neck, and hold their head aloft. Not being afflicted, they regard themselves as favourites of Heaven, and are therefore puffed up with pride, which they show in their gait and bearing. **Violence covereth them as a garment.** Pride and self-conceit naturally lead on to violence, which becomes so habitual to them that it seems like their ordinary apparel (comp. Ps. cix. 18, 19). The violence of the great ones in Israel is continually denounced, both by psalmists and prophets (see Pss. xi. 2; lv. 9; lviii. 2; lxxii. 14, etc.; Isa. i. 15; iii. 15; lix. 3—7; Hos. iv. 1, 2; Amos iii. 10, etc.).

Ver. 7.—**Their eyes stand out with fatness** Their eyes, which gloat upon the

luxuries around them, seem to stand out from their fat and bloated faces (comp. Job xv. 27; Ps. xvii. 10). They have more than heart could wish; literally, *the imaginations of their heart overflow*. The exact meaning is doubtful.

Ver. 8.—*They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily; rather, they scoff, and speak wickedly; of oppression do they speak from heaven's height; i.e. "they scoff at the righteous, and speak wickedly concerning them; they talk of the oppressive acts which they meditate, as though they were Divine beings, speaking from the heavenly height"* (Cheyne).

Ver. 9.—*They set their mouth against the heavens*. So Hupfeld and Canon Cook, who understand the expression of blasphemy; but most modern critics translate, "They have set their mouth in the heavens," and regard the meaning as nearly allied to that of the second clause of the preceding verse, "They speak as though they were inhabitants of the heavens." And their tongue walketh through the earth. Their tongue is always busily employed—boasting (ver. 3), lying, backbiting.

Ver. 10.—*Therefore his people return hither; rather, therefore he turns his people hitherward; i.e. by his great pretensions and his audacity, he (the wicked man) turns his followers to his own courses, and induces them to act as he acts. And waters of a full cup are wrung out to them; rather, and waters in abundance are drained by them. They "drink iniquity like water"* (Job xv. 16), "draining" the cup which is handed to them.

Ver. 11.—*And they say, How doth God know? Their wickedness breeds scepticism in them. They wish God not to know, and therefore begin to question whether he does or can know* (comp. Ps. x. 4, 11, 13). *And is there knowledge in the Most High? Does God concern himself at all with the things that take place on earth* (comp. Ps. xciv. 7)? Is not man too weak and contemptible to attract his attention?

Ver. 12.—*Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; rather, and they prosper always. They increase in riches. This is the impression which the psalmist has received from the general course of human affairs in his day. It is closely allied to the view taken by Job (xxi. 7—15).*

Ver. 13.—*Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. Such was the psalmist's first instinctive feeling, when he noticed the prosperity of the wicked. The Prayer-book Version inserts, between this verse and*

the last, the words, "and I said;" which is correct, though somewhat free, exegesis. Compare with the expression, "I have washed my hands in innocency," Job's remarkable words, "If I wash myself with snow, and make my hands never so clean" (Job ix. 30).

Ver. 14.—*For all the day long have I been plagued. While the ungodly have prospered, and not been plagued at all* (ver. 5), I, the representative of the righteous, have been "plagued," or afflicted, continually. What, then, does goodness advantage me? *And chastened every morning; literally, and my chastisement has been every morning* (comp. Job vii. 18).

Ver. 15.—*If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children; or, if I had said* (Revised Version). If, when these feelings assailed me, and the lot of the ungodly man seemed to me much better than my own, I had resolved to speak out all my thoughts, and let them be generally known, then should I have *dealt treacherously with* (Revised Version) the generation of thy children. I should have deserted their cause; I should have hurt their feelings; I should have put a stumbling-block in their way. Therefore, the psalmist implies, he said nothing—a reticence well worthy of imitation.

Ver. 16.—*When I thought to know this; literally, and I meditated, that I might understand this. A process of careful thought and consideration is implied, during which the psalmist tried hard to understand the method of God's government, and to explain to himself its seeming anomalies. But he says, It was too painful for me. He did not succeed; he was baffled and perplexed, and the whole effort was a pain and a grief to him.*

Ver. 17.—*Until I went into the sanctuary of God; literally, the sanctuaries* (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 35; lxxxiv. 1; cxxxii. 7). The three subdivisions of both the tabernacle and the first temple, viz. the court, the holy place, and the holy of holies, constituted three sanctuaries. The psalmist, in his perplexity, took his doubts into the sanctuary of God, and there, "in the calmness of the sacred court" (Kay), reconsidered the hard problem. Compare Hezekiah's action with the perplexing letter of Sennacherib (2 Kings xix. 14). Then understood I their end. There came to him in the sanctuary the thought that, to judge aright of the happiness or misery of any man, it is necessary to await the end (comp. Herod., i. 32; Soph., 'Ed. Tyr., *ad fin.*; Eurip., 'Andromach.,' l. 100; Aristot., 'Eth. Nic.,' i. 10).

Ver. 18.—*Surely thou didst set them up*

in slippery places. The wicked have at no time any sure hold on their prosperity. They are "set in slippery places"—places from which they may easily slip and fall. Thou oastedst them down to destruction. The fall often comes, even in this life. The flourishing cities of the plain are destroyed by fire from heaven; Pharaoh's land is ruined by the plagues, and his host destroyed in the Red Sea; Sennacherib's army perishes in a night; Jezebel is devoured by dogs; Athaliah is slain with the sword; Antiochus Epiphanes perishes in a distant expedition; Herod Agrippa is eaten of worms; persecutors, like Nero, Galerius, Julian, come to untimely ends. A signal retribution visits the wicked in hundreds and thousands of instances. When it does not, the question remains—Is death the end? This point is not formally brought forward, but it underlies the whole argument; and, unless retribution after death be regarded as certain, a single exception to the general rule of retribution in this life would upset the solution which the psalmist finds satisfactory.

Ver. 19.—How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! There is something very striking in the suddenness with which the prosperity of a wicked man often collapses. Saul, Jezebel, Athaliah, Epiphanes, Herod Agrippa, are cases in point, likewise Nero, Galerius, Julian. The first and second Napoleonic empires may also be cited. They are utterly consumed with terrors; literally, *they perish*; *they come to an end through terrors* (comp. Job xviii. 11; xiv. 17; xxvii. 20).

Ver. 20.—As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. As men despise their dreams when they awake from them, so, when God "stirs up himself and awakes to judgment" (Ps. xxv. 23), he will despise such mere semblances of humanity (Ps. xxxix. 6) as the wicked are.

Ver. 21.—Thus my heart was grieved; literally, *for my heart was grieved*, or "was soured." The "for" refers to a suppressed phrase of self-condemnation, "But at the time I did not see all this—the solution did not present itself to me." I was too full of grief and bitterness to consider the matter calmly and dispassionately. And I was pricked in my reins; i.e. "a pang of passionate discontent had pierced my inmost being" (Cheyne).

Ver. 22.—So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. I had no more intelligence than the brute beasts; I was wholly unable to reason aright (comp. Ps. xxxii. 9; xcii. 7; Prov. xxx. 2).

Ver. 23.—Nevertheless I am continually with thee; i.e. "nevertheless, I have not

fallen away, but have kept always my hold upon thee;" and, on thy part, thou hast holden me by my right hand; i.e. thou hast upheld me and prevented me from slipping (comp. Ps. xviii. 35; lxxix. 21; cxix. 117).

Ver. 24.—Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel. The psalmist expresses full confidence in God's continual guidance through all life's dangers and difficulties, notwithstanding his own shortcomings and "foolishness." He then looks beyond this life, and exclaims, *And afterward* (thou wilt) *receive me to glory*. Even Professor Cheyne sees in this "the story of Enoch spiritualized." "Walking with God," he says, "is followed by a reception with glory, or into glory;" and he compares the passage with Ps. xlix. 16, which he has previously explained as showing that "the poet has that religious intuition which forms the kernel of the hope of immortality."

Ver. 25.—Whom have I in heaven but thee? Who is there in all the host of heaven on whom I can place any reliance, excepting thee? None of thy "holy ones," neither angel nor archangel, can afford me any support or sustenance, preserve or guide or save me, but *thou only* (comp. Job v. 1). And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. Much less can earth supply me with a substitute for God. On him my heart's affections are centred (comp. Ps. lxxiii. 1, "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is").

Ver. 26.—My flesh and my heart faileth. The meaning is, "Though my flesh and my heart fail utterly, though my whole corporeal and animal nature fade away and come to nothing, yet something in the nature of a heart—the true 'I,' consciousness, will remain, and will be upheld by God." God is the Strength of my heart, and my Portion for ever. "A strong assertion of personal immortality" (Cook). "This is the mysticism of faith; we are on the verge of St. Paul's conception of the *πνεῦμα*, the organ of life in God" (Cheyne).

Ver. 27.—For lo, they that are far from thee shall perish. As God is the source of all life, to be "far from him" is to perish—to have this life depart from us, even if existence of any kind remains. The psalmist is vague with respect to the ultimate fate of the wicked, confident only of the continued existence, in a condition which he declares to be "good," of the righteous. Thou hast destroyed all them that go a-whoring from thee. The strong phrase here used is rare in the Psalms, occurring only in this place and in Ps. cvi. 39. It commonly refers to idolatrous practices, but is used sometimes of other kinds of declension and alienation

from God (see Lev. xx. 6; Numb. xiv. 83).

Ver. 28.—But it is good for me to draw near to God; or, “but as for me, nearness to God is my good” (Kay). Compare the well-known hymn—

“Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee;
Even though it be a cross
That raiseth me;

Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee.”

I have put my trust in the Lord God; literally, in the Lord Jehovah (Adonai Jehovah)—an unusual combination. That I may declare all thy works. With the intention of ever hereafter declaring and magnifying all thy works.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 24.—*Divine guidance.* “Thou shalt guide,” etc. Asaph looked out on the world of human life, and beheld a sight which troubled and perplexed him, as it has troubled and perplexed many a pious heart since. He saw the wealthy sinner clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously; godless, yet prosperous; adding field to field; spending in selfish luxury what he gained by fraud and extortion; and at last dying in peaceful old age, and laid in a splendid sepulchre. And he saw the devout, honest, patient worshipper of God, toiling hard to keep the wolf from his door, glad of the crumbs from the rich man’s table to eke out his children’s scanty meal; dying prematurely, worn out with care and hardship, and hurried into a nameless grave. As Asaph saw this, and much more like this, he could not help asking, “*Why is this?*” Why does not the hand of Omnipotence with a touch arrest the crooked balance, crown virtue and piety with prosperity, and overwhelm vice and injustice with misery and shame?” Then he “went into the sanctuary of God.” He joined, though with troubled spirit, in praising God; “for his mercy endureth for ever.” He poured out his soul in silent prayer, while the priest ministered at the golden altar. Then the Holy Spirit shed a light into his mind that lighted up the whole prospect of human life. He saw that he had left the main element out of his reckoning—forgotten to ask, “*What will be the end?*” He discerned the dangers of prosperity and the benefits of adversity; how pride, covetousness, lust, selfishness, injustice, thrive in luxurious self-indulgence, like rank weeds in a rich soil; and how the Lord chastens those he loves (Heb. xii. 10). Then understood he their end. He confessed his error. And with new humility and fresh faith he here entrusts himself and all his concerns to God’s fatherly guidance and sovereign will. “Thou shalt guide,” etc. These words express a deep sense of *need* of Divine guidance; *willingness* to be guided; *assurance* that God will guide.

I. THE NEED OF DIVINE GUIDANCE. Man begins life as the most helpless of creatures. If not fed, clothed, cared for by others, he would perish almost as soon as born. Without the company and training of his elders, if he could grow up at all, he would lack language, if not reason. As he grows up, and reaps the fruit of all this guidance and counsel, he begins to be impatient of control, to imagine himself self-sufficient. He will be guided by his own counsel. This conceit becomes in many cases so unbridled, that the thought of dependence even upon God becomes intolerable. “Our lips, say they, are our own: who is Lord over us?” The truth is that what we really need, when we have outgrown our first lessons, is not less guidance, but of a higher sort. The stronger, richer, wiser, any one is, the more mischief he may do, and the more misery he may incur, if he takes a wrong course. You, young man, in the pride of your untamed energy; you, man of the world, in the ripeness of your gathered experience,—have not less, but more need of guidance than when you sat on the bench at school, or lay in your nurse’s arms. 1. We need guidance because of *our ignorance of the future*. The only things we can certainly foresee are the motions of the heavenly bodies and the action of natural forces. The moment we get into the world of life we are in the region of uncertainty. True, we foresee a great deal. Business would be impossible, life would be impossible, without a great deal of foresight. But over all hangs a haze of uncertainty. Your plans are laid, perhaps, with wise forecast. But will the ship come in? Will the rise or fall on which you reckon take place? Will

the demand for the goods you are making continue, or suddenly cease? Will the harvest be good or bad? You can no more tell than whether you will be able to attend to your business this day week, or be lying delirious with fever. 2. We need guidance because of *the fallibility of our judgment*. Were there no cloud on our knowledge, yet if the balance of judgment hang awry, we may easily involve ourselves and others in irreparable misfortune. This was what so humbled the psalmist. He perceived that his judgment of human affairs had been completely at fault. He had adopted a wholly false standard, and, if left to choose for himself and for others, he would have chosen disastrously wrong. God's thoughts, he saw, are not our thoughts, any more than God's ways are our ways. "What, then, is the guidance?" he asks. "With thy counsel." "Counsel" has a double meaning: "advice," and "plan, or purpose." He may mean, "Lead me by thy Word and thy Spirit, teaching me how to judge, making my duty plain;" or, "Choose my path and lot according to thine own wise purpose." But the first sense really includes the second; for if God *shows* us our way, it must be the way he *chooses* for us. Calvin says, "Although sometimes things turn out well when we are rash and foolish (for God mends our mistakes, and turns our wrong beginnings to happy endings), yet his more common and fuller blessing lies in giving wisdom to his people; and nothing is to be more earnestly prayed for than that we may be ruled by the Spirit of wisdom and counsel."

II. Therefore these words are A PRAYER FOR DIVINE GUIDANCE. As much as to say, "I need guidance; my future is hidden; my judgment is fallible. To thee the future is as the present; the darkness as the light. All events, all seasons, all minds and wills of men, are in thy hand. Choose thou my way. Lead me in thy path, and teach me. Make my path plain; but, even if it be obscure, let me rest in this—that it is thy counsel, not my own." It is one thing to believe the fact of Divine guidance; another to be willing to follow it. One thing, also, to trust God to lead us in the path we have chosen; another to say, "Not my will, but thine." And yet it *ought* to be easy! What is the whole Bible but one continued proof that God's way is the right way, and the ways men choose for themselves, wrong? "All we like sheep," etc.; "He that spared not," etc. (Isa. liii. 6; Rom. viii. 32).

III. ASSURANCE THAT GOD WILL GUIDE. Therefore what we need that God should do, because he can and we cannot; and what we are willing he should do, and ask him to do for us,—that we may expect him to do. These words are more than the cry of need; more than the surrender of self-will; are the triumphant utterance of faith. "Thou wilt guide . . . to glory." Here is a sunbeam of clear hope and inspired promise breaking through all the clouds of doubt, fear, and ignorance. One such test is enough to prove that it is a huge mistake to suppose the hope of immortality hidden from the ancient saints. (Indeed, even apart from inspiration, the Hebrews could not be ignorant of what was well known to the Egyptians, ages before Moses.) Here the balance rights itself. Why do the ungodly prosper? Because they are "men of the world, whose portion is in this life" (Ps. xvii. 14). Why does God not give his children their portion here? That he may prepare them for their portion hereafter (2 Cor. iv. 16—18; John xiv. 2—4, 6). Here is the difference between the foresight of faith and the foresight of worldly calculation. To earthly foresight it is the near future that is plain; the further it recedes, the thicker the mists gather. To the eye of faith it is the near future which we can contentedly leave uncertain, because the distant, the eternal future, is revealed. "We know not what shall be on the morrow;" but we know what shall be when the heavens and earth that are now shall have passed away. "We know" (2 Cor. v. 1).

Ver. 26.—*Strength in weakness*. "My flesh . . . for ever." Asaph's psalms bear no less the stamp of Divine inspiration than David's; yet their character is widely different. The Holy Spirit employs different instruments for different ends. Reading David's psalms and David's life, one is ready to say we have an epitome of all human experience. Yet Asaph shows us depths of experience into which probably David never penetrated. This psalm opens abruptly: "surely"—or, as in the margin, "yet," nevertheless—"God is good to Israel!" This points back to that severe mental conflict in which Asaph had barely escaped overthrow (vers. 2, 3). A struggle with doubt, in which many can sympathize. In vers. 16, etc., he shows how his

eyes were opened to the folly and injustice of his hard thoughts of God. From this deep abasement (ver. 22) he springs at a bound to the loftiest height of faith. And in this twenty-sixth verse, he crushes together, as it were, the two extremes of his experience. At once a cry of defeat and a shout of victory.

I. THE CRY OF DEFEAT, A CONFESSION OF WEAKNESS, DESPAIR, FAILURE. "My flesh," etc. "Heart," in the Scriptures, stands for the whole mental and spiritual nature; "flesh" (often "flesh and blood"), for our nature as mortal, often as sinful. Here, as in Ps. lxxxiv. 2. An utter breakdown of energy, bodily, and mental. Hope and courage seem spent. The past looks an abyss in which happiness has been engulfed; the present, a crushing burden; the future, a dark blank. If I were to call this a picture of human life, I should seem to many darkly, ungratefully exaggerating. Our views of life depend on our experience. Young, happy, strong, hopeful,—you find nothing like this. Past has few regrets, present few drawbacks, future no clouds. Thank God for sunshine! But remember on what a brittle thread life hangs. Health may fail, friends die, most trusted investments prove a snare, calculations mistaken. (*Like houses on brink of Lake of Zag.*) The lesson of our own weakness one of great lessons of life. God has various ways—some gentle, some severe—of teaching it; but we need it. Those who do not learn it, not the happiest (vers. 6—9). Extreme case—people ruined by their own prosperity. But take milder examples—those who have never learned humbling lesson of weakness; not ripest, richest Christians, most able to sympathize. Even our blessed Lord needed this lesson (may we venture to say?), not only for perfection of obedience, but sympathy (Heb. v. 7, 8; ii. 18). If you have never been forced to say, "My flesh and my heart fail," you have much to learn. Especially the full comfort and triumph of the other half of the verse.

II. THE SHOUT OF VICTORY. The utterance of triumphant faith. "God," etc. 1. This implies what the New Testament calls *reconciliation to God*. Theologians speak of *God being reconciled to us*. The Scriptures, of *our being reconciled—God reconciling us to himself* (Rom. xv. 10, see Revised Version, ver. 11; 2 Cor. v. 18). God cannot be "the Strength" of a heart unreconciled—at enmity. I believe there are persons who have heard the gospel preached all their lives, yet never really taken in that the gospel is just this *message*. They know something is wanting to make them true Christians. But "unreconciled!—at enmity!" Not so bad as that! If they could see that it is even so, this would be first step to "taking hold of God's strength." An uneasy conscience is a great cause of weakness; a dead or sleeping conscience, worse. Peace is strength; righteousness, love, joy, are strength. 2. *A mind at rest in God*; satisfied as to the wisdom, justice, goodness, of all his dealings; not because we can thoroughly understand them, but can trust God. Asaph had severe trials (ver. 14). But worst, hardest, difficulty of reconciling what he saw in the world with goodness and righteousness of God. Such doubt as may arise in the most devout mind; the more devout, the more painful. Insoluble to reason (ver. 16). "Light and peace come not by thinking, but by faith" (Perowne). In God's house, perhaps in public worship, perhaps in silent meditation and prayer, these two great truths dawned on him: (1) that God's plan is not to interfere violently to stop sin, but to make sin its own punisher and penalty; (2) the meaning and measure of life lie, not in the compass of this short life, but beyond. Some interpreters so possessed with belief that Hebrews were ignorant of immortality, that they explain this of temporal calamities. Prosperous wickedness often has a shameful and terrible end. But the very difficulty (vers. 3—12) is that this is often not the case. Asaph would not have learned this in the house of prayer, but in courts of law, haunts of business, etc. Besides, this view is untenable. Impossible that Hebrews, to say nothing of inspired prophets, could be ignorant of what Egyptians and other heathen nations knew. (*Sheol* is never "the grave;" it is "Hades.") 3. Accordingly, here is *an infinite portion, a boundless hope*. "My Portion for ever." *Guidance* here, *glory* hereafter (ver. 24). In this sunshine, the darkness and chill of doubt vanish. Not that the believer overlooks the difficulties, but looks beyond. Perhaps sees more forcibly than the unbeliever; but only *shadows* across the path; no longer *barriers*, stumbling-blocks. "God" both "Strength" and "Portion." Not *my* views, *my* faith, but God himself. He does not say, "strength of my flesh," though that, too, is true (Gal. ii. 20, "in the flesh"). Let that fail, decay, perish! Before Asaph spoke or wrote as a prophet, he had to learn as a believer. The same Spirit is willing to be our Teacher.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—28.—*The grievous conflict of the flesh and the Spirit, and the glorious conquest of the Spirit at the last.* I. THE BEGINNING OF THE PSALM. In this he ingeniously pointeth at those rocks against which he was like to have split his soul.

II. THE MIDDLE OF THE PSALM. In this he candidly confesseth his ignorance and folly to have been the chiefest foundation of his fault.

III. THE END OF THE PSALM. In this he gratefully kisseth that hand which led him out of the labyrinth.

Such is the clear and accurate summing up of the contents of this psalm by an old Puritan divine. Should any of us, unhappily, find our own portraiture in the conduct told of at the beginning, may it not be long ere the middle and the end of the psalm portray us equally well!—S. C.

Vers. 1—28.—*Asaph's trial and deliverance.* Asaph was greatly tempted, as this psalm plainly shows. It does not matter whether he speaks of himself or, as is likely, of some other servant of God. Consider—

I. HIS TEMPTATION. 1. *It was a very terrible one.* (See ver. 2, "My feet were almost gone," etc.) How honest the Bible is! It tells the whole truth about men, and good men, too. It shows them tempted, and all but overcome. 2. *It arose from his seeing "the prosperity of the wicked."* A sight, to Old Testament saints, very hard to bear. For they had not our knowledge of the life eternal. Ver. 24 is no disproof of this statement. For had it meant, as we so commonly take it to mean, the being received to the future "glory" of God's redeemed in heaven, how was it that so large a portion of the Jews in our Lord's time did not believe in any future life at all, and that our Lord had to turn to the (to us) apparently irrelevant declaration, "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac," etc., when, if the common interpretation be right, there was this and other plain Scriptures like it to appeal to? Hence, and for yet other reasons, we hold that the Old Testament saints had not the knowledge of the future life and the recompenses that should be accorded them. Therefore to them the sight of what seemed to be injustice—such as the prosperity of the wicked and the adversity of the good—was especially painful; for they knew of no remedy. 3. *And it wrought him much harm.* He became envious and bitter, vers. 4—14 are one long protest and complaint against God; and sullen—"as a beast before thee;" and miserable—"it was too painful for me." And it all but overthrew him (ver. 2). Such was Asaph's trial.

II. OURS IS THE SAME TO-DAY. We see just what Asaph did; and we are tempted to say, as many do say, "The fear of God is not the beginning of wisdom, nor, indeed, wisdom at all;" and so they will have nothing to do with it. But our excuse is far less than that of Asaph, since clearer light and fuller knowledge are ours. Nevertheless, the facts of life do lead to unbelief, if we look only at them. Men feel that right ought to prevail. When we were children, we were told that it would. But very often, so far as we can see, it does not. We look at nature, and it appears utterly immoral, because cruel, relentless, unforgiving, murderous to the weak, favouring only the strong. We read history, and how often it records only the triumph of the wicked and the abasement of the good! Society, also, is ordered on anything but a morally righteous basis. And do we not everywhere see the innocent suffering for the guilty, involved in their sin, and bearing their doom? It is not merely the suffering, though so great, that gives rise to unbelief in God, but the seeming injustice of its allotment. And hence, to-day, the drear cynicism and unbelief of the Book of Ecclesiastes tells the thought of not a few. But note—

III. SOME SURE SAFEGUARDS AGAINST THIS TEMPTATION. See how Asaph found deliverance, and came at length to the conclusion which he avows in the opening verse of this psalm. 1. *He held his tongue*—did not talk about his doubts, but kept them to himself, so far as men were concerned (ver. 15). 2. *He laid them all before God.* (Ver. 17.) He "went into the sanctuary." He prayed, but did not argue. And the result was that he came to see facts in their true light; that the ungodly man's wealth meant but so many "slippery places." Death for him was "destruction," and its

certain prospect caused him to be "utterly consumed with terrors;" and even at his best he was "despised" of the Lord (vers. 19, 20). Thus Asaph's envy was turned into pity, as well it might be. 3. *He realized the love of God.* He gained this by honest confession of the sin of which God had convicted him (vers. 21, 22). Also by calling to mind the love which God had shown him (ver. 23); the care exercised over him; and the sure prospect of blessedness set before him. Thus there came a great rush of love in his heart toward God (ver. 25); and the settled persuasion both of the misery of being far from God (ver. 27), and of the blessedness of drawing near to him (ver. 28). Thus the mist and darkness cleared away, as, on the mount of communion with God, they ever will.—S. O.

Ver. 2.—*Narrow escapes.* "The victorious general, in the hour of triumph, has not unfrequently reason to remember how nearly, through oversight or miscalculation, he had lost the day. A little more pressure on this wing or that, a trifling prolongation of the struggle, a few minutes' further delay in the arrival of reinforcements, and his proud banner had been dragged in the dust. The pilot, steering his barque safely into port, sometimes knows how, through lack of seamanship, he nearly made shipwreck. And the successful merchant remembers crises in his history when he found himself on the brink of ruin—when the last straw only was wanting to precipitate the catastrophe." And like narrow escapes occur in the spiritual life.

I. NOTE SOME OF THEM. 1. *The doubt and darkness of unbelief* caused by brooding over the mysteries of providence (cf. Jer. xlviii. 11). 2. *Terrible temptation.* See Joseph in prison, Moses in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, the martyrs. "The righteous scarcely are saved." 3. *When brought very low*, as the prodigal son was, by our own sin. Then the crisis is when we have to decide whether we will turn back to God or go on in our sin. The prodigal went back to his father; Ephraim was joined to his idols, and, like Amon, "sinned more and more." How many are in heaven now who once were all but lost! David, Manasseh, Peter, the penitent thief, Mary Magdalene, and many more.

II. WHAT SUCH INSTANCES TEACH US. 1. *Never to despair* of any one. God can save them. 2. *Never to presume* for ourselves. "Let him that thinketh he standeth," etc. 3. *Great thankfulness*, if we are kept. 4. *Deep sympathy* with those who fall. 5. *Ever to abide in Christ.*—S. C.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Much ease, much peril.* That is the teaching of these verses, and of innumerable Scriptures besides (see Ps. lv. 19; Jer. xlviii. 11). Thus—

I. GOD IS EVER TEACHING US THIS TRUTH. 1. *In his Word.* See also Heb. xii., and the biographies of God's people in all ages. The history of the Church as given in Scripture abundantly reveals God's merciful law of change. 2. *By analogy.* God suffers nothing to be without change. Even the rocks and hills, the solid globe, are all subject to change. The seasons alternate. Storm and tempest make pure the air which, as in the Swiss valleys, would otherwise become stagnant. The great sea is "troubled, that it can never be quiet." In plant-life, "except a corn of wheat fall into," etc. The processes of change are varied and ever acting in the entire vegetable world. And so in animal life. Not to experience change would be death. And it is so with the mind. No change there is idiocy. It must be stirred by the incoming of fresh truth, and the readjustment of old. In social life—

"The old order changeth, giving place to new,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

In ecclesiastical life. What was the Reformation but the tempest that rushed through the valleys of the Church-life of that day, where the air had become so stagnant and corrupt that men could not live? And it is so in political and in moral life. Much peace is much peril. "Because men have no changes they fear not God." We cannot glide into the kingdom of God, nor, as the well-known hymn mistakenly teaches that we may—

"Sit and sing ourselves away
To everlasting bliss."

Not so do we enter there, but “through much tribulation.” So our Lord, and all experience, plainly declare.

II. BUT WHY IS ALL THIS? Because in our nature there are rooted evils, which can only be got rid of by the action of this law of change. Such as: 1. *Self-will*. See the stream come brawling noisily along, as it descends through the valley down from the hill. But, lying right in its way, lo! there is a huge rock. Down comes the stream full tilt towards it, as if it would say, “Just you get out of my way.” But that is exactly what the rock does not do; and so the angry stream dashes against it. And oh, what rage and riot, what fret and fume, there at once arises! But if you wait a moment, and watch, you will see that the stream seems to be thinking what it had better do; for lo! it glides softly, smoothly, quietly round the rock, which still stands stubbornly and relentlessly just where it stood before. The stream seems to have learnt a lesson—it has become all at once so gentle and submissive. Now, that is one of the ten thousand natural parables with which the world is full. The stream of our self-will, determined to go its own way, rushes on its course; but the rock of God’s law of change, sending adversity and trial, stands in its way, and will not move, and self-will is broken against it, as God intended it should be. Only so can this evil be cured. 2. *Pride*. Trouble and sorrow humble men, and bring down the haughty spirit. 3. *Unbelief*. The materialism and atheism of the day are shattered by this law. In the day of distress, the soul cannot keep from calling upon God. 4. *Selfishness*. Ease fosters this as it fosters so much more that is evil; but trial often teaches men to think of others as well as of themselves. 5. And so with *indolence and the love of the world*. To be “in trouble as other men are” has a salutary power to rouse men from the one and to loose them from the other. And what opportunity does this law of change give for bearing testimony to the sustaining power of God’s grace! Trouble endured with patient God-given courage is a mighty argument for God, the force of which all feel.

III. WHAT SHOULD BE OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THIS LAW? 1. *Faint not; fret not; fear not*. 2. *Humble yourself* beneath the mighty hand of God, so that you may secure the blessing your trouble is destined to bring.—S. C.

Ver. 10.—*The doings of ungodly prosperity*. One of three of these doings seems to have been in the psalmist’s mind, but we cannot certainly say which. The words warrant either interpretation. Let us take, first, that one suggested by them as they stand in the Authorized Version, and as commonly read.

I. THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE LED ASTRAY. For by “his people” many understand the people of God to be meant, and that they, allured and ensnared by the glitter of earthly prosperity, turn from the ways of God to follow after these ungodly ones. “They are led away by the evil example, just as the psalmist confesses he himself was;” and they turn after them. (Cf. “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.”) How often this happens! But what is meant by the “waters of a full cup,” etc.? Either the cup of unholy pleasure, which they drain to the dregs; or else it is, as in Ps. lxxx. 5, and as actual experience attests, that when God’s people go astray, as here represented, it will be a full cup of sorrow and tears that they will have to drink, as indeed they do. The most miserable of men are backsliders from God. It cannot but be so. This is what our translators meant to imply by their rendering. But another meaning that the words warrant is—

II. A CROWD FOLLOW THEM, THAT IS, THE UNGODLY. The people spoken of are the crowd of hangers-on to the prosperous—those who will try to find favour with the rich and great of this world. The Prayer-book Version thus sets it forth: “Therefore the people fall unto them, and therewith suck they no small advantage.” These hangers-on are the people who attach themselves to the world’s rich ones, and “who gather like sheep to the water-trough,” in hopes of what they may get. But whether they get anything or no, the ungodly whom they follow do; they “suck no small advantage.” They are yet more worshipped and fawned upon, and have ready to hand innumerable and willing tools to serve their purpose and to bring more “grist to their mill.” And the result is that they get more proud and arrogant than ever (see ver. 11). But, child of God, whoe’er thou art, say to thy soul, “My soul, come not *thou* into their secret.”

III. THE PEOPLE OF GOD HAVE TO SUFFER BITTER PERSECUTION. So the Chaldee, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate seem to understand the words. The wicked turn upon God's people, who are, in consequence, "fed with the bread of tears, and have given to their tears to drink without measure" (Ps. lxxx. 5). It is the predestined lot of the people of God; but our Saviour tells us that it is a blessed portion. The last and chiefest of the Beatitudes (Matt. v.) declares, "Blessed are ye when men shall persecute you," etc. And it is so; for it shows, by your endurance of persecution, that you have found out the preciousness of the love of God, and know assuredly that, for the sake of it, you may be well content to die. That is knowledge which is, here and now, life eternal. May God keep us from exemplifying the first of these interpretations, and from forming part of that miserable crowd told of in the second! but if we are found amongst the third, then Christ will call us his blessed ones.—S. C.

Ver. 25.—*Supreme delight in God.* "It is not—*What* have I, but—*Whom?* *Things*, however many, rich, glorious, beautiful, cannot satisfy the soul, neither in heaven any more than on earth." Not in things, but in persons, the personal soul must find its portion. And not in many, but in One; to whom the soul can look, to whom at all times it can come, and to whom, as here, it can lift up its cry, "Thou art the Strength of my heart, and my Portion for ever." But—

I. SUCH DELIGHT IN GOD HAS BEEN HELD TO BE IMPOSSIBLE. For example: 1. *Calvin*, a learned, devout, and in the main a true expositor of Scripture, but sadly wanting in those more gentle and tender instincts which are absolutely essential to its full and accurate understanding, has, in commenting on our text, actually said, "If we give the smallest portion of our affections to the creatures, we in so far defraud God of the honour which belongs to him." Now, that is utterly untrue and in dire contradiction to the Word which says, "If we love not our brother, whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen?" 2. And there are *many devout souls* haunted with the fear that, in loving those around them with the intense affection which they know they bear towards them, they are somehow defrauding God of what is due only to him. And yet more, when they compare the love which they have for God with the love which they cherish for those dear to them on earth, the latter love seems so much warmer and deeper than the former that, when they come to a text like this, they hesitate, and confess to themselves that such words are not for them—for them they would not be true. And they are sore troubled about this, and scarce know what to do. They would like to be able to say them, but they feel they cannot. Now, of course, there are many people in whom it would be hypocrisy, gross and palpable, were they to speak as does the psalmist here. They are cold, hard, worldly, and so earth-bound that they never think about loving God. The utmost you can get from them is a vague confession that they "suppose they ought to." But we are thinking of really devout, godly souls, who nevertheless sorrowfully confess that the words of our text, and the many others like them, are far beyond what they can say. Such people believe, apparently, that, though our blessed Lord has commanded them to love the Lord their God with all their heart, they do not, and they doubt if any one ever has done so, or can. They do not seem to see how serious is the charge they thus bring against the Lord—that he has commanded what it is impossible to obey. Earthly parents do not deal with their children so, but they seem to think our heavenly Father does.

II. BUT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR US, NEVERTHELESS. 1. *Here, at any rate, stands one declaration of it.* The psalmist, if he did not express, as we are certain he did, his own deep and sincere feeling, must have been the victim of delusion, or else a wretched hypocrite. But who thinks that? 2. *And he is not alone in such utterance.* The psalms are full of them, and we have already referred to the first and great commandment. The New Testament also speaks of "perfect love"—just that sentiment which our text tells of. 3. *And there have been and are thousands of souls in which such love dwells*, to whom God is their "exceeding Joy," whose supreme delight is in God. 4. *And what seems to does not really contradict this.* For consider the elements of our love to God. They are—complete distrust of self; confidence in God only for the supply of our souls' deepest needs, such as pardon, peace, purity, eternal life; holy reverence and awe and gratitude. But all these are far other than what we cherish

to our fellow-men; so that they do not clash one with the other. On the contrary, the lower love may help the higher, and the higher cannot exist if the lower do not.

III. BUT IF SUCH SUPREME DELIGHT IN GOD BE POSSIBLE, IT IS ALSO INFINITELY DESIRABLE. All life, even the most mean and poor, becomes transformed, transfigured, glorified, by means of it. The soul becomes independent of all earthly favour, and heeds not this world's frown, nor all "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Unspeakably blest and blessing is the characteristic of the soul in whom this love of God dwells. See Paul's "sorrowful, but always rejoicing," etc.

IV. IT IS ATTAINED THROUGH OBEDIENCE AND TRUST. "He that keepeth my commandments, he it is that loveth me," said our Lord. Such obedience is not only the fruit, but the root, of the love which grows out of it. We obey, and we come to love him whom we obey. Serving is the secret—not alone the sign, but the source also—of loving. Our love for our children is in proportion to the sacrifices we make for them. It is so everywhere and for ever.—S. C.

Ver. 26.—*The failing flesh and the strengthening God.* Here is a vivid and blessed contrast. Consider—

I. THE FAILING OF HEART AND FLESH here told of. 1. Some understand this as the result of his foolish conflict with God; and here, as all who contend with God are, he was worsted and brought low. 2. Others, as telling of his passionate desire after God, how he was "sick of love," broken down with his longing for God. 3. Others, as telling of his heavy load of trouble. "He had a God's rod instead of a good piece of bread for his breakfast every morning; and the table was covered with sackcloth, and furnished with the same bitter herbs both at dinner and supper." 4. *Anyway, it is a fact* that heart and flesh do fail, both of the evil and of the good. The best herbs wither as well as the worst weeds. There is no discharge in this war. 5. *What a rebuke it is* to those whose treasures are all of the world!

II. THE STRENGTHENING GOD. How does he accomplish his gracious work? 1. *By his Spirit* in our hearts. 2. *By his Word* of promise for the future. The Spirit and the Word are his "rod and staff," which comfort us.—S. C.

Ver. 28.—*Drawing near to God, a good thing.* The psalmist is very emphatic about it. His words imply that he is quite sure of it. Let us ask, then—Why is it so good to draw near to God? Many are the answers.

I. IT IS SO BY WAY OF CONTRAST WITH WHAT HE HAD BEEN DOING—wearying himself to understand the hidden ways of God, the labyrinth of his providence. No good had come of that, but only evil. Gotthold, in his "Emblems," tells us of the freaks of his child. The father was one day sitting in his study, and when he lifted his eyes from his book, he saw, standing upon the window-ledge, his little son. He was terribly frightened, for the child stood there in utmost peril of falling to the ground and being dashed to pieces. The little lad had been anxious to know what his father was doing so many hours in the day in his study, and he had at last, by a ladder, managed, with boyish daring, to climb up, till there he stood outside the window, gazing at his father with all his eyes. "So," said the father, as he took the child into his chamber, and rebuked him for his folly—"so have I often tried to climb into the council-chamber of God, to see why and wherefore he did this and that; and thus have I exposed myself to peril of falling to my own destruction."

II. BECAUSE OF WHAT IT IMPLIES. 1. That he was at peace with God. A soul unreconciled cannot draw near. 2. That he knew the way. He had learned the blessed but difficult art of drawing near; for drawing near is of the heart, not of the lips merely; and Satan will always try, and too often he succeeds, to hinder that. 3. *He had found how good it was by his own experience.*

III. BECAUSE THE LIGHT IS SO MUCH BETTER in the region near God. What a fog and mist he was in until he "went into the sanctuary of God," and drew near to him! We see things truly there as we cannot elsewhere.

IV. THE TEMPESTS OF THE SOUL DIE DOWN THERE. It is the region of blessed calm.

V. THE AIR IS SO INVIGORATING. God is "the Health of my countenance," "the Strength of my heart."

VI. IS NOT GOD OUR GOD, OUR OWN GOD, OUR SOUL'S HOME? Where, then, can we be better than at home?—S. C.

Vers. 1—28.—*The solution of a great problem.* The question here is—Why should good men suffer, and bad men prosper, when the Law had said that God was a righteous Judge, meting out to men in this world the due recompense of their deeds? The course of things should perfectly reflect the righteousness of God. The psalmist struggles for a solution of this problem. The first verse contains the conclusion he had arrived at.

I. HIS DANGER. Expressed in the second, thirteenth, and twenty-second verses. 1. *The example and sophistries of the wicked had nearly wrought his own downfall.* His feet had been tempted by their prosperity to forsake the ways of righteousness, and he had almost fallen into their infidelity. 2. *His faith in righteousness had been nearly lost.* (Ver. 13.) In vain had he cleansed his inward and outward life—at least, he was tempted to think so for a time. 3. *Others had been induced to follow the example of the wicked.* (Ver. 10.) “Therefore turn his people after them, and at the full stream (of their prosperity) would slake their thirst” (Perowne).

II. THE CAUSE OF HIS DANGER. (Vers. 4—9.) 1. *The wicked and atheistic seemed prosperous and happy.* They had no trouble, no sorrows that hasten their death (“bands”). They are proud and violent, oppressive and defiant of the heavens. All these are hasty and superficial estimates of the experience of the wicked. 2. *He himself was troubled and chastened continually.* (Ver. 14.) He who had been at such pains to cleanse his heart and hands. This was mystery that bewildered him. 3. *But he restrains the utterance of his doubts to others.* (Ver. 15.) He forebore to shake the faith of others, and cause them to stumble.

III. REASSURANCE BY THE RECOVERY OF HIS FAITH. (Vers. 17—28.) 1. *He found the solution in the light of God's presence.* (Ver. 17.) The sanctuary was the symbol of God's presence. Hitherto he had studied the matter only in the light of human experience; now in the light of God's righteous character. 2. *Their prosperity would come to a sudden end.* (Vers. 18—20.) 3. *Communion with God is the realization of our highest destiny, not any unknown good.* (Vers. 23—28.)—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXIV.

“THE misery of the Jews is here at its deepest” (Four Friends, p. 291). The psalmist describes Jerusalem as fallen into “perpetual ruins” (ver. 3). The temple is violated (ver. 3); its carved work is ruthlessly cut down (ver. 6); the aid of fire has been called in to destroy it, and its walls are cast down to the ground (ver. 7). Nor has Jerusalem alone suffered. The object has been to “make havoc” of Israel “altogether;” and the enemy have spread themselves, and “burnt up all the houses of God in the land” (ver. 8). The prophets have succumbed; their voices are heard no more (ver. 9). A blasphemous enemy lords it over the entire country (vers. 10, 23), and sets up its banners as signs of its dominion (ver. 4). Three periods have been assigned for the composition of the psalm: (1) the time of the invasion of Shishak; (2) that of

the Babylonian conquest; and (3) the early Maccabean period, or the reign of Judas Maccabæus. In favour of the first is the ascription of the psalm in the “title” to Asaph. But all other considerations are against it. There is no evidence that Shishak ever entered Jerusalem. He certainly did not break down the carved work of the temple, or set the temple on fire, much less “cast it down to the ground.” His invasion was a mere raid, and Rehoboam seems to have bought his retreat by the sacrifice of the temple treasury (2 Kings xiv. 25—28; 2 Chron. xii. 2—12). The circumstances described in the psalm are also unsuitable to the reign of Judas Maccabæus, in whose time the temple suffered desecration at the hands of the Syrians, but was not seriously damaged, much less demolished. Thus the only date suitable for the composition of the psalm is that immediately following the capture of the city under Nebuchadnezzar.

We must explain the "title" by the consideration that Asaph, like Jeduthun and Heman, became a tribe-name, attaching to all the descendants of the original Asaph, and was equivalent to "son of Asaph" (see Ezra ii. 41; iii. 10; Neh. vii. 44; xi. 22).

The psalm consists of three portions: 1. A complaint to God, including a description of all the horrors of the situation (vers. 1—11). 2. An enumeration of God's mercies in the olden time, as a foundation for hope that he will yet rescue Israel (vers. 12—17). 3. An earnest prayer for relief and restoration, and the re-establishment of the covenant (vers. 18—23).

Ver. 1.—O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? It could only have been in the extremity of distress that a devout Israelite believed, even for a time, that Israel was "cast off for ever" (comp. Ps. lxxix. 5, which must have been written nearly at the same period as this). Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? God's anger "smokes" when it is hot and furious (see Psa. xviii. 8; civ. 32; cxliv. 5). It is now smoking "against the sheep of his pasture"—his own flock (Ps. lxxviii. 53), his peculiar people (comp. Jer. xxiii. 4; i. 6, 17; and Ps. lxxix. 13).

Ver. 2.—Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; or, *which thou didst purchase of old*. The reference is to the redemption out of Egypt (see Exod. xv. 16). God is besought, though he has forgotten, once more to remember his people, and urged to do so by the memory of his former mercies (comp. vers. 12—17). The rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; rather, *which thou didst redeem to be the tribe of thine inheritance*; i.e. the people of thine inheritance. "The conventional expression, 'the tribes of Israel,' was not always used after the fall of the northern kingdom" (Cheyne); comp. Jer. x. 16; li. 19. This Mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt (comp. Ps. lxxiii. 68). The expression, "this Mount Zion," implies that the psalm is composed either by one of the exiles before he is removed from the Holy Land, or by one of those who were left behind by the conquerors (2 Kings xxv. 12, 22; Jer. xlii. 10; lii. 16).

Ver. 3.—Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; or, *the perpetual ruins*. God is asked to visit and protect, or else to visit and inspect, the desolate ruins with which the Babylonians have covered Mount Zion. Even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. The Babylonians had plundered the temple of all its

treasures, breaking the precious Phœnician bronze-work into pieces, and carrying off everything of value that was portable (2 Kings xxv. 13—17). They had also "burnt the house of the Lord" (ver. 9), and "broken down the walls of Jerusalem" (ver. 10) and the walls of the temple to a large extent (see below, ver. 7). It is quite certain that neither Shishak nor the Syrians under Antiochus Epiphanes created any such devastation.

Ver. 4.—Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; or, *have roared*; i.e. have created disturbances, or raised tumults. The temple did not pass into the enemy's hands without fighting and bloodshed; the battle-cry of the assailants and their shouts of triumph when victorious resounded through it (comp. Lam. ii. 7). They set up their ensigns for signs. Probably for tokens of victory and dominion. Scarcely as objects of worship, since their intention was to destroy the temple and leave Jerusalem desolate.

Ver. 5.—A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees; rather, *they seemed as men that plied aloft hatchets in a thicket of trees* (so Kay, Canon Cook, Professor Cheyne, and the Revised Version); i.e. they plied their hatchets with as little reverence as if they had been hewing timber in a copse of wood.

Ver. 6.—But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers. The "carved work" (*pittuchim*) of the temple consisted of the cherubim and palm trees and open flowers which formed the decoration of the temple walls (see 1 Kings vi. 29, where the same word, *pittuchim*, is used). This superficial carved work may have been broken down for the sake of the gold with which it was overlaid (1 Kings vi. 22, 32, 35).

Ver. 7.—They have cast fire into thy sanctuary; or, *they have set thy sanctuary on fire* (Revised Version). The temple of Solomon was burnt by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings xxv. 9; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 19). That of Zerubbabel was never burnt, but was entirely rebuilt, and on a much larger scale, by Herod the Great. That of Herod the Great was burnt in the siege by Titus. They have defiled by casting down the dwelling-place of thy Name to the ground (comp. Lam. ii. 6; iv. 1). The very foundations of the second temple had to be laid by Zerubbabel (Ezra iii. 6, 12).

Ver. 8.—They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them altogether. It was, no doubt, the intention of Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Israel as a nation. Hence the complete destruction of the city and temple (2 Kings xxv. 9, 10; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 19; Lam. ii. 1—9, etc.); hence the deportation of all the

strength of the nation (2 Kings xxiv. 14—16; xxv. 11), and their settlement in the far-off region of Babylonia; hence the desolation, not only of Jerusalem, but of "all the habitations of Jacob" (Lam. ii. 2), all the "strongholds of the daughter of Judah" (Lam. ii. 2, 5). They have burnt up all the *synagogues* of God in the land. The *synagogue system* was first introduced by Ezra, according to Jewish tradition; and it has been argued that the mention of "synagogues" here—literally, "sacred meeting-places"—proves the psalm to be Maccabean. But meeting-places for worship, other than the temple, always existed in Palestine, both before and after its erection. Mesha speaks of having plundered a "house of Jehovah" in his war with Ahab ('Records of the Past,' vol. xi. p. 167); and it is plain from 2 Kings iv. 23 that religious meetings were held by the prophets, probably in houses devoted to the purpose, during the period of the divided monarchy. Hezekiah's destruction of the high places (2 Kings xviii. 4) is not likely to have interfered with the use of these buildings, to which no savour of idolatry can have attached in the mind of the most violent iconoclast. I should therefore believe, with Leopold Löw, that buildings existed before the Exile, in which religious instruction was given by authorized teachers.

Ver. 9.—We see not our signs. Some suppose "standards" to be meant, as in ver. 4, where the same word is used; but it is, perhaps, better to understand, with Dr. Kay, "Divine ordinances, which were standing signs of God's presence—as the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the sabbaths." There is no more any prophet. It has been said that this shows the psalm not to have been written on the occasion of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, since Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were, all of them, then living. But the writer only means to say that there are no prophets in Palestine, where he is residing. Jeremiah in Egypt, Ezekiel on the banks of Chebar, Daniel in Babylon, are nothing to him, even if he knows of their existence, and in no way fill up the gap whereof he complains. Neither is there among us any who knoweth how long. Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years (Jer. xxv. 11, 12) did not remove the doubt, since it was uncertain from what event the seventy years were to be counted. Jeremiah's prophecies, moreover, were not yet, in all probability, collected into a volume, and so may not have been known to the psalmist.

Ver. 10.—O God, how long shall the adversary reproach! shall the enemy blaspheme thy Name for ever! There is no contradiction between these two clauses. The

psalmist wishes to ask two things: 1. Is the present distress to continue for ever? 2. And if not, how long is it to endure? It is true that he inverts the natural order of the questions; but this is so common a mode of speech, that grammarians have given it a name, and call it *ὑπέρθεον-πρότερον*.

Ver. 11.—Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? Why dost thou keep back the right hand of thy power, hiding it in thy bosom? Why not show forth thy power, and consume them, as it were, in a moment? (See the next clause.) Pluck it out of thy bosom; rather, *out with it from thy bosom, and consume them*. The psalmist sees no reason why the Babylonians should not be consumed, and Israel delivered, at once. He has an insufficient sense of the greatness of Israel's sin.

Vers. 12—17.—Comfort springs from the thought of God's previous deliverances of his people, and of his other great mercies. The deliverance from Egypt has the foremost place (vers. 13, 14), as the most striking. Then the deliverance from the wilderness, and the passage of Jordan (ver. 15). From these the poet passes to God's mercies in nature—day and night, light and sun, set bounds of earth and sea, alternations of the seasons—all formed and arranged by the Almighty (vers. 16, 17).

Ver. 12.—For God is my King of old (comp. Ps. xlv. 4). As "King," he has power to perform all that he wills, to set up and to cast down, to give into the enemy's hand and to deliver. Working salvation in the midst of the earth. Not in any imaginary earth-centre, but, as Professor Cheyne says, "quite broadly, in various parts of the earth" (comp. Exod. viii. 22).

Ver. 13.—Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength. A clear reference to Exod. xiv. 21 (comp. Psa. lxxvii. 16; lxxviii. 13; cvi. 9). Thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. The dragon (*tannim*) is frequently used as a symbol of Egyptian power (see Isa. li. 9; Ezek. xxix. 3; xxxii. 2). The allusion here is to the destruction of Pharaoh's host in the waters of the Red Sea (Exod. xiv. 27—30; xv. 4).

Ver. 14.—Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces. Here the metaphor is only slightly varied, leviathan, "the orcodile," being substituted for *tannim*, "the dragon," or "sea-monster," as the representative of the might of Egypt. And gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness. The corpses of the Egyptians thrown up upon the Red Sea shores (Exod. xiv. 30) are certainly the

"meat" intended. Whether the "people of dwellers in the wilderness" are cannibal tribes, or jackals and hyenas, is perhaps doubtful.

Ver. 15.—*Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood; rather, and the torrent* (comp. Exod. xvii. 6; Numb. xx. 11). *Thou driedst up mighty rivers; i.e. the Jordan* (Josh. iii. 13, *et seqq.*).

Ver. 16.—*The day is thine, the night also is thine; thou hast prepared the light and the sun* (see Gen. i. 5, 13, 16); rather, *thou hast prepared him light and sun*. "Luminary" (לֹאֲמָנָה) is probably a class-name for the heavenly lights generally. The sun is then particularized, as so much the most important of the luminaries. But the result is "an imperfect parallelism" (Cheyne).

Ver. 17.—*Thou hast set all the borders of the earth*. The "borders of the earth" are the boundaries of land and sea, which are ascribed to God in Gen. i. 9 (comp. Job xxvi. 10; xxxviii. 8; Ps. xxxiii. 7; Prov. viii. 29; Jer. v. 22). *Thou hast made summer and winter; literally, summer and winter thou didst form them; i.e. they are the result of thy arrangement of creation*.

Vers. 18—23.—In conclusion, the psalmist prays earnestly that God will deliver his people from their wicked oppressors (vers. 18, 19), that he will remember his covenant (ver. 20), cause the oppressed ones to praise him (ver. 21), and assert himself against those who insult and oppose him (vers. 22, 23).

Ver. 18.—*Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy Name* (comp. Lam. i. 7; ii. 7, 15, 16). Every nation of idolaters is a "foolish people" to the sacred writers, whatever cleverness or intellectual capacity it may possess. *Nabal*, the word translated "foolish," designates a folly that is closely akin to wickedness.

Ver. 19.—*O deliver not the soul of thy turtle-dove unto the multitude of the wicked; rather, O deliver not thy turtle-dove unto the greedy multitude* (Revised Version margin). Israel is beautifully compared to a pet dove, the gentlest and tenderest of birds. The Babylonians are the "greedy multitude" ready to kill and devour it. *Forget not the congregation* (or, *the multitude*) *of thy poor for ever*. The "multitude of God's poor" is being carried off into a

cruel captivity, or else left as a miserable remnant in an exhausted and desolated land—in either case needing much God's protection and "remembrance."

Ver. 20.—*Have respect unto the covenant*. The "covenant" intended is probably that made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whereby Canaan was assured to their descendants, as "the lot of their inheritance." Israel is being deprived of its inheritance, and dragged off into "dark places." Will not "respect for his covenant" induce God to interpose, and even now at the last gasp deliver his afflicted ones? For the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. Israel is being dragged into "dark places of the earth"—benighted lands, where there is no glimmer of the light of God's truth—and lands, moreover, which are "full of habitations of cruelty," abodes, *i.e.*, where captives taken in war are treated with harshness and violence.

Ver. 21.—*O let not the oppressed return ashamed; i.e. let not this oppressed nation turn their back on thee in shame and confusion at thy forsaking them*. Rather, *let the poor and needy praise thy Name; i.e. show them some mercy, some deliverance, which may turn their shame into joy, and call forth from them songs of praise*.

Ver. 22.—*Arise, O God, plead thine own cause; i.e. assert thyself, show forth thy power, avenge thyself on thine enemies*. Remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily (comp. ver. 18, and see the comment *ad loc.*). In the ancient world the conquest of a people was always regarded as a triumph over the people's god or gods. Naturally, insults to the god found a place in the victor's songs of triumph (see 2 Kings xix. 10—13; Isa. x. 8—11).

Ver. 23.—*Forget not the voice of thine enemies*. God does not forget insults of this kind, but punishes them (see 2 Kings xix. 28, "Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult, is come up into my ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest"). He punished Babylon after a time with extreme severity (see Jer. l. and li.). The tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually; rather, *ascendeth continually*—goes up before God's throne, crying for vengeance (comp. Gen. iv. 10; xviii. 20, 21; Exod. iii. 9, etc.).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 22.—*God's cause that of his people*. "Arise, . . . thine own cause." The great problems of life, and the inner depths of human experience, are the same in all ages. The surface of society changes marvellously; but heart still answers to heart.

Asaph's questions and troubles and prayers find their echo in ten thousand Christian hearts to-day. It would be extremely interesting if we could certainly tell to what crisis of Israel's history this noble psalm refers. Some say the Chaldean invasion; others, the Maccabean tyranny. Very strong reasons are given in the 'Speaker's Commentary' for believing that it refers to the Egyptian invasion in the reign of Rehobcam (2 Chron. xii.). As that was the first time when the kingdom of David fell under the power of a heathen conqueror, so the trial to the faith of God's people was correspondingly severe. It seemed as though God had forgotten his covenant, and Church and state (to use our modern phrase) were to perish in common ruin. The spiritual lesson is not affected by any uncertainty as to the historic reference. The psalmist takes refuge in God. His plea is that it is God's own cause which is at stake. In effect, it is the same which Moses urged (Exod. xxxii. 11, ff.; Numb. xiv. 13, ff.); and Joshua, "What wilt thou do unto thy great Name?" (Josh. vii. 9). "Arise," etc.

I. THE CAUSE OF GOD'S CHURCH IS GOD'S OWN CAUSE. The word so rendered means "strife," "controversy" (comp. Hos. iv. 1; xii. 2; Micah vi. 2; Jer. xxv. 31). The Lord's cause, then, is that ancient controversy which began when sin entered the world; and will never cease till sin is conquered, and death, the last enemy, destroyed, and all things placed under the feet of Christ. The strife between truth and lies, holiness and sin, right and wrong, between "the things that make for peace" and the things about which men cry, "Peace! peace!" but God says, "There is no peace to the wicked." One of the moral dangers of our time is a feeble sense of the reality, greatness, infinite issues, of the conflict. Society is awake, sensitive, as never before, to human suffering and misery; but no corresponding sense of man's sin and guilt. Criminals are often more pitied for their punishment than condemned for their wickedness. We can understand (or think we can) our Saviour's tears over the approaching calamities of Jerusalem; but, perhaps, fail to see that the deepest source of his grief was the unbelief and the sin of which those impending calamities would be the outcome (Luke xix. 42; Matt. xxiii. 37). We see how dreadful it is for savages to run about naked and eat one another, to be enslaved or massacred. But do we see how far more terrible it is for them to be without God in the world, without Christ, without hope? We do not want to be less humane, soft-hearted, sympathetic; but we do want to measure by a juster standard, to see that *God's* cause is the supreme interest of human history, that there is nothing we can pray for, work for, live for, to be compared with this—that his Name be hallowed, his kingdom triumph, his will be done. We can see that this is God's own cause; but how is it the cause of his people, of Israel in ancient days, of the Church of Christ in our own? Just because this is the very end for the sake of which the Church exists, for the sake of which the nation of Israel was called into being. Christians are in danger of just the mistake into which the Jews fell. They thought they were the chosen, favoured people of Jehovah, to the exclusion of all other nations, and that they might despise and hate the Gentiles. Whereas the truth was, it was for the sake of all mankind that they were chosen—to be God's witnesses, that all nations might be blessed in their promised King and Saviour. So Christians are not saved simply for their own sake, but to be the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world;" "firstfruits" (Jas. i. 18).

II. Therefore, secondly, THE CAUSE OF GOD IS THE CAUSE OF MANKIND. Attempts have been made to set in opposition "the service of God" and "the service of man." In actual fact, none have rendered such service to men as those devoted to the service of God. No power but the gospel of Jesus Christ can take a horde of naked cannibals and, in a single generation, change them into peaceful, intelligent, useful members of the great community of nations—many of them willing martyrs for truth and charity. The moral ideas of universal justice, personal liberty, human brotherhood, the value of each human being, the duty of the rich to the poor, which have abolished slavery and serfdom, and are working so mightily towards the regeneration of society, find room only in Christianized nations, and have their fountain in the gospel. But the gospel aims at something very different from regenerating society with ideas, however true and Divine. It aims to bring each human being, as a lost wanderer, home to God. Alone among systems, the gospel goes to the heart and root of all man's wretchedness and degradation—*sin*. The estrangement of the individual heart and life from God, and disobedience to his law of love. If you want an unanswerable proof that the

gospel is God's word, not man's, you may find one (among innumerable others) in the view given of sin and God's dealing with it. Take just four passages: (1) John i. 29; (2) 1 John iv. 10 ("our sins;" *q.d.* "of the whole world," ii. 2); (3) John vi. 51, "the bread," etc.); (4) John xvi. 8.

III. THE SUCCESS OF GOD'S CAUSE DEPENDS ON GOD HIMSELF PLEADING IT. *Asa's* plea (2 Chron. xiv. 11). We may be in danger of forgetting this. If we see full subscription lists, large congregations, plenty of new societies, we think God's work is surely prospering. If the reverse, we are downcast, perhaps almost despairing. One way in which God wonderfully holds the work in his own hand is in the *raising up of workers*. What would the religious history of mankind have been without Abraham, Moses, St. Paul? Such men as John Wesley, J. F. Oberlin, Felix Neff, Robert Moffat, are not results of any law of evolution and human progress. Each is unique—a gift from God. God only is the Judge, in what way best to plead his own cause. Sometimes by letting men take their own blind, proud way, and eat the fruit of their doings. Spain has never recovered the withering blight brought on her by the Inquisition, which trampled out her noblest life. Nor France the massacre of the Huguenots and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

IV. Therefore we are WARRANTED, ENCOURAGED, CONSTRAINED, TO OFFER THIS PRAYER. "Arise," etc. Beware of praying as though we were more zealous for God's cause than God himself, more earnest for his glory, more compassionate towards perishing men. Yet we are not to treat prayer as a mere form. Sometimes it seems inscrutable, almost incredible, that our poor, weak prayers can be of any account in the world's history—the fulfilment of God's promises. But God knows best. He has made *prayer* one of the great laws of his spiritual universe. Ours not to question, but obey. What infinite comfort to turn from our own failures, the world's unbelief and misery, and the mysteries of providence to God's plain word of promise and command (Matt. vi. 9)!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 3—8.—*Hell's carnival*. This is what is portrayed to us in these lamentations over the desecrations and destructions wreaked upon the temple at Jerusalem, probably at the time of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion (see 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17, etc.). As the destroyer acted then, so he acts now when the like work is on hand of profaning God's sanctuary. What the ancient temple was, the Church of God is—the sanctuary of God. And it has once and again come under the destroyer's power.

I. THE TEMPLE IS LAID WASTE. (Ver. 3.) 1. *That at Jerusalem was*. The sacred service had come to an end; the throng of worshippers were driven away: the ministers of the temple no longer served at the altar; there was desolation everywhere. "The holy and beautiful house wherein the fathers of Israel had worshipped has been plundered and desecrated by a heathen soldiery. Instead of the psalms and hymns and sacred anthems which once echoed within those walls, has been heard the brutal shout of the fierce invaders, roaring like lions over their prey." 2. *And there have been similar desecrations*. Our own land, and other's, are sprinkled over with the ruins of desecrated shrines. They are beautiful even now in their decay, and suggest to us how glorious they must have been when they stood erect and complete in all their grandeur; when, instead of being given over, as now, to mouldering ruin, they were thronged with devout worshippers, and the sublime music of the praises of God reverberated through their high-roofed naves and choirs, and down the long vistas of their vaulted aisles. One can, even now, scarce keep back the bitter curse upon those brutal iconoclasts who in these once magnificent houses of God have wrought such cruel havoc and desolation, and the effects of whose blind fanaticism or wanton wickedness and greed can now never be repaired. The sacred rage which breathes in this psalm finds place yet in many hearts against those detestable destroyers of the most beautiful products of God-inspired genius and devotion that the world has ever seen or will see. 3. *But the desolation of the spiritual temple is worse still, and what most concerns us all*. And the wasters of that are not wicked men who assail us from without, but spiritual foes whom we have sheltered within. It is unbelief which lays

waste the spiritual temple. Worse than fire, or axe, or sword, it makes havoc of the soul. And wickedness following hard on its footsteps completes the work which it has begun. Then comes—

II. THE EXULTATION OF THE ADVERSARY. (Ver. 4.) No doubt this literally occurred at Jerusalem, as it has in many another sanctuary of God which has been brought to ruin. But most assuredly that “roar” has been heard when the Church of God—his temple in the soul—has been laid waste. The adversaries of God point the finger of scorn; they scoff and jibe and mock; they never weary of holding up to contempt the loud, lofty pretensions and vast claims of the Christian Church, as they bid all men see what a wretched fraud she has at last proved to be. They contrast what she said and what she is, and the roar of execration and exultation over her is heard far and wide as that contrast is seen. Let none of us by our infidelities add to that bitter shame.

III. THEY SET UP THEIR STANDARDS AS TRUE. (Ver. 4.) In the temple at Jerusalem the invaders, no doubt, piled their military trophies, banners, and ensigns; or the “signs” spoken of may mean religious emblems, heathen rites and ceremonies (cf. 1 Macc. i. 54, 59; iii. 48). But both meanings may be combined, as the temple may have been turned both into a barrack and heathen altar at the same time. The incident, however, suggests what is so continually seen when the spiritual temple of God is laid waste. Then men take their standards of truth for those of God; they assert their miserable theories of things for the verities which the Holy Scriptures have taught us; they bid us welcome some age of reason instead of the time-honoured truths on which the Church is founded. Their ensigns for signs, man’s speculations for God’s revelations.

IV. THE BEAUTY AND GRACE OF THE TEMPLE THEY BREAK DOWN. (Ver. 6.) So has it been with material sanctuaries of God, and the like has been done in those which are spiritual. For a while the unbeliever filches from the fair fabric of Christian truth those gracious and winsome doctrines which have ever commended the faith of Christ to men, and he claims them as the mere product of reason, as evolved by the processes of human thought. But when his work of destruction is complete, and the spiritual sanctuary of God is all laid waste, faith utterly gone, then it will be found that this “carved work of the sanctuary” will be broken down, and the love and care of men will depart with the love and faith of God.

V. THE WORK GOES ON UNTIL ALL IS DESTROYED. (Ver. 7.) It was so with the material temple; but, thank God, all is not lost in the spiritual. There may be, however, individuals and groups of men in which the dread work is complete, and “God is not in all their thoughts.”

VI. EVERY RELIC AND TRACE OF THE WORSHIP OF GOD IS GOT RID OF. (Ver. 8.) Besides the temple, there were, doubtless, synagogues, places of assembly, where religious men met for worship, though we do not meet with the actual mention of synagogues until the times of the New Testament. And when the first temple was destroyed, we may reasonably believe that such places existed, as we know they did afterwards. But there are, alas! places and human hearts where every relic and trace of God’s worship have been swept utterly away, as if burned with fire. So long as any place where the soul can meet with God is left, the great enemy’s triumph is not complete; he is not satisfied till what is said in ver. 8 has been done. But from this may God keep us all!—S. C.

Ver. 9.—“*We see not our signs.*” It is said that there were five signs in the first temple which the second had not—the ark of the covenant, the fire from heaven, the Shechinah, the Urim and Thummim, and the spirit of prophecy. So in the Church of Christ there are signs which are very blessed for us to see.

I. SIGNS OF WHAT? it will be asked. Of the presence, the power, the love of the Lord in our midst. This was what the signs in the first temple told of.

II. WHAT ARE THESE SIGNS? 1. *The attention of men around.* 2. *The work of conversion going on.* 3. *Witness of believers.* 4. *Their love to one another and to their fellow-men,* because of their love to God. 5. *Their peace and joy in God.*

III. THE DIFFERENT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SEEING AND THESE SIGNS. 1. *There may be neither.* It is better there should be no fancied seeing, if the reality be not there.

For: 2. *There may be the seeing, and not the signs.* 3. *There may be the signs, and yet not the seeing.* 4. *There may be both.* This is most blessed of all.—S. C.

Ver. 17.—*Summer teachings.* The four seasons, it has been well said, are God's four evangelists of the natural world. The sternness of winter; the hopefulness of spring; the richness of summer; the bounty of autumn;—each season has its own message from God to our souls. Note—

I. THE NATURAL SUMMER. This is what is referred to in our text: the psalmist appeals to it as a plea for God's much-needed help. His infinite power, which had made summer and winter, and had been manifested in so many marvellous ways, was able to help Israel in their great distress, and their trust was that he would. 1. *Israel had to maintain stoutly the truth that God made all things.* A whole mob of idol-gods was put forward and worshipped by the heathen as the authors and creators of the powers of nature. 2. *And our missionaries to the heathen have to maintain the same truth of God the Creator of all.* It is by no means universally or generally believed even yet. 3. *And in our day and in our own land, professedly Christian as it is, we may not slacken our testimony to this truth.* It is not that we have to contend with rival gods, as Israel had, and the missionary still has, but the existence of any God at all is either openly questioned or flatly denied. It is not polytheism, but atheism, that confronts and opposes the Christian advocate to-day and here at home. Natural law is everything; as if a law could do anything without an executive to put it in force. The ancient Greeks were pantheists, but our men of science have, too many of them, sunk down to a lower depth than that. The Greek saw gods everywhere and in all things; we see God nowhere. Shall we give in to this proud yet miserable atheism? God forbid! Let us still maintain with the psalmist, "*Thou hast made summer.*" As we look round on all the rich glories of the season, let us confess, with our great Puritan poet—

"These are *thy* works, Parent of good," etc.

II. THE SUMMER OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE. How many are enjoying this! God's daily gifts of life, health, and joy are lavished upon them. They bask in the sunshine of his love. Everything bids them rejoice. But forget not the Giver of your joy—him who made the summer. That holy memory will be to you like the string attached to the child's kite, which is soaring away up in the blue heavens to the child's exuberant delight. But let that string be broken which now steadies and sustains it, not hindering but aiding it in its upward way through the sunlit air, and then you know that at once it will come tumbling ignominiously to the ground. So if we let ourselves forget our God, and we be in thought and affection separated from him, then our poor joy, like that child's kite, will soon fall to the ground, and our gladness will soon be at an end. It is the remembrance, "*Thou hast made summer,*" which does not hinder but help our joy, steadying and sustaining it as did that cord the child's toy. Let us not forget this. And we would bid you remember God, because, else, the summer of God's providence, like the natural summer, is apt to breed many forms of evil life, like those many creeping, noisome, and miserably destructive insects, etc., which the summer sun calls forth, and which in our fields and gardens we are ever seeking to be rid of. How full the Bible is of records of the ill that the summer of God's providence has occasioned to many unwatchful and God-forgetting souls! Remember, too, that such seasons let that live which is not really strong, and which the first frost of winter will speedily kill. So is it easy, when no trial or persecution arises because of Christ, to appear as if we were really his. But when they do arise, what then?

III. THE SUMMER OF GOD'S GRACE. 1. *This may be in us*—is so when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. It is very delightful; is independent of every other summer; comes by degrees; is the result of conflict; unlike the natural summer, it never ends, though it may be interrupted. And: 2. *It is above us*, waiting for us in the future world. There is the "land of pure delight." The lovely scenes of earth are reminders of it. It is the true, real, most blessed, because unending, summer of the soul.—S. C.

Ver. 17.—*Winter.* Winter: what has that to say to us of God and of his ways?—Winter, with its cold, chilling breath, compelling even the strong to wrap themselves round with all manner of protection, and making all who can, shelter within their well-built homes, and draw close their warm curtains, and heap up the blazing fires. Winter, pinching so cruelly the ill-clad, the ill-fed, the ill-housed, making want more terrible, all sickness more deadly, and all misery more miserable. Winter, grim, gaunt, bearing down in its cruel might all less strong than itself. Winter, with its snowy shroud covering the fields and hills which all lie as silent and as still as if they were laid out for burial, and the snow over them were a real winding-sheet instead of only a seeming one. And sometimes it is a real one, when winter bids the snow fall quickly, closely, softly, continuously; then, blinding the eyes of the unfortunate wanderer on the moor, so that he can make out neither road, nor path, nor track, nor waymark; beating persistently against his mouth and nostrils, taking away his breath, numbing all his senses, until the poor lost one staggers on in hopeless search of the way he has lost. “Oh, thou winter snow, who more cruel, deadly, treacherous, than thou? Thou wilt not cease thy work until the poor traveller, weary and heart-broken, falls down exhausted; and then, as he dies, thou wilt smite him in the face, cover him up softly as with kisses, tenderly as with eider down, like a sleek white murderer as thou art!” (Alex. Smith). And not only so is winter terrible; its keen northerly blast, tearing over the seas and lands, driving the ships across the waves, and rendering the mariners all but powerless to struggle against their foe. Their fingers freeze to the rigging, and the stiffened sails refuse to bend to their will, and happy are they if, “amid this howling wintry sea,” they find some port of refuge. Shepherds and their flocks in some seeming shelter on Scotch hills are caught by the whirling, blinding, smothering, snow, and all are lost. Oh, the terrible winter, ruthlessly tearing the foliage off the trees, stripping the flowers from all gardens and fields, banishing most of the birds, and silencing all that remain; rejoicing seemingly in darkness and cold, in all that is drear, deadly, desolate;—such is winter, bearable by the rich and strong, but terrible to the poor and weak, and would be terrible to all were it not for the sure hope of the blessed spring. And yet, though we have spoken hardly of it, God made it even as he made the summer. And he has promised that it shall not fail. Certainly, therefore, it must be for other than only evil; it must serve some beneficent purpose. And it does; we have proof upon proof. Winter, as well as the other seasons, is one of the gifts of our Father-God, the gifts of his love. Let us listen a while to some of the voices of the winter—the wise, warning, winning words it utters to those who will hearken. And—

I. IT SEEMS TO US TO SAY, “BE YE ALSO READY.” It is certain to come; it is no chance arrangement, and none but a fool would fail to make provision for it. Every one does to the best of his power.

“All is safely gathered in,
Ere the winter storms begin.”

Let it be so in regard to the winter that is sure to visit our souls, our circumstances, our lives. Be ready for it when it comes. Let our treasure be where winter cannot come, even in God and the eternal life.

II. TRUST. For the winter is God’s ordering; he makes it drear and dark and even dreadful, as it often seems to be. It is the product of no blind fate, no mere soulless relentless law; but it is of God. If we will hold fast to this sure faith, we shall be able to hope and patiently wait for the salvation of our God, and meanwhile even to rejoice.

III. SUBMIT. Winter is irresistible. Everything must bend before it. Who can resist his will? Great is the part that the winter has played in the humiliation of haughty men. As it lays hold even upon the raging seas, and binds them down in motionless silence, hushing their turbulence till they lie still as a stone; so has God, by the same agency, often baffled and destroyed the power of man. See Napoleon’s retreat from Moscow. And how easily! The gently, persistently falling snow did it all. Shall man, then, war against God? Submit.

IV. SING OF MERCY AS WELL AS OF JUDGMENT. See how in the winter these are blessedly mingled. True, God giveth snow, but it is “like wool” (Ps. cxlvii. 16, 17). It wraps up warmly the seed sown in the earth.

"His flakes of snow like wool he sends,
And thus the springing corn defends."

And "he scattereth the hoar-frost," but it is "like ashes," cleansing, purifying, making healthful that on which they are cast. And the frost is a cleansing power, ridding gardens and fields of the foul, noxious creatures that swarm and creep and devour. And does not that humiliation and sorrow of which the sprinkled ashes told do the like in the region of the soul? "He casteth forth his ice," but they are "like morsels"—like the crumbs which feed the hungry. So the ice prepares the soil, breaks it up, and fits it for the growth of the seed.

V. THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH. Abundant life—see that throng of shouting, laughing boys careering on the ice—heeds not the cold, rather rejoices in it. So let there be in us fulness of Divine life, the life which Christ gives, and we *shall* be able to "stand before his cold."—S. C.

Vers. 7—8, 12.—*The destructive work of man and the constructive work of God.* The prayer in vers. 1, 2, to help the people sunk in the deepest misery, is followed by its basis or ground, which consists of a picture of this misery (vers. 3—9); the sanctuary is destroyed, and all traces of the presence of God among his people have disappeared. The short prayer in vers. 10, 11 seeks support and stay in the thought of the omnipotence of the God of Israel (vers. 12—17). The prayer is renewed at the close in an expanded form (Gen. xvii. 7, 8). It shows how the Church of God and individual believers are to conduct themselves in times when everything appears to be lost and to lie in ruins. The whole psalm may suggest two general points for consideration—the *destructive work of man, and the constructive work of God.*

I. THE DESTRUCTIVE WORK OF MAN. (Vers. 3—9.) The enemy had destroyed everything in the sanctuary, and burnt up the holy place itself. Look at some destructive work in our day. 1. *The material tendencies of physical science.* Leading to a denial of God and immortality, and striking at the foundation of morals by denying the freedom of man's nature. *Ideas destructive, as well as conduct.* 2. *The critical spirit which is abroad.* A spirit of denial, almost universally pulling down, and not building up. This and that not true—in history and creed. 3. *The selfish spirit, wherever it rules, is destructive.* In politics and commerce, and in our social relations—tending to antagonism and separation, and breaking all law—moral, Divine, and social. 4. *The absence of true prophets—inspired men—is also a sign of the destructive process.* (Ver. 9.) The true prophet is the constructor, and not the destroyer; the inspirer, and not the critic.

II. THE CONSTRUCTIVE WORK OF GOD. 1. *God's greatest work of old was redemptive.* (Vers. 12—15.) "For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth." His work in Christ is reconstructive, building men up after the highest pattern. Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfil. 2. *His work in the physical creation is constructive.* (Vers. 16, 17.) He prepared the light and the sun, made summer and winter. The same mind ordained and continues the precious seasons as ordained the laws and works of redemption. 3. *God's covenant is a covenant of salvation.* (Ver. 20.) And the world is still in urgent need of redemption. "The dark places," etc. 4. *The work of redemption is God's own—"his own cause."* (Ver. 22.) And therefore he will not abandon it. We can therefore pray as the psalmist did.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXV.

THIS is a hymn of praise in anticipation of a deliverance, which may be from Sennacherib, or from some other dangerous enemy. The actual praise is confined to the first and the last two verses. The remainder of the poem (vers. 2—8) sets

forth God as a righteous Judge, against whom the ungodly contend in vain, and who will pour out at last the dregs of his vengeance upon them. The author may be Asaph, and the deliverance that from Zerah (2 Chron. xiv. 9—13); or the date may be later, and the writer an Asaphite Levite of the time of Jehoshaphat or Hezekiah.

The phrase, "Al-taschith," in the "title," is probably a musical term. It occurs also in the titles of Pss. lviii., lviii., and lix.

Ver. 1.—Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks, unto thee do we give thanks: for that thy Name is near thy wondrous works declare; literally, *and thy Name is near* (i.e. thy providence and care are close to us); *this do thy wondrous works declare*. The "wondrous works" are those of times past (comp. Ps. lxxiv. 12—15), whereof the psalmist anticipates a continuance or repetition.

Ver. 2.—When I shall receive the congregation; rather, *when I shall have appointed a set time*. It is agreed that the speaker, in this verse and the next, is God, who announces that he is about to descend in judgment. This, however, he will do "at his own set time," for which men must wait patiently (comp. Hab. ii. 3). I will judge uprightly; or, "with uprightness" (comp. Ps. lviii. 1).

Ver. 3.—The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved. They "melt" with fear (Ps. xlv. 6), either at God's coming in judgment, or at the dissolution which a hostile invasion is bringing on their land. I bear up the pillars of it. Meanwhile God upholds, and will uphold, both the moral and physical order of things. He will neither suffer the earth to be moved, nor the supports on which society depends to fail and crumble away.

Ver. 4.—I said. It is doubtful who is the speaker. Professor Cheyne regards the entire passage from the beginning of ver. 2 to the end of ver. 5 as spoken by the Almighty; but most commentators assign vers. 4 and 5 to the psalmist or the people of Israel. Unto the fools; i.e. to the enemy which was attacking Israel; literally, *to the boasters, or to the arrogant ones* (see Revised Version). Deal not foolishly; rather, *deal not so arrogantly*. Do not set yourselves so proudly against the Almighty. And to the wicked, Lift not up the horn; i.e. be not fierce and menacing, like a bull who threatens with his horns.

Ver. 5.—Lift not up your horn on high; speak not with a stiff neck. The phrase, "a stiff neck," common in the Pentateuch (Exod. xxxii. 9; xxxiii. 3, 5; xxxiv. 9; Deut. ix. 6, 13; x. 16; xxxi. 27), is rare elsewhere. It expresses pride, arrogance, and obstinacy.

Ver. 6.—For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. So Hupfeld, Kay, Canon Cook, and the Revised Version. Others suggest

the meaning to be, "For it is not from the east, nor is it from the west, nor yet from the mountainous desert [that help cometh]." But the ellipse of the main idea is improbable. The address is to the enemies who threaten Israel, "Lift not up your horns—speak not proudly—for exaltation comes not from any earthly quarter—east, west, north, or south" ("north" being omitted, as sufficiently implied in the others); it is God alone who gives it, and he is not likely to give it to you."

Ver. 7.—But God is the Judge (comp. Pss. l. 6; lxxxii. 1; xciv. 2; and, especially, the original of all the later passages, Gen. xviii. 25). He putteth down one, and setteth up (or, *exalteth*) another (comp. 1 Sam. ii. 7; Dan. ii. 21; iv. 17). True equally of nations and of individuals.

Ver. 8.—For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red. The "cup of God's fury" is a frequent metaphor with the prophets (Isa. li. 17, 22; Jer. xxv. 15, 17, 28; xlix. 12; Lam. iv. 21; Ezek. xxiii. 31—33; Hab. ii. 16, etc.); and is commonly represented as full of wine, which his enemies have to drink. The "redness" of the wine typifies the shedding of blood. It is full of mixture. Mingled, i.e., with spices, and so made stronger and more efficacious (see Prov. ix. 2; xxiii. 30; Cant. viii. 2; Isa. v. 22). And he poureth out of the same. God pours out the cup of his fury on all nations, or persons, whom he chooses to afflict, and they are compelled to drink of it (Jer. xxv. 15—28). But the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them. To drink a cup, dregs and all, is to empty it wholly, to swallow down all its contents.

Ver. 9.—But I will declare for ever; i.e. "I will declare these things"—viz. God's just judgments upon the wicked. I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. On the force of the phrase, "God of Jacob," see the comment upon Ps. xx. 1.

Ver. 10.—All the horns of the wicked also will I cut off. Besides declaring God's judgments and singing his praises, the psalmist adds that he will, as far as lies in his power, seek to advance God's cause, and establish his kingdom, by checking, controlling, and putting down the wicked. This he expresses by the metaphor, "I will cut off their horns;" i.e. bring down their haughtiness, and deprive them of the power of doing mischief. But the horns of the righteous shall be exalted. Then, as a necessary consequence, "the horns of the righteous"—their power and might and glory—will be exalted.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*The essence, certainty, and preciousness of Divine revelation.* "Thy Name is nigh." This rendering is given in the margin of the Revised Version, and another in the text. The difference arises from the exceeding brevity of the Hebrew making the sense doubtful. But the sense given in our Authorized Version is supported by weighty authorities; and has the advantage of being at once full of meaning and full of grandeur. We may regard it as bringing before us the essence, the certainty, and the preciousness of Divine revelation.

I. ESSENCE OF DIVINE REVELATION. The possibility of *knowing* God, and the possibility of *conversing*, holding communion, with God are the two fundamental truths of revelation. Apart from these, the Bible would give us nothing but dead history, barren doctrine, baseless imagination. The first is expressed in the Scriptures by the *Name* of God; the second by his drawing *near* to us, and bringing us *near* to him. 1. *God's Name* stands in Scripture for all that we can know and do know of him. Names are the instruments of all our knowledge. What we cannot name, or name wrongly, we do not know. Giving names was the beginning of speech (Gen. ii. 19). Moses, therefore, asked how he was to name God to Israel (Exod. iii. 13-15; comp. Exod. xxxiii. 19; xxxiv. 6, 7; xxxiii. 21; Prov. xviii. 10). 2. Communion with God and enjoyment of his favour are constantly expressed under this image of *God's nearness* (though "in him we live," etc.) (Deut. iv. 7; Ps. cxlv. 18; Prov. xv. 29; Jer. xii. 2; Eph. ii. 13, 17).

II. THE CERTAINTY. How do *we know* that we know God, and that we can converse with him? By the evidence of experience, historical and personal. "That thy Name is near, thy wondrous works declare." Divine revelation goes exactly on the lines of human nature and life. We know one another—our fellow human beings by speech and action. These reveal character. The Bible is the continuous record of God's manifestation of himself to men by *word* and by *deed*. His works of nature reveal him (Ps. xix. 1; Rom. i. 19, 20). But he has "magnified his Word above all his Name;" *q.d.* the living voice of his prophets and the record in Scripture of their message, has brought God near to us, and us to him, as nature never could—yet a very large part of Scripture itself consists in the record of his "wondrous deeds, his dealings with his Church and mankind." Above all, the incarnation, the personal life, and atonement of the Lord Jesus, reveal God as nothing else can (John xvii. 3; xiv. 9; 1 John iv. 9; 2 Pet. i. 16).

III. THE PRECIOUSNESS. "Unto thee do we give thanks." What blessing, what treasure, is comparable with this—the certainty that *God is near*, and is *known*!—not the infinite Unknowable, but our *Father in Christ Jesus*. We do not pretend to a complete knowledge of God. The Bible, far from professing to give such knowledge, declares it impossible (Job xi. 7; Ps. cxxxix. 6; Isa. lv. 9). *We do not completely know* our fellow-men or our own selves. But we know all we need to know. Our knowledge, as far as it goes, is real and certain (John i. 18; Job xxviii. 28; Jer. ix. 23, 24). It is an ample resting-place, both for intellect and heart (Matt. xi. 28).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1-10.—*The undaunted one.* Such is the spirit of this psalm; fearlessness characterizes it throughout, and concerning this spirit it teaches much.

I. ON WHAT SUCH SPIRIT RESTS. 1. *On the conviction that God is near at hand* for our help. "For that thy Name is near," etc. (ver. 1). 2. *On the evidence for this conviction* which God's "wondrous works" supplies: works in nature, providence, grace.

II. THE FRUITS SUCH SPIRIT BEARS. 1. *Thankfulness.* (Ver. 1.) 2. *Righteous dealing.* (Ver. 2, "I will judge uprightly.") 3. *Clear-sightedness* as to the reality of things (ver. 3). Where this spirit is, *there is no fear of man*. He shrinks not from facing and confessing the actual truth, however unwelcome it may be. 4. *Cheerful toil.* "I bear up the pillars of it" (ver. 3); cf. St. Paul, "I can do all things through

Christ," etc. 5. *Faithful testimony.* (Ver. 4.) Against the wicked. For God (ver. 7). Concerning wrath to come (ver. 8). 6. *Delight in God.* (Ver. 9.) 7. *Open siding with the right against the wrong* (ver. 10).

III. THE GREAT EXEMPLAR AND GIVER OF THIS SPIRIT—the Lord Jesus Christ.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The uplifting God.* Such is the theme of this psalm. This we gather from the frequent repetition of the word "uplift." Like the repeated clear strokes of a bell, it reverberates through the psalm. In ver. 4 the wicked are bidden "lift not up the horn," as doth the fierce bull that, in the pride of his might, tosses his horns defiantly against all comers. Let them not boast themselves in their fancied strength. And ver. 5 repeats this warning, and ver. 6 tells them that "uplifting"—"promotion," our Authorized Version reads it, but it is the same word all through—is neither from the east, nor the west, nor south, but—so ver. 7 tells them—God is the Judge; he putteth down one and "lifts up" another,—again the same word. And then once more in ver. 10 God declares that the strength, "the horns," of the righteous shall be lifted up. Thus over and over again this emphatic word and key-note of the psalm is heard. And this gracious dealing of God with his people is the ground of the earnest thanksgiving with which the psalm opens; and it is the "Name" of God which it asserts to be so "near," and which his wondrous works declare. As in Ps. cxxi., God's gracious keeping of his people is the theme, and hence the word "keep" is repeated all through the psalm. We do not know for certain when, or by whom, or on what occasion, this psalm was written. It is like the song of Hannah echoed in the Magnificat of the mother of our Lord. Or it may celebrate one or all of David's many deliverances—how God had "uplifted him" out of all his troubles, and hence his vow of righteousness which in ver. 2 and repeatedly, he declares. Or it may celebrate the "uplifting" of Judah and Hezekiah from the peril of Sennacherib. We do not know, nor does it matter. Severed as it is for us from all special circumstances, we are the better able to make application of it according to our individual need. Now, in the text we note—

I. ITS EXUBERANT THANKSGIVING. The writer's heart was full. 1. *He repeats his thanksgiving.* It is as if he felt himself unable to tell out all his gratitude; as if he had said, "Yea, Lord, unto thee do we give thanks; yea, we do." 2. *And it arises from many hearts,* not one alone. It is "we," not "I." 3. *And it reveals the character of the grace received.* That it had been such as was greatly and consciously needed; and could come from no other source (ver. 6); and it had been great indeed (Luke vii. 47); and both unexpected and undeserved.

II. THE ABUNDANT REASON FOR IT. "For that thy Name is near." 1. *What are we to understand by "thy Name"?* It means that which the name suggests. Names call up in our minds that which we know and feel of those to whom they belong. The Name of God suggests, therefore, to any man his idea of God—one thing to one man, another to another. To the writer of this psalm it is evident what thought of God his Name suggested. God was to him the God who lifts his people up from all their distresses. 2. *What he says of this Name.* It is "near." He meant, near in time, in locality,—at hand and not afar off, to his consciousness; he realized this nearness of God. 3. *And we can still assert the Name.* How often and how greatly, and for how many, God has uplifted their souls!—from the burden of guilty fear, of sin's oppression, of earthly care, of death's terror, and of all forms of Satan's rage. In all such times of trouble God has been near to his people, and has lifted them up far above and away from all their fear.

III. ITS PERSUASIVE PLEA. Surely testimony such as is here given is a plea unanswerable that we all should put our trust in the uplifting God, and turn to him in every trouble, and abide in him always. For us, too, there is the further argument of God's grace in Christ, and the infinite love revealed in him. May we hearken and obey!—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*Help laid on One that is mighty.* Our text and this whole psalm show clearly enough that—

I. SUCH HELP WAS NEEDED. 1. *Society, order, law, seemed all on the point of dissolution.* A condition of affairs is contemplated in which everything seemed rushing

ruinwards, and would rapidly have reached such sad ending, had they not been held back by One mightier than they. We cannot say for certain, though we may conjecture, what special age, persons, or events are alluded to. The psalm suits several such, and is capable of many applications. For our own use of its teachings it is well that we are left in ignorance of its actual allusions, and cannot point to the special events which were before the psalmist's mind. 2. *And such conditions are all too common.* We see them in nations, Churches, families, individual souls. Everything seems slipping away, all order and strength and well-being dissolving. It is as if "the earth and all the inhabitants thereof were dissolved." It is so in things temporal, and so, too, in things spiritual. 3. *The causes that produce such conditions are manifold.* Sometimes, in nations, it is war, or political strife, or, and this more commonly, moral corruption. So it seems to have been in the condition contemplated by this psalm (see vers. 2, 4). And none can read the records of history, whether in the Bible or in other books, but may trace this cause, sin, ever at its deadly work. If a nation, a Church, a city has fallen, we have not far to seek for what has brought it about. The philosophy of history is the tracing out the contrasted effects of righteousness and wrong. And in the dissolution told of here, the solvent that brought it about was certainly sin. And so is it also in the like conditions that are found elsewhere. 4. *But wherever found, they are very sad.* The groaning and travail of the whole creation, which were so audible and distressing to St. Paul, are the result of such conditions, and the sorrow would have been greater than he could have borne had he not been "saved by hope"—the hope suggested by the latter half of our text, of help being laid on One that is mighty. For—

II. **SUCH HELP IS FORTHCOMING.** "I bear up the pillars of it." The earth is pictured as some vast temple supported on pillars, but which are on the point of giving way, and would were they not upheld by a mighty support. The meaning is plain—that there is One who holds back the ruin which is everywhere threatening, who will interpose and prevent it. Who is this Mighty One? It may be some monarch, statesman, prophet. God has raised up such—like Moses, David, our own Alfred the Great; like Nehemiah, like William the Silent, and many more. The saying, "I bear up," etc., is not arrogance, but the simple statement of the duty God has assigned him. The faith in God, and the courage which characterize such men, are evident in this psalm. But in the last resort it is God who is the real Up-bearer. It is he who inspires and qualifies his servants.

III. **SUCH HELP, UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, IS WAITING FOR US.** Seek it.—S. O.

Ver. 5.—*The uplifted horn and the stiff neck.* These are two formidable enemies of God and the soul. They are generally found together, as in nature, so in the soul. They help one another in doing evil. They are metaphors derived from the tossing horn and the sturdy neck of the fierce wild bull found in the forests of Palestine. They represent severally the haughty spirit,—that is the uplifted horn; and the stubborn will,—that is the stiff neck. Let us speak of—

I. **THEIR ORIGINS.** 1. *The haughty spirit.* Many are its roots. The evil heart, seeing the wicked prosper, worldly success, God's delay of judgment, ill example, and often the possession of a naturally strong will to which other men, as is usual, yield. 2. *The stubborn will.* This partly natural, partly acquired, and ever fostered by the haughty spirit. Pride cherishes it, and encourages it always.

II. **THEIR EVIL WORK.** God's Spirit, his Word, his ministers, his providence, Christ's love, plead, threaten, and warn in vain, and the man dies in his sins.

III. **THEIR DESTRUCTION.** This wrought by: 1. *The final awful judgment of God.* 2. *His providence.* 3. *His Spirit's power.* They come in reverse order. But they are effectual, one or other of them. Which shall be so with us?—S. C.

Ver. 8.—*The Lord's cup for us.* Many will say that the cup told of in this verse is the Lord's cup of wrath, as in Ps. xi. 6; Isa. li. 17—23, and frequently elsewhere. And if it were here said that the *whole* cup told of in our text was to be drunk by the wicked, there could be no doubt as to what cup was meant. But it is only "the dregs" thereof that is said to be their portion, not the rich foaming draught that fills the rest of the cup. No doubt there is the cup of God's wrath, but there is also the cup

of salvation, and for his people "the Lord" himself "is the portion of their cup." And as in the previous verse the diverse dealings of God with men are told of, putting down one and setting up another, so here also we have the main contents of the cup, which are rich and bright and good, declared, and the miserable dregs which the wicked shall drink and drain out to the last. There is the better part for the good, the evil part for the wicked. We therefore take the "cup" here told of, as setting forth human life, our earthly existence allotted to us by the Lord. And thus we learn—

I. THAT OUR LIFE IS GIVEN TO US OF THE LORD. It is a cup, a portion, an assigned lot, intended and ordered for us. "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" So said our blessed Saviour of the life allotted to him. Life for us all is in the hand of God, and he gives it to each one as he sees fit. This is a very blessed truth. For we know we have no choice over the main elements of our life; when, where, with what endowments, many or few, or of what parentage we shall be born,—all this we have no control over. But it is good to know that not chance, still less ill will, but the Lord, has assigned to each of us the life we have to live, and he, like the master of the feast, deals out to each his cup (cf. Ps. c., "It is he that hath made us," etc.). Therefore we may be sure that he means it to be for our good; for—

II. HE PURPOSES THAT IT SHOULD BE BRIGHT AND JOYOUS. This, though apparently so contrary to what life is to many, is, nevertheless, what the metaphor employed here means. It tells of the wine which was meant to "make glad the heart of man;" the wine which was the symbol, not of vile debauchery, as it too often is in this country, but of gladness, mirth, joy. And the wine spoken of is of the choicest sort—sparkling, foaming, bright, not some common sour beverage, such as the "vinegar" which one of the soldiers at the cross gave to our Lord to drink when he cried, "I thirst." But the cup which the Lord gives us, as many of his children know, the life which he assigns us, is one that he would have to be rich and bright and glad. Not rich it may be—it rarely is—with this world's wealth, but rich with those "unsearchable riches," with that "heavenly gift," which is the perpetual gladness of the soul. Do we all of us know this? We ought to. The fault is our own if we do not. Our Lord would have us all live—and we may—bright and blessed and beautiful lives. We thirst for joy, and God gives us, in the gift of life, a cup full of it. But, as in the happiest of homes, the child to be happy must be obedient, so is it with ourselves towards God.

III. NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS MUCH OF DANGER IN IT. "It is full of mixture" (cf. Prov. ix. 2). As was the wine mingled with myrrh, intended to stupefy the senses, which was given to our Lord on his way to Calvary. This mixture increased the intoxicating power of the wine, or acted as a narcotic to deaden the senses. And in the cup of life there is much to intoxicate, to excite with pride and passion, and to unduly lift up the foolish heart. See Jeshurun, Nebuchadnezzar, the power of wealth, the pride of life, the effects of power, etc. Oh, how many souls have been ruined thus! And there is much to deaden or dull all holy sensibility. Yes, "full of mixture" is this cup of life.

IV. THE WICKED DRINK THE DREGS. They drink so deeply, the world is everything to them, they care for nothing else, and they find that life has its dregs, and they have to drink them. Evil conscience, fear of judgment, disappointment, the future dark, death without hope,—these are some of the dregs. Oh for grace that we may use the world, and not abuse it!—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*A pious ruler's purposes and confidences.* The division of the Book of Psalms into five books, and the clear recognition of the historical relations of many of the psalms, have given fresh interest to the study of this book of the Bible. It was usual to seek only for historical associations of the Psalms in the life of David. We now know that many of the later psalms stand related to the succeeding reigns, to the time of the Captivity, and to the renewed national life, on the return from Babylon. The Psalms have wider associations than the records of the experience of any one life. They reflect God's ways with his people in all the ages, and the ways of God's people with him. This psalm is often passed over as not being a very striking one, or having in it any very memorable or suggestive sentences. But it gains new interest when we connect it with Hezekiah, and find illustrations for it in the great strain-time of his reign, when Sennacherib put the holy city in peril, and there was a strange and sad

strife of parties within the city, making Hezekiah's position an extremely difficult one. Some pleaded hard for human alliances as defence against the Assyrians; Hezekiah held fast his dependence on God, the God of his fathers, the God of the nation. Disorganization within paralyzed his pious attempts; and the party of Shebna was plotting to secure an alliance with Egypt. The psalm is the expression of steadfast purpose and pious hope in a time of inward trouble. Its refrain is, "God reigneth, God is Judge, God is near. All things will be well, for God is with us." See what such a cherished conviction can do for a man.

I. IT GIVES HIM A QUIET CONFIDENCE. He can even give thanks, because his trust makes him feel so restful and happy (see Hab. iii. 17, 18).

II. IT HELPS HIM TO STAND FAST TO THE RIGHT, uninfluenced by the mere party contentions of the time. Man's right is variable in each generation; God's right is the same throughout all generations. The man whose strength and hope are in God can "judge uprightly."

III. IT KEEPS HIM STEADFAST IN EVIL TIMES. "I bear up the pillars." Hezekiah guided the state wisely through that time of commotion and peril. When everything seemed shifting and uncertain, he stood firm to first principles, primary truths, and God. Time always comes round to those who are strong, and stand firm to truth and righteousness.

IV. IT FREES HIM FROM ALL FEAR OF THE WILFUL. He knows that "God is Promoter." The evil man may push and strive: "God putteth down one, and setteth up another."

V. IT ASSURES HIM OF FINAL AND IRREVERSIBLE JUDGMENT. God must be *against* the wicked. God must be *for* the righteous. And it will be seen at last that *he is*.
—R. T.

Ver. 1.—*The Divine Name and Names.* "For that thy Name is near, thy wondrous works declare." Every god worshipped by a people has his own distinctive name among the people. But this is peculiarly true of the nation of Israel. The Divine Name, *Jehovah*, was given as the seal of the special covenant made with the nation. So the name *Jehovah* stands ever for God, God's presence, God's relations. But we can never be wholly satisfied with any one name for God. Besides it, we must have names of our own for him, which find expression for our sense of his gracious dealings with us, and relations to us. Two points are suggested: 1. God has a Name. 2. God has many Names.

I. GOD HAS A NAME. This helps us to realize that he is a Person, not a mere force or influence. The general name for God is *El*. The specific name for God, as God of Israel, is *Jehovah* (see occasion of definitely fixing the name, Exod. iii. 14). Note that it is the assertion of absolute and independent existence. It works out suggestively in three directions. It asserts (1) God's *unity*; (2) God's *spirituality*; (3) God's *holiness*. This threefold conception of God lies at the basis of the Mosaic system, and is, therefore, properly gathered up into his Name. But it is striking and impressive to note, that God was not satisfied with giving his people a name which only dealt with his abstract nature. He added a name which would gather up his *relations* with his people, and called himself, "The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." God's Name is said to be "near," when men are specially impressed with his wonderful workings. Past dealings and present dealings bring home to men's hearts the power and justice and grace which are summed up and expressed in his Name (Deut. iv. 7; Isa. xxx. 27). A remarkable deliverance, such as that from Sennacherib, was poetically spoken of as a "coming near of the Divine Name."

II. GOD HAS MANY NAMES. In families there are often pet names as well as the fixed names. Those pet names express individual feeling. So each person who gains an individual apprehension of God wants to put his special apprehension into a name. Indicate the variety of names: "God of heaven," "King," "Father," etc.; and poetic figures like "my Rock," "Refuge," "Horn," etc. Impress the point that no man really knows God until he finds he can put his own special meaning into the term he uses for him. Each one of us, reading the story of God's wondrous works for us and gracious dealings with us, ought to be able to put our impressions into a name of *our own*.
—R. T.

Ver. 1.—*Reasonings from the Divine activity.* “Thy wondrous works declare.” The thought of the restless activity of God is made by the psalmists, frequently, their ground of confidence. “He that keepeth thee will not slumber; behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep;” “Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders and the judgments of his mouth.” As first introduced to us in the Word, God comes forth into activity as the Creator of the earth; busy for six continuous Divine periods in framing the world of material things to be the trial-scene for man, and setting man in his sphere. And all the ages of human history have revealed God working in man’s spheres, providing, correcting, guiding, restoring, delivering; man’s model of unresting activity.

I. THE DIVINE ACTIVITY IMPRESSES ON US THE DIVINE NOBILITY. Contrast the unexpressive, passive faces of idol-gods. There is no dignity in listlessness, no honour in doing nothing. He is miserable indeed who has nothing to do; but he is a thousandfold more miserable who wants to do nothing. Among men the *workers* are the true nobility. And God is exalted to our thought when the Lord Jesus says of him, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.”

II. THE DIVINE ACTIVITY CONVINCES US OF THE DIVINE INTEREST. Thinking of God’s wondrous works, the psalmist feels how *near* God is to him and to his people—near in love and power, near in succour and blessing. How much more impressive this becomes if we apply it to immediate signs of Divine activity in the sudden overthrow of Sennacherib (2 Kings xix. 35)! Hezekiah could confidently rest in the assurance that God was actively working for him, and the rest of his anxieties would surely be mastered, as this one had been. So we can in a general way assure our hearts by reading of what God has done for our fathers; but the impression of Divine interest comes home to us only when we have been the objects of some gracious deliverance and guidance; then we know God is working *for us*.

III. THE DIVINE ACTIVITY ASSURES US OF THE DIVINE EFFICIENCY. We can trace the way in which that activity has wrought through long ages; and we can see what it has accomplished. It is not only that “with God all things are possible;” it is that all things are wise, right, good. *He can*—that is true. “He doeth all things well”—that is even more true; and it is a more precious truth. The conviction that God is working, and that God is near, calls for the *thanks* which would fittingly express our trust in him.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*God’s set time for judgment.* It is not certain whether vers. 2 and 3 are to be taken as an utterance of the psalmist for himself, or whether God is here introduced as speaking. Dean Perowne thinks, “God is abruptly introduced as the speaker. The oracle is thus given as from the mouth of God himself, to those who may be in doubt or perplexity because their lot is cast in troublous times.” But other writers think that Hezekiah is appealing to God, and assuring him that, even amidst the civil commotions and party struggles creating strong feelings, he will hold fast his integrity as chief magistrate, and judge fairly, uprightly, between man and man. “Receiving the congregation” is thus a poetical figure for the king’s daily magistracy. The Revised Version renders, “When I shall find the set time, I will judge uprightly,” and this favours the view that God is the speaker. “Judgment” here probably stands for “active intervention.” God often seems to delay his help; and such delay is a strain on faith and feeling. He never does really delay, because his time is *set* in infinite wisdom. Illustrate by the waiting at the shores of the Red Sea, for God’s *set time* to make the pathway through. See also Hezekiah’s waiting for God’s *set time* before his deliverance from the Assyrians. A “set time” implies—

I. THOUGHT BEFOREHAND. God knew all Hezekiah’s anxieties long before he seemed to intervene. He was interested. He watched. God was caring when he did not seem to care. How much better it is that God should observe all circumstances, and decide for the wisest moment in which to act for us! We may wish him to act at once; but in that case he could only alter our circumstances. By thoughtfully deciding on a “set time,” the “best time,” God is able to *bless us*, to carry on his sanctifying work *in us*. A set time implies—

II. THE SELECTION OF THE BEST TIME. But what is a best time can never be judged from any one point of view. God’s best is the best all round; the best for

everybody; and the best in every sense. In connection with the psalm, God's set time had to be best for Assyria, best for Sennacherib, best for Israel, best for Hezekiah, best for Shebna and his party, and best for us who have to learn from the old-world story. We can so seldom make a fair judgment concerning God's "set times" for us, because we cannot view them *all round*, and therefore we easily misunderstand them as seen from some point of self-interest. A "set time" implies—

III. EFFECTIVE ACTION WHEN THE TIME HAS COME. Illustrate by the attack of Wolseley on Tel-el-Kebir. A set time was fixed, so everything was prepared and adjusted, and the stroke was vigorously delivered. It is well for us to wait God's time, because his time is a "set time."—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The self-lifted horn*. Perhaps the most suggestive explanation of this figure is that given by Mr. Munro, in his 'Summer Rambles in Syria.' He is writing concerning the females in a Maronite village of Mount Lebanon. "The most remarkable peculiarities of their dress are the immense silver ear-rings hanging forward upon the neck, and the *tantoura*, or 'horn,' which supports the veil. This latter ornament varies in form, material, and position, according to the dignity, taste, and circumstances of the wearer. Horns are of gold, silver-gilt, and silver, and sometimes of wood. The former are either plain or figured in low relief, and occasionally set with jewels; but the length and position of them is that upon which the traveller looks with the greatest interest, as illustrating and explaining a familiar expression of Scripture. The young, the rich, and the vain wear the *tantoura* of great length, standing straight up from the top of the forehead; whereas the humble, the poor, and the aged place it upon the side of the head, much shorter, and spreading at the end like a trumpet. I do not mean to say that these distinctions are universal, but I was told that they are very general, and thus the 'exalted horn' still remains a mark of power and confidence, as it was in the days of Israel's glory." The appeal of the text is to those who unduly exalt themselves, as party-leaders in times of civil commotion are in constant danger of doing. They "think of themselves above that they ought to think." This is clearly indicated in the marginal alternative of the Revised Version, "Speak not insolently with a haughty neck" (see Hannah's song, 1 Sam. ii. 3).

I. THE SELF-IMPORTANT MAN DOES NOT WORTHILY ESTIMATE HIMSELF. The most difficult work for any man to do is honestly to criticize himself. Men shrink from that work. Men incapacitate themselves for it. Men spoil their own vision, and when they look in on themselves only find what they wished to find. "To thine own self be true," even if the truth humbles you in the dust. Illustrate from the case of Shebna.

II. THE SELF-IMPORTANT MAN TAKES NO ACCOUNT OF GOD'S ESTIMATE OF HIM. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked." A man can never delude God with any braggings, or mere appearances. He searcheth the heart and trieth the reins (see Isa. ii. 10—17). See the confession of a psalmist, "My goodness extendeth not to thee." Only the humble man can dare to consider the Divine searchings. Of the proud man it must be said, "God is not in all his thoughts." He would be glad if there were no God.

III. THE SELF-IMPORTANT MAN DELUDES HIMSELF CONCERNING OTHER PEOPLE'S ESTIMATE OF HIM. Because he will only give heed to the flatterers. He blinds himself to the mistrust and fear all prudent and good men show in relation to him.—R. T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Divine promotions through Divine providences*. There seems to be a recalling of the sentiments expressed in Hannah's song (see 1 Sam. ii. 6—8). Keeping to the relations of the psalm with Hezekiah's trouble, we may understand him as expressing his confidence that the national deliverance would not come by securing any national alliances, either with Egypt, the power of the south, or with the kingdoms of the mountain districts round Palestine. Hezekiah's assurance was that Divine providence would work out the Divine purpose. He believed God's purpose was set on his deliverance, therefore he encouraged himself to watch and wait for the working of God's providence. It is remarkable that no reference is made to the north. This *Delitzsch* explains: "It is a northern power which arrogantly, even to blasphemy, threatens the small Israelitish nation with destruction, and against which it looks for help neither from the east nor west, nor from the reed-staff of Egypt, but from Jahve alone." The word "promotion" should be rendered "lifting up," and seems to refer to the depression

and distress of the people at this time of invasion. The point is this—He who trusts in *God* can wait for *God's* workings. Illustrate three ways of trusting God, and find out which of the ways alone can honour him.

I. TRUSTING GOD, AND DOING NOTHING. To this pious people are often tempted. It is a very specious kind of self-delusion. It seems to be a special way of honouring God, to let him do it all. Sometimes this mistake is associated with the Divine promise to give right words when God's servants have to stand before kings. But a promise specially made for sudden experience must not be forced to apply to ordinary, everyday, and anticipated duty.

II. TRUSTING GOD, AND SEEKING HELP FROM FELLOW-MAN. This is an unconscious hypocrisy. The trusting God becomes the unreality, and the reliance on man becomes the practical reality. The condition is indicated in those who "feared the Lord, and served other gods." It was the special sin of a section of the people in Hezekiah's time. They said, "Trusting God is all very well, but we had better be doing something for the national deliverance and defence." It is our peril still. We may really be leaning on man, and think we are leaning on *God*.

III. TRUSTING GOD, AND DOING THE DUTY OF THE HOUR. This is acceptable to God. Simply doing present duty is leaving God's providence to work out God's "upliftings." The duty of the hour is a step in God's providence; each duty is a step; and on them we shall certainly rise to the realization of God's gracious purposes concerning those who *thus* show their trust.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The dregs for the wicked.* Burder has an interesting note on this verse. "The punishments which Jehovah inflicts upon the wicked are compared to a cupful of fermenting wine, mixed with intoxicating herbs, of which all those to whom it is given must drink the dregs, or sediment. The same image is found, not only frequently in other places of the Old Testament, but also very often in the Arabian poets. Thus Taabbata Scharran, in a passage of an Arabic Anthology, by Albert Schultens: 'To those of the tribe of Hodail, we gave the cup of death, whose dregs were confusion, shame, and reproach.' Another poet says, 'A cup such as they gave us, we gave to them.' When Calif Almansor had his valiant though dreaded general, Abre-Moslem, murdered, he repeated the following verse, in which he addressed the corpse: 'A cup such as he gave, gave I to him, bitterer to the taste than wormwood.' The point to which attention is directed is that *all* the contents of the cup God offers to his people have more or less *bitterness* in them. But the good drink the wine, which is mostly sweet, though in some degree bitter; the wicked drink the dregs, which are almost all bitter, and are intensely bitter. And the added bitterness is that they will be obliged to drink these dregs, whether they wish it or not. Probably reference may be to the dreadful fate of Sennacherib's army, and the humiliation of the general himself; but possibly reference is also intended to the *anti-Jehovah* party in Israel, who caused so much trouble by their mischievous schemings. A time of bitterest humiliation was before *them*, when the nation was so gloriously delivered by God.

I. THE MIXED CUP OF A HUMAN LOT. Wine and bitter herbs were in this cup. But the taste of the herbs was only added to the wine, giving it really a tonic value. So the good man's earthly lot is a mixed one. Much that is pleasant; something afflicting, something humbling; but these things only with tonic power. Good men are bettered by the influence on them of the bitter flavour in God's cup.

II. THE DREGS IN THE CUP OF A HUMAN LOT. All the strength of the bitter herbs is kept in the dregs. Nobody would drink them if they were not obliged. The wicked man has to drink them. They represent the "after-time" of all wilful, untrustful souls. There is a judgment of wrath meted out to sinners, and given them to endure to the end. Compare St. Paul's figure, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*The God of Jacob.* It is a singular and suggestive thing that God is not thought of by Hezekiah here as the God of Abraham, but as the God of Jacob. The revelations God makes to men are, partly, general to all men, suitable to man as man; and, partly, special to individuals, precisely adapted to the circumstances and necessities of particular persons. We may therefore profitably study what God was to

Abraham, what to Isaac, what to Jacob. And if we can see these three cases to be, in a comprehensive sense, typical cases, we shall have a general sense of God's relations with men when we call him "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." But the life of Abraham presented no particular likeness to the circumstances of Hezekiah. To Abraham God was the gracious Guide, the near Friend. To Jacob's troubled, anxious life the king turned, and found similar experiences to his own. God's ways with Jacob were those of the Redeemer and Deliverer. This probably was more especially in the mind of Hezekiah. Jacob was a man grievously wronged—wronged by Laban, and fearing wrong at the hands of Esau. And God had stood by the wronged man, saw him through, and saw him righted. That came as a Divine comforting to Hezekiah. He too was wronged; he too was misunderstood; he too was in peril. But the God of Jacob was his God. The "God of Jacob" is God the *Judge*. This may be shown to include three things.

I. GOD IS THE ESTIMATOR OF CHARACTER. It is plain that a man's character can never be safely estimated by a consideration of his *circumstances*. Job's could not. Jacob's could not. David's could not. Try to read Hezekiah's character in those times of strain and stress. Ask Shebna's party their opinion of the king. It is full of comforting to us that we can be sure God is not deceived by circumstances, but knows us altogether. We may be absolutely content with the Divine appraisement. Read Jacob's life in *man's* light, then try to read it in *God's* light.

II. GOD IS THE VINDICATOR OF THE GOOD. This is absolutely and entirely true of every good man, in what is called the "long run." As in Jacob's case, Job's case, and David's case, the vindication may be delayed for purposes of Divine training and sanctifying. God never has finally left his faithful servants unvindicated. His witness rested on Hezekiah: the Divine deliverance from Sennacherib proved a Divine witness on behalf of the faithful king.

III. GOD IS THE PUNISHER OF THE WICKED. And the severest punishment to them is the humbling failure of their seemingly well-devised schemes.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*Horns cut off*. "All the horns of the wicked also will I cut off." A lifted horn well represents the insolent boasting of Rabshakeh, the Assyrian officer (see Isa. xxxvi.). The Divine answer was the *cutting off* of Rabshakeh's uplifted horn. God dealt in this way with proud Rabshakeh: "Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land" (Isa. xxxvii. 7). Or, if Sennacherib be chiefly in mind, we may see that his vain confidences of capturing Jerusalem were destroyed, his "purposes were broken off," his horn was brought low. "So Sennacherib returned," a humiliated and disgraced man; "and it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword" (Isa. xxxvii. 37, 38). Some think that Antiochus Epiphanes is in the mind of the psalmist; and, certainly, further illustration may be taken from his case (Dan. viii. 9). The confidence Hezekiah has in God's deliverance enables him to declare that he shall humble the pride of his foes. And God's intervention would confirm the king in his regular work of humbling the wicked and exalting the righteous, in the exercise of his authority.

I. GOD'S HUMBLING OF THE WICKED. The wicked here are more especially those who scorn his claims and insult his majesty, as did the Assyrian general, saying, "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the King of Assyria." God is "jealous" of the honour of his Name. "The lofty looks of man must be bowed down, and the Lord alone exalted." Show what state of mind and heart is indicated by the offering of such insult to Jehovah. That state of mind and heart is ruin to any man.

II. GOD'S HUMBLING, ENCOURAGING GOD'S PEOPLE TO HUMBLE THE WICKED. Hezekiah will do it, in his official position, because God does it. Apply to all positions of authority. But there is no more difficult duty committed to us than this humbling the proud. It has to be done. It is both right and kind to do it. But we may *harden*, not *humble*. We may act in passion rather than in the calmness of holy love. We should humble because God does. But we must only humble as God does; wounding in the hope of healing.—R. T.

Vers. 1—10.—*The righteous judgment of God.* This psalm celebrates in prophetic strain the righteous judgment of God. The voice of God himself declares from heaven his righteousness; that he is not, as human impertinence has been wont to think, regardless of wrong and suffering, but only waits for the moment which to his infinite wisdom seems best.

I. GOD'S RIGHTEOUS GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD. 1. *God's wonderful work in history attests it.* (Ver. 1.) "What nation is there that hath God so near unto them?" (Deut. iv. 7). He is not separated by distance from the world. His Name, his nature, is near to us. 2. *God's times of judgment are wisely and divinely chosen.* (Ver. 2, "When the set time is come, I, even I, will judge uprightly.") He executes his sentence not according to man's impatient expectations, but at the time which he himself has chosen. 3. *When the moral order of the world seems near dissolution, God's power is the security for its continuance.* (Ver. 3.) The natural and the moral framework of the world are here identified. He sustains the world by the pillars which he has set up. 4. *God is the real Source of every righteous revolution in the world.* (Vers. 6, 7.) "Glory and power come not from any earthly source, though a man should seek it in every quarter of the globe, but only from God, who lifteth up and casteth down according to his own righteous sentence."

II. THE ADMONITION WHICH THESE TRUTHS ADMINISTER TO THE WICKED. (Vers. 4, 5.) 1. *It is madness to resist God.* (Ver. 4.) 2. *No arrogant self-exaltation will avail against God's judgments.* (Vers. 5, 8.) The poet speaks here as a prophet. That which God threatens he accomplishes by the hands of his servants. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished."—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXVI.

THE present psalm consists of three stanzas—the first of three verses, terminated by the pause-mark, "Selah;" the second of six verses, ended similarly, and the third (like the first) of three verses. It is a psalm of thanksgiving for some great and signal mercy, which has delivered Jerusalem, and at the same time benefited "all the afflicted of the earth" (ver. 9). All the earth is therefore called upon to join with Israel in praising God, and making him an offering (vers. 10—12). Critics of all schools (Hengstenberg, Canon Cook, Professor Alexander, Dr. Kay, Four Friends, etc.) agree in regarding the deliverance as that from Sennacherib. We must, therefore, understand the "Asaph" of the title as designating, not the individual, but the division of the Levites named after him.

Ver. 1.—In Judah is God known (comp. Ps. ix. 16; xlviii. 3). By "known" is meant "freshly made known," "revealed," as it were, "anew" by the recent wonderful deliverance. His Name is great in Israel; i.e. greatly honoured and regarded, on account of what has happened.

Ver. 2.—In Salem; i.e. Jerusalem. "Salem" was probably a shortened form of the full and complete name, like "Peor" for

"Baalpeor," "Maachah" for "Aram-Maachah," "El Kuds" for "Beit-el-Kuds," and the like. (So Professor Cheyne.) "Salem" is the peaceful place, the place where God's presence breathed peace and tranquillity. It is only used here and in Gen. xiv. 11. Is his tabernacle; literally, his tent (comp. Ps. xv. 1; xxvii. 5, 6; lxi. 4). The temple is meant, as even Professor Cheyne sees. It took the place of the original "tabernacle," and was modelled upon it. And his dwelling-place in Zion; or, "his lair" (comp. Ps. civ. 22).

Ver. 3.—There brake he the arrows of the bow. The expression "there" seems certainly to show that the deliverance celebrated took place at, or very near to, Jerusalem. This would sufficiently suit the destruction of Sennacherib's army, which certainly occurred in the neighbourhood, though not very close to the city (see 2 Kings xix. 32, 38). The word translated "arrows" (קִשְׁרֵי) means properly "lightnings" (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 48), and expresses the swift flight of the arrow, not actual "fiery darts." The shield, and the sword, and the battle; rather, the war-equipment (Kay, Cheyne).

Ver. 4.—Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey. The psalmist, in this, the main portion of his psalm, directly addresses God. "Thou, O God," he says, "art glorious," or "terrible" (comp. ver. 7, where the same word is used), "and excellent, more than the mountains of prey," or perhaps "from the mountains of

spoil;" i.e. from Jerusalem, where the spoils of the Assyrians are laid up, and where thou sittest and rulest. (So Professor Cheyne and Canon Cook.)

Ver. 5.—**The stout-hearted are spoiled.** A "vivid description of the catastrophe" now follows. The "stout-hearted," the aggressors, the great dominant race, that has spoiled all the nations of the earth, and fears no one (comp. Isa. x. 12—14, "The stout heart of the King of Assyria"), is itself spoiled in turn. **They have slept their sleep.** They have slept, and, as they slept (2 Kings xix. 35), they found it indeed a sleep, even the sleep of death. **And none of the men of might have found their hands.** The mighty men, suddenly assaulted by the grim destroyer, Death, can make no resistance; they are paralyzed; they cannot even move a hand.

Ver. 6.—**At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob.** The catastrophe has been God's doing; man has had no part in it (comp. 2 Kings xix. 28, 35). Both the chariot and the horse are cast into a dead sleep. Metonymy for the charioteers and the horsemen (comp. Isa. xliii. 17). These were the two chief arms of the military service with the Assyrians.

Ver. 7.—**Thou, even thou, art to be feared.** God is to be feared as well as loved. Only "perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John iv. 18), and "perfect love" is not for mortals. **And who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?** literally, *from the time of thine anger* (comp. Exod. v. 23; Josh. xiv. 10).

Ver. 8.—**Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven.** By the destruction of Sennacherib's host, God spoke, as it were, with a voice of thunder, to the whole earth. He delivered a "judgment," or a "sentence" (Revised Version), which could not be ignored. **The earth feared, and was still.** All the world, i.e. all the Oriental world, feared. The attention of the nations of Western Asia generally was attracted (2 Chron. xxxii. 23), and their minds were affected with a wholesome fear of Jehovah. The result was that they remained at rest and gave Israel rest.

Ver. 9.—**When God arose to judgment** (see the preceding verses). God's "rising" is an anthropomorphism, drawn from the fact that men "rise up" when they proceed

to take vengeance (comp. Ps. iii. 7; vii. 6; xlv. 26; lxviii. 1, etc.). **To save all the meek of the earth.** God's vengeance on the wicked are, in great measure, for the relief of the righteous. Sennacherib's discomfiture relieved "the meek of the earth," i.e. not only Israel, but many other down-trodden and oppressed nations. The psalmist's sympathies are with all the victims of Assyrian ambition.

Ver. 10.—**Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee.** The sentiment is general, but no doubt there is a special reference to the recent deliverance. The "wrath of man," i.e. man's wicked fury and hostility of God and his people, shall give occasion for great deeds on God's part—deeds which will bring him praise and honour. **The remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.** Either, "the unexpended fury of thine enemies, that which they have not vented, thou wilt hold in check, and prevent from doing mischief;" or else, "with thine own unexpended wrath wilt thou gird thyself against the wicked, as with a weapon." (So Kay, Cheyne, and the Revised Version.)

Ver. 11.—**Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God.** The people of Israel are now addressed. Under the circumstances, they are sure to have made vows to God in the time of their great trouble, before the deliverance came. Now, when the deliverance has come, let them pay these vows. **Let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared; literally, unto the Terrible One.** By "all that are round about him" the psalmist seems to mean, not Israel only, but those other oppressed ones who had shared the benefit of the deliverance (comp. ver. 9). That presents were brought by some of these is recorded by the writer of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxii. 23).

Ver. 12.—**He shall cut off the spirit of princes.** "The spirit" seems here to mean "the life." God cuts off princes in their prime as a gardener cuts off bunches of grapes (comp. Isa. xviii. 5). He is terrible to the kings of the earth. Not "princes" only—נְדִיבִים—but "kings"—מְלָכִים—also are cut off in their prime when God pleases. Sennacherib's untimely death (2 Kings xix. 37) followed not many years after the destruction of his host, in which there must have been many "princes."

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 10.—*The will of man and the will of God.* "The wrath of man shall praise thee." Two great streams of spiritual force meet our view, alike in the Bible and in human life and history, crossing one another every instant, as waves of light and waves of sound, in closest vital relation, yet each holding its course unhindered—the *will of man and the will of God*. When man was created, not in the image of lower creatures

but "in the image of God," he was endowed with this glorious yet perilous heritage—will and conscience. *Will*—power to weigh reasons, balance motives, pursue a fixed purpose, choose the good or the evil, the right or the wrong; and *conscience*—power to pass judgment on himself, approving or condemning his own conduct. Yet *God's will* must needs be sovereign, supreme; even as God's conscience (if the phrase be lawful) must be supreme arbiter of right and wrong (Dan. iv. 35). Even *the wrath of man* shall praise him. That the obedience, love, piety, of men will praise God is natural and easy to understand; but that man's rebellion, disobedience, even angry and violent resistance to God's will, ends in bringing praise to God,—this is indeed the deepest mystery, both of the Bible and of human life. "The wrath of man"—human pride, enmity, ambition, revenge, lawless violence—*praises God*.

I. WHEN GOD MAKES IT THE INSTRUMENT OF HIS JUDGMENTS; either in chastening his people or in subduing his foes. If this word "*foes of God*" sounds to any harsh and contrary to Divine love, let it be understood that the Bible means by it the enemies of truth, of righteousness, and of love. The Book of Judges is full of examples (see ch. ii. 7, 12, 14, etc.). In later days, the just resentment of the ten tribes against Rehoboam was the means of executing God's sentence against Solomon, and rending the kingdom (2 Chron. x. 15, 16); the invasion by Shishak, the punishment on Rehoboam for forsaking God's Law, "and all Israel with him" (2 Chron. xii. 1, 2); the leading captive of Israel by the Assyrians, and Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, the punishment of centuries of idolatry, and the fulfilment of the warnings of a long series of prophets (2 Chron. xxxvi. 15—17); the overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus was the fulfilment of God's promise to restore his penitent people to their own land.

II. WHEN GOD BRINGS TO NOUGHT HUMAN PRIDE AND POWER, AND DELIVERS HIS PEOPLE. The destruction of Sennacherib's host, the overthrow of Pharaoh's power in the Red Sea, are leading and stupendous examples. "The remainder," etc. (Isa. xxxvii. 28, 29). The rendering adopted by the Revisers is according to the common use of the word (as girding on a sword, a girdle, etc.); but "upon thee" should be printed in italics,—there is nothing to answer to it in the Hebrew. And the much more intelligible and apt sense of the Authorized Version has the authority of one of the greatest of all the Jewish commentators.

III. WHEN THE VIOLENCE AND WICKEDNESS OF MEN, IN MOST UNBRIDLED EXCESSES, WORK OUT THE PURPOSES AND FULFIL THE PROMISES OF GOD. The supreme example is the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus (see John xi. 49—52; Acts ii. 23; iii. 17, 18).

IV. WHEN GOD SUBDUES THE HEART OF HIS ENEMIES, AND TURNS REBELS INTO LOYAL SUBJECTS AND FAITHFUL SERVANTS, persecutors into preachers, blasphemers into witnesses to his truth (see Acts ix. 13—16; 1 Tim. i. 12—17). Willingly or unwillingly, men's lives are weaving the web of God's providence, working the pattern of his purpose. The stormy current of human will cannot overflow its banks. In ways as yet unknown, unguessed by us, God will bring good out of evil. The song of eternity shall be, "He hath done all things well!"

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—12.—*The triumphs of God*. There can be little doubt that this psalm is one of several others whose main theme is God's deliverance of his people from Sennacherib, King of Assyria. Then, in Judah, God was known, and his Name was great in Israel. But we may fitly use the psalm as telling of those great and blessed spiritual deliverances which the soul of God's servants have often known and rejoiced in—these triumphs of God over a deadlier foe than ever any Assyrian king could be to Israel. Concerning these note—

I. WHERE THEY TAKE PLACE. (Cf. vers. 1, 2.) It is where God *dwells*. The soul that is the abiding-place of God witnesses and shares in the triumphs of God as none other can do. Fitful and partial religion leaves the soul more often vanquished than victor, and can never sing such a psalm as this.

II. THEIR NATURE. It is threefold. 1. *God destroys the weapons of the soul's great enemy*. The arrows of evil thought; the shield of unbelief, love of sin, indifference—all that which wards off those words of God which are sharp in the heart of the King's

enemies (Ps. xlv.); the sword of the soul-slaying sin; the battle, the combined array of all the forces of evil. 2. *Takes for himself the prey which the enemy had regarded as his own.* (Ver. 4.) All the spoil of Judah, which Assyria had reckoned to gather on the mountains where they were encamped, all that spoil, together with what they already had,—all was taken from them (cf. Luke xi. 22). So God takes from the evil one the possession of those human powers and faculties which he had usurped and claims, and keeps them as his own. 3. *Keeps the enemy in the place of death.* (Ver. 6.) It would be of little avail if our great spiritual foe were but for a time overcome, if after a little while he could come back with all his power. But our Lord came that he might give complete deliverance; and by the soul that continually trusts in him that deliverance is realized.

III. *How they are accomplished.* (Ver. 6, "At thy rebuke.") The moment we believe, our help comes. Not before. All our strivings and endeavours leave us pretty much where we were; but when abandoning ourselves to God, that he may save us, then his power is made known, the enemy is rebuked and slain. The life of faith is, through God's grace, the death of our foe.

IV. *For whom all this is done.* (Ver. 9, "The meek of the earth.") Judah and Jerusalem were emptied of all self-trust, all pride and boasting, and had become meek, knowing that in quietness and in confidence was their strength. And so with the soul that is delivered by God.

V. *The impression produced.* 1. *Holy fear.* (Ver. 7.) God's mercy and deliverance will never destroy, but ever deepen, holy fear. And there is no argument for God so effectual amongst men as the witnessing his real spiritual deliverances of his people. 2. *Disdain of the wrath of man.* What can it do against us, if God be for us? 3. *Exultant confession, adoration, and service, together with earnest endeavours to draw others unto God.*—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Great because known.* I. *Nothing is of more importance to men than the knowledge and right esteem of God.* 1. We see this in regard to *nations*. Such knowledge raises them from the degradation of sensuality and barbarity to purity and humanity. 2. So also in regard to *individuals*. Such knowledge ministers guidance for life, solace for the spirit, inspiration for righteousness. Thus important is it.

II. *Such knowledge is the special possession and privilege of the Church of God.* "In Judah is God known: his Name is great in Israel." Judah and Israel represent the Church of God, the company of believing, redeemed, God-fearing people, scattered throughout the world. Amongst them God is known by his Word, his people, his ordinances, his Spirit.

III. *Where he is thus known he is great amongst them.* Increase of knowledge of one another, familiarity with them, by no means always increases our esteem of them; but the more we know of God, the greater he becomes to us. See this in the Lord Jesus—the more his disciples knew of him the greater he became to them. For in the past, the present, the future, he is our All.—S. C.

Ver. 7.—*The fear of God.* Consider—

I. *The forms it assumes.* There is: 1. The fear of *terror*. The dismay of the vanquished enemies of God seems specially to be pointed at here (cf. Rev. vi. 16). 2. The fear of *dread*. The might and majesty of God awe the soul, as they well may. 3. The fear of *reverence*. The holy character of God, when seen, cannot but inspire this. 4. The fear of *love*. Such fear trembles and shrinks from causing pain to the object of its love. This is the sweet filial fear which is blessed indeed. It is but another form of the "love which casteth out fear." Some fear of God every soul must one day know: which shall it be for ourselves?

II. *The sources whence it springs.* 1. *The beholding of God's judgment on his foes.* 2. *The experiencing of God's mercy to ourselves.*

III. *The character it bears.* 1. *It will be the supreme motive of the soul.* No matter which form it assumes, it will be the supreme motive whilst it reigns. 2. *It will be exclusive.* "Thou, even thou"—as if shutting out all other fear.

IV. *The blessings it brings.* 1. *The Christian life cannot be begun without it.* 2. *Nor perpetuated; for life without it has no root.* 3. *Nor perfected.*—S. C.

Ver. 10.—“*The wrath of man.*” By this is meant man’s rage against God and against God’s people. Of this it is affirmed that—

I. IT PRAISES GOD. The Bible is full of illustrations of this. It is part of God’s universal purpose of overruling all evil for good. See this in the history of the Fall—it became the occasion of redemption. The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ—it draws all men unto him. Persecution of the Church caused its world-wide extension. The corruption of the Church led to the Reformation. See the hand of God in history continually compelling what is “meant in malice to be changed to blessing.”

II. BUT IS NOT, THEREFORE, TO BE HELD GUILTYLESS. (Cf. Rom. iii. 8, and St. Paul’s reply.) If evil were to be held guiltyless because overruled for good, then there could be no judgment of the world; all punishment of sin now would be wrong, and all wickedness would be justified.

III. BUT IS THE HEIGHT OF SINFUL FOLLY. What madness it is and has ever been found to be!

IV. THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE NOT TO BE TERRIFIED BY IT. (See Job i. 12; 1 Cor. x. 13; Ps. ii.) Let them praise God for the blessed alchemy of his grace, whereby he transmutes the wrath of man into his praise.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Ways of knowing God.* “In Judah is God known.” This is a fitting psalm to be sung after any great national victory, any Divine deliverance. It may be associated with the victory of Jehoshaphat, or with the discomfiture of Sennacherib (2 Chron. xx. 28; Isa. xxxvii. 36). If we associate it with Hezekiah’s times, it should be noticed that the triumph over Sennacherib was, in a very special sense, a Divine triumph, and so an extraordinary revelation of God, through which he ought to have been better known by his people. *Man* had nothing to do with that defeat of Assyria. God’s working in it man might study. One hundred and eighty-five thousand men are said to have been miraculously destroyed in one night, without the operation of any military agencies. Judah and Israel are mentioned together as thus coming to know God, because the two nations, which had been separated from the days of Rehoboam, were united again under Hezekiah. Here God is revealed, and so known and apprehended, by the *judgments* which he executes. But God’s judgments are always two-sided—they relate to those who suffer under them; and they relate to those who are delivered through them.

I. THEY KNOW GOD WHO SUFFER UNDER HIS JUDGMENTS. Illustrate from the Assyrians. It is quite clear that the Assyrian general, Rabshakeh, did not know Jehovah, or he never would have put him into comparison with the gods of the nations as he did (Isa. xxxvii. 10—13). The Assyrians had to be taught that Jehovah was God alone; and that lesson they could only learn through such a manifestation of Jehovah’s power as would declare him to stand alone. See the effect of Divine manifestation on Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. iii. 28, 29; iv. 37); Darius (Dan. vi. 26, 27). But God is known through his judgments even by his own people. Illustrative cases may be taken from the wilderness experiences, the times of Joshua, David, etc. And it is still true for the godly individual; he has sometimes to learn to know God fully by coming under Divine *judgments*. “Judgments” may, for the present purpose, be distinguished from “afflictions” or “chastisements,” as meaning “irremediable calamities,” such as this plague on the Assyrians. The point is an important one. The “irremediable” is more or less in every man’s life; and the “irremediable” is a help to the full knowledge of God.

II. THEY KNOW GOD WHO ARE DELIVERED THROUGH HIS JUDGMENTS. This leads us along more familiar and easy lines. Israel learned to know God through deliverances and redemptions. Those political and social difficulties of Hezekiah’s time, which had their true rootage in mistaken views of Jehovah’s relation to his people, were in part removed by the *knowledge* gained of God through *this* deliverance.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The localization of God.* “In Salem also is his covert, and his dwelling-place in Zion” (comp. Jer. xxv. 38, “He hath forsaken his covert as the lion”). The poetical figure is the likening of God to a lion—the “Lion of the tribe of Judah”—who leaves his covert in Salem, and his lair in Zion, to spoil the enemy. There is now evidence that the holy city was known as Salem long before the time of Joshua,

but the special Divine association with it dates from the time when David brought back the ark, and found for it a resting-place in the new tabernacle on Mount Zion. That ark was the symbol of abiding Divine presence. The poet can only liken the sudden and overwhelming destruction of the Assyrian army to the springing of a lion on his prey. Then it was easy to conceive of the holy place at Jerusalem as the den or covert where the lion abode, and out of which he sprang. In treating such poetical figures, we should remember that Easterns allowed themselves a freer poetical licence than we do; and we should treat their extravagant figures with great care and becoming reverence. First recall to mind that God is *everywhere present*. We must never prison the thought of God to any *time* or any *place*. "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?" (Isa. lxvi. 1). But, keeping that as our primary thought of God, we may realize helpful associations of God with places and persons.

I. GOD MAY BE THOUGHT OF AS THE GOD OF A NATION. "Elohim" for all the world, God was "Jehovah" for Israel—by virtue of special relations and revelations, the "God of Israel." So there is a proper sense in which God may be spoken of as the "God of England;" and we rightly realize the unique relations in which he stands to us. Impress that effective education of the rising race includes the teaching of this special relation of God to our nation.

II. GOD MAY BE THOUGHT OF AS THE GOD OF A BUILDING. In the wilderness we read of "God's tabernacle;" in the later history we read of God's "dwelling-place in Zion." So now we properly speak of God's house," and understand certain buildings to be consecrated to him. There he is pleased to manifest himself.

III. GOD MAY BE THOUGHT OF AS THE GOD OF A PERSON. God was, in a sense, in Moses, with Moses. God's Spirit dwelt "without measure" in Christ. Still God works through his ministers, making of them his earthly dwelling-place.

IV. GOD MAY BE THOUGHT OF AS THE GOD OF A SYMBOL. As in the Shechinah-cloud, and as in the Holy Sacrament. God is *everywhere*. God is *here*.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The returning Conqueror; or, God glorified in his triumph over evil.* The actual triumph over the Assyrian army is poetically presented in the sudden exclamation of ver. 3, "There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle." In ver. 4 God is regarded as returning to Zion with the spoils of the camp. The precise figure is difficult to trace. Some render, "Bright art thou and glorious from the mountains of spoil;" and understand the mountains to be referred to on which the hostile army had encamped. The Prayer-book Version has, "Thou art of more honour and might than the hills of the robbers." Others read, "Enlightened art thou, and glorious, coming down from the mountains of prey;" and this seems to give the most simple and suggestive explanation. Having the lion-figure still in mind, the psalmist sees the lion returning from his prey, with the pride of his triumph on him; and this suggests the glory of God the Conqueror and Deliverer. Compare the songs the women sang when Saul and David returned from the conquest of the Philistines; or Moses' song at the Red Sea; or Deborah's song at the defeat of Sisera; or the cry of Isaiah, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" Our joy in the returning Conqueror, our glory in his triumph for us, may be said to depend on three things.

I. THE GREATNESS OF THE DISTRESS FROM WHICH WE ARE DELIVERED. Illustrate from the hopeless condition of Hezekiah at this time. He had no force effective to combat Assyria; and internal conflict broke up and weakened the little force he had. It was a time of uttermost distress; the very independence, the very existence, of the nation was imperilled. Then contrast the state of things when the hostile army became dead men. Imagine the relief, and the joy of the relief. Such feeling is thus expressed elsewhere: "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing." Lead on to show what that deliverance must be which God wrought, in Christ Jesus, for those whose hopeless distress is described in Rom. iii. 10—19.

II. OUR SENSE OF THE POWER SHOWN IN OUR DELIVERANCE. The agency used for the destruction of the Assyrian army cannot be certainly known. But we feel this—that destruction was a unique and amazing display of Divine power. There had

been nothing like it before. God had lifted up a mighty hand, and stretched forth a strong arm. Show that, in Christ's dealings with the *sin-foe*, the same impression is made on us. See the doxologies in the Book of Revelation.

III. OUR APPREHENSION OF THE FULLNESS AND COMPLETENESS OF THE DELIVERANCE WROUGHT. Compare the results of God's intervention with the consequences of a mere victory on an ordinary battle-field; God wrought a *perfect* triumph. So Christ "leads captivity captive," and "saves to the uttermost."—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The power of the Lord's rebuke.* "At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both chariot and horse are cast into a deep sleep." Byron pictures the scene with great poetical force—

"And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

"And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail."

"God did but speak the word, as the God of Jacob that commands deliverances for Jacob, and, at his rebuke, the chariot and horse were both cast into a dead sleep. See the power and efficacy of God's rebukes." "It is impossible to mistake the allusion to the deeper sleep of death, falling on the sleeping Assyrian army, before the valiant men could 'find their hands,' in the half-waking grasp of weapons in the hour of danger."

I. GOD'S REBUKES ARE SOMETIMES WORDS. Illustrate by Moses' messages from God to Pharaoh. Or the case of the prophet who went to Bethel to rebuke Jeroboam. Or Nathan's rebuke of David. Or Elijah's rebuke of Ahab. What is it that specially calls for the Lord's rebuke? Wilfulness. Persistent forcing of a man's own way. And even more precisely, the daring of the man who forces his way when he knows it is contrary to the will of God, or when he means to put dishonour on God. This is the case before us now. Sennacherib was forcing his own way, with designed intention of insulting and humiliating the God of Israel. And still the Divine rebuke is called forth when we fall into the committal of "presumptuous sins."

II. GOD'S REBUKES ARE SOMETIMES DEEDS. But they are voiceful deeds. See here, the rebuke was a night-blast that slew the tens of thousands, and drove Sennacherib back to his land, a defeated and humiliated man. God's rebuke to hardened Pharaoh was the flower of his army drowned in the Red Sea. God's rebuke to over-confident David was three days' plague in the land. God's rebuke to Herod, who accepted the homage due alone to God, was a terrible disease, that carried him off in agony and disgrace. Read life aright, and we may find God's rebuke in disappointments that we have known, and disasters we have suffered. Blessed are they who (1) *receive*, who (2) *heed*, and who (3) *respond to*, their Lord's rebuke!—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*The Divine anger.* "Who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?" God can only be apprehended through human figures with which we are familiar. So we find in the Divine revelations of Holy Scripture anthropomorphic figures for God, taken from man's limbs and bodily organs; and anthropopathic figures taken from man's feelings, emotions, and passions. But in applying such figures to God, we must carefully eliminate the *sin-element* which belongs to all such things when they concern man. As man is made in the image of God, from man we may learn of God. But as man has marred the image by his wilfulness and sin, we must take care how we apply the likeness which we now think we see. In applying such terms as "anger" to God, it is important to observe the distinction between the anger of an official and the anger of a private person. The anger of an official—a king, or a judge—should have no *feeling* in it; it should be the proper response to some public wrong. The anger of an individual may have *feeling* in it, and be a sign of hatred. In this psalm God is thought of as an official. He is the great King, and so his "anger" is really indignation against the foe that imperils the country, and against the self-willed people who play into the hands of the national

enemy. There is, then, a sense in which the king of a country ought to be angry; but in his anger there should be no feeling of hate, no feeling towards individuals, only feeling concerning the wrong which either individuals or combined bodies may do.

I. THE SENSE IN WHICH GOD MAY BE ANGRY. Three terms need to be carefully defined and illustrated. *Indignation* is the proper revolt of all noble natures against wrong-doing, and especially wrong-doing of a mean character, as when the strong takes advantage of the weak. *Anger* is the state of mind suitable for a king, governor, or judge, in the presence of any form of public injustice or crime. *Wrath* is the term that brings in the additional idea of giving expression, in vigorous action, to vigorous feeling. In some senses, each term may be applied to God.

II. THE FEAR WHICH GOD'S ANGER MAY PROPERLY INSPIRE. Because it is associated with perfect wisdom, absolute righteousness, and irresistible power. We smile sometimes at the futile anger of men; for they can do nothing. We dare not smile at God's anger; for he can do everything. None can stand before him.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*With God judgment is salvation.* “When God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth.” The “meek” are those who, with Hezekiah, held fast their integrity to Jehovah, and yet seemed placed in circumstances of hopeless distress. God's judgment on Sennacherib was their vindication, deliverance, and uplifting. Compare the destruction of Pharaoh's host at the Red Sea. God's judgment on the Egyptians was God's salvation of his people. It may even be established as the recognized principle of Divine dealings, that judgment and mercy shall always go together. They are like the pillar of cloud, which lay dark against the Egyptians, but shone a bright light forth to guide the wonderful path of delivered Israel. It must not be assumed that in this is seen any favouritism on the part of God; for if it is true that God's judgments on the nations were blessing for Israel, it is equally true that God's judgments on Israel were blessings for the nations. What we dwell on here is that, whatever may be the feature of Divine dealing that we specially observe, we may confidently look for signs of that dealing being made a blessing and salvation to somebody. This introduces a very large subject—the vicariousness of all forms of human calamity and trouble. “No man dieth unto himself.” No suffering ever bears exclusive relation to the sufferer. You never have read its mission when you have found out what it did for him. You have never apprehended God's infinitely gracious purposes when you have only seen some one thing that he has accomplished. What mistaken views of God the man would take who persisted in seeing only what this awful night-judgment was to the Assyrians! It must be seen all round to be truly understood and appreciated.

I. GOD WORKS IN WAYS OF JUDGMENT. Illustrate from Bible history, both of nations and of individuals.

II. GOD WORKS IN WAYS OF SALVATION. Illustrate in a similar way.

III. WHEN WORTHILY APPREHENDED, THESE TWO ARE REALLY ONE, AND GOD'S JUDGMENT IS SALVATION. Lead up to illustrate from the sublime case of the Lord Jesus. “The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all,” and the judgment that fell on him was salvation for us.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*Man's wrath bringing praise to God.* The rendering of this verse is uncertain. The LXX. reads the verse, “The wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shall keep festival unto thee.” And the idea of the verse seems to be—“the only result of Sennacherib's enmity to God's chosen people will be that the power of the God who overthrows him shall be more widely acknowledged; for vain will it be for the small remnant of the Assyrians to continue the invasion in which their mighty host had been so terribly foiled” (Jennings and Lowe). This idea may be worked out. Be it the seemingly overwhelming wrath of the mighty army, or be it the manifestly helpless and futile enmity of the enfeebled remnant,—God's ways with them will bring praise to his Name. It will often be noticed that the mischief wrought by a remnant is more to be feared than the mischief wrought by a host. Bunyan, in his ‘Holy War,’ makes a few Diabolians left in Mansoul do greater mischief than Diabolus' army. So there is point in pressing on our attention that

remnants are as much in God's power as armies, and he will be glorified in the mastery of both.

I. THE LIFE-FOES THAT WE KNOW AND ESTIMATE ARE WELL WITHIN THE CONTROL OF OUR GOD. And a man ought to understand what his besetting sins are, what his circumstances of temptation are. There are spiritual foes which "loom large" to our view—large as the vast host of Assyria did to Hezekiah. But "greater is he who is with us than all who can be against us." Those foes lose their power to affright us when once we can see that God will get his glory in dealing with them, and in delivering us from them.

II. THE LIFE-FOES THAT ARE TOO SUBTLE AND INSIGNIFICANT FOR US TO OBSERVE ARE EQUALLY IN THE CONTROL OF OUR GOD. They may be represented by the remnant, or remainder, of the Assyrians. And after the disaster, Sennacherib might have collected his soldiers, stayed in the land, and done much mischief. God controlled that remnant, and sent him ignominiously back to his own country. Subtle foes, small foes, like ichneumon flies, who deposit their eggs in the caterpillar and eat up its life, could ruin us more surely than open foes, were it not that our God will be sure also to get his praise of *them*.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*Following up our vows*. "Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God." Vows were formal promises or engagements made in acknowledgment of Divine mercies, or as conditions on which Divine help was sought. They are illustrated by Jacob's vow after the vision at Bethel; by King Saul's vow at Michmash; Absalom's vow which was made the excuse for starting his revolt; St. Paul's vow, which explained his presence in the temple courts, etc. The vows of the olden time are precisely represented by our solemn *resolves*, our good resolutions, which become promises and pledges of what we will do. The psalmist found out, what we have all found out through our own experiences, that it is easy to make vows and promises, and to take solemn pledges, but far easier to neglect them and let them go unfulfilled. Therefore in moments of awakened feeling, he exclaims, "I will pay my vows unto the Lord," and he advises God's people to "vow and pay"—to follow up their vows, and never to rest until they are fulfilled. It may be well to note what is the mission of vows. They are helpful in *strengthening the will*. A purpose may be formed which will stand but little testing, and exert but feeble influence. We strengthen that purpose if, in relation to it, we take open pledge, we make solemn promise. Our own inward purpose may be easily forgotten; no one knows about it but ourselves, and so its power of influence on us is small. Turn our purpose into a public vow, and we are helped by remembering that others, and God, expect us to be faithful to our word. How has it been with the vows we have made in the past? Have we joined "vowing" and "paying"?

I. OUR VOWS AT CONFIRMATION, AND UNION WITH CHRIST'S CHURCH.

II. OUR VOWS ON BIRTHDAYS, NEW-YEAR DAYS, ETC.

III. OUR VOWS WHEN ENTERING ON NEW LIFE-RELATIONSHIPS—MARRIAGE, ETC.

IV. OUR VOWS ON RESCUE FROM PERILS, OR RECOVERY FROM SICKNESS.

Thinking over all these vows, who among us can fail to be impressed by the thought of how much is unpaid, and how much we owe to God? Never have we had a year of life in which our payment of vows matched our New-Year promises. What a heap of *unpaid* vows the years have piled up! What a heap of *imperfectly paid* vows! Very seldom, indeed, have our vows been fully kept; and we search our lives almost in vain to find any single instances in which we have done *better* than we vowed. It is important that we should have solemn opportunities for calling our vows to remembrance, such as sacramental seasons provide. So we may be set on new efforts to "pay our vows."—R. T.

Vers. 1—12.—*A psalm of triumph*. This is one of several psalms supposed to have been written in celebration of the sudden overthrow of Sennacherib's army in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and suggests the following truths—

I. THAT THE CHURCH IS GOD'S PECULIAR ABODE, WHERE THE MOST GLORIOUS REVELATIONS OF HIS POWER AND GRACE ARE SEEN. (Ver. 3.) The gospel is most emphatically the "power of God unto salvation."

II. THAT GOD'S GREATEST GLORY IS NOT IN DESTROYING, BUT IN SAVING AND

REDEEMING, MEN. (Vers. 4—6.) Here his power for destruction is celebrated; but in the New Testament his work of salvation—his power to *give* life, not his power to take it away.

III. GOD IS TO BE FEARED MORE FOR HIS HOLINESS AND LOVE THAN FOR HIS PHYSICAL OMNIPOTENCE. (Vers. 7—9.) *These* excite filial affectionate fear; *that* excites an unworthy slavish fear.

IV. GOD IS ABLE TO OVERRULE THE REBELLION OF MEN SO THAT IN THE END IT SHALL ILLUSTRATE HIS PRAISE. (Ver. 10.) God's love can conquer human wrath, and so make it praise him.

V. THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE GIFTS WE CAN OFFER TO GOD ARE THOSE OF REPENTANCE AND A RENEWED LIFE. (Ver. 11.) "A broken and a contrite spirit;" "To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God;" "Let all that are around him do homage to his majesty."—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXVII.

THIS psalm is the lament and expostulation with God of some afflicted person, perhaps Asaph, who speaks as the mouthpiece of his countrymen, complaining of Israel's apparent desertion by God (vers. 1—9), but thence rising into a higher strain of hope and confidence, based on a recollection of Jehovah's past mercies (vers. 10—20). The particular occasion which called forth the psalm cannot be determined. The psalm consists of six stanzas of three verses each, to which is appended one of two verses only. The pause-mark, "selah," occurs at the end of the first, the third, and the fifth stanzas.

Ver. 1.—I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice. The repetition marks the intensity of the appeal, "with my voice"—that the appellant is not content with mere silent prayer. And he gave ear unto me; rather, "that he may hearken unto me" (Cheyne), or "and do thou hearken unto me" (Hengstenberg, Kay).

Ver. 2.—In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord (comp. Gen. xxxv. 3; Hab. iii. 16). My sore ran in the night; rather, *my hand was stretched out in the night* (Cook, Cheyne, Revised Version); comp. Ps. xxviii. 2. And ceased not. He continued in prayer all through the night. My soul refused to be comforted (comp. Gen. xxxviii. 35; Jer. xxxi. 15). He was like Jacob when he lost Joseph, or like Rachel weeping for her children.

Ver. 3.—I remembered God, and was troubled. The tenses used are present rather than past; they mark continuance; they describe the condition in which the writer remained for days or weeks. He thought of God, but the thought troubled him. It was

God who had brought the calamity, whatever it was, upon his people. Seemingly, he had "cast them off"—he had "forgotten to be gracious" (see vers. 7—9). I complained; rather, *I muse or meditate* (Hengstenberg, Kay, Cheyne). And my spirit was overwhelmed; or, *waxeth faint*, as in the Prayer-book Version.

Ver. 4.—Thou holdest mine eyes waking; literally, *thou holdest the watches of mine eyes*; i.e. preventedst me from obtaining any sleep. I am so troubled that I cannot speak; literally, *I was perplexed and did not speak*. The perplexity was probably caused by an inability to understand God's ways. Why had he afflicted his people? Was the affliction always to continue? Was Israel cast off?

Ver. 5.—I have considered; rather, *I considered*. In my perplexity, when I could no longer speak, I betook myself to meditation. I considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. He called to mind, i.e., God's doings in the past (comp. vers. 14—19).

Ver. 6.—I call to remembrance my song in the night. He bethought himself of the songs of thanksgiving which he used to sing to God in the night (comp. Job xxxv. 10) on account of mercies received; but this did not comfort him. "Nessun maggior dolore che ricordarsi di tempo felice nella miseria." I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search; or, "and I diligently searched out my spirit" (Cheyne). The results of the searchings out seem to be given in vers. 7—10.

Ver. 7.—Will the Lord cast off for ever? The psalmist asked himself in the night such questions as these: Is it really to be supposed that God will cast off his people for ever? And will he be favourable (or, *gracious*) no more? Surely such desertion is incredible.

Ver. 8.—Is his mercy clean gone for ever? The mercy which he has so long shown towards Israel (comp. Ps. lxxviii.). Doth his

promise fail for evermore? The promise which he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that he would be with their seed for ever (Gen. xvii. 7—13; xxvi. 24; xxxv. 11, 12).

Ver. 9.—*Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Can God, who forgets nothing and no one (Isa. xlix. 15), have forgotten his own nature, which is to be "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness" (Exod. xxxiv. 6)? Assuredly not. The higher nature in the psalmist, as Professor Cheyne observes, expostulates with the lower one. Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Has he shut them up, "as in a closed hand" (Kay, Canon Cook)? (comp. Deut. xv. 7).*

Ver. 10.—*And I said, This is my infirmity; i.e., "the fault is not in God, but in myself"—in my own weakness and want of faith. But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. There is no "I will remember" in the original, which expresses the thought of the writer imperfectly; but some such phrase must of necessity be supplied. The words are retained in the Revised Version and by Professor Cheyne. The remembrance of God's mercies during the many years that are past is that which best sustains us in a time of severe trouble.*

Ver. 11.—*I will remember the works of the Lord. The same thought is carried on and expressed more clearly in the present and the ensuing verse. Then a special remembrance is made of one particular mercy—the deliverance from Egypt (vers. 13—20). Surely I will remember thy wonders of old (comp. Exod. xv. 11).*

Ver. 12.—*I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings; rather, as in the Revised Version, and muse on thy doings (comp. ver. 3).*

Ver. 13.—*Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary; rather, in holiness. God's "way"—his conduct, his proceedings—however strange and mysterious it may seem to us, is always holy, i.e. just and right (comp. Gen. xviii. 25; Job viii. 3). Who is so great a God as our God? God is both good and great; just in himself, and able to execute justice.*

Ver. 14.—*Thou art the God that doest wonders. The gods of the heathen could do nothing. They were weakness, vanity, nothingness. Jehovah alone was powerful. He could work, and could "work wonders." This clause prepares the way for the magnificent description of the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea, which occupies vers. 16—19. Thou hast declared thy strength among the people; rather, among the peoples—i.e. in the sight of many heathen nations (comp. Exod. xv. 14—16).*

Ver. 15.—*Thou hast with thine arm (i.e.*

with thy mighty strength) redeemed thy people. The deliverance from Egypt is constantly called a "redemption" (Exod. vi. 6; xv. 13; Deut. vii. 8; ix. 26, etc.; 2 Sam. vii. 23; 1 Chron. xvii. 21, etc.). It is brought forward here "as the greatest and most wonderful of all the works of God, and hence as containing the strongest pledge of future deliverance" (Hengstenberg). The sons of Jacob and Joseph. A new designation of the people of Israel, and one which elsewhere occurs only in Obad. 18. Professor Cheyne suggests that it is a geographical division—by Jacob's southern Israel, and by Joseph's northern Israel, being intended (comp. Hos. xii. 2; Amos v. 6, 15; vi. 6).

Ver. 16.—*The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee. Professor Cheyne regards this and the three following verses as not belonging properly to this psalm, but a "fragment of another," accidentally transferred to this place. But most commentators see in the passage a most essential portion of the poem. It is the thought of the deliverance from Egypt that especially sustains and comforts the psalmist in his extreme distress. The passage is prepared for by vers. 11 and 14, and is exegetical of ver. 15. They were afraid. They shrank from the sight of God, and made a way for his people to pass over. The depths also were troubled. The very abysses trembled with fear, and moved themselves, leaving the bottom of the sea dry (see Exod. xiv. 29).*

Ver. 17.—*The clouds poured out water. The description here becomes more poetical than historical, unless, indeed, we may suppose that the writer possessed, besides what is said in Exodus, some traditional account of the passage. The skies sent out a sound; or, "uttered a voice"—the voice of the thunder, beyond a doubt (compare next verse). Thine arrows also went abroad; i.e. lightnings darted hither and thither (see Ps. xviii. 14; 2 Sam. xxii. 15).*

Ver. 18.—*The voice of thy thunder was in the heavens; rather, in the whirlwind (Kay, Cheyne, Revised Version). A storm of wind usually accompanies thunder and lightning. This the author, with poetical exaggeration, heightens into a "whirlwind" (comp. Ps. lxxxiii. 13; Isa. xvii. 13). The lightnings lightened the world. More hyperbole. Not only did they "go abroad" (ver. 17), darting hither and thither, but their intense brightness illuminated the whole earth. The earth trembled and shook. Through the reverberation of air, the earth seems to shake in a heavy thunderstorm.*

Ver. 19.—*Thy way is in the sea; rather, was in the sea. Thou wentest, i.e., in person before thy people in their passage across the dry bed of the Red Sea; truly there, though*

invisible (comp. Exod. xv. 13; Pss. lxxviii. 52, 53; cvi. 9; Isa. lxiii. 13). And thy path in the great waters; literally, *thy paths*. So the Revised Version. And thy footsteps are not known; rather, *were not*. No one perceived thy presence, much less discerned thy footsteps. As in external nature and in the human heart, God worked secretly.

Ver. 20.—*Thou leddest thy people like a flock* (comp. Isa. lxiii. 11; Ps. lxxviii. 52). By the hand of Moses and Aaron. God was the true Leader. Moses and Aaron were but his instruments. Moses at one time refused to lead any more, unless God would pledge himself to go up with him (see Exod. xxxiii. 12—16).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 7—9.—*The temptation and the refuge*. "Will the Lord cast off?" Here is a soul passing through the very valley of the shadow of death, yet coming out again into the sunshine of God's loving-kindness and truth. As Christian, in Bunyan's allegory, could not distinguish the whisperings of evil spirits from his own thoughts, so the bitter questions the psalmist records here as almost overturning his faith, may well have been temptations of the evil one. Whatever their source, there could be but one antidote, one refuge. From his dark thoughts and tormenting doubts of God he turns to the actual facts of God's past dealings, and stays his fainting faith on God's eternal faithfulness.

I. THE TEMPTATION. Perhaps the severest trial to which a believer can be exposed is the temptation to entertain hard, unthankful, unbelieving thoughts of God. This is like cutting off the anchor in the tempest. 1. This temptation may spring from *heavy affliction*; unusual in nature or duration, and so aggravated by contrast; or unlooked-for, like a bolt out of a clear sky; or just what we have prayed to be spared and laboured to avoid. 2. *Or from remembrance of special sins*. Conscience wakes, as if refreshed with sleep. We lose sight of the cross, and see only the Law we have broken and the judgment we are on our way to meet. 3. *Or from mental depression*; spiritual darkness; the sense of desertion, and loss of all the joy of God's salvation and comfort of promises. Often this has its secret source in bodily weakness or disease, but is none the less hard to bear, and needs spiritual as well as bodily remedies.

II. THE REFUGE AND DELIVERANCE FROM THIS AWFUL TEMPTATION. 1. *In the conviction that the source of our trouble is in our own weakness*, not in any failure of God's loving-kindness. "I said, This is my infirmity." 2. *In calling to mind God's past mercies*. This psalm opens with a note of faith (ver. 1). Literally, "My voice [is] unto God, and I will cry; my voice [was] unto God, and he gave ear to me." Then vers. 2—4 record Asaph's sleepless, weary trouble. This thought, that his trouble came from God, instead of a consolation, seemed an aggravation of his woe. Then he began to think of God's past goodness—his own past joy in God. Can God change or prove unfaithful? Impossible! Only my own weak, faithless heart can suggest such a thought. If such a time of trial assails any of us, let us remember: (1) *The history of God's dealings with his people*, in the days recorded in Scripture and in after-times. (2) *Our own experience of prayers heard, sins pardoned, troubles turned into blessings, deliverances beyond hope, grace and goodness above all we asked or thought* (2 Tim. ii. 11—13). Trials come from our Father, for we need them. But the temptation to doubt his love and truth comes from the enemy. Do not sit down in the shadow of your grief. Open the windows of your soul towards Jerusalem. Take to you the whole armour of God; but above all, the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit (Eph. vi. 16, 17). Remember: God does not forget (Isa. xlix. 14—16; 2 Tim. ii. 13). Jesus our Saviour changes not (Heb. xiii. 8).

Ver. 19.—*The profound mystery which surrounds all thoughts of God*. "Thy way is in the sea," etc. A new word has been added of late to the English language—a brace of new words, as dismal in meaning, as uncouth in sound—"agnostic," "agnosticism." The fact is not new (1 Cor. i. 21). An agnostic is one who believes it impossible to know that one central, supreme, primary truth, apart from which all knowledge is vanity. Nature, science, conscience, love, like sides of an immense pyramid, slope

upward; but the summit is in cloud. Reason pierces the cloud, and cries, "God is there!" Faith soars into the light which thick darkness veils, and proclaims, "God is love!" But the agnostic reckons Faith unscientific, Reason going beyond her province; doubts if there be anything but cloud. So when Moses went up into the thick darkness where God was, the people, who thought the flesh-pots of Egypt much more real than the voice from Sinai, said, "As for this Moses, . . . we know not what is become of him." Christianity and agnosticism are so irreconcilably opposed, that sympathy on the part of a Christian towards an agnostic seems difficult. Yet you cannot understand any one with whom you have no sympathy; and when you neither sympathize nor understand, you have little chance of doing good. Agnosticism contains a kernel of Christian truth, and therefore presents a point of contrast for Christian sympathy, viz. the *profound mystery* which surrounds all our thoughts of God, setting strait limits to our knowledge, baffling all attempts of human reason to pass those limits (Job xi. 7; 1 Tim. vi. 16).

I. THE MYSTERY OF CREATION. Our senses show us the surface of universe-phenomenon; the harmonious working of the mighty machine; the endless flow, through birth, growth, decay, of the river of life. But where is the *moving power*, the *fountain*, the *loom* in which this wondrous web is being woven, and the *hand* which weaves? Science pierces below the surface; shows everywhere unchanging law, faultless adjustment, interchangeable forces, rules of number, measure, weight, mutual attraction and fitness. But we cannot stop short in these. "Evolution" is supposed to explain it all. But what explains evolution? As Mr. Spencer has rightly observed, we should rather call the process of nature "involution," because at each step and stage something new and surprising comes in. Process is not cause. When, e.g., a number of primary atoms enter into combination, not at haphazard, but in fixed proportions of number and weight, and a new substance, with wholly new properties, is produced—*whence came* these properties? Had the atoms continued apart, they would have had no existence to all eternity. Why do the atoms attract and cleave to one another? Whence their violent movement? *Where are those laws* of number, weight, proportion, which cannot exist in the atoms, yet which every atom so absolutely obeys? To talk of laws is no explanation; it is the very existence of laws we want explained. Science can give no reply to these or ten thousand such questions. The Bible gathers up all lesser mysteries in the one primæval mystery with which its first sentence sets us face to face—not to reason or comprehend, but to worship: "In the beginning, God created."

II. THE MYSTERY OF PROVIDENCE. By "providence" we understand the Creator's wise, merciful, universal, sovereign control over all his works, especially human life and the welfare of his children. We often compare nature, or human life, to a web incessantly weaving; but this is a very feeble image. Instead of parallel threads, crossed at right angles by another set of parallel threads, we see countless millions of independent lines of natural force and of human will crossing at every conceivable angle every moment with incalculable speed. Yet the pattern of God's purpose is being woven. "No man liveth to himself." Sometimes in concert, often in discord, mostly in ignorance or disregard, we are influencing one another, depending on one another. Yet "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." Daily experience confirms the Bible teaching, that in what is to our eyes this inconceivable tangle of will, chance, and law, every thread lies under God's eye, obeys his will. *Illust.*: History of Joseph (cf. Gen. xv. 13; xlii. 36; xlv. 7, 8). Miracles are not more wonderful than providence (special reference here to the passage of the Red Sea). No sharp line between them in Scripture. No reason to think "natural laws" broken in one case or other, any more than man breaks natural laws when he drives his trains through mountains, makes iron float on the ocean, compels wind, water, steam, lightning, to work his engines (see Ps. cxix. 89; Dan. iv. 35).

III. THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH OUR RACE AND WITH INDIVIDUALS. Scripture shows one line of Divine purpose from beginning to end of world. History shows all the most energetic progressive races brought into contact with the Bible and the Church of God. But why the slow progress of the gospel; the huge stagnating masses of heathendom; the late birth of science; the obstinate prevalence of war, tyranny, slavery? If we say (rightly) sin is at the bottom of all, this only runs up

all other mysteries into the deepest and darkest. Compared with all this, what we call "mysteries" in our daily life seem simple, especially with the key of promise (Heb. xii. 5—10). Yet how dark they often are!

IV. Above, beneath, around, behind, all these mysteries is THAT OF WHICH WE SCARCELY DARE SPEAK—THE MYSTERY OF GOD HIMSELF—his eternity, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, righteousness, love (Ps. cxxxix. 6). This is a lesson, not of unbelief, but of faith. A God whom we could comprehend, in whom we found no unfathomable depth of mystery, would be no more the God of the Bible than of nature. Yet "we know what we worship" (John iv. 22). The cloud covers the mount, but the path is open. "We draw near" (Exod. xx. 21; Isa. xlv. 15; Heb. x. 19, 22). See how from this awful view of Divine mystery the psalmist passes—like a change in music from a stormy minor to a cheerful major, and restful close: "Thou leddest," etc. We know all we need to know. Not a question concerning God, on which our welfare *practically* turns, but the Bible has a clear, full answer (John i. 18; xvii. 3; 1 John iv. 16).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—20.—*From darkness to dawn.* So may this psalm be described. We have the night of weeping followed by the morning, if not of joy, yet of peace. It is a portraiture to which the experience of myriads of souls has answered and will answer. Hence, for the help of all such, the psalm has been given. We know not who the writer was, nor when, nor the special reason why, the psalm was written. We only know that it is the utterance of a heart that had been sorely troubled, but to whom light and peace came again. We are shown the darkness, the paling of that darkness, and the dawn.

I. THE DARKNESS. 1. *It was very dark.* There was great trouble. He tells of it in vers. 2, 3, 4. And prayer seemed no good, notwithstanding it was very earnest, hence spoken aloud (ver. 1) and prolonged all the night through (ver. 2: "My hand in the night hath been stretched out [the hand of entreaty and prayer] and ceased not"). Nevertheless, no comfort came. 2. *His grief seems to have prompted distrust.* As Jacob (Gen. xxxvii. 35) about Joseph, and David about his child (2 Sam. xii. 17) and about Absalom (2 Sam. xviii.), so here there was what there should not have been—the refusing to be comforted. 3. *But this made the darkness yet deeper.* He could not remember God (ver. 3). He could not realize his presence and help; he could only sigh in distress. He could not commune with his own heart, but his spirit was too overwhelmed. He would sleep, but could not. He would speak to God, but his trouble was too great. The distressed soul, as it often does, utterly broke down. But a breakdown like that brings speedily the help of God. He will never leave his people in a strait like that, blessed be his Name! And so we see—

II. THE PALING OF THE DARKNESS. Those who ascend high mountains to witness the glory of the dawn are told of its advent by the paling of the darkness. And spiritually, we see this here. God sends the thoughts of his servant back to "the days of old" (ver. 5), and to the bright joyous periods which were like a "song," and their sweet memories came back and talked to him, and set his spirit in "diligent search," so that he was compelled to come to the conclusion that all his dark and dreadful thoughts about the Lord's casting off for ever, and being favourable no more (see vers. 7, 8, 9), were all impossible of belief, mere nightmares of the soul, altogether false and untrue. Then in ver. 10 he comes to see how he has been led to think such sad thoughts. "Then I said, This is my sorrow, that the right hand of the Highest hath changed." Yes, God's providence had changed, but not his heart. Before we pass on, let us ask—Why does God let his servants suffer such eclipse of all joy as is recorded here? Partly by way of reproof. The psalmist "refused to be comforted." We often do when, would we only say, "I will trust," then we should find that we should "not be afraid." It is the letting in of doubt and unbelief that works such harm. Or, if not for reproof, then for the sake of others, that when we find them in darkness, we may be able to tell them how God helped us.

III. THE DAWN. This came through his remembrance of, and meditation on: 1. The

deeds, so wondrous, of the Lord (vers. 11, 12). 2. What God himself was—so holy and so great (ver. 13). 3. The recollection of God's special act of redemption (vers. 15—19). 4. The shepherd-care of God.—S. C.

Ver. 13.—*God's way in the sanctuary.* This verse is capable of different renderings. We take the one here given, as in the main true, and rich in sacred suggestion. God's way is in the sanctuary because—

I. IT IS SEEN THERE. The character, mind, and heart of God are revealed there. His holiness, that nothing unclean may approach him; yet also his mercy and compassion, as seen in the forgiveness through sacrifice proclaimed there; the worship his delights in and demands; the surrender of the self to him, symbolized by the shedding of the blood of the sacrifices, for "the blood is the life." So must the heart, the will, the real self, of the worshipper be presented to God; the transforming power of the Holy Spirit which he will give to us who thus come in full surrender to him, for the fire which consumed the sacrifice was no man-enkindled flame, but came down from heaven, and set forth how the blessed Holy Spirit of God would take hold of our poor dead fleshly nature, and transform it and uplift it heavenward, Godward, as did the fire the sacrifice. Thus was God's way of saving sinful men set forth and shown.

II. LEADS THERE. All his dealings with us are to lead us to his own presence, to bring us back to himself. We have got away into the far country, poor sinful ones that we are, and God's way with us is all to lead us to turn and say, "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say," etc.

III. IS LIKE WHAT IS THERE—holy, just, and good. God can ask, "Are not my ways holy?" They are in harmony with the spirit of the sanctuary. He is holy in all his ways. One rendering of the text is, "O God, thy way is holy." The records of history, of experience, of conscience, all assert the righteousness and holiness of God.

IV. IS UNDERSTOOD THERE. (Cf. Ps. lxxiii. 17.) There we get light sufficient, and, better still, the acquiescent, submissive mind, that learns to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him (cf. Hannah, 1 Sam. i. 13; Luke xviii. 10). Ah! how often has the wearied, much-tried child of God found in the holy sanctuary that there have come such messages from God to his soul, through prayer, or psalm, or hymn, or God-inspired word, that he has gone down to his home comforted!

V. IS TRANSFIGURED THERE. It may have been a terribly hard, difficult, rough way; the man's lot in life may be heavily burdened with care, but "in the sanctuary," as he waits upon God and pours out his soul before the Lord, lo, these very trials and cares become transfigured and changed in fashion, so that they become as wings on which his soul mounts up nearer to God than ever he had attained to before, and he comes to confess, "It was good for me that I was afflicted."

CONCLUSION. Then do we know the way of the sanctuary? Would we enter there? The path leads by the altar. The soul that would enter in and know the blessedness of the sanctuary of God, must come along that path, the path of lowly penitence and trust and heart-surrender, so that on him may come the blessed fire of the Holy Spirit, bringing him into the presence of God.—S. C.

Ver. 19.—*The mysteries of Providence.* "We know not, Israel knew not, by what precise means their deliverance from the hosts of Pharaoh was wrought; we know not by what precise track through the gulf the passage was effected. We know not, and we need not know; the obscurity, the mystery here, as elsewhere, was part of the lesson. . . . All that we see distinctly is that through this dark and terrible night, with the enemy pressing close behind, and the driving sea on either side, he led his people like sheep by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Stanley). And that great event of the Exodus, the mercy and mystery of which were so alike conspicuous, has often been taken as the symbol of those manifold and often mysterious dealings of God with his people in which we can do nothing but believe and trust that, through these deep waters and by these unknown ways, he will bring us out into a full deliverance from all that oppresses us. And for those who trust him this is assuredly what he will do. But the mind cannot keep, and, indeed, it need not, from reverently asking why God's providence is often so full of mystery as well as of pain to men? Calamities frightful in their nature, desolations terrible and widespread, so that human life at times becomes

like the prophet's scroll, which was full, both within and without, of mourning, lamentation, and woe. What is to be said of these things? Certainly they are instrumental in much that is good.

HUMAN LIFE OWES MORE TO ITS PAINS THAN TO ITS PLEASURES. 1. *How would faith be educated and developed but for the demands made upon it by the trials of life?* Trust in God is an absolute essential to the strength, the joy, the power, and the permanence of the Christian life. There must, then, be occasions and demands for its exercise, and the trials of life supply them. 2. *What a spur to invention earthly calamities are!* Perhaps there is no one single safeguard against such calamities in which we now rejoice, but owed its existence to their occurrence, and the pressure they put upon men to discover such safeguard. Is there a lighthouse anywhere along our coasts but where some gallant ship has, for want of it, gone down with many precious lives? 3. *What power there is in life's sorrows to bind together hearts that otherwise would have remained apart!* There is a blessed uniting power in sorrow. 4. *The calamities of life, when death seems to reign in terrible power, serve to startle the conscience of sinful men, and, as it were, force them to think of God and things eternal* (Isa. xxvi. 9). 5. *They strengthen the argument for the future life.* The justice and goodness of God could not be maintained, if "in this life only we have hope." 6. *The good man is by them drawn nearer to God,* and hides the more closely within the blessed shelter of God's never-failing love. 7. *They serve as revelations of character to the self-deceived, and show such how far other than they have thought they really are.* 8. *They teach us to sympathize with the sorrowful.* Even Christ learned through the things that he suffered. 9. *Suffering is the way to life.* "Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom." 10. They show, what men are apt to forget, that "*here we have no continuing city.*"—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Complaining to God.* "I will cry unto God with my voice, and may he give ear unto me!" No historical associations can be fixed for this psalm. It is the psalm of one deeply interested in the welfare of Israel, who takes as a burden on his own heart the depressed condition of the nation, and gloomily regards it as a sign of the withdrawal of God's favour. The trouble of the writer is not personal, but relative; and with its moods may be compared the prayers of Daniel (ix.) and of Nehemiah (i.). It is well that there should always be persons who take the burdens of their nation on their own hearts; recognize the *Divine* relation to national condition; and put their feeling and desire into intercessory prayer. Under some phases of Christianity there is danger of religion becoming too strictly personal—too little concerned with corporate and national life. This psalm is characteristically a psalm of complaint; it is the utterance of a man in sore perplexity and distress, who can only see the dark side even of Divine dealings. Was he right or wrong? May we say he was both right and wrong?

I. ON THE FACE OF IT, COMPLAINING MUST BE WRONG. It is usually the utterance of the discontented mind. A man complains when he imagines himself to be neglected or ill-used. At the bottom of complaining generally lies an overweening sense of our own importance—the idea that we deserve better than we get. This, in part, may have affected the psalmist. Not concerning himself, but concerning the favoured nation. He complains because he thinks the nation deserved better at the hands of God than it was receiving. He was jealous for his people. Fancied desert is the root out of which complainings spring. But what desert can man or nation have before God, that can form ground of reproach? And whoever makes much of his "deserts" must be reminded of his "ill deserts." "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" Complaining of God must be wrong; because it shows (1) no proper understanding of ourselves; (2) no worthy apprehension of his wisdom and goodness. Even in the strangest experiences, *submission*, not complaint, is the becoming thing.

II. ON FURTHER CONSIDERATION, WE MAY SAY, COMPLAINING IS RIGHT. As a sign of confidence in God, it is right; but then it will be complaining to God, not of him. Openness before God means that we speak freely to him just what is in our thought and heart. Relief comes to us only when, in such ways, we can make full and free expression of our confidence, and tell God what we do think and feel, even though we

know it is wrong to think and feel it. Reserve is the bane of friendship. There must be no reserve with God. And the very best way in which to become ashamed of our complainings is to speak them out before God. The infinite patience and gentleness towards us seems to search us through and through.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The mission of mental depressions.* “My hand in the night season was stretched out, and ceased not.” The figure is of the hand stretched out in prayer till it was unnerved by weariness, and yet refused to rest. The cause of lying awake at night is usually mental anxiety and distress; burdens on the mind rather than pains in the body. We begin to think worryfully, and so banish sleep. The text, therefore, presents a season of mental depression; and the occasion of it is found in the anxious condition of the nation. Illust. by the times of Hezekiah. Times of mental depression are not necessarily wrong. They are the natural response of the mind to physical conditions and outward circumstances. They mean “sensitiveness,” “quickness to respond;” and these differ in different individuals. Some are easily made despondent; they can always see, or think they see, black clouds gathering in the sky. Some are unduly hopeful, and fail to respond when circumstances do call for anxiety. We make the mistake of failing to recognize Divine working through the anxieties of the mind, as well as through the pains of the body, and the distress of the circumstances. We deceive ourselves by thinking these mental trials are in no sense *sent*; we make them ourselves, and so we fail to associate God with them, and lose what would be our best comfort and relief. The truth is, that God is even more freely working through our mental depressions, because they are *immaterial*—they belong to the innermost of us, to the sphere in which God’s grace is most unhindered.

I. MENTAL DEPRESSIONS KEEP US CONVINCED OF THE SPIRITUAL. Suppose we took all things easily; never troubled over them; never brooded;—how easily the “material” would gain the mastery! We know there is another world than the world of sense; there is a world of thought and feeling. How intense and real this world is we are made to know when depression prevents sleep, and even breaks down health. And so we come to apprehend the reality of the “spiritual.”

II. MENTAL DEPRESSIONS CONVINCING OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF OUR MORAL CONFLICT. Conceive that the struggle for character only concerned circumstances and relations, and then what an unimportant struggle it would seem to be! “But we wrestle, not with flesh and blood only, but with the rulers of spiritual darkness.” Add mental conflict, and virtue becomes a sublime achievement, a transcendent victory, won at an awful cost.

III. MENTAL DEPRESSIONS MAY BE OVERRULED SO AS TO GIVE NOBLER VIEWS OF GOD. Illustrate by the psalm (vers. 10—20). The law of rebound applies. Compare such a case as that of the poet Cowper, whose songs of trust were the cries of one who was often in despair. The question is—Do we yield to mental depressions, or do we resist them, and so let God work his work of grace through them?—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Occupations for sleepless nights.* Comparing ver. 3, we find that, lying awake, the psalmist had “remembered God,” or, more precisely, had “thought upon God.” It is true that the thought had only brought him trouble, but the occupation was good, whatever it brought him. Comp. Ps. iv. 4, “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still;” Ps. lxxiii. 6, “When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.” As the cause of loss of sleep is generally a physical condition, and often brain-disease of some kind, men usually at such times take sombre, dreary, and distressing views. They are never so ready to “write bitter things against themselves as when they lie awake at night.” It is well to see clearly that the views taken at such times are almost always untrue and unworthy, and can seldom be hopefully made the guide of conduct or the basis of important decisions. And proper correction of gloomy night-views should be made when sunshine brings light and cheer into our souls once more.

I. MOST PEOPLE, WHEN THEY LIE AWAKE, WORRY OVER THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES. And that is a very hopeless occupation. Only dark, depressing, anxious sides of things are likely to come to view in night seasons. It will be found that the fretting things are usually the things selected for thinking over. And, usually, it is imagination that

is active, fashioning woes in the near future, and presenting all the issues that are unfolding as disastrous. It would be a lesson never to be forgotten by any man, if he could be told the fears he fashioned in the night seasons that *never came to pass*.

II. **MANY PEOPLE, WHEN THEY LIE AWAKE, THINK OVER THEIR SINS.** And that is even a more hopeless occupation. A man wants light in which to see his sins truly. Brooding over the "things we have done which we should not have done, and the things left undone which we should have done," is sure to become morbid work. Souls do even get a kind of dreadful satisfaction in making themselves out to be as wicked as possible. And night estimates of sin are very seldom true ones. Besides, this going over of past sins is absolutely wrong, for it is dishonouring God by the untrustfulness which will not fully receive the truth, that all those sins are pardoned and put for ever away. If God no longer "remembers" them, it must be wrong for us to do so.

III. **WISE PEOPLE, WHEN THEY LIE AWAKE, SET THEIR THOUGHTS ON GOD.** And that is the proper and hopeful occupation. 1. Even our circumstances seem to gain new shapings, settings, and relations, and become altogether more hopeful, when we can associate God with them. 2. Even our sins can be calmly reviewed, when we can see how God has dealt with them, and what he has done for us through sanctifying to us our very experience of them.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The cheer of hallowed memories.* "I call to remembrance my song in the night." This expression recalls the appeal of Elihu (Job xxxv. 10), "But none saith, Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?" But the mood of the psalmist here is peculiar. To him the memories of past joys do but intensify present distress. "When I remember how near God once was, the present seems more bitter, and the thought brings increase of sadness." Some, however, render this clause, "I will give my mind to my song in the night; I will muse with my heart while my spirit makes search;" and understand the psalmist to mean, that he resolves to compose the present poem that very night.

I. **ALL MEN HAVE PRECIOUS AND CHERISHED MEMORIES.** However sad and anxious and burdened later life may become, every man's *early life*—childhood, youth, young manhood—is more or less pleasant to look back on. Partly because of what it actually was, partly because of the sunshine which the spirit of youth put on it, and partly because memory keeps the pleasant, and easily drops the painful. Then there are memories of events that have happened. And, for the Christian man, memories of special times of Divine guidance, rescue, restoration. And for many, dearest memories of sanctified human love. The term, "song in the night," suggests special memories of ways in which our hearts were kept trustful and cheerful, even in times of darkest trouble and most painful distress. With the waves and billows going over us, we yet could sing in our souls, "Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness . . . in the night his song shall be with me."

II. **THE PLEASANTNESS OR PAINFULNESS OF OUR MEMORIES DEPENDS ON OUR OWN CONDITIONS OF MIND AND FEELING.** The memories never change. They are always full of God and of his grace. We change our relation to them, and make them depressing or inspiriting according to our moods. According to bodily states, anxious circumstances, or mental and spiritual conditions, we read our past. So the cause for anxiety is that "singleness," clearness of vision, which enables us to see the past as it was, and read aright its relation to the present. So often when memories depress us, we need to see that the fault lies in our way of recalling them; and we should say, "This is my infirmity."

III. **IF OUR MEMORIES TELL US WE WERE ONCE GLAD IN GOD, THEY REMIND US THAT WE MAY WISELY BE GLAD IN GOD STILL.** For "he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." No matter what may *seem* to be the present, it is the sphere of the same Divine love and care.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*Possible exhaustion of God's mercies.* So fully was the thought of God woven into the whole life and relations of a pious Jew, that to him the unbearable distress was the lost sense of God's presence and interest. We have two striking instances of this. The supreme point of David's distress, when fleeing from his son Absalom, lay in this—his enemies taunted him with the lost favour of God, saying,

"Where is now thy God?" And Isaiah closes his magnificent fortieth chapter with this sublime appeal, "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?" Imagined change in God's relation, and the failure of God's mercy, are the supreme woes to all God-fearing men still.

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S GREAT TROUBLES ARE DOUBTS ABOUT GOD, NOT AFFLICTIONS SENT BY GOD. The distinction between these two is this—doubts are inward, afflictions are outward. It is not a very great thing for the soul to master mere circumstances—especially since God never permits them to be overwhelming. The great thing is for the soul to master itself. When our circumstances start doubts, then we get humbled and broken. It is doubt, suspicion, fear, that really crushes our spirits, and forces tears. Our doubtings usually concern: 1. God's Personality. Like David, we cry for assurance that God is a "living God;" not a vain idol; not an abstraction of science; not the vague "eternal that makes for righteousness." 2. God's relationship. He may be God, but is he *my God*? 3. God's faithfulness. For God ever sets out promises for faith to grasp; and what can faith do if God does not keep his promises? 4. God's actual present nearness. "Where is *now* thy God?" "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer might not pass through."

II. THE STING OF DOUBTING-TIMES IS THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF SIN. Illustrate from the case of David, who lost the sense of God, lost his hope in God, filled his soul with questionings and fears, when he had stepped aside from the ways of righteousness and good self-restraint. Sin clouds the mind with doubts.

III. NEITHER AFFLICTIONS, NOR DOUBTS, NOR CONSCIOUS SIN DO MAKE GOD'S MERCIES FAIL. Precisely in those scenes Divine mercies most abound. Things, and conditions of mind and feeling, may affect our *vision* of him; they cannot affect him. We may project our shadows over him, and then find we can only see the shadows. God is not moved to change by our change. "He abideth faithful."

"His mercies aye endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure."

Ask, "Is his mercy clean gone for ever?" and you cannot want any answer. To state the question is to be ashamed of the doubting that suggested it.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*A supreme mental distress.* "That the right hand of the Highest hath changed." It is as if the psalmist were saying, "All this that I have been asking myself, and saddening myself with asking, seems impossible, and yet it is this very possibility of change in God toward me which so sorely perplexes and distresses me." "This is my *sorrow*, the changing of the right hand of the Most High." Do we not all feel that, if God be changed, then indeed the "whole foundation rocks"? We build our hopes on this—"He abideth the same, and his years are throughout all generations." As the psalmist gradually comes to a better mind, he feels that his *sorrow* was really his *infirmity*, and in some sense his *shame*. No man can expect to be free from experience of mental distress; the question is—Shall we give way to it, or shall we resist it? Here, in this psalm, we may find two things.

I. A MAN—A GOOD MAN—DISPOSED TO TAKE DESPONDENT VIEWS. And there is always a *self-strand* in the spirit of the despondent. They keep too much in the self-sphere, looking within rather than "off unto Jesus." This man took despondent views: 1. Of *life generally*. We call those who put this tone on their reading of life *pessimists*—men who can always see the "dark sides," and make "dark sides" when there are none to see. It is partly a nervous, anxious disposition, and may often be wisely dealt with as disease, whose cure may be found in abundance of God's sweet sunshine, and the good cheer of pleasant human friendship. 2. Of *their present circumstances*. Some people always wear "smoked spectacles," and so nothing is bright to their view. 3. Of *God's dealings with them*. They think so much more of the things, than of the love and wisdom that devise, arrange, and adapt them. Things are always variable; the love and the wisdom are always the same. The sea down below is always heaving and tossing; the heavens up above are always steadfast. There is variety in *God's working*, but no variety in *him*.

II. A MAN—A GOOD MAN—WHO SETS HIMSELF TO FIND A REMEDY FOR HIS DESPON-

DENCY. He resists the disposition to doubt, and will not let it get the mastery over him. He sets himself upon thinking well over two things. 1. His own frailty. He suspects that what he seems to see may be in himself. It may be like the tiny insect in the astronomer's telescope, that seemed to show a huge creature eating up the moon. It is well always to suspect imperfection *in our vision* when doubts distress. 2. God's power and purpose. If he cannot see these in his own small sphere, he can see them in the large spheres of the history of God's Church. This is absolutely certain—God works for ends of blessing, and God is able to accomplish that which he purposes.—R. T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*A remedy for troubled hearts.* "But I will celebrate the deeds of Jah." With ver. 11 the change in the prophet's feeling actually begins. "Hitherto he has looked too much within, has sought too much to read the mystery of God's dealings by the light of his own experience merely. Hence the despondency when he contrasts the gloomy present with the far brighter and happier past. He cannot believe that God has indeed forgotten to be gracious, that he has indeed changed his very nature; but that he may be reassured and satisfied on this point, his eye must take a wider range than that of his own narrow experience." The remedy for troubled hearts so often is this—get out of your limited, narrow spheres; take larger, wider, more comprehensive views. Begin to consider the "God of the whole earth;" cease to keep God in the small sphere of your own personal interests. See the unchanging purpose that through the ages runs. For our help towards gaining the larger views of God, the records are left us of his dealings with men in the early ages of the world, and from them this comes out clearly and strongly—God is, everywhere and always, the Redeemer, Deliverer, Restorer, Saviour; always "putting things right again;" always working towards the highest ends of blessing for the creatures he has made. If we can get the conviction of this large truth into our souls, we are easily lifted up above the perplexities of our particular lot. If our "puzzle-piece" does seem to be oddly shaped, it fits into the great scheme, which, when completed, will plainly be seen to have accomplished the highest possible benediction for humanity.

I. IT COMFORTS US TO REMEMBER GOD'S DEEDS AS A WHOLE. Take any biography given in the Old Testament. We could find in it single perplexing things; e.g. Joseph cast into the pit; David hunted over the mountains. But read the lives as a whole, and God's purpose of grace comes fully to view. So read *incidents* of history, and you will be perplexed; read the history, and all becomes clear. Read the struggles of an *age*, and you may find no meaning; read the dealings of God with the *race*, and much is made plain.

II. IT COMFORTS US TO SET GOD'S DEALINGS ONE OVER AGAINST ANOTHER. Nothing stands alone. Everything is prepared for, related to something else, and having its characteristic influences and results. Things match, and the matching often provides the explanation.

III. IT COMFORTS US TO SET GOD'S DEEDS IN RELATION TO OUR HIGHER NECESSITIES. Not comfortableness, but our higher moral welfare, is the end God has in view. It is often a new view of our circumstances to read them in this light.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*The holiness of Divine dealings.* "O God, thy way is holy! Who is [so] great a God as [our] God?" Comp. Exod. xv. 11, "Who is like unto thee, O Jehovah, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" For "in the sanctuary" there is the various rendering "in holiness." It is evident that the term "holy," as applied to God, must include much more than it does when applied to men. We must try to find what was especially in the psalmist's mind, and so what he put, as his meaning, into this word. He began thinking of God's ways with his people Israel, especially in the rescue from Egypt, and deliverance at the Red Sea. This recalled the song of Moses, and the striking contrast between the gods of the heathen and the God of Israel. The first thing that arrests attention whenever that contrast is made is that the God of Israel has *character*, and puts character into his works; but the idol-gods cannot be said to have any character. This the psalmist expresses by saying, "O God, thy way is holy;" or, "Thy doings bear a *character*, they have an aim and purpose, and that is a *moral aim*."

We may take suggestions of a division from the passage in Exodus which presents three points in which Jehovah is unapproachable—holiness, awefulness, and miraculous power.

I. GOD IS "GLORIOUS IN HOLINESS;" that is, in character. We may read the story of God's dealings in either of two ways. 1. We may study it in order to find out what God is in himself. 2. We may bring our knowledge of what God is in himself to help us in explaining the meaning and mystery of his dealings. This latter is the higher work. When we are fully satisfied with the *character* of God, we begin to trace purposes of holiness and love in all his doings. We see that God's *way* is right, because *he* is right. If he is holy, we can trust him, if we cannot trace his way.

II. GOD IS "FEARFUL IN PRAISES." The proper object of the profoundest awe, even to those who approach him with praise and thanksgiving. They who are duly impressed with the Divine holiness never permit any growth of knowledge, any acquaintance with God's ways, to nourish undue familiarities with his sacred Name. Think what we may of God's dealings, we must keep in our souls due reverence for God himself. No *awe* can attach to the gods of man's creation. It is the unique response of man to adequate impressions of the Divine holiness.

III. GOD "DOETH WONDERS." "Both through nature, and on occasions overruling nature, accomplishing the most astonishing results," which are seen to be most astonishing when viewed in the *moral* issues which they accomplish.—R. T.

Ver. 19.—*God's unknown ways.* "Thy footsteps were not known;" that is, they were not known or understood beforehand. They were not, they could not have been, anticipated. It is said that "the unexpected is the thing that happens." And so it is in connection with the ways of God. Man can but seldom find out the Almighty intent. God's "ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts." The life of a godly man is full of the "surprises of grace;" and so he is taught lessons of trust. Recall the scene on the Egyptian side of the Red Sea. Observe that such were the hopeless features of the situation, that a way of rescue never came to the minds of any of the leaders. They must "stand still, and see the salvation of God;" and to the surprise of every one, his way proved to be "in the sea, and his path in the great waters." Of God's ways with his people, three things may be said.

I. EXPERIENCE CANNOT SUGGEST THEM. We fall back on our experience to guide our conduct under new circumstances. What happened before will explain what is happening now. But the sphere of human experiences is strictly limited. Men never do things that somebody has not done before them. "There has no temptation taken us but such as is common to man." But God is under no limitation to the circle of human experiences. He does, he is constantly doing, *new things*. Life for every one of us is like the story of the children of Israel, full of Divine surprises, and we are never "straitened in God." Illustrations may be taken from Old Testament history, in which God delivered his people in ways which experience could not have suggested.

II. THOUGHT CANNOT ANTICIPATE THEM. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." In a similar way, show how man's thought is limited by man's limited knowledge. No man has compassed the entire circle of Divine possibilities. The man who knows most must say, "These are *parts* of his ways." So man has not the material for deciding what God will be sure to do in any given case.

III. TRUST CAN ALWAYS WAIT FOR THEM, sure that God will unfold them in the best times and in the best ways. God's people are as safe as Israel at the Red Sea. God's unknown way for them will be revealed to them in good time.—R. T.

Ver. 20.—*God the Shepherd of his people.* "Thou leddest thy people like a flock." Vaihinger gives a key-note in his sentence, "The minstrel lets his harp drop, and reclines in fulness of faith on God's love." In the psalm depressing circumstances awaken depressing thoughts; they even make the psalmist think hard things about God. He found relief in turning his thoughts away from *himself* and his own condition, and dwelling on the larger theme of God's ways of dealing with his people through all the generations. After going over them awhile, he lightens upon a new and satisfying idea of God with which he may close his meditations. God is really the *Shepherd* of his people. Read his work aright, and you cannot fail to recognize

that it is just *shepherding*. He leads as a shepherd leads his flock. The shepherd-figure is familiar to Scripture readers; but our Western associations cannot fill the term with its best meanings and suggestions. In mountain districts, or on broad moorlands and plains, we get more suitable impressions of the perils of sheep, and of the exclusive devotion of the shepherd to their care.

I. GOD AS SHEPHERD FOR THE NEEDS OF HIS PEOPLE. Shepherding involves competency of knowledge of the district, so as to provide pasture and water. Apply to the provisions made for Israel when journeying through the wilderness—manna, water, meat. These represent our common everyday needs, which truly come by the Shepherd's providing, arranging, and controlling. But a flock has special needs, such as arise from sickness, weather, time of lambs, etc. And so the striking figure is given us of God, "He shall feed his flock like a Shepherd; he shall gather the lambs in his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that give suck." Shepherding, then—flock-leading—involves that our "God doth provide." "My God shall supply all your needs."

II. GOD AS SHEPHERD FOR THE CHANGES OF HIS PEOPLE. This point is specially Eastern. Flocks necessarily kept moving, changing the pasture-grounds, because of failing food and need of adjustment to different seasons. In mountain-lands the cattle are taken to the higher grounds for the summer months, and brought down into the valleys again before winter sets in. Some of the changes in the circumstances of God's people are made by his providence. There never was an age of greater restlessness and changeableness than this in which we live. Some of the changes come through our own wills and wilfulness; and these changes try the Shepherd. Within the Shepherd's will the sheep have their own will—freedom, in many ways, to follow their own inclination. So we have a large liberty, a measure of free-will; but it has always to be kept within the Shepherd's lines. Man's free-will must be kept well within God's will. On this side special dealing is sometimes found necessary for the sheep and for God's people. The Shepherd may require to be even *rough* in his restraints and restorings.

III. GOD AS SHEPHERD FOR THE DANGERS OF HIS PEOPLE. Illustrate from Eastern flocks: *day-dangers*—such as crossing rivers, broken limbs, sudden floods down the wadies, etc.; *night-dangers*—need of finding sheep-cotes, gathering brushwood to top the hurriedly raised wall of the fold, watching against wild animals and robbers. But the sheep are not aware of, or fail to estimate, their dangers. All the burden of watching depends on the shepherd. So the dangers of God's people come from (1) what they are; (2) where they are; (3) the relation between what they are and where they are. Their Shepherd knows precisely both *them* and their *circumstances*. The faithfulness of our Shepherd only meets with fitting response in our submission and obedience. If God is still leading his people as a flock, two things may be impressed on us. 1. Able to lead is God's attribute. 2. Willing to be led is his people's attitude.—R. T.

Vers. 1—15.—*Refuge in God's unchangeableness*. Occasion of the psalm uncertain. "The poet flees from the sorrowful present away into the memory of the years of olden times, and consoles himself especially with the deliverance out of Egypt. But it remains obscure what kind of affliction it is which drives him to find refuge from the God now hidden in the God who was formerly manifest."

I. HE PERSEVERES IN PRAYER, THOUGH HE HAS NO SENSE OF THE PRESENCE OR MERCY OF GOD. (Vers. 1—3.)

II. WHEN HE CAN NO LONGER PRAY, HE FALLS BACK IN THOUGHT UPON THE MEMORIES OF THE PAST. (Vers. 4—6.)

III. IF GOD HAS FORSAKEN HIM, IT IS SOMETHING INCONSISTENT WITH HIS NATURE AND COVENANT. (Vers. 7—9.) His *promises* cannot fail; his *mercy*, which is from everlasting, cannot be blotted out from his nature. Ver. 10 is of doubtful interpretation.

IV. HE WILL CONQUER HIS DOUBTS BY REMEMBERING GOD'S WONDERS WROUGHT FOR HIS PEOPLE OF OLD. (Vers. 10—15.) Because God *must* be unchangeable. God redeemed his people from their afflictions in Egypt; therefore he will redeem them from their present affliction.—S.

Ver. 3.—*Sick-bed promises*. "I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained,

and my spirit was overwhelmed." "Conversion during trouble difficult and unsatisfactory." Most men forget God while they are free from trouble; *some* remember him in trouble, and the remembrance brings an increase of trouble. Salvation, conversion, on a sick-bed (death-bed) difficult and doubtful.

I. IT IS DIFFICULT. 1. The mind is sometimes oppressed with such fears as to prevent the exercise of faith and love. Prospect of immediate death, and the sudden light cast upon the memory. 2. The enfeebled state of the mind and the pains of the body hinder us from receiving any spiritual impressions. 3. The greatness of the change requires all the powers of health. Painter and astronomer in a storm.

II. THE REALITY OF IT IS DOUBTFUL. 1. The want of experience to prove its soundness. Temptation, etc. 2. The suddenness of it, without striking a blow. 3. The mind may have been deeply *impressed* without being *changed*. In prospect of eternity, remembered sins would *impress*. Faith, love, hope, necessary to *change* the mind.

Address two classes. 1. Those who have not fulfilled their sick-bed promises. 2. Those who are trusting to a future sick-bed conversion.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXVIII

THIS, the first of the "historical psalms," though assigned by the rationalistic school (De Wette, Ewald, Köster, Hitzig) to a period subsequent to the Captivity, is generally allowed by more sober critics (Hengstenberg, Kay, Wordsworth, Canon Cook, Professor Alexander) to belong to the Davidical age—i.e. either to the reign of David or to that of Solomon. The abrupt conclusion when David's time is reached indicates that the writer cannot carry the lessons of history any further. The way in which David is spoken of (ver. 72), and the (apparent) mention of the temple in ver. 69, indicate that Solomon's reign was begun, and make "a few years after the accession of Solomon" the most probable date of the composition. There is thus no reason for rejecting the authorship of Asaph, which is asserted by the title.

The psalm is, as the title also declares, one of "instruction." It seeks to keep the people faithful to David and his house, and to check their tendency to place themselves under the leadership of the tribe of Ephraim, by recalling the whole course of God's dealings with Israel in the past, from the time of the sojourn in Egypt to the establishment of David's kingdom. It also seeks to keep them faithful to God, by showing how all their past calamities and sufferings had arisen out of their unfaithfulness (vers. 8, 10, 22, 32, 37, etc.).

The psalm divides itself merely into a

preface or introduction (vers. 1—8), and a continuous narrative (vers. 9—72).

Vers. 1—8. — The *introduction* calls special attention to the teaching that is about to be put forth, which it declares to be traditional (ver. 3), and, further, to be the sort of instruction which God had especially commanded to be given to his people by their teachers (vers. 5, 6) for their edification (vers. 7, 8).

Ver. 1.—Give ear, O my people, to my law; rather, to my teaching. *Hat-torah—torah* with the article—is "the Law;" but *torah* alone is any teaching or instruction. *Incline your ears to the words of my mouth*. Dr. Kay regards the words of ver. 1 as "God's own words," (1) on account of the expression, "O my people;" and (2) on account of "*my Law*." But "*my people*" is not inappropriate in the mouth of a psalmist, and occurs in Pss. lix. 11 and cxliv. 2. It "indicates the love in which the effort of the psalmist originated" (Hengstenberg). And "*law*," as already observed, is not the proper, or at any rate not the only, meaning of *torah*.

Ver. 2.—I will open my mouth in a parable. The facts of Israelitish history are the "parable," the inner meaning of which it is for the intelligent to grasp. They are *ᾠδαὶ αἰνέσεως*. I will utter dark sayings of old (comp. Prov. i. 6). *Khidoth* (חידות) are properly "riddles" (see Judg. xiv. 12). Here the idea is that God's dealings with his people had been "riddles," whereto the psalmist would give the clue (comp. vers. 21, 22, 33, 56—59, etc.).

Ver. 3.—Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us; or,

"recounted to us" (Kay). The facts of their past history had been handed down orally from father to son among the Israelites, not simply learnt from their sacred writings. So the facts of Christianity have reached us, not merely through the New Testament, but also by the teaching of the Church.

Ver. 4.—We will not hide them from their children. They shall still be handed down in the same way. We of this generation will still continue the practice of handing down, by word of mouth, to the next generation, how God has dealt with Israel. Asaph's psalms were written, it must be remembered, to be recited in the services of the sanctuary (comp. 2 Chron. xxix. 30). Showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord; i.e. the actions for which he deserves praise. And his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done (comp. vers. 12—16, and vers. 23—55).

Ver. 5.—For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel. The "testimony" and the "law" are the whole series of commands given by God to his people, beginning with the directions concerning circumcision in Genesis (xvii. 10—14), and terminating with the last precept in Deuteronomy (xxxii. 46). They may include also the teachings of God through history. These he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children (see Exod. xii. 26, 27; xiii. 8, 14, 15; Deut. iv. 9; vi. 7; xi. 19; xxxii. 46, etc.).

Ver. 6.—That the generation to come might know them. "The generation to come" is the next generation, that immediately following those to whom the command was directly given. Even the children which should be born. Their actual sons and daughters. Who should arise and declare them to their children. The first generation were to hand the knowledge on to the second, the second to the third, and so on. This is the way in which the bulk of human knowledge actually passes on. Not much is learnt from books without a teacher (see Acts viii. 31).

Ver. 7.—That they might set their hope in God. Instruction in God's Law, and in his treatment of their forefathers, would naturally tend to make the Israelites "set their hope in God," who in the past had done so much for them. And not forget the works of God. They could not well forget, if they were perpetually reminded of them. But keep his commandments. If they bore God's works—i.e. his many mercies—in mind, they would be the more disposed to obedience.

Ver. 8.—And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation (comp. Deut. xxi. 18, 20, for the combination of the two words). The "stubbornness" of Israel is noted in Deut. ix. 27; Judg. ii. 19; and frequently by Jeremiah (iii. 17; vii. 24; ix. 14; xi. 8, etc.); their "rebelliousness" in Deut. ix. 7, 24; Isa. xxx. 1, 9; lxxv. 2; Jer. v. 23; Ezek. ii. 3—8; iii. 9, 26, 27; xii. 2, 3, etc. (compare also for the idea 2 Kings xvii. 14—17; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14—16; Ezra ix. 6, 7; Neh. i. 6, 7; Dan. ix. 5—11; and Acts vii. 51, "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye"). A generation that set not their heart aright; literally, that prepared not their heart—did not make it ready to receive Divine influences (see 1 Sam. vii. 3; Job xi. 13; 2 Chron. xx. 33). And whose spirit was not steadfast with God. It was not that Israel was wholly without religious feeling, but the feeling was fickle, unsteadfast, never to be depended on (comp. Exod. xxxii. 1—6; Numb. xvi. 41, 42; Judg. ii. 17, etc.).

Vers. 9—72.—The historical portion of the psalm now follows. It commences with some general remarks on the transgressions of Ephraim, i.e. of Israel while under the guidance of Ephraim—from Joshua to Samuel (vers. 9—11). It then proceeds to details, and sketches the Israelite history from the deliverance out of Egypt to the establishment of David's kingdom (vers. 12—72).

Ver. 9.—The children of Ephraim (comp. ver. 67). Ephraim was the leading tribe, from the appointment of Joshua to succeed Moses until the establishment of Saul as king. Hence the tabernacle was set up within the territory of Ephraim (Josh. xviii. 1). The importance of Ephraim appears in Judg. iii. 27; vii. 24; viii. 1, 2; x. 9; xii. 1—6. Being armed, and carrying bows. There is no "and" in the original. "Carrying bows" is exegetical of "being armed" (comp. 2 Chron. xvii. 17). Turned back in the day of battle. The allusion is not to any one particular occasion, but to the ill success of Israel under the leadership of Ephraim during the whole period of the Judges (see Judg. ii. 14; iii. 8, 13, 31; iv. 2; vi. 1; x. 7, 12, etc.).

Ver. 10.—They kept not the covenant of God (comp. Deut. xxix. 25; xxxi. 20; 1 Kings xix. 10, 14, etc.). And refused to walk in his law (see Judg. ii. 11—13; viii. 33; x. 10).

Ver. 11.—And forgot his works (see ver

42), and his wonders that he had showed them (see vers. 12—15, 24—28, 43—53).

Ver. 12.—Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. The miracles of Egypt are, perhaps, the most striking series in Jewish history. A more particular account of them is given below (vers. 44—53). They were wrought “in the field of Zoan,” i.e. in the rich flat tract east and south of the city of Zoan, the Greek Tanis, now *San*. (On this place, see Mr. Reginald Poole’s ‘Cities of Egypt,’ pp. 64—88.) This fact could not have been gathered from Exodus, but must have come to the writer from the tradition of which he speaks in ver. 3.

Ver. 13.—He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through (see Exod. xiv. 21, 22). And he made the waters to stand as an heap. The expression is taken from the Song of Moses (Exod. xv. 8). It must be understood poetically.

Ver. 14.—In the daytime also he led them with a cloud. The “pillar of the cloud” is, of course, intended (see Exod. xiii. 21, 22; xiv. 19, 24; xl. 38; Numb. ix. 15; x. 34; xiv. 14; Deut. i. 33). And all the night with a light of fire. The “pillar of fire” (Exod. xiii. 21; xl. 38; Numb. ix. 16, etc.).

Vers. 15, 16.—He clave the rocks in the wilderness; rather, *he clave rocks*. The word has no article. The reference is probably to both Exod. xvii. 6 and Numb. xx. 8—11. And gave them drink as out of the great depths; rather, “and gave them drink abundantly, as out of the depths” (so Cheyne and the Revised Version). On the abundance of the water, see Numb. xx. 11, and compare the next verse: He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers.

Ver. 17.—And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the Most High in the wilderness. The two provocations of a demand for bread (Exod. xvi. 3) and a demand for flesh (Numb. xi. 4) are joined together in the present passage, as the two occasions of giving water are in vers. 15, 16. Only the second of these two provocations was subsequent to the (first) giving of water; but the psalmist does not allow himself to be bound by considerations of strict chronological accuracy. He is a poet, and not an historian; though at present he is treating of history.

Ver. 18.—And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust; rather, *by asking food* (Kay, Cheyne, Alexander). The term used (אכל) is wide enough to include both bread (לחם) and flesh (שר). “For their lust” (literally, “for their soul”) means for the gratification of their carnal

appetites (comp. Exod. xvi. 3; Numb. xi. 5).

Ver. 19.—Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? (see Numb. xi. 4). But the psalmist either feels himself at liberty to expand the account given in the Pentateuch, or has a further knowledge of the real feelings of the people, which has come to him by tradition (compare the comment on ver. 12).

Ver. 20.—Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams (literally, *the torrent-courses*) overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people? These were probably the people’s thoughts rather than their words. An “evil heart of unbelief” underlay their clamours and their murmurings. They doubted God’s power to relieve their wants, notwithstanding all the proofs that they had had of his omnipotence.

Ver. 21.—Therefore the Lord heard this. Though these might be unspoken thoughts, yet God would “hear” them, i.e. be aware of them; for “he knoweth the very secrets of the heart.” And was wroth (comp. vers. 59, 62; Deut. iii. 26). So a fire was kindled against Jacob. Not a material fire, as in Lev. x. 2; Numb. xi. 1—3; and xvi. 35; but the fire of God’s displeasure. And anger also came up against Israel (comp. vers. 30, 31; Numb. xi. 33).

Ver. 22.—Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation. They trusted neither in God’s power nor in his love; they neither believed that he would nor that he could save them.

Ver. 23.—Though he had commanded the clouds from above; rather, *and he commanded* (Hengstenberg, Cheyne, Revised Version). The command was subsequent, not previous, to the want of faith (see Numb. xi. 4—31). And opened the doors of heaven (comp. Gen. vii. 11, “The windows of heaven were opened”). The expressions are, of course, poetical (see also 2 Kings vii. 2).

Ver. 24.—And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them; rather, *and rained down manna to eat, and gave them* (comp. Exod. xvi. 13, 14). Of the corn of heaven (comp. Exod. xvi. 4; Ps. cv. 40; John vi. 6, 7).

Ver. 25.—Man did eat angels’ food; literally, *bread of the mighty ones*, by which the LXX. and most commentators understand “angels” to be meant. “Angels’ food” may mean either the actual food on which angels subsist, or food supplied by the ministration of angels, and derived from their dwelling-place. It cannot be laid down dogmatically that angels require no food. He sent them meat to the full

(comp. Exod. xvi. 8, where the Israelites contrast with their wretched life in the wilderness their life in Egypt, where they "did eat bread to the full").

Ver. 26.—He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by his power he brought in the south wind. Here, again, tradition seems to speak. The narrative in the Pentateuch has only, "There went forth a wind from the Lord" (Numb. xi. 31).

Ver. 27.—He rained flesh also upon them. With the expression, "rained flesh," comp. Exod. xvi. 4, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven;" and see also Gen. xix. 24 and Exod. ix. 23. As dust; i.e. "as thick as dust" (Prayer-book Version). The quails lay "as it were two cubits high" for the distance of a day's journey round about each encampment (see Numb. xi. 31). And feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea. The commonest image of multiplicity (Gen. xxii. 17; Deut. xxxiii. 19; Josh. xi. 4; Judg. vii. 12, etc.).

Ver. 28.—And he let it fall in the midst of their camp. The quails "covered the camp" (Exod. xvi. 13). Round about their habitations. They extended also round it on every side (Numb. xi. 31).

Ver. 29.—So they did eat, and were well filled; i.e. sated (comp. Numb. xi. 19, 20). For he gave them their own desire; or, *their own lust—that they lusted after* (Revised Version).

Ver. 30.—They were not estranged from their lust; i.e. their lust was not yet satiated—they were still indulging it. The meat was yet in their mouths, still undergoing mastication, when—

Ver. 31.—The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them (comp. Numb. xi. 33, "While the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague"). By "the fattest of them," we are to understand the strongest and healthiest. And smote down the chosen men of Israel; rather, *the young men*, as in the margin, "the ripened youths" (Cheyne). Here, again, the author adds touches which he has not obtained from the Pentateuch.

Ver. 32.—For all this they sinned still. Neither gratitude for favours received (vers. 13—17), nor alarm at punishments inflicted (ver. 31), had any effect on the stiff-necked people; despite of both, they "sinned still" (comp. vers. 40, 41, 56—58). And believed not for his wondrous works. Unbelief was at the root of their contumacy. They could not deny God's mighty works in the past, but they did not accept them as any evidence of his power to do other mighty works in the future (see ver. 20).

Ver. 33.—Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. Their faithlessness was punished by their forty years of vain and purposeless wandering in the wilderness, and by the "troubles" that befell them there.

Ver. 34.—When he slew them, then they sought him (comp. Exod. xxxii. 28, 35; xxxiii. 4, 10; Numb. xi. 33; xvi. 48, 49, etc.). The repentance is not always noticed in the Mosaic narrative, being, as it was, short-lived, if not even feigned (ver. 36). But, no doubt, after each outpouring of the Divine vengeance, there was at least some show of repentance, as noted in Exod. xxxiii. 4. And they returned—i.e. turned back from their evil courses—and inquired early after God; rather, *earnestly* (Cheyne, Canon Cook).

Ver. 35.—And they remembered that God was their Rock; i.e. their strength and stay. The expression is first used of God in Deut. xxxii. 4. And the high God their Redeemer (comp. Ps. xix. 14; lxxiv. 2).

Ver. 36.—Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth. The Revised Version is simpler and better, *But they flattered him with their mouth*. All that they said or did when alarmed by some judgment of God's was a mere pretence—an attempt to "flatter" and cozen God, and so win his favour. And they lied unto him with their tongues. They offered him a lip-service, which was a "lie," a mere semblance of real religion.

Ver. 37.—For their heart was not right with him. It is the worship of the heart alone which God values (see Deut. x. 12; Prov. iii. 1; xxxiii. 26, etc.). If the heart be not "right with God," our worship is an offence to him. Neither were they steadfast in his covenant (comp. ver. 8).

Ver. 38.—But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity. (On God's compassion, see Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7; Numb. xiv. 18; Ps. ciii. 8; cxlv. 8.) And destroyed them not. The allusion is to such occasions as are noted in Exod. xxxii. 10—14; Numb. xiv. 12—20; xvi. 21, 45—50, when God was on the point of destroying the whole people, but relented at the intercession of Moses. Yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath (comp. Judg. ii. 11—16; iii. 8, 9; iv. 2, 15; vi. 1—8, etc.).

Ver. 39.—For he remembered that they were but flesh (comp. Gen. vi. 3). Flesh is weak, erring, frail—"in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. vii. 17)—God, therefore, who had made them "flesh," had compassion on their weakness. A wind that passeth away, and cometh not again (comp. Job vii. 7). Man is a mere passing breath—as light, as fleeting, as tran-

sitory—"a vapour that appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away" (Jas. iv. 14).

Ver. 40.—How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! (comp. Deut. xxxi. 27; xxxii. 15—18; Aots vii. 30—43, etc.). That God is "grieved" at man's sins appears, not only from this passage, but also from Gen. vi. 6; Ps. xcv. 10; Eph. iv. 30; Heb. iii. 17.

Ver. 41.—Yea, they turned back and tempted God; rather, *again and again they tempted God* (Hengstenberg, Kay, Cheyne); see Exod. xvii. 2, 7; Deut. vi. 16. And limited the Holy One of Israel (comp. Num. xxxiv. 7, 8). This may mean either "they set limits to his power in their own minds" (see ver. 20), or "they actually limited his power to help and succour them by their want of faith" (comp. Mark vi. 5, "He could there do no mighty work," explained in Matt. xiii. 58 to have been "because of their unbelief"). The other meanings suggested—"disgraced" and "provoked"—are less probable.

Ver. 42.—They remembered not his hand; i.e. "his doings" (comp. ver. 11, they "forgot his works"). Nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy. "The day" intended is probably that of the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea (Exod. xv. 28). In this the Egyptian signs culminated.

Ver. 43.—How he had wrought his signs in Egypt. The point just touched in ver. 12 is now taken up and expanded, with the object of showing to the Israelites of the writer's day what cause they had for thankfulness to God in the past and for trust in him for the future. And his wonders in the field of Zoan. "The field of Zoan" (*sochet Zoan*) is said to be mentioned in an Egyptian inscription (*Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache* for the year 1872, p. 16).

Ver. 44.—And had turned their rivers into blood (see Exod. vii. 19, 20). "Their rivers" are the many branches of the Nile, some natural, some artificial (Herod., ii. 17), by which Lower Egypt is traversed. And their floods; or, *their streams*; i.e. the smaller canals, which diffused the Nile water over the entire land. That they could not drink (see Exod. vii. 21).

Ver. 45.—He sent divers sorts of flies among them (see Exod. viii. 24). A particular sort of fly or beetle is meant, rather than many different sorts. Dr. Kay and Professor Cheyne suggest "dog-flies"—Canon Cook, the *Blatta Orientalis*. Which devoured them; i.e. "preyed upon them," sucking out their life-blood. And frogs, which destroyed them (see Exod. viii. 6). The poet, not being an historian, does not give the plagues in their chronological

order, neither regards himself as bound to mention all of them. He omits the third, and reverses the order of the second and fourth.

Ver. 46.—He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust. *Khásil* (חָסִיל), here translated "caterpillar," is probably either a particular kind of locust, or the locust in one of its stages. (On the plague of locusts in Egypt, see Exod. x. 14, 15.)

Ver. 47.—He destroyed their vines with hail (see Exod. ix. 23—25). Here, again, there is an inversion of the order in which the plagues came, since the plague of hail preceded that of the locusts. There is also an addition to the narrative of Exodus in the mention of "vines" (see also Ps. cv. 33), which may indicate a use of tradition. That vines were cultivated in Egypt is now generally acknowledged. And their sycamore trees with frost; or, *with sleet*—a variant of the "hail" in the other hemistich.

Ver. 48.—He gave up their cattle also to the hail (comp. Exod. ix. 19—21, 25). And their flocks to hot thunderbolts (see Exod. ix. 24, 28, 29, 34). The "fire which ran along the ground" (Exod. ix. 23) must have been caused by electrified clouds of high tension; the highly charged drops of rain meeting the inductively charged earth, and sparking across when within striking distance. This is believed to accompany every thunderstorm, though generally invisible to the eye. When exceptionally severe, it would convey the idea of running fire, and would of course be very destructive of life. It is no wonder that most of the cattle which were left "in the field" died (Exod. ix. 21, 25).

Ver. 49.—He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble. "The accumulation of terms signifying Divine wrath is designed to set forth the dreadful nature of this last judgment" (Hengstenberg)—the death of the firstborn. By sending evil angels among them. Most modern critics regard this clause as in apposition with the preceding one, and consider the "wrath, indignation, and trouble" to be themselves the "evil angels" spoken of. Some, however, as Hengstenberg and Kay, interpret the passage of spiritual beings—not, however, of spirits of evil, who are never said to be ministers of God's wrath, but of good angels, who on this occasion were "ministers of woe."

Ver. 50.—He made a way to his anger; literally, *he levelled a way for his anger*; i.e. made a smooth path for it (Cheyne). He spared not their soul from death; rather, *held not back their soul*. But gave their life over to the pestilence. This is, undoubtedly, the true meaning, and not "he

gave their beasts over to the murrain." Though no "pestilence" is expressly mentioned in Exod. xii. as having caused the death of the firstborn, yet pestilence may assuredly have been the means employed.

Ver. 51.—**And smote all the firstborn in Egypt** (see Exod. xii. 29). The chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham; or, "the beginning (literally, *firstfruits*) of their strength" (comp. Gen. xlix. 3). "The tabernacles of Ham" is a periphrasis for "Egypt"—the Egyptians, according to the author of Genesis (Gen. x. 6), being descendants of Ham (comp. Pss. cv. 23, 27; vi. 22). There are no sufficient grounds for connecting the name of Ham either with the Egyptian Kem, Kemi—the native name for the country—or with Khem, one of the principal Egyptian gods. The literation is, no doubt, close in the latter case; but etymologists lay it down that close approximations are especially deceptive.

Ver. 52.—**But made his own people to go forth like sheep** (comp. Pss. lxxvii. 20; xcvi. 7). **And guided them in the wilderness like a flock.** The guidance began from Succoth, and was effected by means of the pillar of the cloud and the pillar of fire (see Exod. xiii. 20—22).

Ver. 53.—**And he led them on safely, so that they feared not** (comp. Exod. xiv. 13—22). At Pi-hahiroth they "were sore afraid" (Exod. xiv. 10), but after Moses had exhorted them (ver. 13), they showed no more signs of fear. But the sea overwhelmed their enemies (Exod. xiv. 26—31; xv. 1, 4, 10).

Ver. 54.—**And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary.** The "sanctuary" is here probably the Holy Land, as in Exod. xv. 17; or we may translate נֶחֱד קֹדֶשׁ "his holy territory." Even to this mountain. Mount Zion, on which the writer regards himself as standing while his words are chanted in the temple service. Which his right hand had purchased; or, *had gotten*, "had won." God's right hand won the whole land for his people.

Ver. 55.—**He cast out the heathen also before them** (comp. Exod. xxxiv. 24; Deut. vii. 1; 1 Kings xxi. 26; Ps. xlii. 2, etc.). "They gat not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but God's right hand, and his arm, and the light of his countenance" (Ps. xlii. 3). **And divided them an inheritance by line.** The measuring-line, which was employed in parcelling out territory, is intended (comp. Jer. xxxi. 39; Amos vii. 17). Joshua's division of the land (Josh. xv.—xix.) among the tribes is specially pointed at. **And made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents; i.e. in the tents of the heathen**

—the abodes of the Hivites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.

Ver. 56.—**Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God** (comp. above, ver. 17). The Israelites continued to "tempt and provoke God" after they had obtained possession of the Holy Land, and divided it among them (see Judg. ii. 11—19; iii. 12; iv. 1; vi. 1; x. 6—15; xiii. 1, etc.). **And kept not his testimonies; or, his ordinances** (Cheyne).

Ver. 57.—**But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers** (comp. ver. 8, and the comment *ad loc.*). They were turned aside like a deceitful bow (comp. Hos. vii. 16). A "deceitful bow" is one that fails in the hour of need, either breaking, or losing its strength, or sending its arrows wide of the mark.

Ver. 58.—**For they provoked him to anger with their high places.** The "high place" worship was always displeasing to God. It was, no doubt, deeply tinged with idolatry. **And moved him to jealousy with their graven images.** In the time of the Judges, both graven and molten images were employed by the Israelites in a worship which they nevertheless regarded as the worship of Jehovah (see the history of Micah in Judg. xvii. and xviii., especially ch. xvii. 4, 13, and ch. xviii. 14, 17, 18, 31).

Ver. 59.—**When God heard this, he was wroth** (comp. above, ver. 21). **And greatly abhorred Israel.** Not Israel, as distinct from Judah, but Israel in the broadest sense, the entire nation, as in ver. 55.

Ver. 60.—**So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh.** The "tabernacle of the congregation" was first set up under Joshua (Josh. xviii.) at Shiloh, a city of Ephraim, and here the national sanctuary continued throughout the period of the Judges (Judg. xviii. 31; xxi. 19; 1 Sam. i. 3, 24; ii. 14; iii. 21; iv. 4, etc.). God was regarded as having "forsaken" this sanctuary, when he allowed the ark of the covenant, its chief treasure, to be taken (1 Sam. iv. 11—22). Subsequently, but at what exact time is unknown, the tabernacle was removed from Shiloh to Nob (1 Sam. xxi. 1), and later on to Gibeon (1 Kings iii. 4). The tent which he pitched among men. (On the form and materials of the tabernacle, see Exod. xxvi. 1—37, and compare Mr. Fergusson's article on the subject in Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' vol. iii. pp. 1451—1455.)

Ver. 61.—**And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand.** God's "strength" and "glory" is the ark of the covenant (compare the expression in 1 Sam. iv. 21, 22, "The glory is departed from Israel"). (For the capture and "captivity" of the ark, see 1 Sam. iv. 17, and v. vi.)

Ver. 62.—He gave his people over also unto the sword. Thirty thousand Israelites were slain in the battle in which the ark was captured (see 1 Sam. iv. 10). And was wroth with his inheritance (comp. Ps. xxviii. 9; xxxiii. 12; cvi. 5, 40).

Ver. 63.—The fire consumed their young men. The reference is not to such passages as Lev. x. 2; Numb. xi. 1; xvi. 35, where a literal fire seems to be spoken of, but rather to the fire of war (Numb. xxi. 28; Isa. xxvi. 11; Jer. xlviii. 45), or more generally to the fire of the Divine anger (Isa. x. 16—18; xlvii. 14, etc.). And their maidens were not given to marriage: literally, *were not praised in song*; i.e. in the bridal song. The destruction of the young men, either in battle or in any other way, caused there to be more marriageable girls in Israel than there were husbands for (comp. Isa. iv. 1).

Ver. 64.—Their priests fell by the sword. As Hophni and Phinehas at the taking of the ark (1 Sam. iv. 11), and, no doubt, many others on other occasions. And their widows made no lamentation. The solemn funeral dirge could not take place, since the bodies remained on the battle-field.

Ver. 65.—Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep (comp. Ps. vii. 6; xxxv. 23; lxxiii. 20). God is said to “awake,” when, after a time of inaction, he suddenly exerts his Almighty power, to the discomfiture of his enemies. That God never really slept was the profound conviction of the Israelites generally (see 2 Kings xviii. 27; Ps. cxxi. 3, 4). And like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine (comp. Zech. x. 7; Isa. xlii. 13).

Ver. 66.—And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts; rather, *backward*, so that they fled before him (comp. Ps. xl. 14; lxx. 2, etc.). There is no allusion to 1 Sam. v. 6—12. The reference is rather to the many victories of Israel over the Philistines, which began under Samuel (1 Sam. vii. 10), and continued under Saul and David. He put them to a perpetual reproach. Covered them, that is, with shame and disgrace. The shame culminated, perhaps, in David's victory over Goliath (1 Sam. xvii. 40—51).

Ver. 67.—Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph. The “tabernacle of Joseph” is the sanctuary at Shiloh, which was north of Bethel, and thus within the limits of the tribe of Ephraim. When a permanent site was to be assigned to the tabernacle and the ark, God did not choose for them the position of Shiloh, but that of Jerusalem. And chose not the tribe of

Ephraim. Ephraim had enjoyed the pre-eminence from the time of the death of Moses (see the comment on ver. 9). By the course of events between Samuel's death and the establishment of the kingdom of David, the pre-eminence had been transferred to Judah, according to the design of the Almighty from the first (see Gen. xlix. 8—10).

Ver. 68.—But chose the tribe of Judah. The choice was made when David was, by God's command, anointed to be king (1 Sam. xvi. 1—12). The Mount Zion which he loved (comp. Ps. lxxxvii. 2, “The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob”). God, no doubt, inspired David with the thought of fixing his residence in “the stronghold of Zion” (2 Sam. v. 9), and of bringing up the ark of the covenant into it (2 Sam. vi. 12—17). The presence of the ark determined the selection of Jerusalem for the site of the temple.

Ver. 69.—And he built his sanctuary like high palaces; rather, *like the heights*. The “heights of heaven” (Job xi. 8; xxii. 12) are probably meant. Like the earth which he hath established for ever; i.e. lofty as heaven, stable and firmly fixed as earth. The ultimate fate of the sanctuary is mercifully hidden from the psalmist.

Ver. 70.—He chose David also his servant (see 1 Sam. xvi. 1, 12). And took him from the sheepfolds (comp. 1 Sam. xvi. 11, 19; 2 Sam. vii. 8).

Ver. 71.—From following the ewes great with young he brought him (comp. Isa. xl. 11). The Hebrew word translated “ewes great with young” really means “ewes that are giving suck.” This is the portion of the flock which needs the tenderest care. To feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance (see 1 Chron. xi. 2). As Peter, James, and John were called from their occupation of fishers to be “fishers of men” (Matt. iv. 19), so David was called from feeding sheep to feed God's people.

Ver. 72.—So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart. On the whole, David performed his task of governing Israel faithfully. He had the direct testimony of God to that effect (see 1 Kings ix. 4). And he guided them by the skillfulness of his hands. David was not only an upright and faithful king, but also a “skilful” or prudent one. He built up his kingdom into an empire without suffering any serious disasters. Israel reached its acme of glory and prosperity under him, decline setting in under Solomon.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 29.—*The heart's desire gratified.* "He gave them their own desire." Three days' march from Sinai, at the first halting-place, where the tabernacle was first pitched after quitting the plain at the foot of that holy mountain, the wandering Arabs of the desert might gaze on the saddest, most shameful waymarks of Israel's pilgrimage towards the Land of Promise. A row of dreary mounds marked where thousands of plague-stricken corpses had been hastily buried by the terrified survivors. As the silver trumpets again sounded, and the mourning host, with thinned ranks, marched away from the ghastly spot, they named it "Kibroth-hattaavah"—"Graves of lust." Many centuries afterwards the Holy Spirit in this psalm wrote this epitaph.

I. THE HISTORY is told in Numb. xi., with that terseness and graphic power which belong to Bible narratives. The grand characteristic of those narratives, however, is not their style (though it may well be called miraculous), but this—they let us see behind the scenes; they withdraw the veil and show us God's guiding and controlling hand—in miracle, when miracles are needed, not otherwise; but no less in the ordinary course of nature and human affairs. Thus we are taught that when we cannot see behind the scenes, within the veil, the same hand is always there. This terrible episode in Israel's history is one of the most signal illustrations of that profound mystery—the thwarting of God's gracious designs by man's sin and unbelief. "Design"—not that absolute purpose which must stand, let who will gainsay, but, as in nature and providence, so in the spiritual realm, the lines along which God works; the manifest fitness of things; the blessed and useful results which would certainly come about if men were trustfully obedient. In this sense, the design with which God led Israel forth out of Egypt is clear as day (Isa. xliii. 21). To form a nation, giving them the two main elements of civilization—order and ideas: wise, righteous order; true, noble, fruitful ideas. And this, that they might be—as they have been, spite of all their sin and failure—the religious leaders and teachers of mankind. They were a rough material—with little, perhaps, beyond the patriarchal government of their chiefs of tribes and families, and the strict discipline to which their labour in Egypt inured them, to raise them above the "mixed multitude" of fugitives who joined them in their escape from bondage. Severe training was indispensable to mould them first into an army of hardy warriors, then into a nation of industrious, God-fearing, law-abiding free men. But had they bent to the hand that led them, listened to the voice that spoke to them, it would have been a gracious discipline. Their first lesson was the foundation-truth of religion—absolute dependence on the power and providence of the Almighty Creator, "not far from every one of us" (vers. 14—16, 23, 24). Then, at the foot of Mount Sinai, even the dullest, most unbelieving, ungodly heart was constrained to feel the actual presence of the living God; and national as well as personal life definitely hung on these two principles—obedience to God's Law, and faith in God's promise. Stained and maimed as is the history of God's ancient people, through their incurable, insensate unbelief and rebellion, so faithfully confessed in their own Scriptures, it is yet the source, remote but real, of our own religious life to-day; supplies our most touching and stirring pictures and parables of the Christian's life-journey to the better land. What would it have been could they have risen to the height of God's purpose, and, like Caleb, "followed the Lord wholly"? Three conclusions seem so plain that I do not well know how any candid mind can avoid them. 1. That such a history—so unlike anything else—would never have been invented had it not been real. 2. That Hebrew writers would never have penned such a history of national apostasy, folly, and sin (of which this psalm is an epitome and specimen), unless divinely inspired. 3. The fact that what the Bible records as God's promises have been fulfilled after the lapse of ages, spite of the unbelief and opposition of those to whom they were given, cannot rationally be accounted for except by the fact that they *are* in truth God's word, which cannot be broken (Numb. xxiii. 19).

II. SOME SPECIAL LESSONS FROM THIS PAGE OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY. 1. *God is able to give you your "own desire."* Some hidden wish, perhaps, so bold, or selfish, or wrong, or out of all ordinary range of likelihood, you dare not breathe in human ear. Yet if God spoke to you as to Solomon (2 Chron. i. 7), *that is what would leap to your*

lips. If God *does not* grant it, it will not be because he *cannot*. No need of miracle. "With God all things are possible." Beware, therefore, how you pray! 2. *God may (and sometimes does) grant our heart's desire*, not approving, but in displeasure and punishment: happy for us if it be only for chastisement; not (as in the case of Israel) for destruction (Ps. cvi. 15). Not arbitrarily. The body cannot be gorged, unbridled lust satiated, and at the same time the soul fed, the spiritual life nourished. Examples: love of wealth; amusement; success; ease. God and idols cannot both dwell in the soul's sanctuary. Sin brings its own penalty. 3. *Therefore God may refuse and withhold our heart's desire, not in anger, but in mercy and wisdom*. The father will not give the stone, serpent, scorpion (Luke xi. 11, 12), even if the child asks for it. 4. *The heart's desire is the test of character*. What a man loves both shows what he is and moulds him. "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Heb. iv. 12). The sinful desire, Christ teaches, is sin (Ps. xix. 12; 1 John i. 8, 9). 5. *There are desires which we may be sure God will satisfy*: the earnest of their own fulfilment (Ps. cxlv. 19; Isa. xxvi. 8).

Ver. 34.—*Mercy remembered in wrath*. "When he slew them," etc. Sin is not all wilfulness; it is also infirmity—our calamity as well as our crime. Perhaps, otherwise, repentance and pardon would be impossible. God takes account of men's weakness as well as of their guilt. He alone can hold the balance. This psalm lays a heavy indictment of disobedience, lust, and unbelief against God's chosen people. Yet there is no more touching, beautiful description of Divine compassion than vers. 38, 39. *In wrath he remembers mercy*. The punishment of sin is not only consistent with God's mercy, it is an exercise of mercy; because both its effect and purpose are to bring men to acknowledge their sin and return to God. If it fail, hardening instead of softening, this is through impenitence and unbelief.

I. First lesson. EXPERIENCE SHOWS THAT TROUBLE LEADS MEN TO SEEK GOD WHEN NOTHING ELSE WILL. "When he slew them" (cf. Ps. cxix. 67, 71). 1. *Trouble scourges conscience awake*; brings sin to mind (1 Kings xvii. 18). Joseph's brethren carried their sin on their consciences unconfessed two and twenty years; covered the sore with opium plaster of silence, indifference, forgetfulness. But with Simeon bound before their eyes, accused of being spies, families at home gnawed with hunger, conscience woke (Gen. xlii. 21, 22). In many cases trouble actually springs from sin: conscience dull, indeed, if not touched! Of course, this does not apply to all troubles. No greater mistake than for Christians to torment themselves with the notion that every trial is punishment for some special sin. Probably the hardest trials in life arise from sins of others; e.g. good wife has bad husband, good husband bad wife, godly parents undutiful, vicious children; honest man deceived by those he trusts. Even carelessness, ignorance of others, may overwhelm brightest life with calamity; e.g. whole family swept away through poisoned milk or ill-laid drains. Yet, even so, the sufferer may hear a voice none else can hear. Very solemn, touching glimpse of inner working of conscience (Job xiii. 23—26). 2. *Trouble breaks up the illusions of life*. Life's chariot-wheels would drive heavily if we had no illusions. Hardly even young people would have courage to face the future if we saw things just as they are. A token man was meant for bliss—an heir of life, not death—that trouble commonly seems so strange, joy so natural. Faith can lift above sorrow, but no experience (our own or others') makes us *at home* with it. As misfortune tests a man's friends—perhaps few out of many, and not those he counted on—so when trouble singles us out, sets us apart on that beach of God's school, we learn the difference between dreams and realities, pleasure and profit, show and substance. Well for you if then the anchor holds; great eternal realities emerge. Terrible if the surface breaks up, shadows dissolve, and *no reality*, no refuge, rest, certainty, remain! The lesson of Ps. xli. is a hard one; but those who have learned it count it worth while: "God is our Refuge" (vers. 1—3). 3. *In trouble men learn to pray*. The sense of our weakness and dependence on God, and of his nearness and readiness to help, may slumber, like sense of sin; and need heavy blow to waken it. Even earnest Christian can hardly pray when all goes smoothly, as when the storm bursts. Jonah, no doubt, a man of prayer; but never prayed before as when weeds wrapt about his head (Jonah ii.). Disciples (Mark iv. 38). Even heathen sailors (Jonah i. 6). The anchor of prayer which, perhaps, has swung idly through half the

voyage of life, is let down then. (See Mrs. Browning's 'Cry of the Children.') Let us correct our views of life. We are often amazed—faith is tried—by the enormous mass of human sorrow and suffering, and that life is so unstably balanced on brink of death. How would it be if trouble banished, and life secure, healthful, joyous, for centuries—*men still being sinners*? Would not God be more fearfully forgotten, sin regarded as a trifle, shows of life taken for substance, voice of prayer fall silent? World would become not better, but incalculably worse. In mercy, as well as judgment, man was shut out of Eden (Gen. iii. 22) lest immortality became a curse.

II. AS EXPERIENCE SHOWS THIS RESULT OF TROUBLE, GOD'S WORD REVEALS THIS DESIGN OF TROUBLE. "Then they sought him." God meant they should. What we have spoken of may be called the *natural* effect of trouble, if accepted as God's chastening—to awaken conscience, dispel illusions, lead us to pray; not *necessary* result—taken amiss, it may harden. "Natural result" is only another name for *Divine purpose* (except so far as sin has perverted our nature). But God's Word gives far higher, more inward, view of life—a *distinct Divine plan and purpose*, at least for every life yielded and trusted to God. No view of life so noble as this (Ps. cxxxviii. 8). Scripture abounds with illustrations: Abraham, Joseph, David, Saul of Tarsus. *Exceptions?* Yes, in this sense, that high place and conspicuous service are for the few. But, after all, chief aim in God's training is *character*, not service; not what we are to *do*, but to *be*. Tens of thousands in lowliest walks God is training, as surely as Joseph—not for high place here, but *glory, honour, immortality*. Now, if one thing is plain, it is that *character is perfected by discipline*. Gold needs the furnace (Heb. xii. 5). To go above all mere human examples. Our Saviour's whole life was obedience—prayer—fellowship with his Father. But see Heb. v. 7—9; ii. 10; John xvi. 32. Those lessons, therefore, we have spoken of, do not belong merely to conversion, or early stages of Christian experience. Christian who has long rejoiced in forgiveness may need deepened sense of sin. If he has kept his head steady in prosperity, he may yet need the bracing air and cool twilight of adversity. Holiest Christian may be brought nearer to God—to the Saviour. It would be a narrow view to think all this exhausts the design of trouble. In the case of our blessed Lord we should not have dared to think of this end at all, if not so plainly taught. Main end—supreme purpose—"to give his life a ransom." He "bare our sins." Even with us, his humble imperfect disciples, suffering is largely "vicarious"—for the sake of others. Calls forth as nothing else could, sympathy, love, mutual help. Softens and enriches the soil of life. St. Paul (Col. i. 24).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—72.—*Whole psalm: Warnings against unbelief.* I. ITS PURPOSE. 1. *To warn Ephraim*; not to taunt and exult over him, but to warn. This psalm seems to belong to the period of the disruption. Ephraim, with the other northern tribes, had broken away from Judah and from the worship of God, and this psalm seems designed, by its recital of their old sins and the consequences thereof, to warn them against like sin in the future (cf. 2 Chron. xiii.). 2. *To warn Judah*. If they had been greatly exalted of God, and by his presence amongst them were so still, let them take warning by Ephraim's sin, that they fall not in like manner.

II. ITS CONTENTS. 1. After an *exordium* (vers. 1—4), in which he asks attention, and tells the manner of his speech, its source, and its intent; 2. He *begins his history*, telling of the covenant, and wherefore God had appointed it, and what a failure on Israel's part it had been (vers. 5—8). 3. Then he *gives the details* of his story. He charges Ephraim as being most in fault; how they broke the covenant, refused God's Law, and forgot his works—the wonders of the Exodus and of the wilderness, the pillar of fire, and the water out of the rock; how they tempted God in spite of all, and taunted him with their unbelief as to his power to provide them bread. 4. Then the psalm recites *how God was wroth* with them, and gave them the flesh they lusted after, but the plague along with it, letting them eat of the fruit of their own ways (ver. 31). 5. Next he tells of *their miserable repentance* (vers. 34—36), and how oft, nevertheless, God forgave them (vers. 38, 39). 6. Then from vers. 42—58 there is a

furth^r recital of God's favour, and their ingratitude and disobedience. Then from vers. 59—67 is told the *final rejection of Ephraim*, and from thence onward the choosing of Judah and of David, and the justification of that choice (ver. 72). But—

III. WHAT IS THE MESSAGE OF ALL THIS FOR US TO-DAY? 1. *The fearful strength of the evil heart of unbelief.* Religious privilege cannot restrain it; miracles cannot convince it; nor mercies persuade it; nor awful judgments permanently change it. 2. Inquire *whence deliverance* from such evil heart may come. (1) Do not encourage it. Sin makes unbelief our interest—we cannot afford to believe. (2) If we have given such encouragement, by true repentance take it away. (3) Encourage faith. Let it be your real interest to believe, as the real believer knows it is. He loves faith. (4) By constant communion keep close to God.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*History a parable.* In Matt. xiii. this verse is quoted as the ground of our Lord's teaching by parables. He never used fables—stories which contain the unnatural and grotesque,—but parables—stories of what were, or might have been, actual occurrences. Probably many of them were. And all history is a parable, and ought to be so used by us in teaching far more than it is; for, like the parables, history has for—

I. ITS AUTHOR—God. The story of the nations often seems to be no better than a wild hurly-burly, and their wars to be no more important than, as one has said, the fightings of so many kites and crows. But such idea is the result of a merely slight and superficial observation. Deeper study would show the

“Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.”

The philosophy of history is the discovery of God.

II. ITS METHODS—the record of events that are ordinary, familiar, human. These are the common groundwork of both parable and history.

III. ITS USEFULNESS—that it conveys instruction in a manner that arrests thought, deepens impression, awakes interest, and is retained in the memory as other forms of teaching are not. It is especially adapted for children.

IV. ITS INTENT AND PURPOSE—to teach men, and to incline them to follow the ways of God. And such are—

V. ITS RESULTS. For just as the result of the parables of our Lord on the minds and hearts of men is simply incalculable in the vast extent of its controlling power, so also is it with the teachings of history. They have created a just judgment and a fixed habit of mind in men, upon which most of the modern life of the nations is based. History—the record of experience—is, after all, the Bible of mankind, and doubtless was intended so to be. We do no honour to the sacred Scriptures by our too common habit of confining our studies of the ways of God in history to its records alone. All history teaches of God, and not that of the Bible only. Happy will it be for both teachers and taught when they, as did the writer of this psalm, regard all national history as a parable of God.—S. C.

Ver. 4.—*Religious education.* The first eight verses of this psalm have much to say upon this great question. Upon—

I. ITS AUTHORITY. “He commanded our fathers” (ver. 5; cf. Deut. vi.). That which reason, conscience, and experience would alike teach, the authority of God confirms by direct command. And it is at our peril that we neglect this. The sanctions that accompany the command have not to wait for the future life for their fulfilment; they are visible everywhere in the present, as they have been in all the past.

II. ITS IMPORTANCE. This entire psalm is the sad record of the results of neglecting this command (see vers. 8, 40).

III. ITS METHOD. 1. By entrusting this duty mainly to the parents (see ver. 5)—those who might naturally be expected to feel the chief interest in, and responsibility for, their children. 2. Adopting the most interesting mode of instruction—the parabolic (ver. 2); the historic (ver. 4). 3. Charging the children with the responsibility of transmission (vers. 5, 6).

IV. ITS HIGH AND HOLY PURPOSE. (Vers. 7, 8.)—S. C.

Ver. 9.—*Recreant Ephraim.* We do not know what battle this was. Some point to 1 Chron. vii. 21; others to Josh. xiii. 1, 13 and xviii. 3; others to 1 Sam. iv. But we do not certainly know. Ephraim's character was such as is here described (see ver. 57). Also Hosea, *passim*; he terms them "a cake not turned;" "a silly dove." He says, they "compass me about with lies." As to their armour, see 2 Chron. xvii. 17. Also see David's teaching "the children of Judah the use of the bow." Their opportunities for service were very great. As a tribe they were rich; the sanctuary of Israel was at Shiloh, in their midst; the metropolis of the land also; theirs, too, the largest population, the most famous names—Joseph, Joshua, Gideon. They were an especially military tribe. As to their fate, they utterly perished (see Rom. xi. 1—8). Their history is very instructive; for there is a battle to be waged to-day. As we watch we see many come to it "armed," and capable of rendering the good service we look for from them. But lo! many of them turn back, and render no help at all, to their own shame and to the hurt of many more. Note—

I. THE BATTLE. "All the world's a stage," said our great poet. Had he said, "All the world's a battle-field," he would have been yet more true to fact. The battle is between God and Satan, as to who shall reign over us—God or his adversary. And God has equipped many soldiers for the fight. See—

II. THE ARMOUR he has given them—given to many of us. Christian education; holy example; means of grace; power and capacity for service, imparted by the teaching of his Word; the sanctions and urgings of conscience, the drawings of his Spirit, and much more. Such things constitute the armour which would make us good soldiers if we would avail ourselves of them. But there is—

III. THE TURNING BACK on the part of many, even as Ephraim turned back. Ridicule has, perhaps, to be met; or loss to be borne; or self to be denied; or ease to be foregone; the cross in one or other of its forms has to be taken up; and many go away—go back, sorrowful, perhaps, but, nevertheless, they turn back. Oh, what shame to them! a people nobly born, well-armed, and pledged to the service, and yet, etc.! What dishonour to Christ! what discouragement to the faithful Church! what loss to God's kingdom! what triumph for the foe! what ruin for themselves!—S. C.

Ver. 16.—*The rock.* (Cf. 1 Cor. x. 4; Numb. xx.) What rock was this? Travellers have described such rock; but we do not know that it was this one. But we do know that it existed; that the waters which flowed from it followed Israel; which is what Paul means by saying that the "rock followed them;" and that this rock was a type of Christ—not Christ himself, but a type of him. Note—

I. THE RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN CHRIST AND THE ROCK. 1. *In nature.* A rock is like Christ; it is stable, solid, fit for a foundation. A rock may be a great defence. "Be thou my strong Rock, a House of defence to cover me." A refreshing shade. "The shadow of a great rock," etc. 2. *In the fact that the rock was smitten* ere the waters flowed out. 3. *Moses, the Law's representative, was the smiter.* And to obey the Law, Christ was smitten.

II. THE STREAMS WHICH FLOWED FROM IT. These tell of what from Christ flow to us—pardoning mercy, sanctifying grace, spiritual consolation, eternal life. And as those streams, so these are free, satisfying, copious, constant.

III. THE INQUIRIES SUGGESTED. Have we drunk of them? If not, do so. Are we drinking of them? Invite others.—S. C.

Ver. 21.—*National judgments.* This psalm is emphatically a judgment psalm. It teaches that—

I. NATIONS ARE JUDGED AS WELL AS INDIVIDUALS. History is almost entirely occupied with the judgments of God upon nations. Hence it is that we say, "Happy is that nation which has no history!" for if it has, we know the nature of the record for the most part.

II. THEIR JUDGMENT IS JUST. Study the causes of the decline of empires, nations, and peoples, and it will generally be found that, as with the Canaanitish nations, their vice and wickedness had become so rampant and foul that, for the sake of humanity at large, it was necessary that the besom of God's destruction should sweep them away. Gibbon's great work on the 'Decline and Fall of the Empire of Rome' is really

—though Gibbon was far enough from intending it to be so—a *thesdict*, a vindication of God and of his righteousness.

III. BUT SUCH JUDGMENTS DO NOT COME UNTIL ALL OTHER MEANS HAVE BEEN FIRST TRIED. It was so with Israel. They had witnessed the plagues upon Egypt. They had experienced the unstinted mercy and long-suffering of God. They had seen the glorious miracles which God wrought on their behalf. They had been taught his holy Law. So that the question of Isa. v. 4 was altogether just. And so in the history of all nations. If God's vengeance cometh surely, it cometh very slowly; so that, perchance, it may not need to come at all.

IV. THEY ARE EXECUTED IN THE PRESENT LIFE. There is no future judgment for nations. When Christ came, as he did at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the judgment he predicted should then take place was fulfilled.

V. IN THEM THE INNOCENT SUFFER WITH THE GUILTY. This is inevitable. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. Hence—

VI. THEY PREDICT THE FUTURE FINAL JUDGMENT. God shall then judge every man according to his works, as is not possible in the judgments of the nations now.

VII. ARE EFFECTUAL BUT FOR A TIME. They do not put an end to sin, but only stay it for a season (ver. 34).

VIII. ARE ACCORDING TO RIGHTEOUSNESS. The leaders in sin shall suffer deepest condemnation. See the doom of Ephraim, Israel's ringleader in iniquity (vers. 9, 57, 67).

IX. THE SINS WHICH PROVOKE THEM DO NOT HINDER THE PURPOSES OF GOD. (Ver. 70.) David was raised up to carry on what should have been Ephraim's work.

X. TRUE PATRIOTISM IS TO HELP FORWARD, BY ALL MEANS IN OUR POWER, THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH ALONE EXALTETH A NATION.—S. C.

Ver. 32.—*The tenacity of sin.* This psalm might have for title, "The Devil's Grip;" "The Heart-hold of Sin;" "The Gates of Hell prevailing," or any other such sad surname. For throughout its weary length it tells of scarce anything else. And would that it were only an old-world story!—a tale of ancient Israel, but of nobody else. But concerning such persistence in sin, note—

I. IT IS SEEN TO-DAY AS MUCH AS EVER. In the history of nations; of Churches; of families; of individuals. Of how many may it be said as it was of Amon, "But Amon sinned more and more"! What Christian pastor has not had under his own observation again and again those whose story is told here?

II. THERE ARE NO GRACIOUS RESISTANCES WHICH IT DOES NOT OVERCOME. "For all this," was said of old, and can be now. This "all" includes now, as of old: Divine revelation (ver. 5); early education (ver. 3); warning from ill example of others near to them (ver. 8); unspeakable mercies and deliverances (vers. 11, 12); perpetual providential love; forbearance upon forbearance (ver. 38); terrible judgments (ver. 31); opportunities of return (vers. 34, 35). All this and more of like gracious nature they disregarded, even as men do still.

III. ITS SECRET IS EVER THE EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF. Not the unbelief which is the result of the perverted brain, but that which is generated by the evil heart, the sin-loving soul.

IV. ITS WORD OF WARNING IS VERY PLAIN. 1. "Fools make a mock at sin." What else can they be who tamper and trifle with such a deadly thing! It may be in you seemingly weak as a cobweb film; let alone, it will become strong as the cable which holds fast, let the strain on it be what it may. 2. Meet this tenacity of sin by the tenacity of grace. Cling to Christ in strenuous prayer; hold on so to him. 3. Be content with nothing less than the gift of the clean heart; be sanctified as well as justified. "The blood of Christ cleanseth from *all* sin." 4. Remember how the strong one was and ever will be cast out by the Stronger (Luke xi. 21, 22), even Christ, who is "mighty to save," if we will give ourselves up to him.—S. C.

Ver. 34.—*The determined sinner's regular round.* There are regions to which so many tourists go, and the notable places in which they usually visit in an almost fixed order, that the way they take has come to be known as and called "the regular round." This psalm and this verse seem to set forth another regular round which sin-hardened souls do perpetually take. We will—

I. NOTE ITS STAGES. 1. *They start with sin*, and on and on they go, with occasional misgivings, which, however, soon grow less along the broad, attractive, much-frequented road. 2. But next they come to where *the punishment of God* has to be met and endured. This is a dreary place, and they cry out in their pain. But they cannot avoid this stage. However slowly they may seem to travel, they reach it one day, and a dark day that is. They had no business along the road at all, and God will have them know that; and hence this punishment stage is placed right across it, that men may either be deterred from going by the road at all, or else turn speedily back. But if they will still go on in it, they are certain to come to this terrible place. 3. *They are in a great hurry to get away*, and so they alter their course. They seem to repent of their previous journey altogether. "When he slew them, then they sought him." "The devil was sick, the devil a monk would be." How often Pharaoh, when he had got to this miserable stage, made as if he would amend his way! And it very often seems as if such as he really had done so. The sham repentance is, to our poor bleared eyes, so much like the real, that we are quite deceived, and we help the sinner to deceive himself. 4. *Then next is the stage of the hardened heart.* The will unsubdued, the mind determined on its own way. Hidden away, deep down underneath the decorous disguise of a temporarily altered conduct, there is the stone-like heart, the will resolute in its own way. It is not going to change, though it may be prudent to seem for a time as if it were. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." 5. Then there is reached, not long after, *the first stage whence the wretched round began.* The soul is back at its sin again.

II. THE POINT WHERE THE SOUL MAY BREAK AWAY. It is at the repentance stage. Some one has said that what we call the ten plagues might rather be called Pharaoh's ten opportunities of turning from his sin to God. And undoubtedly they were such. The pang of repentance which he felt might have led right away from God's judgments.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

And in the affairs of the soul that tide at flood is the hour when God shows us the wretchedness of our sin, and bids us turn to him.

III. HOW TO DO THIS. 1. *It is evidently possible.* The road branches where you are: one way leads to God—the way along which God's voice is surely calling you; the other leads to the hardened heart,—it is the way along which you have come. 2. Now *call upon God* for help to answer his call. 3. *Break away in actual conduct.* Books, companions, amusements, all that is to you occasion of and temptation to sin; break away resolutely and at once from them; have done with them altogether. 4. *All the while keep calling upon God.* He has promised to save you. Put in the cheque of his promise, and claim payment of it. Trust him, expect him to make good his word—and *he will.* *Crede experto.*—S. C.

Ver. 36.—*The worship that God hates.* I. IT IS ALL TOO COMMON. This psalm is all taken up with the record of such worship. And it did not begin with the people told of here. What was Cain's worship but so much flattery and lying unto God? And all through the prophetic history, the like worship is perpetually denounced. The one class of people whose presence and contact even the wonted gentleness of our Lord could not abide were such as these—hypocrites. We know with what scathing words he was wont to address them. And the apostles of our Lord, after his ascension, were continually meeting with it and condemning it. And it is rife and rampant still. How terrible the contrast, so widely seen, between what men profess and what they really are and do! But—

II. HOW IS IT TO BE ACCOUNTED FOR? 1. *Sometimes the visible anger of God will lead to it.* It is the too common product of a religion begotten of terror and abject fear (see ver. 34; and cf. Isa. xxv. 9). Such times will make men profess anything that they think will get them relief. 2. *Sometimes it is from the contagion of common custom.* Everybody makes a profession of religion; in many circles it is held to be bad form not to do something of the kind. But it makes no sort of difference to the real character or the ordinary conduct. It leaves the heart untouched, and too often worse than that. 3. *There is a secret, undefined trust that there is some good in it,*

after all. People do not flatter their fellow-men, nor tell lies to them when they are perfectly sure that no advantage will result; still less if they are sure that harm will follow. But they think they will be advantaged by it, perhaps greatly. And so in regard to God. Men think that their attention to religious observances, and the loud profession they make, must count for something to their advantage when the great reckoning-day comes. And hence the flattering and lying told of here go on. 4. *And such people encourage one another.* Religious teachers, judging only by what they see—and they cannot do much more—assume that all is right, and hope for the best, and so insensibly soothe those who really need to be aroused from their condition as with the trump of doom. Even under a generally faithful ministry a man who will not give up his sin can manage to suck a poisonous satisfaction from these flatteries and lies, whereby he has probably first of all deceived himself, and hopes to deceive God, as he has his ministers and his Church generally. But—

III. *WHAT COMES OF IT?* 1. If there be amendment of conduct, it is very short-lived (vers. 34—40). 2. A heart made harder than before. 3. Repeated Divine chastisements, so that their life is a wretched one. 4. Final and utter rejection (vers. 59, 60).

IV. *WHAT DOES ALL THIS SAY TO US?* 1. Examine yourselves. Do you give time to regular secret prayer? Are you really consecrated to God? If so, then: 2. Trust Christ to keep you hour by hour and day by day.—S. C.

Ver. 40.—*Provoking God.* Israel did this, and notwithstanding every inducement to do otherwise. We note—

I. *MANY PEOPLE DO THE LIKE STILL.* God speaks plainly, loudly, persistently, by his Spirit, his providence, his Word, his judgments, and yet, etc.

II. *AND THEY WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO UNLESS* (1) they be willing to give up their sin; and (2) set themselves to seek the Lord.

III. *HAVE WE DONE SO?* Then: 1. Truly repent. 2. Trust Christ. 3. Be filled with the Spirit.—S. C.

Ver. 40.—*How oft did they provoke?* I. *ANSWER THE QUESTION.* This long psalm supplies a sample of Israel's sin. Their provokings were so frequent that the whole history of the people, stretching over many generations and long centuries, seemed to be all of a piece, and is called "the day of provocation."

II. *INQUIRE HOW THEY PROVOKED GOD?* By the perpetual repetition of the wretched round of sin, and then repentance. If they had done nothing else but sin, they would quickly have perished; if they had sinned once, and done with it, their history would have been a far happier one; but it was this perpetual backsliding which provoked God.

III. *WHY WAS IT?* There was: 1. The force of example; all the nations round, the greatest and most glorious of them included, worshipped idols. 2. Then the indulgence which idolatry gave to sin; it was such an easy religion. 3. The difficulty of realizing the unseen, of living by faith. 4. The cravings of a corrupt nature.

IV. *WHAT MADE THEIR CONDUCT SO WICKED?* 1. *It was such madness.* Nothing but evil had ever come of their sin, and yet they went after it again. 2. *Such ingratitude to God.* What had he not done for them? 3. *The terrible harm they did to their children and to the whole world.*

V. *WHAT CAME OF IT?* What always must come—repeated and terrible chastisement, and rejection at the last.—S. C.

Ver. 41.—*Limiting God.* This psalm contains many instances of this. It is a painful thing to see even a bird or beast, made for freedom and longing after it, caged or chained or otherwise kept in captivity. Yet more is it distressing to see a man of noble aspiration, of lofty capacity, of patriotic spirit, and intent on doing good, get "cribbed, cabined, and confined" by petty prejudices, mean jealousies, base motives, and vile conduct, on the part of those around him; and often such a sight has been seen. And the cry of a soul awfully limited and bound down is heard in Rom. vii. 24, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me," etc.? What barrier in the way of blessing do such limitings set up? But what must it be to limit God? How much more sad and deplorable that must be! Now—

I. MAN CAN LIMIT GOD. 1. *But this may be questioned.* It should seem impossible when we think of the greatness and power of God, of his universal sway, of his infinite wisdom, of the hurt and harm that must come of such conduct. All such considerations seem to render impossible the limiting of God. 2. *But undoubtedly man can do this.* For else he would be a mere machine, not a man; he would have no more volition than a tree or a bird. If he is to be able to say "Yes" to God, he must be able also to say "No." And he can and does. Scripture asserts it—see this whole psalm. God stood ready to bless, but Israel would have none of his counsel, and set at nought all his reproof. Reason asserts it, for it steadily affirms that we are free, and can will and choose as we please. Experience asserts it. Concerning nations, Churches, individuals, has not God again and again said, as Jesus did when he wept over Jerusalem, "How often would I have gathered thee . . . but ye would not!" We read how in some places Christ could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief.

II. AND MEN DO THIS STILL. 1. Very often in their prayers and desires. They insist too much upon definite blessings being given. They ask some temporal blessing—rain, or health, or the sparing of life, or it may be a spiritual blessing; but they limit God to definite time, manner, and means. And such prayers come to nothing, for they have asked amiss. And then men make a mock at prayer. We need to remember our Lord's words in Gethsemane, "Father, not my will, but," etc. 2. *Yet more do we limit God in our thoughts.* (See vers. 19, 20.) And all anxious care and foreboding is really a limiting of God. Hence Christ so forbade it (see Matt. vi.). How Jacob limited God when he cried, "All these things are against me"! We shall get help against this by heeding Paul's counsel (Phil. iv.), "Be careful for nothing, but," etc. But if foreboding care is guilty of this, yet more is despair, whether for ourselves or for others. 3. *But most of all, and worst, our sins limit God.* The Church at Laodicea kept the Lord outside her door. And how often we stand in our children's way, when God would bless them, by our worldliness and unbelief! We will not let God bless us or them. God would, but we would not. May the Lord pardon us every one, and save us from this sin!—S. C.

Ver. 57.—"*A deceitful bow.*" Note—

I. WHAT GOD REQUIRES IN HIS SERVANTS. 1. *That they should be as a bow.* That is a weapon, and for him. Christians are to be aggressive, a power in the hands of God against the world, the flesh, and the devil. 2. *That they should be powerful.* In the case of the bow, that depended on the elasticity of the wood, or the temper of the steel, of which the bow was made, also on the skill shown in its construction. Fault in either so much lessened the value of the bow. And God would have us a power in his hands; he can use weak things, but he would have us strong for himself. 3. *True.* The bow made of the right material and in right manner would send the arrow straight to the mark and up to the mark, so that it would not fall short or swerve aside. But how many of us, in serving God, are guilty of this! We fall short, are not thorough, or are by one cause or another turned aside. 4. *And that their strength should abide.* It was said of Joseph, "His bow abode in strength." As a good bow would retain its tenacity and elasticity, so that it could be permanently relied upon. Here is the real test of our fidelity; it is not so much our having strength—at the beginning we all have this more or less—but it is the keeping it, the standing the year-in-and-year-out strain. This is what God desires in us.

II. WHAT BY HIS GRACE THEY VERY OFTEN ARE. 1. *The bow was a very effective weapon.* Hence no army was sent forth without a large body of trained archers. Its silent, swift, distant, deadly effect made it a weapon not only very valued, but indispensable. And God has such servants. Was not Peter one such, and Paul, and many other of less distinguished name—men who so wrought for God as to render service of most effectual kind? And there are such still, men and women too, so endued with power by God that their presence and ministry are the signal at once for great victories to be won for God. 2. *And it was therefore reckoned as very formidable, a force not to be trifled with by any foe.* And because faithful ministers of God are such weapons for God, therefore it is that Satan strives with all his power to disarm them or to render their ministry of none effect. He knew full well what destruction the Lord Jesus would bring upon his dominion, and therefore, immediately after his baptism, he

wrought during those dread forty days, by repeated and terrible temptation, to make his mission ineffectual and to baffle its design. But our Lord, as we all know, gained signal victory, as we also through him may gain like victory.

III. HOW, THEREFORE, GOD REGARDS THEM. 1. The bow was a *trusted weapon*. "I will not trust in my bow," said the psalmist (xliv. 6), implying how usual was the trust men had in it. The sword and the bow are constantly coupled together in Scripture as the two chief weapons of the soldier on which he was to rely. And so God trusts his servants, commits the treasures of his grace to them, entrusts them to guard and keep the souls Christ died to redeem. 2. And hence a *favourite weapon*. David commanded that the children of Judah should be taught the use of the bow, because it was his beloved Jonathan's favourite weapon. And it is not too much to say that the chosen means whereby God accomplishes his victories in his spiritual kingdom is through his faithful servants. Not to angels, not to the might, learning, or wisdom of this world, has God given this great charge. But to those who may be, and often are, weak and despised in the eyes of the world, but God makes them mighty.

IV. BUT, NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARE DECEITFUL. In the bow itself, it is owing to fault in material or structure. In those whom the bow represents, it is because they are spiritually weak and untrue. The Prophet Hosea (viii.) uses this same figure, and shows how applicable it was to the people of his day. And there are such now.

V. THE RESULTS OF SUCH DECEIT ARE ALL SAD. God is dishonoured; the faithful Church is reviled; the enemy triumphs; the bow itself is cast away.

VI. HOW THIS MAY BE PREVENTED. By abiding in Christ, who is our Life, our Strength, our All.—S. C.

Ver. 59.—*God turned against his people*. I. THIS AN AWFUL POSSIBILITY. We have an instance here told of. And the history of nations, Churches, individuals, furnish many more.

II. BUT GREATLY DISBELIEVED. The devil will do his bad best to make men not believe it. Therefore uses: 1. False theology, wresting the Scriptures. There were people in St. John's day (see 1 John i.) who said they had no sin. Some trusted in their Abrahamic descent; others did not believe in sin at all, they counted it to be but infirmity; others talked of the imputed righteousness of Christ, and affirmed that whatever sin they might commit, they, being in Christ, were guiltless; others, as to-day, believed that God was too merciful to condemn any one. 2. The deceitfulness of sin. 3. The ill example of others.

III. MUCH NEEDING, THEREFORE, TO BE INSISTED ON. Slight views of sin lie at the root of well-nigh all departures from God, but such views are impossible when it is seen to what they lead.

IV. BUT NEVER TO BE FEARED BY THOSE WHO WILL LIVE IN THE LOVE OF GOD.—S. C.

Vers. 67—72.—*God's chosen ones*. These verses show that they whom God chooses are—

I. OFTEN NOT FOUND AMONGST THE GREAT. (Ver. 67.) Ephraim was the lordly tribe, the aristocracy of Israel. They had a long roll-call of illustrious names. But God "refused the tabernacle of Joseph" (cf. 1 Cor. i.).

II. BUT, NEVERTHELESS, THEY MAY BE. (Ver. 68.) For the tribe of Judah was but little less exalted than Ephraim. God puts no ban upon any rank, or people, or tribe. How stern are the utterances of our Lord about the rich! And yet there have been many saints of God who have been rich.

III. ARE FOUND GENERALLY AMONGST THE LOWLY. (Vers. 70, 71.) "Blessed are ye poor," said our Lord. From amongst them the pioneers of the kingdom of God have nearly all come—"unlearned and ignorant men," poor, but rich in faith.

IV. AND WHERE NO APPARENT FITNESS EXISTS FOR THE WORK THAT HAS TO BE DONE. David, a rustic shepherd lad, and yet, etc. (ver. 71).

V. BUT GOD'S CHOICE IS ALWAYS JUSTIFIED. (Ver. 72.) Of what great servant of God could it have been foretold that he would be what he came to be?

VI. OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IS THE SUPREME EXAMPLE OF THIS. Despised of men. My soul, what is he to thee?—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The responsibility of hearers.* “Incline your ears.” This psalm is regarded as the first and greatest of the historical psalms. It is “an inspired comment on the sacred history, with an avowed didactic purpose of warning, by a recital of God’s repeated mercies, and of Israel’s repeated sins. The historical psalms have a double value. They illustrate and confirm the historic record, always giving it vividness, and occasionally adding fresh touches of detail. But their real importance lies in the light which they throw on the religious conception of that history, which, indeed, alone makes it a continual lesson on the eternal will of God, and the unchanging characteristics of humanity.” This psalm may be compared to the modern sermon or religious address, which differs from teaching in being an appeal to feeling, emotion, and principle, as well as to intellect. The Hebrew people were, and still are, easily interested in public teachers who can skilfully review the national history. But the point to which attention is now directed is, that there is a double responsibility when the teacher and the taught come together—an effort demanded of the hearer as well as of the teacher. He must “incline his ear.” Dr. Clay Trumbull points out, in relation to Sunday school work, that “intelligent, purposeful teaching includes the idea of two persons, both of them *active*. ‘Teaching,’ as causing another to know, includes the mutual effort of two persons to the same end. The teacher must endeavour to cause the pupil to learn a particular fact or truth which he wants him to know; the learner must *endeavour to learn* that particular fact or truth. Until the two are at this common work, the process of teaching has not begun: until the learner has learned, the teacher has not taught.” The counsel to “incline our ears,” or “our heart,” is repeated again and again in Scripture (see Josh. xxiv. 23; 1 Kings viii. 58; Pss. cxix. 36, 112; cxli. 4; Prov. v. 13; Jer. vii. 24; xxv. 4, etc.). It seems designed to impress on us that we are responsible for making the effort to hear profitably. Men make effort to listen to music; they make effort to catch every word of the orator; they can and they ought to make effort to heed the religious teacher. The responsibility of hearers may be said to concern four things.

I. CULTIVATING THE HABIT OF LISTENING. Which involves drawing the mind in from other subjects, and fixing it on one. Of some people this praise can be spoken—they are *good listeners*.

II. HEARING WITH INTELLIGENT ATTENTION. Involving the activity of the mind in relation to what is heard. Thinking as well as listening.

III. HEARING WITH PERSONAL INTEREST. For religious truth is not abstract, but relative to individuals. A man does not bear the right relation to it until he sees how it *concerns himself*.

IV. HEARING WITH PURPOSE OF OBEDIENCE. For all religious teaching is designed to be, in some way, a guide to conduct.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Teaching by parable.* The answering word to “parable,” in this verse, is “dark sayings,” or “hard sentences,” which reminds us of the Queen of Sheba, who journeyed to Jerusalem to prove Solomon with “hard questions.” We cannot bring the precise New Testament ideas of the word “parable” to bear upon the word as used in this psalm, and yet its meaning is very exact. The parable is treated as a setting of truth which veils or hides the truth, and compels the hearer to search, if he would find it. A parable is truth like a *nut*. The kernel of truth can only be reached by those who will break the shell. Here the psalmist gives a sketch of the national history in such a way that, to many, it may only be a sketch of history; but he wraps up higher moral and spiritual teachings in it, and these those who are in earnest may discover. The parable, as used by our Lord, may be thus described: “It used an incident, taken from common life, and rounded into a gem-like picture, to set forth some corresponding truth in the higher and spiritual region.” The Old Testament parable used “points of history” with a similar purpose. There is need for this method of teaching, in precise adaptation to every age; because the human mind needs help to the apprehension of higher truth, and the human heart needs help to the reception of spiritual truth. Pleading for teaching by parable or by illustration still, we may point out that—

I. IT ARRESTS ATTENTION. Just as children are all alive if we propose to tell them a story, so the teacher and the preacher at once brighten up their audiences when they give an illustration. Our Lord always secured attention because he was illustrative. There were no abstract statements in his teachings; they were all changed into pictures. His work "swarmed with figures of speech," and so it was that "the common people heard him gladly."

II. IT DISARMS PREJUDICE. It is difficult for public teachers to warn and reprove wisely. They may easily offend by direct and pointed applications. They can interest in a picture which excites no prejudice, and skilfully bring out applications that awaken consciences, and set them making their reproaches.

III. IT EXCITES THOUGHT. Illustrate by the difference between history as a bare record of facts, and the philosophy of history, which concerns the relations of the facts, and the mutual influence of the characters. The psalmist here designs to present the old history in such ways as to compel thought concerning God's ways with man, and man's ways with God.

IV. IT REMAINS IN MEMORY. Only particular dispositions and trained intellects can remember abstract propositions. Everybody can remember stories, pictures, and illustrations; and there is always the possibility that, holding the parable, they will hold—for use on occasion—the truth which it was designed to teach.—R. T.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Our mission to the coming generation.* The interest of the Old Testament in children is seldom worthily recognized. The Divine confidence is felt in Abraham on this singular ground, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment" (Gen. xviii. 19). The meaning of the most significant rite of the Mosaic system—the Passover—was to be carefully explained to the "children." The command is given concerning the holy laws, "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" (Deut. vi. 7). The psalmist speaks thus of his work: "This shall be written for the generation to come; and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord" (Ps. cii. 18). And the prophets repeat after Isaiah, and say, "The father to the children shall make known thy truth" (Isa. xxxviii. 19). Dr. Horace Bushnell, in a very striking way, calls the religious teaching of religious families "the out-populating of the Christian stock." There is always hope for the *new* generation; but the foundation of that hope is the righteousness and faithfulness of this generation. Then they truly work for the *children* who work to fit the *parents* for influencing the children. Our mission to our children is—if we follow the psalm—

I. TO TEACH THEM GOD'S DOINGS AND GOD'S WILL. This mission is entrusted first to parents. Only as civilization involves parental inabilities and disabilities, can the duty be delegated to servants, or to Sunday school teachers. The things we have to teach our children are: 1. God in history. 2. God in covenant. 3. God in law. 4. God in redemption. Our power to do our work worthily depends on our own spiritual apprehensions. And they must not be left to *pick up* religious knowledge. God requires that we *teach* them.

II. TO HELP THEM TO BEGIN LIVES OF TRUST AND OBEDIENCE. (See ver. 8.) This we can do: 1. By commending such lives in the grace and beauty of *our own*. It is not enough to "allure to brighter worlds;" we can "lead the way." 2. By teaching them the lessons that we may be able to draw from our own experience. 3. By enforcing the warnings which are suggested by the ancient histories (see ver. 9). 4. By patiently aiding them in the formation of good religious habits.

III. TO MAKE THEM FEEL THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE GENERATION FOLLOWING THEM. The object set before us, in teaching our children, is (ver. 7), "to the intent that, when they come up" into their fatherhoods and motherhoods, "they might show their children the same." So our influence should be repeating itself, generation after generation. Our faithfulness to our mission may put a new and nobler impress on the coming generations (see Ps. cxlv. 4).—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*The bad example of Ephraim.* The incident here alluded to is not known.

Evidently there was some well-remembered occasion when Ephraim suffered an ignominious defeat in consequence of their apostasy from God. There is a Hebrew legend which records how, during the Egyptian captivity, the tribe of Ephraim, in the pride of their heart, endeavoured to forestall the appointed time of the Exodus, and went out armed, only to be massacred by the men of Gath. It has, however, been observed that in the prophetic books (especially Hosea), the whole northern kingdom is mentioned under the term "Ephraim;" and, taking this view, the "psalmist may allude to a defeat of a peculiarly disgraceful character, which was regarded as a punishment of the ten tribes for their secession from the divinely appointed Davidic dynasty. Precisely of this nature is the defeat of the 800,000 men of Jeroboam by the 400,000 of Abijah, in 2 Chron. xiii." But we ought to look for some instance in which Ephraim made a show of taking part with the other tribes, and forsook them—perhaps through jealousy—in the moment of stress. The image is one of *faithlessness*. The thought that calls to mind the sin of Ephraim is given at the close of ver. 8, "A generation . . . whose spirit was *not steadfast* with God." We are to learn, not from their act, but from the spirit which found expression in their act. Illustrate from all known of this tribe.

I. A BAD EXAMPLE OF WAVERING. Compare Reuben, "unstable as water." This is the common failure of impulsive people, who take up things excitedly, but have no staying power. (See the "stony ground" hearers.) It implies grave weakness of character, which prevents success in life being won, or confidence being felt. We can never be sure of the wavering man, who may respond to the last impulse, and fail us at the most trying time. Constancy, steadfastness, are not recognized sufficiently as elements of character that may be, and should be, developed and educated in the young, who should be made to carry through what they begin.

II. A BAD EXAMPLE OF LACK OF PRINCIPLE. In the case before us, Ephraim evidently acted on mere feeling. Principles of loyalty, and brotherly service to their fellow-tribes, would have enabled them to master "feeling" and "fear." They had no adequate "sense of the right;" they allowed themselves to be ruled by the "expedient," which constantly leads men to do mean and shameful things. He only is noble who can act on principle, and suffer for the right.

III. A BAD EXAMPLE OF SUSPICIOUSNESS. Illustrate by the difficulty Gideon had with the Ephraimites (Judg. viii. 1—4). Some always think they are being neglected, slighted. In this case, probably Gideon had not thought about these Ephraimites, so he could not have designed any evil. When discontented with ourselves, we readily suspect other people's treatment of us.

IV. A BAD EXAMPLE OF SELF-IMPORTANCE. Ephraim was always thinking what was due to *itself* as the leading tribe. The people who are over full of *self* are only too likely to fail their friends in the evil day.—R. T.

Vers. 12, 31.—*God's marvellous doings*. The marvel of God's doings is always this—He is ever rescuing, delivering, restoring, redeeming, saving, or, as we may say, *putting things straight*. The type of all God's doings was, to the Jew, the rescue of the race from Egyptian bondage. The Divine attributes are not best seen in punishments or scenes of terror; throughout the history of the world they have been most fully revealed in God's savings, deliverings, and redeemings. Moses composed a song when the Hebrews had safely reached the further shores of the Red Sea. To him that rescue was a most impressive demonstration of the Divine righteousness; so the song runs thus: "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" When God would declare the great foundation laws, he revealed himself as the nation's Deliverer and Saviour: "I am the Lord thy God, that brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." When Joshua pleaded so earnestly, "What wilt thou do unto thy great Name?" the thing distressing him was that God seemed to have ceased to be a Deliverer and Redeemer of his people. David gains right impressions of the Divine righteousness by meditating on the Divine mercy. Started on this line, we may consider as "marvellous doings"—

I. THE DIVINE DELIVERANCES. Reading sacred history for illustrations, we find:
1. Noah delivered from peril of flood. 2. Abraham delivered from Chaldean polytheistic

associations. 3. Hebrews delivered from bondage, and from position of peril at the Red Sea. 4. Local deliverances, as in the times of the Judges, early history of David, reigns of Asa and Jehoshaphat. 5. National rescue from captivity. 6. Deliverance from sin, by Christ Jesus. Every case is a *marvel* of Divine wisdom, power, and grace. And God is best known in his *redeemings*. "He delivereth and rescueth."

II. THE DIVINE PROVIDENCES. Which efficiently provide, and mysteriously guide. By providences we mean the ordinary arrangements of life, as distinct from times of trouble and peril. There is a *marvel* of the Divine ordering of Israel's way, and of ours. Heaven-sent manna, and streams from smitten rocks, tell of an ever-wonder-working providence. To devout minds, no marvel is greater than God's making "all things work together for good."

III. THE DIVINE FORBEARANCES. Many of these are called to mind in this psalm. God's long-suffering towards stiff-necked Israel must always seem a marvel of grace; and his people in every age have exclaimed, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed."

IV. THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS. (See ver. 31.) These must be included, but they are put *last*, because "judgment is his strange work." The marvel of God's judgments is the absence of vindictiveness in them, and the power that makes them work towards ends of moral blessing.—R. T.

Ver. 18.—*Heart-tempting of God*. Prayer-book Version, "And provoked the Most Highest in the wilderness." The idea is that, in their urgent entreaty for meat, which became, in fact, a demand, and an expression of masterful self-willedness, the people made it necessary for God to do what he would gladly have been spared from doing—*correct them by means of severe judgments*. "They required meat for their *lust*." God provided for their *need*; they wanted him to provide for their *self-indulgence*; and this no man has ever any right to *expect* of God, though, in fact, he does give us "all things richly to enjoy." But notice this point. The mere request the people made did not appear to be wrong in itself. The wrong is seen when the heart, the purpose, prompting the request, is clearly recognized. "God looketh on the heart." Compare the request of Simon Magus (Acts viii. 21). Simon Peter recognized heart-tempting of God, and firmly declared, "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

I. OUR REQUESTS CAN NEVER STAND ALONE. We can usually only judge the propriety or impropriety of a request. God never separates the request from the person who makes it. Even we look anxiously for signs of sincerity and earnestness. God finds all the interest of a request in the state of mind it expresses. What prompts the request is the question of supreme importance. God answers the *man*, not the man's words. Show in how many ways there may be divorce between the *man* and his *request*. Illustrate by Augustine's prayer, "Lord, convert me," which sounds well, and can be approved. When he added, "but not yet," he let his heart speak, and spoiled his prayer. When God read his heart, he heard this, "Don't convert me, Lord." If we look at the *heart* behind the request of the Israelites, we can see the unbelief which would put God to the test, and say, "He can give us this light bread, he cannot give us good meat." Plead for searchings of heart before offering petitions to God, because he will answer the heart, not the petition, so we must see to it that the *petition expresses the heart*. God is provoked by insincerity to correct through judgments (vers. 30, 31).

II. OUR REQUESTS MAY REALLY BE INSULTS. None of us can come aright to God unless "we believe that he is, and that he is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek him." God asks for trust. "Believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." The supreme offence to God is "doubting him," "suspecting him." These men offered insult to Jehovah when in effect they said, "Give us flesh to eat; we know you cannot do that."—R. T.

Ver. 22.—*God's call to trust fully*. God is represented as being "grieved" because his people failed to trust him, and depend upon his help. The good man is troubled when those whom he loves fail to trust him. We love to be relied on. We do our noblest and our best for those who will confide in us. And from ourselves we may learn to think of God aright. The best in man is the suggestion of the truest thoughts we can have of God. Our Lord represented the attitude of God towards us when he said to

the ruler, "Only believe [trust]; all things are possible to him that believeth." If God calls us to trust him fully, and is grieved with us when we fail to trust him fully, the question arises, "Has he made such trust possible and reasonable?" We may confidently say he has, in view of what we know he is; what relations he bears to his people; and what things he has been doing in all ages for his people.

I. IN VIEW OF WHAT WE KNOW HE IS. Whatever side of his revelation of himself to us we may study, the impression left on us is that he is *infinitely trustworthy*. Take his *Creatorship*, involving the reliance of all existence on his upholding. Take his *independence*, as indicated in the term, "I am," given to Moses as a substitute for a name. Take his *holiness*, as the indication of absolute perfection in character. We want, in those on whom we can rely, power—we must know that they can; independence—we must be sure that they are above being biased; and character—we must be sure of their response, in feeling, to our need. On this line it may be shown that none but God can have the right to claim our perfect trust. We may "trust in the Lord for ever."

II. IN VIEW OF THE RELATIONS HE BEARS TO HIS PEOPLE. These have a special character. Beyond what God is to all his creatures, he bears special relations to his people. These gather up into the terms, Redeemer, Saviour, Father. Redeemer from Egypt, and from sin. Saviour from peril, and from self. Father, as bearing on himself the burden of his children's well-being. If these relations are unfolded in their Christian developments, the call to full trust will be shown as every way reasonable.

III. IN VIEW OF THE THINGS HE HAS BEEN DOING IN ALL AGES. This brings us to the psalm. We may select illustrations from this historical retrospect. The two things immediately connected with the text are—the failure to trust God to provide needful daily bread. They might have trusted, for he could, he did, provide. With this lesson, the people failed to trust God for needed drink. But they might have trusted fully, for he could, he did, provide.—R. T.

Ver. 37.—*The grievous sin of insincerity*. "For their heart was not right with him;" Prayer-book Version, "not whole with him;" Perowne, "not steadfast with him." An accusation is brought against God's people by Hosea to this effect, "Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty." Some are said to have "feared the Lord, and served other gods." But it is a more searching view of insincerity, or double-mindedness, if we see that a man may keep up his open and outward relations with God, and all the time be really serving himself, "following the devices and desires of his own heart." This is the kind of insincerity to which, in subtle ways, we are all exposed; and it is a supreme offence in the sight of God, who wants act and motive, doing and feeling, to match. Our Lord Jesus Christ represented the feeling of God in his stern words concerning the insincere, the hypocrite. To the wicked he was ever tender and gracious; but to the wicked who cloaked his wickedness, to the man who came hiding with fawning words his malicious purpose, the Lord Jesus was most severe. The point of insincerity that comes out in connection with the text, is the show of reformation that men will make in order just to get out of their calamities. "When he slew them, then they inquired after him;" but there was no serious purpose in their inquiries. "Yea, they turned again, and sought God." They did but "flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongue."

I. INSINCERITY IS OFFENSIVE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. The infinitely True One loves truth. The infinitely Pure One loves sincerity. Insincerity never deceives him, who "searcheth the heart and trieth the reins," and "needeth not that any should testify of man, for he knows what is in man." The clothes of a man should genuinely express the man. Much more should the words of a man, and the ways of a man, express the man.

II. INSINCERITY IS AN ANXIETY IN THE MIND OF GOD. Because it is the most effective hindrance to his work in men's souls. The man puts a false front on, to prevent God's dealing with him as he is. Because it reveals a depraved condition. And because cherished insincerity exercises a most debasing influence on character. A man cannot become noble who keeps up a sham. The inevitable result is the formation of a habit of mind and thought which makes a serious and truthful life impossible.—R. T.

Ver. 70.—*The grace of Divine selections.* “He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds.” The selection of David may be viewed from two sides. It was an act of Divine grace toward David himself; and an act of Divine grace in providing such a king for the people.

I. DIVINE GRACE TOWARD DAVID HIMSELF. A careful study of David’s early life brings out the fact that he was, in some sense, the despised one of the family. He was evidently much younger than his brothers; probably the child of another mother, who was brought into the family under somewhat peculiar circumstances. While all the brothers went to the war, David was kept at home. When Jesse called all his sons before Samuel, he left David out, as if he hardly came into the family reckoning. It was, then, the despised one, who had been sent to the sheepfolds with the women, who was selected by God for the highest place in the new state. God constantly makes the “poor of this world to confound the wise.” But not arbitrarily. Only because he seeks to fit men to places, on the ground of their endowments and character and fitness for their positions. There is “no respect of persons with God.” David was selected as the fitting man.

II. DIVINE GRACE PROVIDING SUCH A KING FOR THE PEOPLE. He was selected on the Divine judgment as to what was best for the people. Compare Saul, selected as meeting the people’s idea of what was best for them. Kingsley says, “I look on David as an all-but ideal king, educated for his office by an all-but ideal training. Among the dumb animals he learnt experience which he afterwards put into practice among human beings. The shepherd of the sheep became the shepherd of men. He who had slain the lion and the bear became the champion of his native land. He who followed the ewes great with young fed God’s oppressed and weary people with a faithful and true heart, till he raised them into a great and strong nation. So both sides of the true kingly character, the masculine and the feminine, are brought out in David.” It may be pointed out that, in David, were qualities of kingship which would have made him a blessing to any nation, in any age. And it may further be shown that, in him, there were characteristic abilities, which made him specially the man for his time. Lead on to show that the one thing which made David’s reign a supreme blessing to the people was his *personal* and *governmental* loyalty to the theocratic idea. He never failed through any disloyalty to his Over-lord, Jehovah.—R. T.

Vers. 3—8.—*The Divine object of revelation.* In this paragraph we have stated the object which God had appointed Israel to fulfil—to receive his Law and truth, that they might transmit them to posterity, and that they and their posterity might be brought to a living trust in God, and obedience to his will. Suggests—

I. GOD HAS MADE THE FULLEST REVELATION OF HIMSELF AND HIS WILL TO MANKIND IN JESUS CHRIST. 1. *He has gloriously revealed his character in Christ: his love.* Christ showed the nature of God to be love by *his own character* and by *his teaching*. 2. *By him also he made the most perfect revelation of his Law.* The old Law was interpreted by Christ, and received its most spiritual meaning and its widest sweep and application. *Love* is the only fulfilment of the Law—love to God and love to man.

II. THAT THIS REVELATION IS ADAPTED TO WORK OUT THE SALVATION OF MEN. 1. *By awakening trust or faith in God.* (Ver. 7.) That is the natural effect of the revelation he has made. 2. *By producing obedience to his will.* (Ver. 7.) 3. *By awakening a reciprocal love.* (Ver. 4.) This celebrates “the praise of God, and his might, and his wonderful works that he has done.”

III. THAT THIS REVELATION WAS GIVEN THAT IT MIGHT BE PROPAGATED. To all that are living now, and to all coming generations. 1. *By the public ministry.* By preaching, by books, and by living example. 2. *By the instruction of our children.* In the family and in schools. The power of character as a teacher.—S.

Vers. 32—39.—*God’s tender mercy.* This passage describes the conduct of the rebellious and lustful Israelites in the wilderness, and sets forth three things—God’s chastisement of their sin; their superficial repentance; God’s pitiful compassion.

I. GOD’S CHASTISEMENT OF SIN. (Vers. 33, 34.) “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth

in unrighteousness." 1. *Their sin was sensual indifference to the wonders of God's redemption.* (Ver. 32.) "They believed not his wondrous works"—in connection with their redemption from the miseries of Egypt. The same sin now in reference to the work of Christ. 2. *The punishment was trouble and death.* (Vers. 33, 34.) Sin always leads to trouble, and sometimes to death. 3. *By granting them their sinful desires.* (Ver. 29.)

II. **SUPERFICIAL REPENTANCE.** (Vers. 34—37.) 1. *It was inspired by fear.* (Ver. 34.) Fear—terror—never produces genuine repentance. 2. *They made insincere promises of amendment.* (Ver. 36.) "They flattered God with their mouth, and lied unto him with their tongues." It was no true repentance. 3. *They were still unchanged in heart.* (Ver. 37.) And no repentance is true and lasting which does not make the heart right towards God.

III. **GOD'S PITIFUL COMPASSION.** (Vers. 38, 39.) 1. *God's punishment of sin is a moderated punishment.* (Ver. 38.) "And did not stir up all his wrath." No punishment goes beyond the desert, and he makes it as light as it can be. 2. *God pities as well as condemns our weakness and misery.* (Ver. 39.) "He knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust." 3. *God's forbearance is exercised with a view to our redemption.* (Ver. 38.) "Many a time turned he his anger away." "Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXIX.

THIS is "a psalm of complaint, closely parallel to Ps. lxxiv." (Cheyne), and must, like that psalm, be referred to the time of the Babylonian conquest (see above, p. 81). It shows us the Holy Land occupied by the heathen, the temple desecrated, Jerusalem laid in ruins, the special servants of God put to death, and the whole nation of the Israelites become an object of scorn and reproach to their neighbours (vers. 1—4). Some critics have supposed that it might have been written after the invasion of Shishak; but the condition of things is far worse than can be reasonably supposed to have been reached at that period. Others incline to assign it to the age of the Maccabees; but Jerusalem was not then destroyed, much less "laid on heaps" (ver. 1). Hence the general voice of commentators is in favour of the date here advocated.

The psalm consists of four strophes of four verses each, together with an epilogue consisting of one verse only. In vers. 1—4 the situation is described. In vers. 5—8 and vers. 9—12 prayer is made to God for deliverance, and for vengeance upon the cruel enemy. Ver. 13 is an expression of confidence in God, and a promise of perpetual thankfulness.

Ver. 1.—O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance (comp. Ps. lxxiv. 2;

lxxviii. 62). Israel—like the people and the land—is "God's inheritance." Thy holy temple have they defiled. The Babylonians defiled the temple by breaking into it, seizing its treasures and ornaments (Jer. lii. 17—23), and finally setting fire to it (Jer. lii. 13). They have laid Jerusalem on heaps. This was certainly not done either by Shishak or by Antiochus Epiphanes; but was done, as prophesied (Jer. ix. 11; xxvi. 18; Micah iii. 12), by the Babylonians.

Ver. 2.—The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven. A common incident of warfare (see the Assyrian sculptures, *passim*). The flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth; or, of the land. Hyænas and jackals would dispute the flesh of the slain with vultures and crows.

Ver. 3.—Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem. During the long siege (eighteen months) the number slain in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem would be very large. And there was none to bury them (compare the prophecy of Jeremiah, ch. xiv. 16). The population being for the most part carried into captivity, and but few left in the land (Jer. lii. 15, 16), the bodies of the slain lay unburied, the few left not being able to bury them. Compare the preceding verse.

Ver. 4.—We are become a reproach to our neighbours (comp. Ps. xlv. 13; Lam. ii. 15; v. 1). The "neighbours" intended are the nations in the vicinity of the Holy Land—the Syrians, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, etc. Their attitude towards Israel under the circumstances may be gathered

from what is related of the Edomites in Ps. cxxxvii. 7. A scorn and derision to them that are round about us. It was not so much the "reproaches" of their enemies that vexed and grieved Israel, as the jeers and scoffs which they heard on every side (comp. Lam. i. 7, 20; ii. 15; iii. 62, 63).

Ver. 5.—How long, Lord? *i.e.* "How long, O Lord, is this condition of things to endure?" (comp. Ps. vi. 5; xc. 13; Rev. vi. 10). An ellipse after "how long?" is common. Wilt thou be angry for ever? (see Ps. xlii. 1; lxxiv. 12; Lam. v. 20). Shall thy jealousy burn like fire? It was their worship of other gods that God especially visited on his people by the Babylonish captivity (see Jeremiah, *passim*).

Ver. 6.—Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee. It is not the heathen that had never heard of God who are intended, but those who, having heard of him, had refused to "know" him (comp. Exod. v. 2), as was the case with all the nations round about Canaan. And upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy Name. Now that we are punished, go on to punish those who have persecuted us, and who are at least as guilty as ourselves. "The prayer rests," as Hengstenberg remarks, "upon what God does constantly. Judgment begins at the house of God; but it proceeds thence to those whom God has employed as the instrument of his punishment. The storm of the wrath of God always remains to fall at last upon the world at enmity with his Church."

Ver. 7.—For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling-place. This and the preceding verse occur also, almost word for word, in Jer. x. 25. It is difficult to say which writer has quoted from the other.

Ver. 8.—O remember not against us former iniquities; or, *the iniquities of our forefathers* (so Professor Cheyne and the Revised Version); comp. Lev. xxvi. 45, "I will remember to them the covenant of their ancestors"—where the same word (עֲוֹנוֹתָם) is used. Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us; or, *come to meet us* (Kay, Cheyne). For we are brought very low (comp. Ps. cxi. 6; cxlii. 6).

Ver. 9.—Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy Name. The calamities suffered have not extinguished all faith or hope. God is still the God of Israel's salvation, *i.e.* the God from whom alone salvation can be obtained and may be expected. He is entreated to come to Israel's aid, not for their sakes, as they are wholly undeserving, but for his own glory (comp. Exod. xxxii. 12; Numb. xiv. 13; Deut. ix. 28;

and xxxii. 27). And deliver us, and purge away our sins; literally, *make atonement for our sins* (Exod. xxx. 15); *i.e.* "cancel them" (Cheyne), or "forgive them" (Hengstenberg, Kay). For thy Name's sake (comp. Ps. xxiii. 3; xxv. 11; xxxiv. 3; Ezek. xxxvi. 22).

Ver. 10.—Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? (so Joel ii. 17). A triumph over a foreign nation was always regarded in the ancient world as a triumph over their gods. Their gods were bound to protect them, and, if they did not, must either have been absent or powerless (comp. 2 Kings xviii. 33-35; xix. 12). Let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed; rather, *let there be shewn forth among the heathen in our sight vengeance for the blood of thy servants that has been shed*; or, in other words, "Let an evident judgment, visible to us, fall upon the heathen who have shed the blood of our brethren, thy true servants." An immediate judgment is prayed for; but it did not please God to send the judgment till after the expiration of a long term of years.

Ver. 11.—Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; or, *the groaning*, as in Exod. ii. 24. The Babylonians treated their Jewish captives variously. Some, like Daniel and the "Three Children," were favoured, and exalted to high places. But the bulk of them were afflicted and oppressed (see Lam. i. 3-5; v. 18, etc.). But, whether well or ill treated, all sighed to return (comp. Ps. cxxxvii. 1-6). According to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die; literally, *that are children of death*, which may have the meaning assigned to it in our version, or may simply signify, "those whose death is imminent"—who cannot live long now that they are torn from their country. The phrase recurs in Ps. cii. 20.

Ver. 12.—And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord. (For the "reproach" intended, see ver. 10.) The whole passage means, "Punish them seven times as much as thou hast punished us." Then their reproach will be seven times as great.

Ver. 13.—So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture (see Ps. lxxiv. 1; and comp. Ps. lxxviii. 52). Will give thee thanks for ever. When thou hast punished our enemies, and delivered us, we will give thee thanks perpetually, and show forth thy praise to all generations. An instance of identical parallelism.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 9.—“*For the glory of thy Name.*” The mariner throws out his heaviest anchor when the storm rages; if that will not hold, nothing else can save. So the psalmist puts out this plea. The tempest of judgment was sweeping over the land. The future was dark. Israel’s unfaithfulness had forfeited God’s promises. We have no certain clue to the exact occasion of this psalm. The Spirit who spake by the prophets would not tie it up to one time of trial, but let it stand ready for the Church’s use. Serious difficulties beset the explanations that it belongs to the time either of Nebuchadnezzar or of the Maccabees. Much may be said for referring it to the Egyptian invasion in the time of Rehoboam; which, if not equally calamitous with the Assyrian and Babylonian, must have appeared unspeakably terrible, following close on the glories of David and Solomon; flinging over the heads of devout Israelites the deadly fear that God was about to annul his covenant and forsake his people. “If the foundations,” etc. (Ps. xi. 3). He can take refuge in God. So Jeremiah (xiv. 21).

I. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS PLEA? A name stands for much or little, according to whose it is. A stranger’s palls on our ear as empty sound. A great man’s—Milton, Wren, Howard, Wilberforce—stands not only for the man himself, but his work. We think of ‘Paradise Lost,’ St. Paul’s, the lightening of the prisoners’ misery, the freedom of the slave. A friend’s name sets a thousand echoes ringing, the heart beating; brings roses to the cheek or tears to the eye. A man’s name stands for his character, credit, faith. The banker looks what name is at the back of the paper. “Give us your name,” say the promoters of an enterprise, “and we are certain of success.” Prov. xxii. 1 true in more senses than one. When a man *gives his name*, he pledges his honour. So, then, God’s *name* stands for his honour, promise, character—in a word, for his very *self*; and for all that we know concerning him (see Exod. iii. 13; vi. 3¹). When Moses asked to see God’s glory, the Lord answered that he would proclaim *his Name* (Exod. xxxiii. 19; xxxiv. 5; cf. xliii. 21). Our Saviour sums up his work on earth thus (John xvii. 6). The “*glory*” of *God’s Name*, then, corresponds, humanly speaking, with what every honest man holds dearer than life—his character. On God’s part it stands for his claim to love, trust, obedience, gratitude, reverence, adoration. On ours, when we exercise all these, we are said to “give glory to God,” “the glory due unto his Name.”

II. WHAT IS THIS PLEA WORTH? Wherein lies its force and value? “For men to search their own glory is not glory.” Some minds are perplexed by the thought that what is wrong for us cannot be right for God; and so God cannot make his glory the object of his dealings. This is for want of clear thought. Eternal principles of right and wrong are the same with God as with us, else no mortal likeness to God possible. But duties change with relationships; parental not the same as filial; or a king’s as a private citizen’s. That God is what he is is the eternal foundation of all happiness, life, being. That he should be *known to be* what he is, and receive the love, obedience, worship, due to him, is indispensable to the order and well-being of his children. If all men glorified God perfectly, this would be a happy and glorious world. Just because it is possible for us to glorify God, it is degrading and unhappy to live for lower ends. To live for self is lowest of all, self-worship the worst idolatry. To live for others—for your family, your profession, your country, your fellow-men,—this is noble as far as it goes. But high above all other aims (like the snow-peak above lower heights) rises this crowning achievement. The highest life was his who could say John xvii. 4. If this is true of each, it must be true of all. And God must act according to truth. “He cannot deny himself;” cannot abdicate, or “give his glory to another.” Impossible! If we try to imagine such an impossibility, we see it would be an infinite wrong to all creatures no less than to the Creator. Clouds in the sky do not hinder the sun’s rays from filling space; but they shut them out from earth. Life is depressed; were they dense enough permanently

¹ The words may possibly, without violating Hebrew grammar, be taken as a question, “And . . . was I not known?” Otherwise we must understand that the full import of this name was not revealed to the fathers as to and by Moses.

and completely to shut out the sunlight, it would perish. So all that hides God's glory is deadly to man's true life.

III. WHEN AND BY WHOM MAY THIS PLEA BE USED? By all God's children at all times. It ought to be the prayer of all men. Our Saviour sets it in the forefront of our prayer, "Hallowed," etc. If our hearts beat true, no selfish desire will compete with this; God's honour will be dearer than life. Yet our best welfare is comprehended (Prov. xviii. 10; Ps. xxv. 11). But this plea specially fits times of public distress and danger, as in this psalm; and the position and work of God's Church in the world. Moses urged it (Exod. xxxii.; Numb. xiv.); Joshua (vii. 9). These two petitions are inseparable, "Hallowed be thy Name; thy kingdom come."

IV. THE GOSPEL IS THE GREAT ANSWER TO THIS PRAYER. This was the angels' song (Luke ii. 14); our Saviour's prayer, and God's answer (John xii. 28). This is the gospel message—our sins are forgiven *for his Name's sake* (1 John ii. 12). The glory of God's Name consists, above all, in righteousness and love. It is often said, and the saying is often blamed, that the gospel *reconciles* these. Where no discord is, there is no room for reconciliation. Yet, to our view, justice requires punishment; love, pardon. The gospel shows these, not in discord or contrast, but unity (Rom. i. 17, 18; iii. 25, 26; vi. 23; 1 John i. 9).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—13.—*An imprecatory psalm.* We need not be at pains to fix the date of this psalm, whether it belongs to the period of the Exile or of Antiochus Epiphanes. The words to some extent suit either. But we note in it—

I. WHAT IS RIGHT FOR EVERY ONE. The writer is in sore trouble, but he takes his trouble to God. One purpose of all such trouble has already been won—the heart has been brought nearer God.

II. WHAT WAS NATURAL AND NOT WRONG FOR ISRAEL, BUT WOULD BE VERY WRONG FOR US. We refer especially to the vengeful utterances which we find in vers. 6, 10, 12, 13. Now, concerning them we note: 1. *That there are very many such in the Psalms.* The comminatory, and especially the imprecatory psalms, have ever been a stumbling-block to Christian readers. But there they are, and we cannot get rid of them. 2. *They are very natural.* The spirit of resentment and revenge is a definite part of human nature; it may manifest itself in varied forms, more or less barbaric, according to the degree of civilization which has been reached, but it exists in all. 3. *And in Israel of old it was not wrong.* For it must ever be remembered that to them no revelation of the future life, still less of the future judgment, had been given. Had there been any Scripture plainly teaching this doctrine which Christians know so well from the New Testament, our Lord, in showing to the Sadducees who believed no such doctrine, would not have appealed to a text which, unless he had told us so, we should never have regarded as teaching that doctrine at all. Before our Lord so explained it, it had not been recognized that the oft-repeated words, "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac," etc., involved the truth of the future life. But there was no more evident text, or it would have been appealed to. Hence, and for many other reasons, we conclude that the truth of the future life and immortality, still less of judgment to come, had not been brought to light when these psalms were written. If this were so, then such as the psalmist could only vindicate the righteousness of God by appealing to his visible acts of judgment and retribution here and now. Were they not seen, who would believe in a righteous God at all? Hence was it that so often, and so prominently, not to say so fiercely, the ancient psalmists and prophets appealed to God as in this psalm. Had they known what we do, there would have been no such appeals made. It was not mere personal revenge or national hate, but jealousy for the honour of God's Name, and therefore we say that, however wrong such sentiments would be for us, in them they were not wrong. 4. *But for us they would be wrong,* being altogether opposed to the Spirit of Christ. 5. *All this does not condemn either national or personal self-defence.*

III. HOW WE MAY LAWFULLY ADOPT FOR OURSELVES THIS WHOLE PSALM AND ALL SUCH PSALMS. By turning all these prayers for the destruction of enemies against the

hosts of spiritual wickedness, "the gates of hell" which do sore assail, and seek to prevail over the people of God. They are the heathen, the defilers, the destroyers, the shedders of blood, the mockers, the oppressors. Not against our fellow-men, but against them, we may and should thus pray. The devil and his angels are no mere myth or superstition, but terrible realities, and every faithful soul knows sadly well their cruel tyranny, and seemingly invincible might.—S. C.

Ver. 8.—"*Brought very low.*" I. THIS A CONDITION VERY COMMON. Sometimes it is through: 1. *Mental distress*, helplessness, sorrow, despair. 2. *Or sickness of body*, as Hezekiah. 3. *Or outward disaster*, as in this psalm.

II. ITS CAUSES GENERALLY TRACEABLE: 1. *To ourselves*—our own sin or folly. 2. *To others* with whom we are associated. See this verse, where "former iniquities" mean the iniquities of people who have lived before us. Parents, ancestors. We all are members one of another, and if one suffer, all others suffer with him. Hence it may be their sin or folly rather than our own. 3. *To God*. He, as with Job, may see fit to let us be brought very low.

III. ITS REASONS VARIOUS. 1. *Punishment*. 2. *Discipline*. 3. *For the drawing of the soul nearer God*. 4. *For opportunity of testifying to God's sustaining grace*. 5. *To teach sympathy*.

IV. BESET WITH PERIL. The devil loves to hit a man when he is down. Hence he assails the mind with thoughts hard, bitter, unbelieving, desperate. Shipwreck of faith and good conscience lies near at hand.

V. BUT MAY BECOME THE MEANS OF GREAT SPIRITUAL ATTAINMENT. Even our Lord "learned obedience" so.—S. C.

Ver. 10.—*The heathen taunt*. I. THE HEATHEN DID SAY THIS—Where is their God? The Jew had talked so much of his God, how great and glorious he was, what wonderful works he had done, the victories he had given them, that now, in view of their burning city, their desecrated temple, the heaps of slain in their streets, the heathen in pride and scorn flung this taunt in their face—Where is your God?

II. AND THE HEATHEN SAY IT STILL. Missionaries go to them, and tell them of God, so holy, merciful, righteous, that many of them are won for God; but lo! there come, soon after, fellow-countrymen of the missionaries—traders, sailors, and others, who bring vile alcoholic drinks, murderous weapons, vices unnamable, and much else with them, and do their bad best to make the heathen's home a hell: what wonder if they should ask, as they do—Where is your God?

III. AND MEN GODLESS AS HEATHENS SAY IT HERE IN OUR OWN LAND. 1. *So-called scientific men*. One of them, the other day, contemptuously declared that he had been looking down a microscope for some thirty years, and he hadn't found God yet; and he was sure he should have found him if there was a God to be found. And many others scoff at the idea of God, and deny his existence, or, at any rate, defy you to prove it. 2. *Others, because of the problems of moral and physical evil, refuse to believe in God*. 3. *Others under the pressure of trial and earthly care*: hence they have become bitter and hard, and so cast off all faith. 4. *Many others, as they mark the glaring inconsistencies of professed Christians*. They condemn them all as false, hypocritical, and insincere.

IV. But we ask—WHEREFORE SHOULD THEY SAY THIS? 1. *Wherefore the man of science?* For God is known by the spirit, not the intellect. 2. *Or the mind baffled by moral problems?* Our children trust us, when they cannot understand: should not God's children trust him? 3. *Or the care-embittered soul?* Does the denial of God make care lighter? Would it not be better to humble one's self before God, and to hide in the shelter of his love? 4. *And the declaimer against the inconsistencies of the Church?* He exaggerates them, and ignores the mass of true-hearted believers.

CONCLUSION. But let us take care to give no occasion for the heathen to say—Where, etc.—S. C.

Vers. 1—4.—*Times of persecution*. Such times have been repeated over and over again. They must be recognized as parts of the Divine administration, and we must inquire how they are made to bear on the spiritual interests of God's Church in the

world. They are not merely historical incidents. They are not merely isolated calamities. They are only seen and apprehended aright when they are seen to be Divine permissions, and even taken up and used for high moral ends by Divine power. They are one form in which God's Church is disciplined, and, through discipline, perfected. Illustrate from the Book of Revelation, which deals so largely with the persecution of Christ's Church, but shows us the Church being sanctified through its tribulation. Illustrative cases of persecution may be taken from (1) Old Testament history; e.g. the times of Jezebel. (2) New Testament history; e.g. the time succeeding Stephen's martyrdom. (3) Early Church history; e.g. the persecution under Diocletian. (4) Middle Age history: give some account of the work of the Inquisition in Spain. (5) Modern Age history: see the persecution of the native Christians in Madagascar, under the Queen Ranavalona. The historical associations of this psalm with the seventy-fourth, which is singularly like it, cannot be certainly assured. It is generally agreed that it must refer to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, or to the sack of the city by Antiochus Epiphanes. If the latter is referred to, we must recognize that some of the psalms belong to the Maccabean period. The details of these two sieges may be given, and the psalm treated as helping us to realize the misery and distress of God's people at such a time. The points which may be opened out profitably are these: 1. *Judgments on the wicked bring disabilities on the righteous.* The invasion of Nebuchadnezzar was a distinct Divine judgment on the Israelite nation. The Babylonians did but execute the Divine judgment, as Israel itself had, in previous ages, executed the Divine judgments on the Canaanites. Sometimes God was pleased to spare the few faithful ones, as in the case of Noah; the prophets preserved by Obadiah; and the Christians at the Roman siege of Jerusalem. But usually the judgments affected the pious and the wicked; and the attitude of the pious under the judgment became an appeal and an example. It should, however, be noticed that judgments on the wicked are only chastisements to the righteous. 2. *The trouble of the righteous is the insult offered to God, rather than the damage done to themselves.* Here the defiling of God's temple is the chief complaint. This better suits an association with Antiochus Epiphanes. In all times of public calamity, the good man is chiefly concerned about God's honour, as Joshua was when he cried, "What wilt thou do unto thy great Name?" Such concern for God's honour is one of the surest signs of right-heartedness.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*Expected limitations of the Divine wrath.* "How long, O Jehovah, wilt thou be angry for ever?" The duration of Divine judgment may seem long to pious feeling; it is known not to be long, when faith begins to read it aright. The Divine wrath is ever in the control of the Divine righteousness and the Divine love. There is no personal feeling in it. When its ends are reached, the Divine wrath is satisfied. God's people may comfort themselves with the assurance that there are three limitations always being put on the Divine wrath.

I. THE DIVINE HONOUR. Of that honour God is jealous. We may be quite sure that he will never act, or continue to act, in such ways as would reasonably give men wrong thoughts concerning him. Take one thing: the good man may be quite sure that God will never so act as to produce impressions of *personal vindictiveness*. We may not think of God as "hating" anything that he has made. His judgments are official, parts of the wise ordering of his kingdom. No man could have high ideas of the Divine honour who failed to realize the strict limitations of the Divine wrath. Judgments on frail men could not honour the God of righteousness and love, if they were continued for ever. They end when their object is gained.

II. THE DIVINE PURPOSE. This too must be seen to be official, not personal. The well-being of the creature, not his own pleasure, we are to regard as the purpose ever set before God. It is, however, a *moral* purpose concerning a *moral* being; and can be best represented by the aims cherished in the family life. Parents hold ever before them the good manhood and womanhood of their children; and in their efforts to secure these things, strict limitations have to be put on times of wrath and judgment. If God's purpose is to fit us to be with him, and to have us with him, his anger can but be a "hiding of his face for a little moment;" it cannot be for ever. If God's purpose is our betterment, no agency used by him can be unduly continued. If it were,

"our souls would fail before him." Illustrate from the Church in the wilderness; the times of the prophets; such Christian times as the age of our Queen Mary. The Divine purpose of dispensations of wrath must be *fully accomplished*; and therefore troubles, calamities, and persecutions may have to stay wearily long, until the souls of the martyred cry out, "How long, O Lord, how long!" But God has the long ages to work in, and his purposes are ever "ripening fast, unfolding every hour."

III. THE DIVINE PITY. The psalmist found comfort in thinking of this. "He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust." His judgments and his chastisements are always strictly limited to that which we are *able to bear*. There is something very like untrustfulness in the plaint of our text. He who is sure of the Divine pity and love has no voice in which to utter the fear that his judgments can be "for ever."—R. T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Praying against our enemies.* The gravest difficulties in treating the Book of Psalms concern the entire psalms, and the passages in the psalms, which seem to be invocations of wrath on personal enemies. This is reasonably felt to be wholly contrary to the spirit of Christianity. It is not, however, usually noticed, that it is a hopeful sign for a man to speak his bad feelings out to God. He will do mischief if he speaks them out to his fellow-men. He will do no mischief if he speaks them out to God. Before him the man will soon grow calm, and begin to think more kindly. Illustrate by the relief it is, when we feel very strongly about a matter, to speak out quite freely to some one who, we are sure, will not make mischief of it. We feel better when we have got it out. The psalmists were wise in this—that when they felt disagreeably towards their fellows, they told God, and not their fellows. It is also pointed out that most, if not all, the imprecatory psalms represent *official* rather than *personal* feelings; and a king or governor may pray against the *national* enemies, as Hezekiah might properly pray against the Assyrians. From a person acting officially, we presume that the element of *temper* is excluded. The mischief done by the invaders was distinctly national—the desecration of the temple, the reduction of the city to a heap of ruins, the exposure of the dead, the captivity of multitudes. Prayer for the turning of God's judgments on the nation's enemies could not be regarded as improper, seeing that exactly this God had done over and over again, notably in the case of Sennacherib. What God would do it could not be wrong to pray him to do. And seeing God says, "Avenge not yourselves;" "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord;" it may even be regarded as an act of virtue and piety to restrain our vengeance, and commit our vindications unto the Lord. He who prays against his enemies will not take upon himself his own vindications. The following thoughts may be opened and illustrated.

I. We had better *pray* against our enemies than *fight* against them.

II. When we pray we commit all the *times* and *ways* of judgment on them to the infinitely wise and gracious Lord. In even this prayer we should say, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

III. If we pray about persons, we soon begin to change our feelings towards them.

IV. But it is the height to which Christian principle raises us, when we pray *for* our enemies rather than *against* them. The older religion prayed for vengeance on them, the newer religion prays for mercy towards them. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him drink."—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The trouble of our old sins.* Prayer-book Version, "Oh remember not our old sins." Because a man cannot forget his old sins, he is very disposed to think that God cannot forget them either. And this he will do in face of the repeated assurances of God's Word, that his *forgiving* includes his *forgetting*. Three very striking figures are used to assure us that God will not keep the memory of the sins which he has forgiven and blotted out. 1. It is as if they were thrown "behind his back." 2. It is as if they were "cast into the depths of the sea." 3. It is as if they were removed from us "far as the east is from the west." We can never really think that God will bring up against us what he has forgiven. The fear that he will only tells of the state of our own hearts. We may, therefore, consider—

I. THE REASONABLE USE WE MAY MAKE OF THE MEMORY OF PAST SINS. This

may be applied to both national and family sins. Israel was required to keep in memory the sins of its forefathers, and prophets made it part of their work to remind Israel of those bygone iniquities. So we may be sure that some moral value lies in such memories. This much we can see: they keep us (1) impressed with the sovereignty of Divine grace; and they bring us (2) the safeguard of a proper fear of ourselves. In view of the sins of the past, we are plainly the monuments of Divine grace; all boasting is excluded. We can have no claim before God. He must mercifully have passed by transgression and sin in order to "clear the guilty." He loved us because he loved us, and no more can be said. Divine grace triumphed in bringing salvation to such as we were. See St. Paul's plea: "Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. vi. 11). And the thought of our past sins brings a worthy humbling, and a holy fear. What we have been we might fall back upon again; and we can only be kept steadfast by the sustainings of Divine grace (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 8). Nothing checks self-confidence, the self-trusting that destroys dependence, like recalling our wilful past. We have fallen—the thought makes us fear lest we should fall again; and forces from us the cry, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

II. THE UNREASONABLE USE WE MAY MAKE OF THE MEMORY OF PAST SINS. Dwell chiefly on one point. We are always wrong, and we always act unworthily, when we think of our past sins without thinking also that they are forgiven, blotted out, put away; so far as God is concerned, done with, irrecoverable. It honours God for us to use the memory of our past sins in order to make us more watchful and humble; but it never honours God for us to worry over sins that he has forgiven, and put wholly away from him. We ought to enter into the full joy of his forgiveness.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*Purging away sins.* "Deliver us, and purge away our sins;" "Cover our sins." The figure is evidently one familiar to those brought up under the old covenant system. In it the atonement idea was prominent, as a "covering over" of transgression. The two words are distinct, but closely related; and they suggested the two things which man needs to have done to his sin. It must (1) *be covered over*; (2) it must *be purged away*.

I. OUR SIN MUST BE "COVERED OVER." The Mosaic idea of the word "atonement" is very clearly defined. It always means "to cover." An "atonement" is exactly this, "a sin-cover." It is something that covers sin over; puts it out of sight; hides it from view; removes it from consideration; puts something before God in its place. To "make atonement" is really to "make a sin-cover;" and that is but a quaint Hebrew figure for "to make reconciliation," or to provide a basis or persuasion for reconciliation; "the conception being that sin is thereby covered up, hidden from sight and memory. Exactly the same thing is meant when, using a different figure, it is said to be purged, cleansed, taken away. When the transgressor is said to be atoned or reconciled, the being *covered* is taken subjectively in the same way; as if something had come upon him to change his unclean state and make him ceremonially or, it may be, spiritually pure. But the subject thus atoned is not only covered or cleansed in himself, he is figured as put in a new relation with God, and God with him; and it is as if God were somehow changed towards him—newly inclined, propitiated, or made propitious" (H. Bushnell). As a New Testament illustration of this term, we may be reminded of the words of St. James, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall *hide a multitude of sins*." St. James was an apostle of the most Judaic type, and he evidently had in mind the Old Testament idea of covering sin by some conspicuous act of goodness, and so making atonement for it. As an Old Testament illustration, the striking words of Ezekiel may be taken. He says, in the name of Jehovah, "If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done, he shall live." That is, his full, hearty return to God shall be graciously regarded as a sin-cover, it shall hide from God those former sins which, if God saw, would demand his judgments. There are three very striking historical incidents in

the Old Testament which illustrate this "covering over of sin." They are Moses' intercession with God in the matter of the golden calf. The atonement made by Aaron in connection with the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And the vindication of Phinehas, when Balaam's bad advice had brought moral woes on Israel. These were but preparatory illustrations of the way in which man's sin is "covered over" by the great atonement, the great vindication of the Divine righteousness, made by the Lord Jesus Christ. He is God himself covering over human sin.

II. OUR SIN MUST BE "PURGED AWAY." We must not for one moment think of the atonement as if it were some device or deception. It is no "covering over" that merely keeps from view. There is another truth that must be clearly seen. Along with the "covering over" goes a "purging away." It is not covered up and kept, but covered over until it can get purged away. The Word of God is ever trying to help us in apprehending that sin is not the mere *act* we do, but the *state of mind and heart* out of which the act comes, and of which it finds the expression. The sin is, as it were, in the stuff, like a stain; so it must be washed, cleansed, purged away. And this is done by Divine discipline. And this the true-hearted man desires to have done in him, and lovingly yields himself to the Divine cleansing. He even makes it a matter of devout and earnest prayer, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." In this passage national calamity is seen as the consequence of national sins; but the psalmist seems almost able to take the truer, deeper view, that those national calamities are doing God's purging work, and delivering the nation from the power of the old sins. We want our sins *covered over*, but that cannot content us. We also want them *purged away*. And this is but another way of saying that we need Jesus the *Justifier*, and Jesus the *Sanctifier*.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*The cry of the prisoner.* "The sighing of the prisoner." The prisoner here is not the man under the penalty of his crime. It is the captive placed under wearying limitations, not for personal faults, but as sharing the national disabilities. The case of such may be treated from three points of view. We have the sigh of the captive, the exile, and the oppressed.

I. THE SIGH OF THE CAPTIVE. The restraint of personal liberty is a most grievous distress. Man loves his freedom, and cannot endure bondage. There is the captivity of the body, but there is also a captivity of opinion, and a captivity of habits. When men are awakened, they begin to sigh under *these* bondages. "He is the free man whom the truth makes free, and all are slaves besides." Illustrate by the condition of captive Israel in Babylon. One psalmist pictures their distress in a very touching way (Ps. cxxxvii. 1, 2), "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof." Not captives in the bodily or in the national sense, we may be captives to sin; then what is the sigh we breathe, and the cry we make, and into whose ears will our cry enter? There is One whose work concerns the "freeing of them that are bound." There is a trumpet-voice which proclaims for all who sigh and cry in the prison-house—

"The year of jubilee is come,
Return, ye ransomed sinners, home."

II. THE SIGH OF THE EXILE. Where patriot-feeling is strong, it is an inconceivable distress to be away from one's own land. At least it is to be *compelled* to be away. We may leave home pleasantly at our own will; we never leave home pleasantly against our will. Illustrate by the passionate yearning of the Babylonian exiles for Jerusalem. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." See Daniel, the exile, praying with his window open toward Jerusalem. And yet here is a most strange and unnatural thing—so many souls are exiled by the compulsions of sin and self-will from their true home in God, and yet they neither sigh nor cry for their return. For all who do sigh there is a Divine Zerubbabel, ever ready to lead them back.

III. THE SIGH OF THE OPPRESSED. For the captive life in Babylon was a life of stern trials and hardships. There were even some "appointed to die," placed in peril of life. To whom should they cry in their time of sore need, save to the God of their

fathers? Like Samson, blind and oppressed, they could find a way to God. And sin is an oppression and humiliation. They who live in sin find it, as the prodigal son did, a hard lot; and presently they cry for home and father and God, even as he did.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*Divine relationships our best plea in prayer.* "We thy people and sheep of thy pasture." This verse gives a gleam of hope and confidence at the end of the long cry of anguish. Compare a New Testament cry, "Though we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself." Illustrate by our Lord's distress on the cross. In extreme anguish, he yet could say, "*My God, my God!*" We may set in order three possible pleas which we are permitted to use in prayer. (1) Our needs; (2) God's Name; (3) God's relations. He must be consistent with himself.

I. OUR NEEDS. This may seem the most persuasive plea from our point of view. It is, indeed, our best plea in asking from our fellow-men. With them we must make out a clear case of need. And God graciously allows it to be our plea with him. But in our family life we know that the children's wanting a thing is not a sufficient reason for giving it to them; because their wants and desires are not necessarily their real needs. There are some considerations on which their needs must be estimated. True, we ought to speak quite freely our thoughts about our needs when we draw near to God; and it is equally true that a Divine and gracious consideration of our needs guides the Divine decisions and the Divine doings; but we must not think of this as the supreme persuasion with God.

II. GOD'S NAME. In the Old Testament it is impressively presented to us that the supreme motive urging God is jealousy of his own Divine Name. All good for man is bound up in keeping the honour of the Divine Name. Man has no anchorage for his trust and hope if God be not infinitely good. For our sakes he must do nothing, give nothing, withhold nothing, if these things imperil his Name, make us question his Divine integrity. Ezekiel is the prophet who puts this point most forcibly. "Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy Name's sake" (Ezek. xxxvi. 22). Apply to God's Name as the Almighty One, the All-holy One, the All-saving One. There must always be consistency between the Divine doings and the Divine Name. Good men, like Joshua, are jealous of the Divine Name.

III. GOD'S RELATIONS. Not what he abstractly *is*, but what he relatively *is to us*. God has been pleased to come into relations with us; to set himself in relations. He has therefore limited himself, conditioned himself, placed himself under honourable obligations. And so our supreme plea in prayer has come to be, reminding God of the honourable obligations involved in his relationships to us. We may be sure of this—he must be true to himself. This may be fully opened out in connection with the most blessed relationship of *Fatherhood*.—R. T.

Vers. 1—13.—*Prayer for deliverance from suffering.* "Written in a time of the deepest distress; the city is desolate and the whole nation oppressed by the cruel thralldom of their heathen oppressors. They are apparently deserted by God, and their bitterness enhanced by the feeling that God was exacting from them the penalty for the iniquity of their forefathers."

I. SUFFERING. 1. *God's Church seemed in danger of being entirely overthrown.* (Vers. 1—5.) Nothing causes profounder sadness to good men than the apparent triumph of the cause of unrighteousness and injustice. *This seemed a retributive penalty for the sins of themselves and their forefathers.* (Ver. 8.) Nothing aggravates our sufferings so much as the knowledge that we, and those connected with us, have been the real causes of them; that they are Divine punishments.

II. THE PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE. (Vers. 8, 9, 12.) Contains three pleas. 1. *Their own misery.* "We are brought very low;" we are come to great misery (vers. 8, 12). It is the cry for mercy to a compassionate Father; and God has taught us to make this appeal. 2. *For the sake of God's own Name.* His Name or nature is that he is the God of salvation, and that for his own sake, as well as for the sake of his guilty sons and daughters, he will deliver. It is his nature to help and save; his glory is his goodness, as we are taught in Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. But this is more wonderfully

brought out in the incarnation and the life and death of Christ. God's Name or nature is love. 3. *Because of their close relation to God.* (Ver. 13.) They are *his* people, nourished and cared for and led by him. The Lord will not abandon those that are so closely related to him. "The Lord is my Shepherd; therefore I shall not want." Christ, as the good *Shepherd*, is his Representative.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXX.

A PSALM in which the writer entreates God to restore his favour once more to Israel, and especially to the ten tribes, who are in affliction, and in danger of perishing (vers. 1, 2, 15—17). The psalm is evidently written while the temple is standing (ver. 1), and while Israel still occupies the Holy Land (vers. 8—15), but in a time of deep suffering, when the nation has sustained a severe blow. It probably belongs to the period immediately preceding the final captivity of the ten tribes, when the kingdom of Israel was already tottering to its fall, and the carrying off of the population had begun (2 Kings xv. 29). The psalm is "Asaphian," i.e. composed by a member of the Asaphian division of the temple choir, but certainly not by Asaph. It consists of two short strophes (vers. 1—3, 4—7) and one long one (vers. 8—19), each concluded with an almost identical refrain (vers. 3, 7, 19).

Ver. 1.—Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel. The title, "Shepherd of Israel," is a new one; but it follows naturally from the metaphor, so often employed (Pss. lxxiv. 1; lxxvii. 20; lxxviii. 52; lxxix. 13), of Israel being God's "flock." Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock. "Thou that leddest" (Cheyne). The mention of "Joseph" shows at once that the thoughts of the psalmist are fixed on the northern kingdom. Thou that dwellest between the cherubims. The two cherubim that overshadowed the mercy-seat seem to be meant. Shine forth; i.e. "show thyself—manifest thy might" (comp. Ps. 1. 2).

Ver. 2.—Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. "Ephraim" and "Manasseh" form a natural expansion of the "Joseph" of the preceding verse; but it is difficult to understand the mention of "Benjamin" here. Hengstenberg suggests, and both Canon Cook and Professor Cheyne seem to accept the suggestion, that it was only a small portion of Benjamin which adhered to Judah at the division of the

kingdoms, the greater part attaching itself to the rival power. Stir up thy strength; i.e. "rouse thyself from thine inaction—come forward, and make thy might to appear." And come and save us; literally, *come for salvation to us*. The writer identifies himself with the rebel tribes, who, after all, are a part of God's people—a part of Israel.

Ver. 3.—Turn us again, O God; or, restore us—"bring us back"—i.e. bring those of us who are in exile (2 Kings xv. 29) back to our country. And cause thy face to shine (comp. Numb. vi. 25; Pss. xxxi. 16; lxxvii. 1). The metaphor scarcely needs explanation. And we shall be saved. If thou lookest upon us with favour, our salvation is assured.

Ver. 4.—O Lord God of hosts. A form of address unusual in the Psalms, but occurring in Ps. lix. 5; lxxxiv. 8; and below in ver. 18. How long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? literally, *how long wilt thou smoke?* (comp. Ps. lxxiv. 1). "Against the prayer" means "in spite of the prayer," or "notwithstanding the prayer." Ordinarily, God forgives, and ceases from his anger, as soon as the afflicted one makes earnest prayer to him. But this is not always so. A time comes when his wrath cannot be appeased—when "there is no remedy" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 16). Evil has been persisted in too long.

Ver. 5.—Thou feedest them with the bread of tears (comp. Ps. xlii. 2, "My tears have been my meat day and night"). And givest them tears to drink in great measure; or, *and givest them to drink a copious draught of tears*; literally, *shālîsh* is a measure of capacity, probably the third part of an ephah (see Isa. xl. 12).

Ver. 6.—Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours. A great invasion, Assyrian or Babylonian, was always a signal to the near neighbours of Israel—Syria, Moab, Ammon, Edom—to indulge in hostilities (see 2 Kings xxiv. 2). And our enemies laugh among themselves (comp. Pss. xlv. 13; lxxxix. 4).

Ver. 7.—Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. Here the refrain occurs for the second time, but with the slight variation or "O God of hosts" instead of "O God" simply (see the comment on ver. 19).

Vers. 8—19.—The poet, to excite God's compassion, proceeds to depict Israel as it was and as it is. He adopts the figure of a vine, perhaps suggested to him by the description of Joseph in the dying speech of Jacob (Gen. xlix. 22), and carries out his metaphor, in nine consecutive verses, with great beauty and consistency. Isaiah's description of Israel as a vineyard (Isa. v. 1—7) is somewhat similar.

Ver. 8.—*Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt.* The history of Israel as a nation begins with the Exodus. The nation was transplanted from Egypt into a soil better fitted for it by the loving hand of God, in order that it might have ample room to grow up and develop itself freely. God "brought it out of Egypt," not merely in the exercise of his ordinary providence over humanity, but by an active exertion of his Almighty power, and a long series of miraculous manifestations, without which the transfer could not have been effected. He then cast out the heathen, and planted it—drove out, that is, before Israel the seven nations of the Hivites, Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, and Jebusites, and, having driven them out, "planted" in his own people (see Ps. xlv. 2).

Ver. 9.—*Thou preparedst room before it.* The "room" was made by the removal of the heathen inhabitants, who were first greatly weakened by Rameses III., and then driven out by Joshua. And didst cause it to take deep root; rather, *and it took deep root*, as in the Revised Version. And it filled the land (comp. Deut. xi. 24; Josh. i. 3). Possession was taken of the whole land, not at once (Judg. i. 27—36), but slowly and surely; the furthest limits being reached in David's time (1 Kings iv. 21, 24).

Ver. 10.—*The hills were covered with the shadow of it.* The "hills" intended are probably those of the south—the hill country of Judah—since the clauses which follow designate the boundaries towards the north, west, and east. (So Hengstenberg, Kay, Professor Cheyne, and others.) And the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars; rather, *and the goodly cedar trees were covered with their branches.* The cedars of Lebanon are intended. They marked the boundary-line on the north. The psalmist calls them "cedars of God," by a strong, but not unprecedented (Ps. xxxvi. 6), hyperbole.

Ver. 11.—*She sent out her boughs unto the sea.* The Mediterranean; the western boundary of the land. And her branches

(or, *her shoots*, Revised Version) unto the river. The Euphrates (see Gen. xv. 18; 1 Kings iv. 21, 24).

Ver. 12.—*Why hast thou then broken down her hedges? or, her fences.* Vineyards in the East were fenced round with walls (see Isa. v. 5). So all they which pass by the way do pluck her; i.e. "pluck off her grapes"—ravage her and plunder her (comp. Ps. lxxxix. 40, 41).

Ver. 13.—*The bear out of the wood doth waste it.* The "bear out of the wood," i.e. the wild bear—is probably Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings xv. 29), or the Assyrian power generally. And the wild beast of the field doth devour it. Other beasts, i.e. other enemies of Israel, join in and share in the plundering (see above, ver. 6, and comp. Jer. v. 6).

Ver. 14.—*Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts;* i.e. "come back to us, to be our Helper and Defender." Look down from heaven, and behold. Condescend to "look down" upon us "from heaven," thy dwelling-place, and "behold"—take note of our condition, see how we suffer, and thou wilt be sure to visit this vine; i.e. to "visit" it, not in wrath, but in loving-kindness and compassion—to "visit it with thy salvation" (Ps. cvi. 4).

Ver. 15.—*And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted;* rather, *the stock.* (So Kay, Cheyne, and the Revised Version.) Some, however, regard נָטַע as a verb, and translate, "Establish that which thy right hand has planted" (see the LXX, Michaëlis, Hupfeld, Canon Cook, and others). And the branch that thou madest strong for thyself; literally, *the son*, which may mean the offshoot (comp. Gen. xlix. 22). Is this offshoot Ephraim? or is the entire vine, all Israel, intended?

Ver. 16.—*It is burned with fire, it is cut down.* The flames of war have begun to consume it—it is no longer a vine, but mere fuel (comp. Isa. xxxiii. 12), ready to be burned. They perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Here the metaphor is dropped. The climax has been reached, and the matter is too serious for rhetorical treatment. The nation typified by the vine, the Israel of God, is perishing—perishing "at the rebuke of God's countenance"—because his favour is withdrawn from them. Unless God steps in to save, destruction is certain.

Ver. 17.—*Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand.* Either upon Israel generally, or upon Ephraim—the northern kingdom—especially. A Judean poet interceding for the rival state, is touching, Upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself (comp. ver. 15 and the comment).

Ver. 18.—So will not we go back from thee; i.e. "we shall not go back from thee *any more*." Gratitude for our deliverance will bind us fast to thy service. Quicken us (comp. Hos. vi. 2). The prayer is for national rather than spiritual life—for a recovery from the destruction which has almost come upon them (ver. 16). And we will call upon thy Name; i.e. we will be faithful to thee henceforth; we will not go after other gods, but "call upon" thee, and thee only. The poet makes himself the spokesman of the whole nation.

Ver. 19.—Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. The psalm is closed by the refrain in its third and most perfect form. First we had, "Turn us again, O God" (ver. 3); then, "Turn us again, O God of hosts" (ver. 7); now, "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts"—the appeal to God continually increasing in intensity. Having made his third appeal by the covenant Name, the psalmist seems to feel that he has done all that he can, and desists.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 3, 7, 18.—*A cry of weakness, a prayer of faith.* "Turn us . . . we shall be turned." The life of the individual, of the Church, of the nation, depends not on means, methods, forms, institutions. With God is the fountain of life. These words are a cry of weakness, helplessness, humiliation; but also a prayer of faith, hope, joyful expectancy.

I. A CONFESSION OF WEAKNESS, DANGER, SIN. 1. In ordinary affairs a sense of weakness, helplessness, dependency, is the forerunner of failure, often its cause. Rash over-boldness, conceit of ability and good luck, though dangerous, are more apt to ensure success than timid self-distrust. Strange, then, that the "glad tidings," calling us to the grandest, most hopeful of all enterprises, begins by bidding us despair of ourselves! for true repentance is nothing less. The reason is precisely the grandeur of the mark set before us. In undertakings and tasks within our reach, calm self-reliance is the winning temper; but when the task is altogether too vast, the aim too high, for our strength and wisdom, self-confidence becomes folly, humility our safety. Further, the reason lies in the *original greatness of man's nature*, and his undestroyed capacity. The height measures the fall. If a temple or a pyramid be overthrown, what hands have built, hands can rebuild; but if a landslip carries down half a mountain, God's hand alone can rebuild. 2. A confession, not only of *weakness*, but of *sin*. The soul has turned away from God, and in so doing destroyed itself (Hos. xiii. 9). No sense of helplessness more absolute than conscious guilt. The past is irrevocable. Tears cannot wash the memory. Prayer cannot undo the deed ('Macbeth,' act ii. sc. 2, "Wake, Duncan," etc.). I cannot sever to-day from yesterday, my *present* self from my *past*. This is the sting and burden of *remorse* ('Macbeth,' act v. sc. 1, "Here's the smell of the blood"). He whom we have forsaken alone can restore us (Lam. v. 21).

II. A PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS AND FULL FAVOUR. "Cause thy face to shine," etc. Salvation can be nothing less than full restoration to God's favour, childlike trust; no middle ground between condemnation and acceptance (Rom. v. 1). When the storm-cloud is blown away, what comes in its place is not mere daylight, but sunshine. Our sins are the cloud that hides God's face (Isa. lix. 1). The sort of *half-and-half* condition in which many seem contented to live—between hope that they shall be saved, and fear that they shall be lost—has no warrant in Scripture. "We shall be saved," not "We hope we may be." Salvation is God's free, full gift in Christ, if not rejected or neglected, to be accepted fully, and *wrought out* with all our might (Phil. ii. 12, 13; Eph. ii. 10). "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John v. 12). The true Christian temper, therefore, is the perfect, habitual union of these two—profound humility because of our sin and sinfulness; joyful trust and thankfulness because of "the salvation which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. ii. 10).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The cherubim.* Who and what were they? We regard them as types of redeemed humanity, and designed to prefigure and promise that redemption. In proof, consider—

I. THE VARIOUS REFERENCES TO THEM IN THE SCRIPTURES. 1. *In connection with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise.* (Gen. iii. 24.) This passage tells but little of the nature of these exalted beings, only that they were held fit to occupy the place where only perfect righteousness could dwell. But neither their form, number, nor service are revealed to us. But inasmuch as the word "place" signifies rather "to place in a tabernacle," it seems as if the spot (see Gen. iv. 14—16) where God had placed them had become a sort of local tabernacle, and was called "the presence of the Lord," and so for a long time remained, probably until the Deluge. Thus the idea of the cherubim seems to have become familiar to the Jews. Bezaleel, when he was bidden make cherubim for the ark of the covenant, knew exactly what he was to do (Exod. xxxi. 2; xxv. 18, etc.). There must, therefore, have been some tradition concerning these mysterious beings, though that tradition is almost entirely lost to us. But we cannot but believe that our unhappy first parents, as they looked upon the cherubim, must have had some idea as to what they meant, and, like the first promise made to the woman of her seed that should bruise the serpent's head, so these mysterious beings would convey to their minds a gleam of bright, blessed hope, that restoration to what they had lost was destined for them, and that, though not now, yet in the future, they should again find themselves amid that favour and joy and righteousness from all which their sin had cast them out. 2. *In the construction of the ark of testimony.* (See Exod. xxv. 18, etc.) Now, at first sight this seems as if it was a contradiction of the command not to "make any graven image, nor any likeness," etc. (Exod. xx.). But that command had reference to the making of such likenesses for the purpose of worship, as did the Egyptians, who paid to such things religious honour. But this Israel was not to do; nevertheless, they might and did make these cherubim, on the ark, woven in the curtains, and all about the tabernacle and temple. They were not representations of God, or of angels, or of anything upon earth, but, as we believe, of the spiritual character and condition of humanity when redeemed. Then: 3. *The cherubim are told of in Ezek. i. 10, and in ch. x.,* where a description is given of them, but such as is impossible of pictorial representation. They were, when represented as in the tabernacle, but sacred hieroglyphs, symbols, not of earthly or heavenly bodies, but of spiritual realities. Then: 4. *In Rev. iv. the "four living ones" told of there* (not "beasts," as our most unfortunate translation gives it) are again the cherubim.

II. WHAT THEY REPRESENT. We have already said that we take them as symbols of redeemed man. 1. *They represent humanity,* not the elemental forces of nature. This has been affirmed from Ps. xviii. 10; civ. 4, etc. Hence the air, fire, winds, have been regarded as the cherubim. But if so, how can they be called "living ones"? The blind forces of nature have no "life" in them. But the cherubim have. And it is the life of humanity. 2. *The creature-representation tells of character.* The ox (see Ezekiel and Revelation) tells of patient meekness, readiness for sacrifice or for toil, accustomed to the yoke—the character our Lord tells of, and exemplified, when he said (Matt. xi.), "Take my yoke upon you." The lion, symbol of nobleness of nature, of courage and might. Hence Christ is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." The eagle tells of the swift, strong, upward-soaring spirit that mounts heavenward, Godward. *Man*, the chief of all creatures, in whom all these excellences combine. 3. *Of perfect man.* For the cherubim are in the presence of God, but standing on the mercy-seat; hence they tell of man redeemed by the blood of Christ, and ever there, abiding always. Amid such God loves to dwell.

III. THEIR TEACHING FOR US. 1. *The infinite compassion of God.* See the depths of distress in which they were to whom these visions were given. But then God thus came to them with hope, and so with help. It is his blessed way. 2. *We may be as the cherubim,* shall be, if "in Christ." That is, we shall be perfect, holy, blessed, because dwelling for ever in God's presence.—S. C.

Ver. 3.—Real salvation. 1. Three times is this prayer repeated, but with slight, though noticeable, difference. Here, in its first utterance, it is addressed only to God. But the second time (ver. 7) it calls on God as "God of hosts." The eye of faith saw the ministers of God's power around him, the hosts of the holy angels who waited to do his will. Then the third time (ver. 19) it is the "Lord God of hosts" on whom he calls, making mention of the covenant name by which God was known in Israel as

especially *their* God. Hence our argument for faith. If God be our God, then he will help us. Thus "Faith's day grows brighter as the hours roll on; and her prayers grow more full and mighty." Prayer wars to its work, and in it. Often we begin with but scant store of trust, but as we pray on our hope and confidence grow. Therefore be instant in prayer. 2. Note the opening words of this prayer. It is "turn us," not our circumstances and conditions. Many people think that if these were right they would be right; but the truth is far more often just the other way: it is *we* who want changing; if the Lord turn *us*, then all the rest will be of small import, and will be turned as much as will be for our good. And it is not a mere improvement, a patch on the old garment, that is wanted—just a partial reformation here and there, but a complete change. "Ye must be born again." God must "turn us." An old sea captain replied to a faithful minister who, in seeking to lead him to God, told him that he had better sail from henceforth under another flag, "No," said the sailor, "that won't do; I mean to scuttle the ship, and get a new one altogether; there's nothing else to be done. I've tried to mend the other often enough." He was right. No partial amendment will save any soul. And God must turn us. There is a human side in man's salvation, but there is still more a Divine side, and the first work is of God. He ever seeks us before we seek him. And when he fully saves a man, it is along the lines suggested by our text. There are three stages in the work.

I. GOD TURNS US. And he does this: 1. *By giving us repentance.* Too many keep calling on men to "only believe." Christ and his apostles never bade men "only believe," when they sought salvation. But Christ commanded that "repentance and faith" should be preached, not faith only. Where, as with the Philippian gaoler, the apostle said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," etc., it was because repentance had already taken place, the man was really repentant at that moment. And whenever God turns a soul to himself, it is by way of repentance. This means that the soul sees its sin, feels and grieves over it, renounces it before God and man. 2. *By leading us to faith.* Not the mere belief of any doctrine about Christ, but more than that—the actual committal of himself to Christ for salvation; actually trusting him to pardon, accept, and save. Now, this is the complete spiritual change which the word "turn" implies. It is the first great step in the soul's salvation. Then—

II. GOD TURNS US AGAIN. The prayer is, "Turn us *again*." Now, what does this mean? 1. *It may be the prayer of a penitent backslider.* This psalm contemplates Israel as such. And unless the backslider is turned again, he cannot be saved. He must come back to God. But: 2. *It is the prayer of one who seeks full salvation.* After repentance and faith, which constituted the great first step in salvation, and which do save a man if he abide therein, there is given a higher gift to him who heartily desires it. It is called in Acts viii., xviii., xix., speaking of the Samaritan converts, of Apollos, and of the twelve disciples of John at Ephesus, "the receiving of the Holy Ghost." It is a distinct and further and most blessed gift, qualifying for service, and uplifting the soul to a stage of experience which it has not known as yet. It separates the soul from sin, secures the clean heart, and wins the fulfilment of that glorious promise in Ezek. xxxvi. 25, and the many others like unto it. The believer is made "pure in heart," and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses him from all sin. This comes from the receiving of the Holy Ghost. We are delivered from that miserable round of sinning and repenting, which the mass of professing Christians wearily travel, and, instead thereof, a life is lived in which the "whole spirit, soul, and body is preserved blameless." It is the "abundant life" which our Lord came to give.

III. GOD CAUSES HIS FACE TO SHINE. This tells of "the joy" of God's salvation, that walking in the light which ensures that here and now the days of our mourning are ended. It is that holy, happy, joyful, winsome religion which is what our God intended us to have, which not a few have enjoyed, and which waits for all those who truly seek it. Then, when all this is, then "we *shall* be saved." God will be glorified, we ourselves filled with the love of God, and our fellow-men will be blessed through us as otherwise they cannot be. Then will our religious life answer to the beautiful description given in vers. 8—11. "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus."—S. C.

Vers. 8—15.—*The vine of God.* These verses may be taken—

I. AS A SYMBOLIC HISTORY OF ISRAEL. 1. *For God's people were as a vine.*

Designed for fruit ; carefully tended ; highly esteemed ; thoroughly cleansed ; diligently guarded. 2. *Israel had been brought out of Egypt.* 3. *The nations of Canaan were driven out.* 4. *Israel became a settled nation.* 5. *Strong.* 6. *Populous.* "Filled the land ;" covering the hills and the plains. 7. *Dominion increasing,* from the Mediterranean in the west to the Euphrates in the east. Then, at the time when this psalm was written : 8. *A great change had come.* Fierce foes, as Assyria and Babylon ; and wild-beast-like enemies, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and others, all made havoc of Israel, uprooting and devouring. But all this led Israel, as God purposed it should, to turn again unto him in penitence, faith, prayer, and reconsecration (ver. 18). But also—

II. AS AN ALLEGORY OF THE CHRISTIAN SOUL. 1. *In prosperity.* For it, too, is God's vine. Redeemed from the slavery and wretchedness and sin of the Egypt-like world. The heathen, the terrible spiritual enemies, God drove out, and saved his people from their sins ; planted the soul in the kingdom of grace ; made it happy in God, so that it took "deep root." And that grace of God governed the whole being, "filled the land," so that, as Paul, he could say, "I live, yet not I, but," etc. The Divine life in him attained to noble proportions, in height, in breadth (ver. 10). And became victorious over many, and possessor of wide and beneficent power (ver. 11). All this tells of the soul happy and strong, and abiding and useful in God. Blessed condition. 2. *In adversity.* (Ver. 12.) We are told (2 Chron. xxxiii. 31) how God left Hezekiah. That was an instance of God breaking down the "hedges." It was done "to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." This God often does. At other times in anger, to punish, as with Israel. Yet again to teach the soul its dependence upon God. What are these hedges ? Holy habits, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the soul, means of grace. Sin forfeits all these, breaks through holy habit, drives away the Spirit, sterilizes all means of grace. It is not God who breaks down the hedges, but our sin—our forgetfulness of God, our disobedience, our pride. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed," etc. And then what is told of here is sure to follow (vers. 12, 13). Any passer-by is able to pluck away her strength, to rob the soul of some of its power. The soul gives in to them, does what they say. And some foul, fierce, strong, wild-boar-like sin will get itself entrance into the soul, and, oh ! the wasting that there is then ! what rooting up and devouring of all good ! and lesser creatures, but of like nature, rush in and do similar work. O my soul, keep near thy God, lest thy hedges be broken down ! 3. *In recovery.* Thank God, the allegory does not close with the misery we have just contemplated ; but we see recovery beginning. For there is (ver. 14) earnest crying to God ; pleading of the ancient covenant (ver. 15). God himself planted the vine and loved it. Confession of utter misery (ver. 16) and helplessness and guilt ; for their misery is because of God's rebuke. Pleading again God's former love, so great, so precious, how he made Israel "strong for thyself ;" protesting (ver. 18) that they will no more go back from God ; and interceding for that again turning to God, and that consciousness of his favour which would ensure that they would go back no more. These are the steps of the upward ascent, even out of the depths.—S. C.

Ver. 18.—*Going back from God.* This psalm, this verse, is a penitent confession that Israel had been guilty of this sin, and it is a prayer for pardon and restoration. But such backsliding did not cease with Israel. We have here—

I. A CONFESSION OF THE SIN. Israel needed to make such confession. But so do others now. 1. *Apostates,* like Demas, Judas, etc. 2. *Those who know God has called them, but from fear of man refuse to confess him.* 3. *Those who have confessed him, but live inconsistent lives.* 4. *Those who, after special seasons of nearness to God, go back to indulge their old sins.* These, and yet others, need this confession.

II. A PORTRAYAL OF ITS MISERY. (See vers. 5, 6, 12, 13, 16.) The backslider is the most miserable man on the face of the earth. He can never forget that he has known the better way, and has chosen the worse.

III. AN ASSURANCE OF ITS PREVENTION. 1. *Such prevention needed ;* for going back is so easy, so secret, so perilous, so shameful, so condemned of God. 2. *And is sure, by the grace of God turning us again,* leading us into the possession and retainment of the fulness of his grace, and giving us the joy of his salvation.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Throned above the cherubim—a conception of God.* Prayer-book Version, "Thou that sittest upon the cherubim;" Perowne, "Thou that sittest (throned above) the cherubim;" Revised Version margin, "dwestest between." It is plain that this psalm was composed when Israel was groaning under some foreign oppression which it was powerless to resist. It is a plaintive cry for restoration to a state which should be indicative of the Divine favour. Two periods may be mentioned as times when Palestine became the battle-ground of rival powers (see ver. 6)—when Assyria and Egypt fought in it; and in the post-Exilic period, when it was the apple of discord between the Ptolemies and the Seleucidæ. There is evident poetical reference to the tabernacle of the wilderness, rather than to the temple at Jerusalem; for the poet was thinking of God as *leading* his people, and in vision saw the tribes in their camping and marching order. The cover, or mercy-seat, of the ark was thought of as the throne of Jehovah. Above it rested the bright light, which was the symbol of the Divine presence; and the figures of the cherubim, with their wings extended and touching each other, formed the canopy of the throne. God's presence there was the sign of his abiding presence, and close, helpful relations with his people. His shining out, or shining forth, was the sign of his specially acting in judgment on the rebellious, or in vindication of the Divine honour, as in the case of Korah. So the psalmist, in Ps. l. 2, says, "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." (The account of the cherubim is given in Exod. xxv. 19—22.) We inquire what thoughts of God are specially associated with his manifestations from between the cherubim.

I. GOD IS EVER PRESENT WITH HIS PEOPLE. To the Jewish mind the symbol was always there between the cherubim, though not one of the people ever beheld it. It helped them to realize that their God was in their midst. No matter what might be the national calamities, at least they could be sure of this—that symbol of the present God remained. There could be no overwhelming calamity while the Keeper of Israel was still between the cherubim.

II. GOD MAY BE HIDING HIMSELF FROM HIS PEOPLE; or rather, he may *seem to them* to be hiding himself. This is the trouble of the psalmist—Israel is in sore distress, and God seems to keep silence, to "dwell in the thick darkness," and hold aloof from the strife. God never is uninterested in his people's cares; but his interest may sometimes best be shown in withholding his hand, and biding his time. His time is sure to come.

III. GOD MAY BE ASKED TO MANIFEST HIMSELF TO HIS PEOPLE. It may be precisely for the attitude which expresses itself in *asking* that God may be waiting. He manifests himself by "stirring up his strength to help us, and by shining forth his glory to cheer us."—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*God's strength needed for saving work.* "Stir up thy strength, and come and save us." It is singular that three only of the twelve tribes should be mentioned; but the poet's mind was full of the wilderness associations, and he knew that these three tribes followed in the order of procession immediately *behind the ark*. So the shining forth of the glory is thought of as at once seen by them. "The writer prays that the brightness of the Shechinal, the light of God's countenance, thus manifested in old time 'before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,' may be once more vouchsafed as a sign of favour." The expression here used, "Stir up thy strength for our salvation," implies that all God's savings may be thought of as expenditures of the Divine strength—the strength of the Divine *activity*, the strength of the Divine *wisdom*, and the strength of the Divine *love*.

I. THE STRENGTH OF GOD'S ACTIVITY NEEDED FOR SAVING WORK. This is the point of the prayer of the psalmist. He wants God to show energy, to put forth energy, to bestir himself in order to *do* something for his people. The poetical thought is of God dormant, unconcerned with the trouble of his people. It is as if he would even awaken him to activity. The expression must be treated poetically. It brings out the idea that man needs God's active strength, since man asks his help only when he feels helpless. The *saving* needed is beyond man, so he has a high idea of the energy and the power that must be required.

"'Twas great to speak a world from nought;
'Twas greater to redeem."

Apply to the redemption of the world from sin through our Lord Jesus Christ. What activity, energy, skill, and power were required for the great salvation!

II. THE STRENGTH OF GOD'S WISDOM NEEDED FOR SAVING WORK. The histories of the Old Testament abundantly illustrate the fact, that God's times and ways of saving are seldom such as man could have thought of. The wisdom of them was fully seen in their issues; but it was altogether beyond men, too strong for men to grasp and understand. How Israel was to be saved from Egypt, or Assyria, or Babylon, men could not tell. It was done in the times of Moses, and of Hezekiah, and in the "Return," through the strength of the Divine wisdom, combined with the strength of Divine energy. Apply to the great salvation from sin. The Divine wisdom in it has been the marvel of the ages, and it is marvellous still, deeper than even an ocean-line can reach. "The wisdom of God in a mystery."

III. THE STRENGTH OF GOD'S LOVE NEEDED FOR SAVING WORK. This leads into familiar ranges of thought. Our best deeds are done, and are best done, in the strength and inspiration of our love. And we are bidden to try and realize that love of God in human redemption, which is "beyond all manner of so much."—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The turnings and returnings of God.* "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine." The expression, "turn us," seems to have been used in the prayers of the captives in Babylon; they are represented as saying, "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south!" The exiles are not praying for repentance, but for a change in their circumstances—a change in the evident relations of God to them. Their captivity seemed to them God's turning them away from him. What they asked was a gracious returning to them. Putting the sentence in modern form, it would read, "Turn to us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved." Some render, "O God, restore us!" which conveys the same idea.

I. GOD'S TURNING AWAY DECLARES THE NEED FOR DIVINE JUDGMENTS. If we estimated life aright, we should think more of the presence and working of God in our life, as the Overruler, Restrainer, Guide, who is ever moulding and moderating our impulse, ever putting straight what we bend awry. And then we should regard aright God's holding aloof, turning away, "drawing up into a cloud," and leaving us to the miseries of our own self-ordering; which miseries would become his correcting judgments. This point may be effectively illustrated by God's word to Moses when Moses was interceding in the matter of the golden calf. God proposed to withdraw his *own Presence* as Guide, Restrainer, and Overruler; and Moses knew well that would prove the severest of judgments. The same thing may be shown in the case of King Saul. It is figured as the withdrawal of God's Spirit from him. Left without Divine restraints and overrulings, Saul runs down into woes that are Divine judgments. So with Israel in captivity. They had so grieved God that he had "turned away," and left them to follow their own political devices. They sought Assyria, or they sought Egypt, and they would not seek Jehovah. They must come under Divine judgments, and learn through them; but they brought the judgments on themselves. And God's turning and leaving them alone was at once the necessary thing, and the most merciful thing. When men are wilful, Divine severities are Divinest mercies.

II. GOD'S TURNING-TOWARDS SHOWS THE TIME HAS COME FOR DIVINE RESTORINGS. It is the sign that men have learned the lesson of their judgments and calamities, and have come to a better mind. They have begun to realize what God turned away means and involves; they have begun to want the sight of God's face again, and the cheer of the shine or smile on his face. And when that is *man's mood*, God can turn round, and can enter again on those guiding, overruling, and restraining relations, which then are rightly esteemed. Bunyan illustrates, in his 'Holy War,' very effectively the turning away of Emmanuel, the consequent misery of Mansoul, the awakening desire for Emmanuel, and his gracious return.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The refusal of prayer.* "How long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?" The sign of the anger was God's not heeding their cry. "They asked and received not, because they asked amiss." The Prophet Isaiah (i. 15) even represents God as saying to his sinful people, "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear:

your hands are full of blood." And the prophet, for himself, says (lix. 2), "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." And a psalmist expresses the true feeling when he writes, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." "Angry against the prayer" expresses quite a human kind of feeling. When men refuse our request, our first thought is that they must be *angry with us*. This, then, represents man's thought and fear concerning God; but it does not precisely represent the actual fact. God is angry, as anxious, loving parents are angry. He refuses prayer for the sake of the offerer. And parents know that it is often much harder to *refuse* a request than to *grant* it. The refusal is love, not anger. The exiles ask the question of the text in an impulsive spirit, half complainingly. We may ask quietly and calmly their question. How long will God hold aloof from men's prayers?

I. GOD NEVER REFUSES PRAYER IN "MERE SOVEREIGNTY." Caprice or jealous feeling must never be associated in our minds with God. "We speak of the Divine sovereignty; but sovereignty is not an arbitrary, capricious thing; it is a righteous and holy thing; and God must ever act in conformity with the unalterable principles of his character." "There is no mystery in those temporary desertions with which God sometimes visits his own people. The reason of them is to be found in themselves—in their sinfulness, in their unsteadfastness, in their unfaithfulness." All Divine withdrawals and temporary refusals mean *discipline*.

II. GOD MAY HOLD ALOOF UNTIL JUDGMENT HAS DONE ITS WORK. Note that this involves uncertainty as to time of restoration. Judgment acting on different moral natures is prolonged according to the response different natures make to it. It would be no kindness to resume gracious relations *before* the disciplinary work was complete.

III. GOD MAY HOLD ALOOF UNTIL HUMILITY TONES THE PRAYER. Take humility as representing the state of mind when self-will and self-pleasing are mastered. Humility is holding our will in submission to God's will.

IV. GOD MAY HOLD ALOOF UNTIL MAN IS UNITED IN HIS PRAYER. Part of a man may pray for, and part of him may pray against. Will may pray for, heart may pray against. Duty may pray for, feeling may pray against. Illustrate by the figure in Hos. ii. 21, 22.

V. GOD MAY HOLD ALOOF UNTIL HIS ANSWER CAN BE THE FULLEST BLESSING. Oftentimes to give too soon would but be to give a *part*. God waits till we are empty of self, and can be filled *with himself*.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—"*Tears to drink*:" the mission of troublous experiences. "Givest them tears to drink in great measure." Reference must be to the dreariness and hopelessness and misery of the captives in Babylon. There was no other time in the national history when the expression was so suitable. The misery is forcibly pictured in Ps. cxxxvii. When the eyes of the exiles were full of tears, it was bitterness indeed to be asked to sing "one of the songs of Zion." "How could they sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Eastern people are very expressive in their grief, and shed tears very freely; but the expression here is poetical. Men are thought of as having so much trouble in their lot that they seemed to feed upon their tears. Stanley says, "The psalms of the time answer to the groans of Ezekiel, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, as deep to deep. No human sorrow has ever found so loud, so plaintive, so long-protracted a wail. We see them in the places of their final settlement, often lodged in dungeons with insufficient food, loaded with contumely, their faces spat upon, their hair torn off, their backs torn with the lash. There were the insults of the oppressors, there were the bitter tears which dropped into their daily beverage, the ashes which mingled with their daily bread." This subject may be profitably treated by recalling the fact that our Lord Jesus is recorded to have wept tears on three occasions, and these occasions may be regarded as representative. Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus; Jesus wept in sight of unreceptive Jerusalem; Jesus wept in the garden of Gethsemane.

I. THE MISSION OF THE TEARS OF BEREAVEMENT. Tears seem specially sacred to such times. They are, indeed, nature's relief. We feel anxious when our bereaved friends cannot weep. Tears are brain relief as well as emotional relief; but they are the sign of the broken heart, the unavailing regret, the love that has become only a memory. But see the mission of such tears. 1. They call out sympathy. 2. They

satisfy our feeling that we ought to feel. 3. They honour our departed friends. 4. They are silent prayers which God heeds.

II. THE MISSION OF THE TEARS OF CONCERN FOR OTHERS. Illustrated by our Lord's concern for Jerusalem. Observe that tears are not becoming while there is any hope of their yielding to gracious influence. The tears come when those we would bless seem determined to "resist the Holy Ghost." As long as Jesus could hope to save Jerusalem, there was no room for tears. They came when Jesus was compelled to say, "Now they are hid from thine eyes. Your house is left unto you desolate." We weep when we are forced, in hopelessness, to *let alone* those whom, from our very hearts, we desire to bless.

III. THE MISSION OF THE TEARS FORCED OUT BY MENTAL STRAIN. Illustrated by our Lord's tears in Gethsemane. Times when we want to understand, and cannot; when we want to believe, and cannot; when we want to obey, and cannot; when we want to see our way, and cannot; when we want to submit, and cannot. Such was the condition of the exiles.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The vine-figure of God's people.* A favourite figure with the prophets. The metaphor is applied to Israel in Isa. v. 1—7; Jer. ii. 21; Ezek. xv. 6; xvii. 6—8. There was a golden vine representing the nation, sculptured on the gate of the temple. The association of the vine with Egypt has been disputed; but the mural paintings at Thebes, at Beni-Hassan, and in the pyramids contain representations of vineyards. Boys are seen frightening away the birds from the ripe clusters; men gather them and deposit them in baskets, and carry them to the winepress. Two things are suggested—

I. THE VINE AS A FIGURE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE. 1. The vine is a foreign plant, not really belonging to Canaan. Quite possibly it had actually been introduced from Egypt; but its proper home seems to be the hilly region on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. Israel, like the vine, was transplanted, not a native of Palestine—transplanted in order to accomplish a Divine purpose, remaining only so long as the Divine Husbandman may think right. 2. The vine itself is a worthless plant; its value lies wholly in the fruit that it bears. Vine-wood is altogether useless, too porous and light to serve any good purpose. It only carries the sap that is to appear as luscious fruit. So Israel was reminded that it had no merit as a nation; it could only convey the Divine life to men as it brought forth the fruits of righteousness. 3. The vine represented Israel because it is a plant which is so dependent, needs so much care, and has such splendid possibilities. It must be held up; it must be vigorously pruned and thinned; it must be richly nourished. And so Israel needed Divine upholding, discipline, and encouragement; and that Divine care had been fully and freely given.

II. MAN'S TREATMENT OF HIS VINES AS A FIGURE OF GOD'S TREATMENT OF HIS PEOPLE. See the details given in Isa. v., and compare the description of planting a vineyard, given by Van Lennep, in 'Bible Lands and Customs,' vol. i. p. 112. Note: 1. Careful selection of ground—soil and aspect are most important. So God selects Palestine for the nation of Israel. Show the singular appropriateness of its situation, and its characteristic features. 2. Fencing it in. This necessary because of the enemies of the vine—little foxes that are cunning, wild boars and bears that are strong. See the fencing in of Israel—on the west, by sea; on the north, by mountains; on the east and south, by deserts. 3. Gathering out the stones. Because richness and depth of earth are needed, and there should be no hindrance to the spreading of the roots. So God dispossessed the nations that were occupying the soil. 4. Building a tower. For a watchman to see approaching foes in time of the ripening. So God's guiding eye and hand were ever on his people. 5. Making a wine-vat. Implying full expectation of fruitage. So God looks that his people bring forth "much fruit."—R. T.

Vers. 12, 13.—*Bitter experiences as Divine chastisements.* The wild boar is a creature which abounds in all parts of Asia Minor, and it is the farmer's greatest plague. It is specially mischievous in vineyards—what with eating and trampling underfoot, it will destroy a vast quantity of grapes in a single night. Homer writes of

"A monstrous boar,
That levell'd harvests and whole forests tore."

The bitter experiences of the vineyard are of three kinds. 1. The vineyard loses its fence (ver. 12). 2. The beasts make it a ruin (ver. 13). 3. Found in hopeless condition, it is at last cut down and burnt. So Israel began its national woes when it lost the Divine Guard and Defence. Its enemies then gained their power and opportunity. Illustrate from the supreme anxiety of Moses, because Jehovah threatened no longer to lead and guide the people; also, from Joshua's trouble, when Israel lost its Divine fence before Ai. See the consequences of the withdrawal of God's protection from the first king, Saul. It may be said that circumstances sufficiently account for the national calamities that befell Israel; but it is of supreme importance that we see deeper than the movement of circumstances, and trace the working of him who moves the circumstances. Withdrawing his special defence, and leaving a man to himself and to his circumstances, is the severest form of Divine chastisement, because it implies that God is *grieved*. The man or the nation has not only done wrong, he has done wrong in such a way as to offend or insult God. There is no chastisement so hard as being "left to our own devices." It involves our supreme humiliation. We then find ourselves out, and learn that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps;" and we find our perils out. The child that loses its mother has to learn from what varied forms of danger its mother preserved it; and we find out what God's "compassing our path and lying down" means, when God, grieved with us, withdraws into a cloud. When God held aloof from Israel, Assyria came in on the vineyard, like a wild boar, and Babylon like a bear, trampling and destroying. In this, however, we are but to see God's sternest form of chastisement, not vindictiveness, not mere punishing for the sake of upholding authority, but chastisement with a view to correction. Grace withdrawn that grace may come to be sought and valued.—R. T.

Ver. 18.—*God's grace our best safeguard*. "So will not we go back from thee." This assurance implies that the people, in whose name the psalmist speaks, had fully learned the lesson which God designed to teach them by the withdrawal, which was chastisement, and involved bitter distress and humiliation. They had turned to God, and God had turned, in mercy and in restoring grace, to them. The issue of bitter experience was, that the people desired to be steadfast servants of God henceforth. Compare the psalmist's personal exclamation, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now will I keep thy word." But there is a yet deeper sign of their return to right-mindedness. They do not merely make a promise, "So will not we go back from thee;" they acknowledge that they need *Divine help* in the endeavour to keep their promise. They go on to say, "Quicken us, and we will call upon thy Name." That is the supreme lesson which the discipline and the chastisement of life are to teach us—our entire dependence on the Divine grace and upholding.

I. THE PROMISE MADE BY THE DISCIPLINED. A promise of steadfastness. The disciples of Christ went back, and walked no more with him, because his higher, spiritual truth was beyond their reach; and, as they could not apprehend it, they were offended by it. But these Israelites had wavered in their allegiance to Jehovah, because they wanted to "follow the devices and desires of their own hearts." So the result of their discipline was that most hopefully humiliating thing, *the abating of self-confidence*. They felt their need of God, their dependence on God, and made their resolves that henceforth they would cleave closely to him. So far good. Resolves are good; but everything depends on the spirit in which they are made. Trust in the resolve soon ends in worse failure.

II. THE HOPE OF KEEPING THEIR PROMISE, WHICH THE DISCIPLINED MIGHT CHERISH. The hope that God's grace would be their inspiration and support. They pray, "Quicken us," which not only means, "Give us life," but, "Renew to us life;" "Ever keep up the energizing, the vitalizing, and the controlling." *Life* expresses exactly that which we need, to change barren resolve into constant, active, and holy endeavour. We need never fear "going back," if God will graciously quicken us. That grace is our sure defence from our weak selves.—R. T.

Vers. 1—19.—*God's redemption*. "It is not a bringing back out of exile that is here prayed for, for the people are still on the soil of their own country; but in their present feebleness they are no longer like themselves, but stand in need of Divine

intervention, the shining forth of the hidden countenance of God, in order again to attain a condition that is in harmony with the promises." Suggests—

I. GOD HAS MADE A GLORIOUS REDEMPTION POSSIBLE FOR US. (Ver. 8.) Has transplanted us from the darkness and slavery of Egypt into a glorious land of promise.

II. BY THE ABUSE OF OUR PRIVILEGE WE MAY BRING OURSELVES INTO GREAT FEELDENESS AND MISERY. 1. *God may seem not to answer our prayers.* (Ver. 4.) 2. *And to leave us to unavailing remorse.* (Ver. 5.) 3. *Appetite and passion may destroy us by their ravages.* (Ver. 13.)

III. GOD IS STILL NEAR TO HELP ALL WHO EARNESTLY DESIRE RESTORATION. 1. *He goes before us as he went before the Israelites in the wilderness.* (Ver. 1.) As a Shepherd. 2. *He has also the power to help us.* Dwells between the cherubim, the symbol of his earthly power; and is Lord of hosts—symbol of his heavenly power. 3. *When we can see our duty and privilege in the light of God's face, we shall repent and return.* (Ver. 3.) That is, we must see them in the very strongest light before we shall repent.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXXI.

PROFESSOR CHEYNE regards this psalm as composed of "two distinct lyrical passages," accidentally thrown together (compare his theory of Pss. xix., xxiv., xxxvi., lv., lxxvii., etc.); and certainly there is more reason for this than can be adduced for his other separations. It is difficult to trace any connection between the joyous opening strophe (vers. 1—5) and the sad and chastened monody which follows (vers. 6—16).

Vers. 1—5 appear to be the preface of a song of thanksgiving, intended for public recitation at one of the great public festivals—either the Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles.

Vers. 6—16 are part of a psalm of complaint, wherein God expostulates with his people.

Ver. 1.—Sing aloud unto God our Strength. "Loud" singing is regarded as indicative of earnestness and sincerity (see 2 Chron. xx. 19; Neh. xii. 42; Pss. xxxiii. 3; xcvi. 4, etc.). (On God as Israel's "Strength," see Pss. xxvii. 1; xxviii. 8; xli. 1; cxi. 7.) Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. The word translated "make a joyful noise" is especially used of the blare of trumpets (Lev. xxiii. 24; Numb. xxix. 1).

Ver. 2.—Take a psalm; or, lift up a song. And bring hither the timbrel; rather, strike the timbrel. The pleasant harp with the psaltery. The instruments ordinarily used in the service of the sanctuary were harps, psalteries, and cymbals (1 Chron. xv. 16; xvi. 5; xxv. 6; 2 Chron. v. 12; xxiv. 25;

Neh. xii. 27). Here the timbrel (תִּמְרֵל) seems to take the place of the cymbal.

Ver. 3.—Blow up the trumpet in the new moon. There was a blowing of trumpets at the beginning of every month (Numb. x. 10), in connection with the appointed sacrifices (Lev. xxviii. 11—15); so that the month intended cannot, so far, be fixed. As, however, the chief blowing of trumpets was on the first day of the seventh month (Lev. xxiii. 24), most commentators regard the psalm as composed for this occasion. There are some, however, as Hengstenberg, Professor Cheyne, and Professor Alexander, who consider it to be a Passover psalm. In the time appointed; rather, at the full moon; i.e. on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when the Feast of Tabernacles was opened (see Numb. xxix. 12). Trumpets were probably blown then also. On our solemn feast-day. The Feast of Tabernacles is called κατ' ἑξοχὴν, "the feast," in many passages of the Old Testament (see Professor Cheyne's comment on this psalm, 'Book of Psalms,' p. 228).

Ver. 4.—For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob; rather, this is a law (Kay, Cheyne, Revised Version). See the passages quoted in the preceding note.

Ver. 5.—This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony. The special mention of "Joseph" here is strange. Professor Cheyne explains, "God appointed the Law to be valid in northern as well as southern Israel." Hengstenberg and Professor Alexander account for the expression by the pre-eminence of Joseph during the sojourn in Egypt. When he went out through the land of Egypt. When he (Joseph) went out over (or, across) the land, i.e. at the time of the Exodus. Where I heard a language that I understood not. It can scarcely be supposed that this clause belongs properly

to ver. 5. It is rather an introduction to the monody wherewith the psalm (as it has come down to us) concludes—the mournful complaint of God against his people. So Professor Cheyne, who translates, “The discourse of one whom I had not known (i.e. of God) did I hear.”

Vers. 6-16.—The “discourse” is now given. It commences somewhat abruptly, and is, perhaps, itself a fragment, the beginning of which is lost. God reminds Israel of his past favours (vers. 6, 7), exhorts them to faithfulness (vers. 8, 9), promises them blessings (ver. 10), complains of their waywardness (vers. 11, 12), and finally makes a last appeal to them to turn to him, and recover his protection, before it is too late (vers. 13-16).

Ver. 6.—*I removed his shoulder from the burden.* In Egypt, burdens were borne upon the shoulder, either simply held upon it with both hands, or distributed between the two shoulders by means of a yoke (see Rawlinson's ‘Herodotus,’ vol. ii. p. 214). *His hands were delivered from the pots; rather, from the basket;* i.e. the basket in which the clay was carried before it was made into bricks.

Ver. 7.—*Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee* (see Exod. ii. 23; iii. 7; xiv. 10, etc.). *I answered thee in the secret place of thunder.* The pillar of the cloud seems to be meant. In this, and from this, God answered the cry of his people (Exod. xiv. 24). *I proved thee at the waters of Meribah* (Exod. xvii. 7). The “*selah*” after these words marks a pause, during which the people addressed might reflect on the manifold mercies which God had vouchsafed to them in Egypt, in the wilderness, and elsewhere.

Ver. 8.—*Hear, O my people* (comp. vers. 11, 13). Israel is still “God’s people,” however rebellious (vers. 11, 12). God has not yet given them up. *And I will testify unto thee; or, “protest unto thee”* (Kay, Cheyne). *O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; or, “if thou wouldst but hearken unto me!”*

Ver. 9.—*There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god* (comp. Exod. xx. 3; Deut. v. 7). Such worship had evidently begun, and required to be forbidden afresh.

Ver. 10.—*I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt.* The reminder was continually needed (see Exod. xii. 2; Lev. xxvi. 13; Deut. v. 6; Hos. xii. 9; xiii. 4). *Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it* (comp. 2 Kings xiii. 19). God’s gifts, both temporal and spiritual, are

proportioned to our eager longing for them. As Christ could not do his miracles in one place because of their unbelief (Mark vi. 6, 6), so God cannot give lavishly unless we desire largely.

Ver. 11.—*But my people would not hearken to my voice* (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 10, 41, 56; 2 Kings xvii. 14; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, 16). *And Israel would none of me; literally, would not obey me* (see the Prayer-book Version).

Ver. 12.—*So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust.* God’s Spirit will not always strive with men (Gen. vi. 3). After a time, if they persist in evil courses and disobedience to his commands, he “gives them up,” withdraws from them, leaves them to themselves, to the “lust,” or rather “stubbornness” of their own hearts—to their own perverse wills and imaginations. *And they walked in their own counsels* (comp. Jer. vii. 24). This result is inevitable. If God no longer guides their thoughts and enlightens their understandings, they can but follow their own foolish counsels, and the result cannot but be disastrous.

Ver. 13.—*Oh that my people had hearkened unto me!* rather, *would hearken unto me!* (see Professor Driver’s ‘Hebrew Tenses,’ § 145, and compare the Revised Version). *And Israel had walked in my ways!* rather, *would walk!*

Ver. 14.—*I should soon have subdued* (rather, *I should soon subdue*) *their enemies.* Israel is still surrounded by enemies, anxious for his destruction. God could subdue them and sweep them away in a moment, if he pleased; and would do so, if Israel would repent and return to him. The appeal is to the living Israel—the Israel of the psalmist’s time, which is given one more chance of triumph over its enemies. *And turned my hand against their adversaries.* Logically, the two clauses should have been inverted, since the subjugation of Israel’s enemies would be the effect of God’s hand being turned against them.

Ver. 15.—*The haters of the Lord.* Israel’s enemies are always spoken of as God’s enemies also (comp. Ps. iii. 2, 7; ix. 3; lxxviii. 1; lxxix. 6, 7, etc.). They “hate” Jehovah (Ps. xxi. 8; lxxviii. 2), not merely as Israel’s Protector, but as the Source of all good, whereas they delight in evil. *Should have submitted themselves unto him; rather, should submit themselves, or “should yield feigned obedience”* (Authorized Version, margin). *But their time* (i.e. Israel’s time) *should have endured for ever; rather, should endure.*

Ver. 16.—*He should have fed them also; rather, he should feed.* *With the finest of the wheat;* literally, *with the fat of the wheat* (comp. Deut. xxxii. 14 and Ps. cxlvii.

14). And with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee; rather, *would I satisfy thee*. The expression, "honey out of the rock," is taken from Deut. xxxii. 13. It evidently means "honey of the best"—

native honey, stored by the bees in clefts of the rocks. Of course, both the "wheat" and the "honey" are metaphors, which we are to regard as shadowing forth all temporal and spiritual blessings.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 13.—*God's lamentation over man's lost opportunities*. "Oh that my people," etc. Among the saddest words ever spoken are those we utter concerning what *might have been*. Lost opportunities; neglected duties; mischance that was within a hair-breadth of good fortune; misunderstandings that a little candour or patience would have prevented; voices we do not listen to, but whose echoes haunt us; the joy, wealth, success, love, happiness, within our grasp, if we had not let them slip;—what a weight of meaning, depth of sadness, these put into the words, "It might have been"! How many lives are wearing themselves out in the gloom of failure or disappointment! what countless multitudes have closed in sorrow and shame, whose whole course would have been different, if at some "parting of the ways," perhaps in the early morning of life, they had not taken the wrong turn! A more awful depth of meaning and pathos belongs to the closing verses of this psalm. *God's lamentation over man's lost opportunities*. We speak of what *might* have been and *has* been; God speaks of what *ought* to have been on men's part, and what surely *would* have been on his.

I. GOD'S VIEW OF HUMAN LIFE. The Bible mode of regarding human life differs from the way in which we naturally look at our own lives, by the same distinction which marks off Bible history from ordinary history, Bible poetry from ordinary poetry, Bible morality or ethics from those of ordinary moralists—*supreme universal reference to God*. Account for it as you please, the Scriptures in this respect stand apart from all other literature. Man naturally puts himself, as the old astronomers the earth, as the centre of all things. The Bible teaches him that God is the Centre as well as Source of all life (Rom. xi. 36). Even religious people talk and think of religion as *an important element* in human life, essential to its true happiness, neglect of which is guilty and disastrous. The Bible speaks of and to men as *made for God*, missing the whole purpose and blessing of life if estranged from him. So while we look at what *is*, God's Word shows him beholding what *ought* to be. We picture what *might have been*, he tells us what *would have been*; we hope or fear what *may* be, he reveals what *will* be. We are absorbed in the present; God shows us its root in the past, its fruit in the future (Gal. vi. 7, 8). It may be asked—What room, then, for repentance and pardon? Is not this to throw us back under the dominion and condemnation of *law*? Answer: God's laws are of two sorts: the law of love and duty, fulfilled by willing obedience, which, therefore, man can disobey and break; and natural laws—spiritual as well as material—which cannot be broken. For God to set them aside would be to destroy, not to save. *E.g.* the thief, the liar, the drunkard, may repent of his sin, and God will pardon it; but the restoration of confidence, and conscious sense of honesty, or the regaining of health destroyed by intemperance, can come *only* by the practice of the appropriate virtues.

II. THE REAL TURNING-POINT OF LIFE. God's own voice here sets forth the blessings which Israel not only *might*, but certainly *would*, have enjoyed, if they had not flung them away wilfully, ungratefully, madly (vers. 14—16). What, then, hindered? Where was the false step—"the parting of the ways"? Answer: vers. 11, 12. This was the secret of all Israel's calamities and misery. Note that the Revised Version here uses the *present* and the *future* (vers. 13—16). The Hebrew equally admits this rendering; nothing forbids our combining both meanings. But the reference of the whole psalm is to the *past*. It begins with a shout of joy, referring to the Feast of Trumpets, the beginning of the (civil) year, and the Feast of Tabernacles, at full moon of the same month. Then looks back to the institution of these festivals, the Law of Moses, the deliverance from Egypt. Then to the whole subsequent history—one long record of rebellion and ingratitude (Jer. xxii. 21).

The LESSON is for us (1 Cor. x. 11). By "turning-point of life" I mean not some one fatal crisis, at some special time (though such there are, in many lives), but the guiding force, determining motive, master principle, which gives character to each day as well as to the whole life; makes each step an advance in the right path, or an error. *Obedience to the voice of God.* 1. In his Word (John x. 27; xii. 47—50). 2. Conscience, which is the inward echo of God's voice. 3. His providence. 4. His Spirit, who alone can give the *hearing ear and understanding heart*. Here is something sadder yet: "Israel would none of me" (John v. 40, 42; viii. 47). To disobey, to wander, to be lost, you need not resolve on self-destruction; you need only to be careless, let things drift, like one who sleeps when his boat is drifting towards the rapids. You can be careless. God cares. "Oh that my people," etc. (Luke xix. 41, 42; Matt. xxiii. 37).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 10.—"*Open thy mouth wide;*" or, *great expectations encouraged.* There is no one that we like less than a man who is always begging. Our way is to tell people who ask of us, that they are not to come again, or that we can do but very little for them. And those who ask know how we feel, and hence they plead, perhaps, that they have never asked before, or that they never will again, or that they only ask for a very little. Now, it is not difficult to defend this our common conduct with suplicants; but what a contrast it offers to our God's dealing with us! He does not send us away when we come to him, nor complain that we come so often, or that we ask so much; but, as here, he encourages our greatest expectations, and bids us "open our mouth wide," etc. Such immense encouragement does he give to us to all boldness in prayer.

"Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For his grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much."

The psalmist had probably often noticed how the young birds open their mouths wide for the food which they know the parent bird will give them, and for which, therefore, they wait with such eager expectancy. And he points to this familiar fact, and bids his countrymen in like manner expect blessing from God, for God will not disappoint them. Now, on this subject, note—

I. THAT THERE ARE SOME WHO NEVER OPEN THEIR MOUTHS AT ALL. They do not believe in prayer, they count it so much waste breath, and affirm that it avails no more than the piteous cry of the hare when she knows that the hounds are upon her. They urge that all things are governed by fixed law, and no desire of ours, however fervent, can make the slightest alteration. Or else, they say that if what we ask for be right for God to give, he will give it without our prayer; that if it be not right, then, as certainly, he will not give it: he knows our need without our telling him. But we have one short reply to all this, and we say to all such disbelievers in prayer—Have you ever really prayed? Myriads of believing souls there are who with one voice will affirm, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me;" and we prefer to believe these who know that God heareth prayer, rather than you who have never really prayed.

II. THERE ARE OTHERS WHO OPEN THEIR MOUTHS, BUT NOT "WIDE," as we are here bidden to do. They pray, but they do not expect much to come from it. In words they ask for great things, but they do not really believe they will have them. Our Lord's command to us is, "When ye pray, believe that ye receive" (Mark xi. 24). Now, in regard to temporal blessings, it may be that we cannot have confident expectation that we shall have the precise favour we ask for; but we ought to have such expectation that that which is really best for us God will certainly give. But in regard to spiritual blessings, such as deliverance from sin, for which, in words, we so constantly pray, we ought to expect the very blessing itself. "The blood of Jesus

Christ . . . cleanseth from all sin;" there is, therefore, absolute warrant for expecting such cleansing; and we need not think, though practically we do, that the blunder of a little lad known to the writer, is really the truth. In repeating the General Confession, when he came to the words, "and there is no health in us," he substituted for them, "and there is no help for it." And that is what so many practically think. They remember their own grievous past, they know the force of long evil habit, and their own wretched weakness, and they see the persistence of evil and sin everywhere, even in the good; and they come to the sorrowful conclusion that "there is no help for it" this side the grave. They have no real expectation of deliverance, and, therefore, they do not get it. And yet people go on perpetually asking for it. The reason of their not having is that they will not open their mouths wide, and so God cannot fill them with his blessing. But—

III. NONE EVER WILL, UNLESS THE CONDITIONS OF SUCH EXPECTATION BE FULFILLED. There must be: 1. *A mouth to open*; that is, power to believe. Now, we all have that, and use it every day about other things. 2. *Need of God's blessing*. Unquestionably there is that. 3. *Sense of this need*. Consciousness of it, and distress because of it. Hunger after God's blessing. 4. *Will to believe*. Trust is more a matter of the will than of the reason. "I will trust, and not be afraid." Refuse to doubt, resolve to believe.—S. C.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Given up*. Note—

I. THE CONDITION CONTEMPLATED. It meant: 1. *No longer held back from sin*. "Their own hearts' lust" was to lead them now. 2. *No longer urged to goodness*. 3. *The Spirit no longer striving with them*. 4. *Divine chastisements abandoned*. (Cf. Isa. i. 5.) See the history of Israel for proof of all this. And it is true still, when a soul is "given up" by God—when even his resources seem exhausted.

II. ITS TERRIBLE CONSEQUENCES. 1. *They are often naturally visible*. A God-forsaken people, Church, soul, can be readily recognized. Disaster, defeat, shame, weakness, death,—these are some of the outward signs. 2. *They are felt within*. (See the history of Saul, 1 Sam. xxviii. 6.) Ah! the inward misery of the soul given up of God.

III. THE INVARIABLE CAUSE. (Hos. iv. 17; and see text.) 1. *They would not hearken to God's voice*. Neither by his messengers, nor through conscience, nor in providence. 2. *They would have none of God*. They cared neither for his favour nor for his frown.

IV. THE DIVINE RELUCTANCE TO THUS DEAL WITH THEM. (Ver. 13; Hos. xi. 8; Matt. xxiii. 37; Luke xiii. 34.)—S. C.

Ver. 12.—*Our own way our worst woe*. Our text a declaration of God's dealing with rebellious men. We note concerning it that—

I. IT TELLS OF A PUNISHMENT WHICH SEEMS NO PUNISHMENT AT ALL. Those who rebelled so grievously against God were allowed to do just as they liked, to have their own way as they pleased. 1. *Now, our text does tell of punishment*. It is not a statement of indifference on the part of God, or of failure, but of his holy displeasure. 2. *And it is a punishment of which we have many instances*. As when Israel lusted after flesh (Ps. lxxviii. 30). And when they would have a king, and God gave them Saul (1 Sam. xii.; Hos. xiii.). The history of Balaam. Ephraim joined to his idols. The devils asking and being allowed to enter the swine at Gadara. "Not this man, but Barabbas!" and they had their way. The prodigal would go into the far country. And there are many other illustrations beside. 3. *God is slow to resort to it*. He tries all other means first. 4. *It convinces when none other will*. Men are forced to believe, then, that God was right and they wrong. 5. *But it seems the reverse of punishment*. For the Law of God was to Israel a yoke which galled and fretted and chafed them incessantly. Its "thou shalt not" met them at every turn of their lives. Now, this punishment seemed to be deliverance from the yoke and licence to do as they pleased. Where was the punishment in that? 6. *And men think the same still*. For to them the service of God is so much restraint, religion a tight torturing ligature, which holds them back from what they choose, and binds them down to what they would never choose. And undoubtedly religion is a restraint and a bond. We are never to conceal

this fact, and the really religious have no desire to. But men generally do not like it at all, and are glad to be rid of it.

II. BUT IT IS A PUNISHMENT SO TERRIBLE THAT NONE CAN BE MORE SO. To be given up to our own hearts' lust is God's most awful doom. 1. *What would such so-called liberty be in other regions?* Suppose the stars, instead of obeying their Creator's laws, were each to wander at its own will? Where would music be if the laws of harmony were not obeyed? What home would that be where there was no law? Or state, where anarchy prevailed? 2. *And so in regard to the soul.* Man is made for God, and, as St. Augustine says, "Nostrum cor inquietum est donec requiescat in te." It must be so. See the varied and appalling judgments of which the Bible tells—the Deluge; Sodom; the destruction of Pharaoh, etc. What are they all but the natural results of determined sin? Better any punishment—even hell itself—than that God should leave us alone, or give us up, as told of here.

CONCLUSION. Are you suffering under the hand of God now? Then assuredly he has not left you alone. Turn to him. Are you at ease in sin? Then "Awake, thou that sleepest!" You have need to. Are you serving God? Then let all men know that his service is perfect freedom, the delight of your soul.—S. C.

Vers. 13—16.—*What might have been.* These verses tell what Israel missed, but might have had. And they are written for our learning. Note—

I. WHAT GOD WAS PREPARED TO DO FOR THEM. 1. *Subdue their enemies.* 2. *Discomfit their adversaries.* 3. *Conversions should have been numerous.* 4. *Eternal life should have been theirs.* 5. *And fulness of joy.* And in reference to men now: God waits to be gracious and to do all for them that corresponds to the blessings told of here.

II. BUT NONE OF THIS CAME TO PASS; ONLY THE VERY OPPOSITE. In their character, conduct, and condition, things went from bad to worse. Enemies not subdued; their adversaries became stronger; sin rampant; their days few and evil; want and misery in their dwellings.

III. HOW SUCH RESULT CAME ABOUT. 1. *It was not God's will.* Cf. the tears of Christ over Jerusalem. "How often would I have gathered thee," etc. 2. *But it was Israel's own fault.* (Vers. 11, 12.) Thus it ever is.

IV. THE SORROW OF IT ALL. God dishonoured; the Holy Spirit grieved; their children and their neighbours led astray; themselves given up of God; and all this need not have been. Dread the doom of such.—S. C.

Vers. 1—3.—*The consecration of music.* Instrumental music was associated with the Mosaic festivals; but the organization of music for ordinary religious worship is supposed to have been the work of David. The important differences between ideas of music in the ancient East and in the modern West needs to be carefully shown. Noise is chiefly considered in the East, harmonies are most valued in the West. Even the chanting at religious services was more like that which we call "Gregorian" than like the double tunes ordinarily used. Public services gained a new and attractive feature when music was introduced into them; and those gifted with the power of singing and playing were allowed to take part in them. Then public services rose from being bare duty to become personal pleasure. Perhaps David's work in consecrating to God's worship poetical and musical gifts has never been worthily estimated. Thomson tells us that "the Orientals know nothing of harmony, and cannot appreciate it when heard." He went to a grand concert of instrumental musicians. "Seated on a raised platform at one end of the room were half a dozen performers, discoursing strange music from curious instruments, interspersed with wild bursts of song, which seemed to electrify the congregation. They had a violin, two or three kinds of flutes, and a tambourine. One man sat by himself, and had a large harp." "No doubt the temple service, performed by those who trained for it, stirred the deepest fountains of feeling in the vast assemblies of Israel, at the great feasts."

I. THE CONSECRATION OF MUSIC AND SONG TO GOD. All man's talents, gifts, and endowments can be devoted to the service of God. Man has no power—poetical, artistic, musical, dramatic, or practical—in the use of which he cannot or may not serve God. Very strange was the notion once entertained that instrumental music

was not becoming to God's worship. And even yet there is a strange limitation to particular instruments, which alone are regarded as appropriate. We need to see more clearly that every gift has its Divine sphere of service.

II. THE CONSECRATION OF MUSIC AND SONG TO MAN. Especially to man's artistic culture, and to man's pleasant and healthy recreation. The gifted in this direction are human benefactors. But we need to secure consecration to the highest and best interests of man. The gifted should never pander to low tastes, or help to degrade their fellows.

III. THE CONSECRATION OF MUSIC AND SONG TO THE SERVICE OF GOD THROUGH THE SERVICE OF MAN. This should be the high aim of all the gifted. In the use of their gifts so to serve their fellow-men, as that God should be glorified through their ministry.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Authority in religion.* "For this was a statute for Israel." Reference is directly to the "blowing up the trumpet in the new moon." However that might be done, because it was felt to be suitable, or because it was pleasant, it had to be done because it was *required*; and it would have to be done, whether men could recognize its suitability or not, whether men found it pleasant or not. There is authority in relation to religious observances; some persons more readily recognize and respond to that authority than others; but all pious persons find somewhere and in something an ultimate basis of appeal. For some it is the inspired Scriptures, for some it is the witness of the universal Church, and for some it is the requirement of some duly authorized teacher. There has always been discussion as to the proper centre of authority in religion, and the universal Church is divided into sections by the variety of opinion on this subject.

I. AUTHORITY IN RELIGION MUST SATISFY MAN CONCERNING THE TRUTH. So many men always have been, and some always must be, incompetent to decide perplexing doctrinal or ethical questions for themselves. Some are unduly biassed by education; some have neither mental powers nor leisure time for carrying on the necessary studies. In every department of truth, most men take their opinions on the authority of others; and it is even more necessary, in regard to the higher truths of religion, that men should have their standards and their guides. True, we have the Bible; but men like Anselm, Augustine, Calvin, and Wesley, with the great teachers of later days, have been authorities in religious truth to thousands.

II. AUTHORITY IN RELIGION MUST LIMIT MAN'S VAGARIES. The speculative faculty leads men, in these times, to wander in all sorts of unknown regions; and produces a restlessness and uncertainty which are seriously imperilling faith. Perhaps we read men's books too much, and God's book too little. Happy they who can rest in the "truths most surely believed among us," because they are declared with an authority which they can recognize.

III. AUTHORITY IN RELIGION MUST ENFORCE MAN'S DUTIES. Social life has changed the conception of what is becoming to a Christian. We want guidance in the modern endeavour to live the Christian life. Self-indulgence weakens our will, and we want the help of distinct requirements in ordering our religious habits. But yielding to authority must be kept within healthy limitations, and preserve personal independence and responsibility.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*The unknown tongue.* "I heard a language that I understood not." It is exceedingly difficult to trace the meaning of this sentence. The first suggestion is, that it may refer to the sojourning Israelites not understanding the language of the Egyptians. Another suggestion is, that Israel did not understand the voice of God when heard from Sinai. Jennings and Lowe give a fresh and striking suggestion. They think the sentence is the utterance of God when passing over Egypt to judge it; and they translate, speaking thus, "The saying, 'I know not,' I will hear." The reference is to the boastful saying of Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord." And God is represented as saying, "I will hear his speech; I will take notice of it; I will punish it." If we are to assume that *God* is speaking in this verse, as he seems to be in ver. 6, then this reference to Pharaoh may be accepted. Another idea is, that in this sentence the psalmist makes a sudden break, and abruptly

exclaims, "The language of one I know not, I hear;" and what he hears he proceeds to tell in the following verses. God's voice sounded strange to him.

I. THE UNKNOWN VOICE OF GOD. Illustrate by the direct speaking of God from Sinai, which so alarmed the people. All close communications of God with men, whether by vision or voice, are humbling, surprising, and overwhelming. Unknown, in the sense of being unfamiliar; and unknown because unexpected. God communicates in the language of men, since he desires to be understood; but his will is usually revealed through human agencies.

II. THE UNKNOWN LANGUAGE OF EGYPT. This may be shown to have made part of the burden and trouble of Israel, from which God so graciously delivered them. It was the land of the stranger, and the different language spoken by the inhabitants constantly reminded Israel of its *bondage* and its *hope*.

III. THE "UNKNOWN" DECLARATION OF PHARAOH. His saying, "I know not." His declaring that Jehovah was to him *unknown*. His language about "not knowing" the God of the Hebrews. God took notice of the boastful speech; for the declaration that he did not know really meant that he did not *care*, and so he must be *made* to know, by seeing and feeling the judgments which Jehovah executeth. It is necessary to remember that Eastern poetical figures are often far-fetched, and very difficult to trace.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—"*The secret place of thunder.*" "Thunder-covert;" literally, "hiding-place of thunder;" i.e. the dark thunder-clouds, from behind which God spoke to the Israelites. Some writers find a reference to the pillar of cloud and fire, in which God appeared for the guiding of Israel's journey. But there is no special reason for calling the pillar of cloud a "thunder-cloud." The poet is, in a very general way, reviewing the Divine dealings with Israel; and here the troubles connected with the time at Sinai are clearly referred to. The "hiding-place of thunder" is surely the "thick darkness where God was" (Exod. xx. 21) when the Law was given from the "smoking mountain," amid "thunderings and lightnings." The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews rhetorically contrasts the revelations from Sinai and from Zion (Heb. xii. 18-24). His description of the revelation given from Sinai may help us to understand this poetical figure, "the secret place of thunder." "Ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the words should not be spoken to them any more." Thunder, then, may be taken, poetically, as the characteristic of the Old Testament dispensation. We must keep in mind two things: (1) the intensity of the thunder-noise in mountain districts; and (2) the peculiar Eastern sentiments about thunder. In illustration of (1), Dr. Stewart gives the following experience of a thunder-storm at Mount Sinai. "Every ball, as it burst, with the roar of a cannon, seemed to awaken a series of distinct echoes on every side; . . . they swept like a whirlwind among the higher mountains, becoming faint as some mighty peak intervened, and bursting with undiminished volume through some yawning cleft, till the very ground trembled with the concussion. . . . It seemed as if the mountains of the whole peninsula were answering one another in a chorus of the deepest bass. Ever and anon a flash of lightning dispelled the pitchy darkness, and lit up the mount as if it had been day; then, after the interval of a few seconds, came the peal of thunder, bursting like a shell, to scatter its echoes to the four quarters of the heavens, and overpowering for a moment the loud howlings of the wind." In illustration of (2), the fear produced by thunderings now may be shown, though superstitious ideas are checked by some measures of scientific knowledge. The fear of thunder is shared by the animals in the fields. Thunder, then, is the fitting illustration of the *old* dispensation; but unsuitable to the *new* dispensation. It fits the old because it impresses on man the sense of *mystery*; it gives man an idea of *force*; and it fills man's mind with *fear*.

I. THUNDER BRINGS A SENSE OF MYSTERY. In those days, *how* it comes was not known. Always, *when* it comes is not known. It was, and it still is, something over which men can only wonder. Show that this character is preserved in the God of the Old Testament. He hides himself. "Clouds and darkness are round about him." His voice is to man but as the inarticulate thunder. In some ages of the world, and in

some conditions of the race, mystery in God is the best education; it awakens the spiritual faculties in child-ages, as it does in children.

II. THUNDER GIVES MAN AN IDEA OF FORCE. When he hears it, man feels there is something wholly beyond his control. And force must be felt by the Israelites to lie behind law. He who gives the Law must be felt able to *enforce its sanctions*. Joubert tells us that the absolute rule of moral training is "force till right is ready." The thunderings and lightnings of Sinai impressed the force of the Divine authority.

III. THUNDER FILLS MEN'S MINDS WITH FEAR. If fear is not the highest motive inspiring obedience, it is the necessary motive for many people, and the first motive for all. Fear is not lost, as the inspiration of obedience, in Christianity, it is only glorified in love. "Perfect love casteth out fear." Storm and tempest clear the atmosphere, and prepare for the warmth and quickening of the steady sunshine; and so the thunder of the Old Testament prepares for the life-giving sunshine of the New.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*The sole Object of worship.* This verse recalls to mind the second recitation of the Decalogue in Deut. v. "In ver. 9 the key-note of the revelation of the Law from Sinai is struck; the fundamental command which opens the Decalogue demanded fidelity to Jehovah, and forbade idol-worship as the sin of sins." The claim of Jehovah on the Israelites needs to be precisely described. God, as El, was very generally, perhaps universally, known. But men went wrong, in relation to him, when they began to make representations of him. Then two things happened: (1) different representations became fixed to different localities and countries; and (2) the representations came to be worshipped, rather than the spiritual Being whom they represented. Israel was selected, as a nation, to preserve for the world the imperilled primary truth of the *unity and spirituality of God*. So two things are firmly asserted as the basis of God's revelation of his will to Israel.

I. GOD IS THE ONE GOD OF THE WHOLE EARTH. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord." "The God of the whole earth shall be called." There are no such things as "strange gods." An idol is a "nothing," a "vanity." God is God alone. See the importance of this for Israel. Looking on the nations around them, they might imagine that the gods of the nations were doing better for them than Jehovah was doing for his people, and so they might be tempted to join service to these strange gods with service to Jehovah. So they must learn that God was really the God of all nations; the one and only true God. In view of our work among the heathen, we still must hold fast this primary and fundamental truth—there is but one God; and he is as truly the God of the heathen as of the civilized and the Christianized.

II. GOD IS THE ONE OBJECT OF HUMAN WORSHIP. Man must worship. He feels dependent. He must look out of himself for some one on whom to lean. He must be sure that he on whom he leans is absolutely trustworthy. There never can be more than one absolutely trustworthy Being. If right ideas be attached to God, we must feel that there can only be *one* God. He must be the perfect realization of our highest conceptions; and therefore our *admiration* and our *dependence* will unite to make him the sole Object of worship. He who knows God wants to worship no other.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*Sufficiency in God.* "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Whatsoever be the needs or the desires of God's people, there is abundance of grace for the supplying of the needs, and the satisfying of the desires. Compare our Lord's saying to his disciples, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my Name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." The figure in the text is explained in Thomson's 'Land and the Book.' "It is said to have been a custom in Persia, that when the king wished to do a visitor especial honour, he desired him to open his mouth wide, and the king then crams it full of sweetmeats, and sometimes even with jewels. And to this day it is a mark of politeness in Orientals to tear off the daintiest bits of meat for a guest, and either lay them before him, or put them in his mouth." In declaring himself to be Israel's God, and demanding the sole and entire worship of the people, Jehovah graciously adds the assurance, that he is at once able and willing to meet and supply all their need. He could not ask their entire trust if he was not efficient to meet all their wants. There was no call to seek the help of any strange god, for they were in

no sense straitened in Jehovah. This subject may be applied to Christians by taking illustrations, from the history of Israel's wanderings, of the following points.

I. SUFFICIENCY IN GOD FOR ISRAEL'S KNOWN NEEDS. These concerned (1) daily supply; (2) wise guidance; (3) efficient defence; (4) patient bearing with infirmities; (5) provision for social relations and national requirements. So we can never think of any want we have that is beyond God's supply.

II. SUFFICIENCY IN GOD FOR ISRAEL'S UNKNOWN NEEDS. For our real needs are not those we find out for ourselves. Those are our *superficial* needs, and often not even *real* needs. It introduces a surprise of grace to say there is the supply in God of all the needs of which *he knows* and we do not. Often it is God's supplying us that brings the consciousness of the need. How good that God's grace is not limited by our knowledge!

III. SUFFICIENCY IN GOD IS ASSOCIATED WITH GOOD WILL. That gets expression in gracious and satisfying assurances and promises.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*The sin of self-will.* Observe that the sin of which complaint is here made is not that Israel *did not* hearken, but that Israel *would not* hearken. God goes in behind the acts of disobedience, and is concerned with the *spirit of wilfulness* which found expression in the acts. The judgment of God upon them brings to view the special feature of their sin. "So I gave them up to the obduracy of their heart, that they should walk in their own counsels" (ver. 12).

I. SELF-WILL AS THE SIN INTO WHICH MEN FELL. Self-will is the perverted use of free-will. Free-will could be self-will if man were an *independent* creature. Free-will must not be self-will, because man is a *dependent* creature. Free-will became self-will, because man allowed himself to be guided by what seemed "pleasant to the eyes and good for food," rather than by what he knew to be the will of him on whom he depended. Serving himself is the essence of sin for one who has been made dependent—in every way dependent—upon God. What we have to counteract is the delusion that man is an independent being, and therefore may "follow the devices and desires of his own heart." Illustrate from Dan. v. 28.

II. SELF-WILL AS THE SIN FROM WHICH MEN ARE DELIVERED. There are penalties into which men have brought themselves by their self-will, and from these they need to be delivered. But it would be no effective redemption that dealt only with penalties. Deliverance from self-willedness, in a dependent creature, can only be effected by making him on whom he depends so infinitely attractive that he wins full trust and obedience. And this is accomplished by God's manifestation of himself to men in the Person, life, and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. SELF-WILL AS THE SIN INTO WHICH THE REDEEMED ARE IN DANGER OF FALLING BACK. Illustrate from the Israelites, as redeemed unto the service of Jehovah, from Egypt. Bring out (1) the open ways, and (2) the subtle ways, in which nowadays Christians may be tempted to the self-trust which breaks them away from their dependence on God.—R. T.

Ver. 12.—*The sorrow of God.* Occasioned by this—he could not do for his people what he would. He would have delivered them from their foes, and fed them with the finest of the wheat. They, by their conduct, compelled him to withhold his hand, and even to smite instead of bestow. Compare the sorrow of Christ when looking from Olivet upon Jerusalem. He mourns over what he would have done for its people; but they "would not."

I. GOD'S JOY IN THE BLESSING OF HIS PEOPLE. Their temporal blessing, when the state of their minds and hearts makes his giving temporal blessings the highest moral and spiritual good to them. It is not merely that God "gives us all things richly to enjoy;" it is that he *loves* to give; he finds his *joy* in giving. Illustrate from the provisions made for Israel.

II. GOD'S SORROW BECAUSE OF THE RESTRAINT OF HIS BLESSINGS. Sometimes he cannot give temporal blessings, because the state of mind and heart of his people would turn them into moral and spiritual curses. See in the case of Israel; how vain, self-confident, and proud Israel would surely have become, if, taking no notice of its character, its wilfulness, and murmuring, and rebellion, God had showered all con-

ceivable good on the nation! It is the grief of love that it must restrain its gifts lest they should be misused.

APPLICATION. If we lack good things that we desire, and think we need, let us never explain the lack by the Divine unwillingness to bless, or by any vague notions of Divine "sovereignty." God would give these things to us if, in view of our best interests, he could. He is to be thought of as grieved that he cannot. And the thought of his grief should incite us to get rid of the hindrance that is on our side. To the trustful, humble, obedient soul God's richest benedictions may safely come.

—R. T.

Vers. 13, 14 (compared with Isa. xlviii. 18).—*Man's inconsideration.* I. GOD HAS SPOKEN AND REVEALED TO MAN THE WAY OF LIFE. God's ways are the ways of life. 1. *God's way is the way of law.* Physical and moral and spiritual. "Whatsoever a man soweth," etc.; "To him that hath shall be given," etc. 2. *God's way is the way of love.* 3. *God's way is the way of faith.* So that through it he dispenses pardon, strength, and comfort.

II. THE SIN OF MAN IS INCONSIDERATION OF GOD'S WAYS. This leads to: 1. *A neglect of the Divine rule of life.* An inconsiderate man is a man without understanding, a man without a steadfast purpose, given over to pleasure and selfishness. 2. *A forfeiture of the Divine help against our difficulties.* An inconsiderate man cannot accept or use the Divine help.

III. GOD'S LAMENT OVER THIS INCONSIDERATION. 1. *It hindered him from a benevolent exercise of his power on their behalf.* "I gave them up to the stubbornness of their heart:" that was all God could do for them. 2. *They are defeated by their enemies in the battle of life.* It is only by God's help we can conquer in the great struggle we have to maintain. 3. *God could not nourish them with heavenly food.* (Deut. xxxii. 13.) The finest of the wheat and honey out of the rock. Like the prodigal, they lived upon the husks.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXXII.

Two different explanations have been given of the general bearing and intention of this psalm—one, recently advocated by Professor Cheyne, that it is a denunciation of the angels whom God has put in charge of the earth (see Dan. x. 13—21; xii. 1), on account of the violence and injustice which they have connived at and permitted; the other, that it is a denunciation of the human judges in Israel, who are corrupt and oppressors of the people. The objection to the former view is, first, that the angels are nowhere else taxed with wrong-doing, or with anything worse than folly (Job xv. 15); and, secondly, that it is inconceivable that God should entrust the government of the world to such imperfect and peccant beings. Moreover, that God should threaten his angels with death (ver. 7) is contrary to the whole tone and spirit of the rest of Scripture. The other interpretation is, therefore, to be preferred. God, standing amid the angelic host in heaven, denounces

the unjust judges who are bearing sway over his people on earth. The writer of the psalm may well be the Asaph of David's time. It consists of an exordium (ver. 1); a body, composed of denunciation and threats (vers. 2—7); and a conclusion, calling on God to take immediate action (ver. 8).

Ver. 1.—*God standeth in the congregation of the mighty;* or, "in the congregation of God"—"the Divine assembly" (see Job i. 6; ii. 1; Isa. vi. 1, 2, etc.). *El,* in the singular, can scarcely mean the "mighty ones of earth." He judgeth among the gods. He "holds a court of judgment in heaven, surrounded by the Divine ministers, who will execute his behests" (Canon Cook).

Ver. 2.—*How long will ye judge unjustly?* "The cry of the impatient Jehovah" (Cheyne); comp. Exod. x. 3; xvi. 28; Num. xiv. 11, 27. *And accept the persons of the wicked?* Accepting men's persons is favouring them unduly on account of their position or outward circumstances. It was strictly forbidden in the Mosaic Law (see Deut. i. 17; xvi. 19; Lev. xix. 15).

Ver. 3.—*Defend the poor and fatherless;* literally, *judge them.* "Do not deny them

justice; do not refuse to hear their cause" (comp. Isa. i. 23; Jer. v. 28). **Do justice to the afflicted and needy.** After consenting to hear their cause, be sure thou doest them justice. These commands are covert reproaches.

Ver. 4.—Deliver the poor and needy. The poor were terribly oppressed, and needed "deliverance" (see Job xxix. 12; Isa. i. 17; iii. 14, 15; lviii. 6; Micah iii. 2, 3). **Bid them out of the hand of the wicked; or, rescue them.**

Ver. 5.—They know not, neither will they understand. Scarcely "an aside from the indignant judge," as Professor Cheyne suggests, much less a remark interpolated by the poet (Ewald, Hitzig). Rather a complaint of human perversity, addressed by Jehovah to the angelic host who are present (ver. 1). It is not an accidental and excusable ignorance, but a wilful and guilty one that is spoken of. **They walk on in darkness.** Loving darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil (John iii. 19), they walked in the way of darkness (Prov. ii. 13). **All the foundations of the earth are out of course; rather, are shaken.** The fundamental bases on which the life of man upon the earth rests, the very principles of morality, are shaken, and totter to their fall, when those whose place it is to administer justice pervert it and deal out injustice instead.

Ver. 6.—I have said, Ye are gods; i.e. "in my Law I have called you gods"—I have given you this lofty name (see Exod. xxi. 6; xxii. 8, 9), since ye judge on my behalf, "as my representatives" (Deut. i. 17; 2 Chron. xix. 6; Rom. xiii. 1, 2). **And all of you are children of the Most High.** Not therefore "gods" in the strictest sense, but possessing a derived, and so a qualified, divinity.

Ver. 7.—But ye shall die like men. The name of "gods," even the fact of your being representatives of God, shall not save you from condign punishment. Ye shall be punished with death, as other wicked men are punished (Ps. lxxiii. 18). **And fall like one of the princes; i.e. come to an untimely end, as so many "princes" have done** (see Josh. xii. 9—24; Judg. i. 7; iii. 21; vii. 25; viii. 21, etc.).

Ver. 8.—Arise, O God, judge the earth. The words of God (vers. 2—7) being ended, the psalmist calls upon him to proceed at once to judgment; but he does not limit the judgment to Israel's unjust judges. God is asked to "arise" and "judge the earth," i.e. the whole world (comp. Ps. vii. 7, 8; lvi. 7; lix. 5). **For thou shalt inherit; or, "for thou dost inherit."** "God is the King of all the earth" (Ps. xlvii. 2), not of Israel only. **All nations—the whole world—must be regarded as his possession or "inheritance."**

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—A view of human life from above. "God standeth," etc. Earthly greatness, and God's supreme rule of rulers and judgment of judges, are the theme of this sublime, brief psalm. The psalmist takes his stand on the watch-tower of inspired prophecy; and gives, as the Bible is wont, a view of human life from above, as seen, not in the light of man's judgment, but God's (1 Sam. ii. 8; Luke i. 52).

I. THE OFFICE AND DIGNITY OF RULERS. In the administration of justice, and claim to obedience—enforced, in the last resort, by death-penalty—they are *God's* representatives; therefore here called "gods." The state, in its care of the lives, property, duty, and welfare of its citizens, is a kind of earthly providence, entrusted by God himself with this authority (Rom. xiii. 1—4). Here is no reference or limitation to any special form of government, monarchical or republican, aristocratic or democratic. *The right of man to rule over his fellow-men*, in whatever particular form of government, like the right of parents to the obedience and reverence of their children, can come only from God. Armies can compel submission. Popular will can create offices, and choose men to fill them. But men could never *create authority*. It belongs to God. In this doctrine of Scripture (and also of common sense) there is no shadow of support for the slavish and monstrous doctrine of "the Divine right of kings," with which the pulpits of England once resounded; or to the claim that hereditary government is more Divine and sacred than elective. What is "ordained of God" is the maintenance of law and justice, for the welfare of the people and punishment of wrong-doers, by lawfully constituted public authority.

II. GOD'S SUPREME RULE AND RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF EARTHLY RULERS. 1. See the special sins and failures with which the judges or princes of Israel are charged; and the national disorder and danger thence arising (vers. 2—5). Merciful pity for the poor, the oppressed, those bereaved of their natural protectors, is a strong characteristic

of Bible morality and religion (Jas. i. 27; ii. 13). Justice is to be enforced for the sake of mercy. We may say that Divine justice is part of Divine mercy; "for God is love." 2. Those high in rank and office are reminded that not only their authority, but their life, is held from God; at his pleasure every moment (ver. 7). The death of great men is among the special means by which God's providence contests earthly affairs. The master-hand grows cold, and all the threads of policy it wove snap; the reins it held drop (Ps. cxlvi. 3, 4). Therefore the only consolation to the devout patriot, politician, or lover of men is in turning from the injustice, the instability, the errors of human governments to the kingdom of Christ. The prayer of ver. 8 is equivalent to our daily prayer, "Thy kingdom come!" Death, which is the ruin of all other sovereignties, was the foundation of Christ's. What seemed its sudden blood-red sunset was indeed its ruddy dawn (Heb. ii. 9).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Corruptio optimi pessima est.* We have here a vivid picture of the corruption of men, supposed to be, and who should have been, the best in Israel. It refers to the judges, and tells them how judges are judged (Acts xxiii. 3). And it may be applied to all misuse of power or abuse of trust, where, when, or howsoever any may be guilty thereof. This short psalm tells much concerning—

I. THE DIVINE ESTIMATE OF NATIONS SUCH AS ISRAEL. They are "the congregation of God." This is the true rendering (cf. Numb. xxvii. 17; xxxi. 16; Josh. xxii. 16, 17). Israel is no mere fortuitous concourse of individuals, but a chosen people, a congregation of God. They belong to him, are cared for by him; God dwells in their midst, takes his place—"standeth"—among them. Such nations are really theocracies, no matter what form of earthly government may exist. This name for nations, "the congregation of God," likely, if recognized, to be of salutary power. To the nation itself it will give self-respect, and tend to righteousness. To its governors, a sense of responsibility, and a holy fear lest they abuse their high office.

II. THE DIVINE METHOD OF RULE. By means of viceregents, who should derive their authority from God, and who should embody in themselves the majesty of law, and in whom men would look to find the most perfect earthly pattern of Divine attributes of truth, and justice, and mercy, and impartiality. The name "gods" is therefore applied to the judges (see also ver. 6, and Exod. xxi. 6; xxii. 8, 28; iv. 16; Perowne). And men are ever on the look out for such; and that form of government is best by which such men are most surely placed in power, and men of an opposite character most surely excluded. And to better ensure such rulership is the intent of the reminder that God himself will judge the judge. Nevertheless, we are shown next—

III. MAN'S FRUSTRATION OF GOD'S PURPOSE. (Ver. 2.) This has been a crying evil, not in Israel alone, but wherever God has been unknown or forgotten. The proper duty of the judge is declared in vers. 3, 4; but this they have been far enough from remembering or practising.

IV. THE CAUSES OF SUCH WRONG. 1. *Moral blindness.* "They know not." 2. *They care not to acquaint themselves with the Law of God.* What little they do know they understand not, and they harden themselves in their sin by their "walking in darkness," their habitual practice of evil. There are ever the downward steps in wrong. Then we are shown—

V. THE TERRIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR SIN. 1. *To society generally.* "All the foundations of the earth are out of course." That is, there is a general break-up of all civil order; anarchy and confusion inevitably ensue. It does not need the Bible to show how exceedingly bitter and evil a thing sin is. The facts of history and the observation of God's providence make that clear enough. 2. *To the wrong-doers themselves.* They had been greatly exalted; they had been regarded, in virtue of their sacred office, as "gods," as "sons of the Most High;" but by their abuse of their trust they should be hurled down as other evil men, and fall low like as they had seen so many evil princes fall. And this not in the natural course of events, but as the result of the awful judgment of God.

CONCLUSION. From all the injustices of earth we may turn to God (ver. 7), and appeal to his judgment. For—blessed be his Name!—we are the inheritance, the real possession, not of ungodly men, but of God. Our true Judge is the true “Son of the Most High” (John x. 34—38).—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The Judge of the judges.* “He judgeth among the gods”—*elohim*, a term sometimes used for those high in office (see Exod. xxi. 6; xxii. 8, 28). Called *gods* as being God’s representatives. The psalm may be illustrated by the address of Jehoshaphat to the judges, given in 2 Chron. xix. 6, 7. Our Lord gives the reason for princes or judges being called “gods,” in John x. 34, 35, the “Word of the Lord” came to them, and gave them authority to speak and act in his name. Judges must feel that God is with them in their judgments, and they *dishonour him* when they give unjust or partial judgments. This may be illustrated from the custom of opening our assize courts. The idea is that the queen actually herself judges all causes, and proclamation is made in her name. She acts through delegates, but the people are to understand that, if not in person, yet in reality, *she* is judging them. Judges who act unworthily *dishonour her*. As “magistracy” was the most important work of Eastern kings, the term “judge” was used, in a general way, for all positions of public honour, authority, and responsibility. So we may take the term “judges” as suggesting all kinds of official positions in which *we* may stand; all places in which we are put to rule or influence others; and then we may see the claim God makes to stand in relation to them all. He is the “Judge of all judges.”

I. GOD ACTS THROUGH THE JUDGES. That truth takes two forms, a lower and a higher. In the lower form, all judges, all officials, all teachers, are the Lord’s delegates; standing for him, speaking and doing in his name, expressing to men his will. This may be illustrated in Moses, Joshua, the so-called judges, the kings, and from one point of view, the prophets. But, in the higher form, God is conceived as being actually in the judge, and what he says and does can but convey to men God’s will concerning them. So our Lord said, the Father spoke by him. The true ruler and teacher reaches this higher view. And the authority of the teacher is properly recognized only when he is felt to be the voice of God.

II. GOD EXPECTS JUDGES TO BE OPEN TO HIM. So that he may work unhindered in them. The openness is indicated in the mastery of all self-pleasing, and the full willingness to be the Divine channel. All officers in Christ’s Church, great and small, need to watch themselves, lest they close up their powers, so that God cannot work through them.

III. GOD TAKES STRICT ACCOUNT OF HIS JUDGES. Specially of this, whether they gave to men *his message*; and whether they gave it to men just as *he would have it given*.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Accepting the person.* Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xix. 7), in addressing the judges, reminds them that “with the Lord our God is no respect of persons, nor taking of gifts” (see also 2 Sam. xiv. 14; Acts x. 34; Rom. ii. 11; Gal. ii. 6). This Hebrew term, “accepting the person,” or “accepting the face,” is the equivalent of our term, “show partiality to.” The figure is taken from the Eastern custom of prostration before a king or judge. The accepted suitor is commanded to “lift up his face,” that is, to rise up. The extent to which the bribery of judges is carried on in the East may be illustrated by the following passage, referring to Egypt, by Mr. Lane. “The rank of a plaintiff or defendant, or a bribe from either, often influences the decision of the judge. In general the naib (deputy of the judge), and mooftee (chief doctor of the law) take bribes; and the cadi (chief judge) receives from his naib. On some occasions, particularly in long litigations, bribes are given by each party, and the decision is awarded in favour of him who pays highest. This frequently happens in difficult lawsuits; and even in cases respecting which the law is perfectly clear, strict justice is not always administered, bribes and false testimony being employed by one of the parties. The shocking extent to which bribery and suborning false witnesses are carried on in Moslem courts of law, and in the tribunal of the cadi at Cairo, can scarcely be credited.” The psalmist pronounces the magistrates of his day to be indifferent to justice, neglectful of their duties, venal and unscrupulous, and he warns

them of the ruin they are bringing on society. St. James reminds us that this "undue partiality," this "accepting the person," this showing preference for the rich, is not confined to judges. It may be observed even in the relations of the Christian Church (see Jas. ii. 1—4).

I. THERE IS NO "ACCEPTING THE PERSON" WITH GOD. This is distinctly declared by St. Peter (1 Pet. i. 17). "If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work." Certain settings of the Christian truth, those known as Calvinistic, which put in prominence the Divine *election*, have been used or misused to encourage an idea of "favouritism" in God. It is always better to regard the Divine election as simply the all-wise selection of the most fitting person for the work which has to be done. It is only a subtle form of self-conceit which makes us imagine ourselves the special favourites of Heaven. "God accepteth no man's person." "The Judge of all the earth does right."

II. THERE SHOULD BE NO "ACCEPTING THE PERSON" WITH MEN. This, however, must apply to official relations and duties, not to personal feelings and preferences. It is the fruitful source of evils in the family, business, society, and the Church. The least loved and the most unlovely folk in the world are the family pets, the society pets.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The claims of the poor.* This verse suggests four classes. The "poor" are those who have little or no money. The "fatherless" are those who have no defenders and friends. The "afflicted" are those who have to bear actual suffering. And the "needy" are those who have reasonable wants which they cannot satisfy. And in these senses we have the poor always with us; and whensoever we will we may do them good. The immediate application of the passage is to persons in authority who may defend the poor against private injustice or neglect. "They are to cause the benefit of the administration of justice to tend to the advantage of the defenceless, of the destitute, of the helpless, upon whom the Law-giver of Israel especially keeps his eye." Moses solemnly cursed the man that "perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow" (Deut. xxvii. 19). Matthew Henry has the following striking sentences: "It is bad to rob any man, but most absurd to rob the poor, whom we should relieve; to squeeze those with our power whom we should water with our bounty; to oppress the afflicted, and so add affliction to them; to give judgment against them, and so to patronize those who do rob them, which is as bad as if we robbed them ourselves. Rich men will not suffer themselves to be wronged; poor men cannot help themselves, and, therefore, we ought to be the more careful not to wrong them." What, then, do the poor in every age reasonably claim from every one who has means, or occupies a position of authority or influence? Put under three terms.

I. THE POOR CLAIM JUSTICE. That which is their unquestionable right, in every case, and under every circumstance. Not merely a right judicial decision in every disputable question. Not merely fair treatment, if coming under any accusation. But social justice—a right share of all citizen-privilege, and a righteous reward for all their labour. It is not justice to take any sort of advantage of a man because he is poor. In these days the poor are learning to make their demand for justice, as between man and man, heard and heeded.

II. THE POOR CLAIM CONSIDERATION. If anybody is to have an advantage, let it be the poor folk. In every age there has been the tendency of the well-to-do to claim for themselves all the consideration. The Christian spirit steadily resists this tendency; and the social movements of modern times may well be toned by the Christian spirit.

III. THE POOR CLAIM HELP. This brings in the practical side of their claims, and reminds of their actual sufferings and disabilities. See what help is required by the four classes mentioned above.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The national peril in the mal-administration of justice.* This subject is illustrated by the rebellion of Absalom. That rebellion would not have been possible if the confidence of the people had not been lost by David's neglect of the judgment-seat. Absalom gained favour by craftily saying, "Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would

do him justice!" (2 Sam. xv. 4). Those who search into the causes of great national revolutions find they have always to take account of the influence on the people of unfaithfulness in the judges, and lost public confidence that *the right* can be obtained. This is true of Western nations, but it is more true of Eastern nations, who know of justice as the decision of an official, rather than as the execution of a recognized and written law. Solomon gained public confidence by a wise and quick-witted judgment. He in part lost public confidence by high-handed dealing with the people's complaints. The prophets, in their complaints of the special evils of their times, give prominence to the injustice of the judges, and their neglect of the causes of the poor. Still no crimes are supposed to undermine more swiftly the public confidence, and produce more social mischief, than those committed by mercenary judges, who give decisions in view of their own interests, rather than on the basis of what is just and right. 1. Men look for a *standard of righteousness* higher than they can reach themselves. They are taught to look for that standard in the impartial public judges and magistrates. If they find themselves disappointed in them, they readily get the feeling that there is no standard right, and then they lose the check upon their own wilful, self-pleasing doings. Public justice is found to be the necessary foundation and buttress of public morality. 2. National life loses its inspiring *example* when the king, the magistrate, and the official are found to do unjust things. Nations, as well as individuals, must make their ideals, and realize them, or think they realize them, in some individuals. Kings ought to be to their people realized ideals, and so living examples. And in the more limited spheres, so should the judges be. A man easily goes to ruin when he finds his realized ideal fail him. And so does a nation. There seems to be no right when there is no public right; no right in its high places. Nations are rightly severe on all judges who dishonour the seat of judgment.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Our changing estimates of men.* "I have said, Ye are gods . . . but ye shall die like men." Life, in its progression, involves a process of "disillusioning." The youth builds "castles in the air," "castles in Spain;" but advancing life deals with them as the growing sunshine deals with morning mists. We begin life with admiring and trusting everybody; it is well for us if advancing life does not find us standing beside the psalmist, and saying, "All men are liars." David thought Ahithophel was a fast and faithful friend. He changed his ideas of him when he learned that "Ahithophel was among the conspirators with Absalom." No more bitter experience do men ever pass through than that of finding those they thought faithful "fail from among the children of men." Here the difficulty is the changed estimate we are sometimes compelled to make of our public men. The psalm concerns those in authority and office. The psalmist is distressed because he cannot think of them as he once thought, and as he would like to think; they had altogether fallen from the position in which he had placed them.

I. *WHAT MEN OUGHT TO BE.* There is a true and proper sense in which every man is an official. Every man has some one dependent on him, and every man can exert an influence, and be an influence, on some one. This may be put in another way—Every man is somebody's ideal. In the text the judges are thought to be what they ought to be—uncorrupt, simple, sincere; agents that convey the pure word and will of God to men. And this is what every one of us who has influence on a fellow-man should be. Those dependent on us should have good ground for making us their ideals. Using the word in its Old Testament sense, men should look on us, and in their admiration, say, "Ye are gods." We ought to be such in integrity, simplicity, and nobility, as to make their saying so reasonable.

II. *WHAT MEN PROVE TO BE.* Our ideas of them generally prove illusions, but there is no reason why they should not change for *better* ideas. They need not change for the worse. But life proves a heavy strain for all men. Some are sanctified through it, but some are deteriorated. The text contemplates those who prove unfaithful, untrustworthy, and even come under the judgments of God, for special sins, as Adam did. Impress that the ideal Christ never yet disappointed any man. There has never been reason for changing our estimate of *him*.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*God's inheritance in all nations.* Bishop Perowne translates this, "For

thou hast all the nations for thine inheritance." Bishop Wordsworth says, "All nations are thine inheritance. 'Thou gavest a special inheritance to Israel; but all lands are thy Canaan, and all will be judged by thee.' The term "inheritance" is used in a somewhat unusual way, and what we regard as its precise meaning is not to be pressed. The idea in the mind of the psalmist was that God is the rightful Sovereign of the whole earth, and therefore he may be asked personally to correct the evils of his representatives. An "inheritance" is here viewed as something which comes to a man, and is absolutely his, over which he has entire control. Israel was God's inheritance because entirely in his control. But those called gods, judges, princes, had nothing that was *theirs* in any such sense. But every land and every people is, in this way, God's inheritance. And when the subordinate servants fail anywhere, appeal can be made to the absolute Ruler and Judge. Aglen puts the point of the verse in this way: "It is as if, despairing of the amending of the corrupt magistrates, the poet, pleading for Israel, takes his case out of their hands, as Cranmer in the play takes his case out of the hands of the council, and entrusts it to the great Judge of the world, to whom, as a special inheritance, Israel belonged, but who was also to show his claim to the submission and obedience of all nations." The point to work out is this—when we are troubled by thoughts of the injustice and untrustworthiness of men in whom we ought to be able to confide, we may find consolation in large comprehensive views of the supremacy of God—our God—over all the earth. In this way we get helpful impressions of—

I. GOD'S EXPERIENCE. These failures that surprise and alarm us are no surprise to the God of the whole earth. He has had to deal with such things and such people over and over again. He knows how to deal with such cases.

II. GOD'S INTERVENTION. When we see God as having all nations for his inheritance, we realize that he must, through long ages, and he must still, be constantly engaged in *righting things*; holly interfering with wilful men, putting confused things straight. Then we are reassured. He can put right what *perplexes us*.—B. T.

Vers. 1—8.—*A solemn rebuke* addressed to those who, pledged by their office to uphold the Law, had trampled upon it for their own selfish ends.

I. GOD'S RELATION TO RULERS. (Ver. 1.) 1. *He has appointed them to a Divine work*. They are to represent the justice and righteousness of God. 2. *He holds them responsible for their manner of doing it*. Judges them.

II. THE RIGHT USE AND THE ABUSE OF RESPONSIBLE POWER. (Vers. 2—4.) 1. *The right use of power*. To give justice and redemption to the poor and defenceless. To defend the helpless and the oppressed. 2. *The abuse of power*. "To accept the persons of the wicked" is to favour their cause on account of their position or station.

III. THE CORRUPTION OF RULERS DEMORALIZES SOCIETY. (Ver. 5.) "The foundations of the earth are out of course." 1. *The example of men high in station is more influential than that of others*. 2. *Law unjustly administered demoralizes and degrades a people*.—S

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXXIII.

THE psalmist makes a passionate appeal to God on behalf of Israel at a time of great danger. A confederacy has been formed among the surrounding nations, having for its object the destruction of Israel's nationality (ver. 4). The confederacy includes Edom, the Ishmaelites, Moab, the Hagarenes, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia, and Tyre (vers. 6, 7); and it has the support of Assyria (ver. 8). Much doubt exists as to the period of Israelite history

whereto the psalm and the events it commemorates belong. The prevalent opinion identifies the movement with that made by Moab, Ammon, and Edom, in the reign of Jehoshaphat, whereof an account is given in 2 Chron. xx. (So Tholuck, De Wette, Hengstenberg, Delitzsch, Kay, Canon Cook, and Professor Alexander.) Another view held is that the psalm belongs to the time of Nehemiah, and to the attempt then made to crush Israel by Sanballat, Geshem, and Tobiah (see 'The Psalms chronologically arranged,' by Four Friends, p.

310). More recently, Professor Oheye has argued strongly in favour of a Maccabean date, and endeavoured to identify the confederacy with that described in 1 Macc. v., which was put down by Judas Maccabæus. A post-Captivity date is, however, rendered impossible by the mention, among the confederates, of Amalek and Assyria, which had both ceased to exist before the time of Nebuchadnezzar. We are thus thrown back upon the first hypothesis, unless, indeed, a suggestion may be made that the time of David is possible, and that the occasion may be that described in 2 Sam. x.; 1 Chron. xix. Then only have we a record of Asshur helping the children of Lot (2 Sam. x. 16; 1 Chron. xix. 6, 16).

Metrically, the psalm divides into four strophes, three of four verses each, and one (the last) of six.

Ver. 1.—Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. A crisis has come which calls for the Divine interference. If his people are to be saved, God must no longer sit still. Compare the frequent calls on God to "arise" (Ps. iii. 7; vii. 6; xlv. 26; lxxviii. 1, etc.).

Ver. 2.—For, lo, thine enemies; i.e. Israel's enemies, who are also "thine enemies" (see the comment on Ps. lxxxi. 15). **Make a tumult;** literally, *make a roaring*, like the roaring of the sea (comp. Ps. xli. 3; Isa. xvii. 12). **And they that hate thee** (compare "the haters of the Lord," in Ps. lxxxi. 15). **Have lifted up the head;** i.e. raised themselves up against thee—taken a menacing attitude (comp. Judg. viii. 28).

Ver. 3.—They have taken crafty counsel against thy people. Such a widespread confederacy as that described below (vers. 6—8) cannot have been formed without much secret consultation and plotting. **And consulted against thy hidden ones;** i.e. "those whom thou hidest in the covert of thy presence from the plottings of man" (Ps. xxxi. 20, Revised Version; comp. Ps. xxxvii. 5).

Ver. 4.—They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation. This was the general object of Israel's enemies at all times (2 Kings xxiv. 2; 2 Chron. xx. 11; Ps. cxxxviii. 7; 1 Macc. iii. 35; v. 2), and thus does not help much towards determining the date of the occasion here spoken of. That the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance (comp. Exod. xvii. 14; Deut. xxxii. 26; Ps. xxxiv. 10; cix. 13).

Ver. 5.—For they have consulted together

with one consent (comp. ver. 8). They are confederate against thee; literally, *have entered into a covenant against thee*. A formal treaty seems to be intended.

Ver. 6.—The tabernacles of Edom. Edom was always among the bitterest of Israel's enemies, and naturally took a part in almost every combination that was made against them. Though sometimes subjugated (2 Sam. viii. 14; 1 Kings xi. 15, 16), it continued hostile during the whole period of Israelite and Jewish history. Hence the constant denunciations of the prophets (Isa. xi. 14; Jer. xxvii. 3; xlix. 7—22; Ezek. xxv. 12—14; Joel iii. 19; Amos ix. 12; Obad. 6—18; Mal. i. 4). And the Ishmaelites. The Ishmaelites were the chief inhabitants of Northern Arabia (Gen. xxv. 13—18). They do not often appear among Israel's enemies. Of Moab, Moab, on the contrary, is a persistent adversary (see Numb. xxii. 6; Judg. iii. 12—30; 1 Sam. xiv. 47; 2 Sam. viii. 2; 2 Kings i. 1; iii. 4—27; xxvi. 2; 2 Chron. xx. 1—10). And the Hagarenes. The "Hagarenes," or "Hagarites," are only mentioned here and in 1 Chron. v. 10, 19—22. They were probably a branch of the Ishmaelites, named after Hagar, Ishmael's mother (Gen. xxv. 12). Their name occurs among those of Aramæan tribes in the Assyrian inscriptions.

Ver. 7.—Gabal. There is no reason to doubt that the Phœnician town of the name, mentioned in Ezek. xxvii. 9, and alluded to in Josh. xiii. 5 and 1 Kings v. 18, is meant. A southern Gabal, in the vicinity of Edom, is a fiction. Gabal was one of the most important of the Phœnician cities from the time of Shalmaneser II. (B.C. 828—810) to that of Nebuchadnezzar (B.C. 635—560); see the author's 'History of Phœnicia,' p. 79. And Ammon. Ammon, like Moab, was a perpetual enemy of the Jewish people from their entrance into Palestine to the time of the Maccabees. And Amalek. The Amalekites, on the contrary, disappear from history from the time of their destruction by the Simeonites in the reign of Hezekiah (1 Chron. v. 42, 43). The Philistines. Persistent enemies, like Edom, Moab, and Ammon (see 1 Macc. v. 66). With the inhabitants of Tyre. Tyre, in early times, was friendly to Israel (2 Sam. v. 11; 1 Kings v. 1—18; ix. 26—28), and is not elsewhere mentioned as hostile until the reign of Uzziah (Amos i. 9). She rejoiced, however, when Jerusalem was destroyed (Ezek. xxvi. 2).

Ver. 8.—Assur also is joined with them. This is the climax. Assyria—the great empire—the most important of all the kingdoms of the earth—has joined the petty nations upon Israel's border, and

holds a place in the great confederacy. From the historical books it would appear that this occurred but once, viz. in David's great war with the Ammonites and their allies (see the Introduction). They have helped the children of Lot; *i.e.* the Moabites and Ammonites (comp. Gen. xix. 37, 38; Deut. ii. 9, 19). Moab and Ammon would seem to have been the principal powers engaged in the confederacy. The others were their helpers.

Ver. 9.—*Do unto them as unto the Midianites.* The allusion is probably to the discomfiture of the Midianites by Gideon (Judg. vii. 19—25; viii. 1—12). As to Biserā, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison (see Judg. iv. 5).

Ver. 10.—*Which perished at En-dor.* "En-dor" is not mentioned in the narrative of Judges; but it was certainly in the neighbourhood of Taanah and Megiddo, which are mentioned (Judg. v. 19; see Josh. xvii. 11). They became as dung for the earth; *i.e.* their carcases manured the soil (comp. 2 Kings ix. 37; Zeph. i. 17).

Ver. 11.—*Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb.* "Oreb" and "Zeeb," the leaders of the Midianitish host, were taken prisoners and slain by the Ephraimites who pursued after Midian (Judg. vii. 25). Yea, all their princes as Zeba, and as Zalmunna. Zeba and Zalmunna were the kings of Midian slain by Gideon himself (Judg. vii. 21).

Ver. 12.—*Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession; rather, the homesteads of God; or "the pastures of God" (Ps. xlii. 2), i.e. of God's people, Israel.*

Ver. 13.—*O my God, make them like a wheel; rather, like whirling dust*—the dust that is caught up by an eddy of wind, and twisted round and round (see Isa. xvii. 13). As the stubble before the wind. Both the "whirling dust" and the "stubble" are images of what is lightest, most shifting,

and of least account (see Job xiii. 25; xv. 7; xxi. 18; xli. 29; Isa. xl. 24; xli. 2; Jer. xiii. 24; Mal. iv. 1).

Ver. 14.—*As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire.* Cause them, *i.e.*, to consume away and perish, as a burning forest, or as blazing brush-wood on a mountain-side.

Ver. 15.—*So persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm.* There is some confusion of metaphors; but the general meaning is clear. God is called upon to execute vengeance upon Israel's enemies by sweeping them away with the storm and tempest of his wrath (comp. Job ix. 17; Isa. xxix. 6).

Ver. 16.—*Fill their faces with shame; i.e. cause their enterprise to fail, and so bring them to shame and confusion of face. That they may seek thy Name, O Lord.* A merciful purpose lies behind the greater number of Divine visitations. They are intended to scourge men into submission, and cause them to turn to God. The psalmist, being in full sympathy with God, desires that his merciful intentions may have effect.

Ver. 17.—*Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish.* An expansion of the thought contained in the first clause of the preceding verse, which must not be regarded as annulling the kind wish of the second clause. Like Hezekiah (Isa. xxxvii. 20), the psalmist desires nothing so much as that "all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Jehovah, and he only, is God," and may turn to him in sincerity and truth. It is for this end that he wishes them to be brought low, even to the verge of destruction.

Ver. 18.—*That men may know; rather, that they may know.* There is no "men" in the original. That thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth (see the comment on ver. 16).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—18.—*Soul-spoilers.* Dismissing from our consideration the probable historical occasion of this psalm (for which see 2 Chron. xx.), we take it as a vivid representation of the enemies and destroyers of the soul. Now—

I. THERE ARE SUCH. Whoever yet sought to live the Divine life, and to walk with God in faithful obedience, that did not speedily find out that there were enemies of his soul such as are set forth here? For see—

II. THEIR CHARACTERISTICS. 1. *Numerous.* What a vast horde are named as Israel's foes (vers. 6—8)! And is not this true of our foes? They are not single, or few, or scattered; but they seem arrayed in troops, and meet us at every turn of our lives. 2. *And very strong.* Read the history and see the dismay which filled the minds of the devout Jehoshaphat and his people at the awful confederacy which had come against them. And the half-despairing soul, often and often, is tempted to throw down his weapons and to abandon a war in which he seems to have no possible hope of victory. The world, the flesh, the devil are, any one of them, too strong for him; how

much more when confederate together, as they often are! 3. *United*. (Ver. 5.) Everything at times seems to be in league against the soul, as were Israel's enemies against them, our Lord's enemies against him. They come from all quarters (see vers. 6—8); foes from the south and east are first named, then those from the west, and lastly those from the north. Thus was Israel begirt and shut in with foes who, usually hostile to one another, were now one in hatred to Israel. 4. *Deadly*. It was not a mere raid against Israel, but a fixed purpose to utterly destroy (ver. 4). And none other is the purpose of our soul's adversaries—not merely to annoy or injure, but to destroy (1 Pet. v. 8). 5. *Subtle*. (Ver. 3.) Like “a bolt out of the blue,” so often is the assault upon our soul. At an hour when we think not, in ways we never dreamt of, when off our guard, when it seemed not only unlikely but impossible,—so does our crafty foe assail.

III. THEY SEEM SOMETIMES TO BE VICTORIOUS. (Ver. 2.) We seem to hear the “tumult” of their loud exultation, and to see the haughty lifting up of the head. So it seemed to Elijah (1 Kings xix.), so it has seemed to thousands of sore-beset ones since.

IV. GOD APPEARS TO KEEP SILENT AND INACTIVE. (Ver. 1.) He seems to let things go their own way; our cry does not avail; the bitter agony of our soul does not seem to move him. This is terrible; but the experience of Israel of old is, not unfrequently, that of God's Israel still—but only for a while.

V. HELP COMES IN RECOLLECTION. 1. *That these enemies are confederate not so much against us as against God*. They are “thine enemies” (vers. 2, 5, 18). Therefore we may look away from our weakness to the infinite power of God. 2. *That God has vindicated his Name in days gone by*. (Vers. 9—11.) Oh, it is blessed when in darkness and difficulty to remember God's deliverances of old, how completely our enemies were overthrown, how he made them “like Oreb and like Zeeb”! Memories such as these stay and strengthen the soul.

VI. ISRAEL'S SPIRIT MUST BE OURS. 1. There must be *no idea of compromise*. Israel desired the complete extermination of their foes. There is a burning ferocity of hate in these verses (9—17), which is utterly alien from the spirit of Christ towards our human foes; it is the spirit of the Old Testament, not that of the New. But in regard to our spiritual foes, the would-be spoilers of our soul, we may, we should, we must, cherish a spirit of uncompromising hate. 2. *The honour of the Lord's Name must be our motive*. For his sake (vers. 16, 18) we are thus to pray.—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*God's hidden ones*. This name is especially applicable to Israel because of the geographical position of their country. (Cf. Numb. xxiii. 9, “The people shall dwell alone.”) They were away, off the beaten track of the nations, shut in, and, as it were, hidden, by the deserts on the east and south, the sea on the west, and the mountains on the north, from the rest of the world. But the expression in the text is applicable to all God's people everywhere and always. They are his hidden ones. And we note concerning them—

I. THE FACT—THEY ARE HIDDEN. 1. *Their physical life God often hides from those who would destroy it*. Not always does he do this, but often, as Peter from Herod (Acts xii.; and cf. Obadiah's hiding of the prophets, 1 Kings xviii. 4). And how often God has hidden his servants in wildernesses, glens, mountain heights, catacombs, etc.! The adversary would fain have destroyed them all, as the wolf the sheep; but they have not all been destroyed, the sheep yet outnumber the wolves. 2. *Their spiritual life is ever a hidden one*. For it resides not in themselves, but in another, as the life of the branches is in the vine (John xv.; Col. iii. 3). The principles that govern it are not known or understood or appreciated by the world. Its law of self-sacrifice, meekness, etc. Except by uncertain conjecture, the world knows nothing of its springs of action and its controlling motives. The practice of this life is also so different from the world's life. It is meek, retiring, not loving notoriety; it pursues a lowly and unnoticed way; it has no eye for worldly pomp, no ear for worldly applause. It is not necessarily identified with any places, or seasons, or forms of worship, or order of men; but whilst generally using more or less of them, is independent of them all. 3. *And this condition of God's hidden ones is of their own choice*. (Ruth ii. 12; Ps. xci. 1; cxliii. 9.) They love to have it so. The hidden life is, in their esteem, the blessed,

the secure, the eternal life. 4. *It is God who hides them.* (Cf. Ps. xxxi. 20; John x. 28.) He does this by his providential care and by keeping them in his own love. And the majority of them he has hidden from men below in his own blessed presence in heaven. The Church on earth is a little flock indeed, not absolutely, but in comparison with the vast flock in the heavenly pastures, and there they are for ever hidden from all the malice and might of men or of the devil.

II. *WHAT THIS FACT IMPLIES.* 1. *Their preciousness in the sight of God.* Things common and cheap we do not hide, or those for which we do not care. Jewels are hidden oftentimes, and God calls his hidden ones his jewels (Mal. iii. 17). And how could they be other than precious, when we remember their cost!—"redeemed with the precious blood of Christ;" each one was bought with that price. And God deems them precious, also, for their own sakes. They can and will respond, ever more and more perfectly, to that love in the heart of God which, like all love, yearns for response such as they only can give. 2. *Their peril.* God would not have hidden them as he has were they in no danger (see text). And how perpetually did our Lord bid us "watch and pray"! The world, the flesh, the devil, are ever bent on doing us harm. We are safe only as "our life is hid with Christ in God." 3. *Obscurity.* The world knows us not, even as it knew him not. See how all but unbroken is the absolute silence of secular history as to the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, and as to the history of his Church, until its marvellous growth and supernatural power compelled its attention. And still, the fame, favour, and honour of the world are things which none of God's hidden ones may seek (John v. 41, 44). 4. *Safety.* (Ps. xci., the whole psalm.) 5. *The love of him whose hidden ones we are.*

III. *TO WHAT IT SHOULD LEAD.* 1. *To deep love of God.* Whatever God has given you, he has given and he can give nothing like this—numbering you among his hidden ones. 2. *To staying where you are.* Dwell in the secret place of the Most High. 3. *To having done with forebodings, murmurings, and helpless grief.* Should such as you be chargeable with such things? 4. *To confession of God's love to you before your fellow-men.* 5. *To all holy endeavours to bring others where you are.*—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The mission of the Divine silence.* The occasion of the psalm is clearly some time of national peril from a confederacy of foes. The special distress is that, while the national enemies are vigorously active, God, the Defender of Israel, seems to be quiet, and even indifferent. The psalm is full of hope because, even while the fear of indifference on the part of God distresses the writer, he turns to God with importunate entreaties. The occasion may well have been the combination of Moab and Ammon against Israel in the days of Jehoshaphat, which is narrated in 2 Chron. xx. 1—29 (notice the reference to Asaph in ver. 14). The summary of confederated powers need not be regarded as more than a poetical expansion. A poet of Israel could not know with historical exactness the precise constituents of the opposing force. He gathers together *all* who were regarded as national foes. Bishop Perowne says, "The poet is fully alive to the danger which threatens his nation. Look where he may, the horizon is black with gathering clouds. Judah is alone, and his enemies are compassing him about. The hosts of the invaders are settling like swarms of locusts on the skirts of the land. East, south, and west, they are mustering to the battle. The kindred but ever hostile tribe of Edom on the border, issuing from their mountain fastnesses; the Arab tribes of the desert; the old hereditary foes of Israel, Moab and Ammon; the Philistines;—all are on the march; all, like hunters, are hemming in the lion who holds them at bay." The words used in this verse—"silence," "peace," "still"—involve the Divine refraining from both encouraging message and helpful action. This Divine dealing, though frequent, is always specially trying to faith; but it is designed to be the culture of that *patience* which is one of the best expressions of faith.

I. *THE DIVINE PROMISE OF HELP.* This is distinct, clear, full, unlimited. We may be absolutely sure of the Divine help for every time of need. "God will help, and that right early."

II. *THE DIVINE RESTRAINT FROM HELPING.* The disposition of the Divine love may be to help at *once*. The decision of the Divine wisdom may be to withhold help for a while. And as the Divine wisdom and love are in perfect harmony, love supports the decision for restraint. Restraint is not refusal.

III. THE MISSION OF THE RESTRAINT TO ISRAEL'S FOES. It makes them *presume*, and so involves them in overwhelming calamities. Divine restraint leads the foe into hopeless situations.

IV. THE MISSION OF THE RESTRAINT TO GOD'S PEOPLE. It leads to self-revelation. We find out the imperfectness of our trust in God when we are put to the strain of waiting for his help.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The foes of the Church are the foes of God.* The psalmist calls the enemies of his nation *God's* enemies. "*Thine* enemies make a tumult." But it would not be a matter interesting to us, or one about which we could pray, if they were God's enemies only. The point of importance is that they are God's enemies *just because they are ours*. We find the best relief from the fear of what they may do, in thinking that God counts them to be *his* enemies; and if we cannot defend ourselves from them, God can defend us. So this realization that our enemies are God's enemies becomes (1) a ground of appeal; (2) a restful consolation; and (3) a source of strength. Work this out in relation to the Jewish nation. In a special and representative sense the Jewish nation was Jehovah's nation. So the Church, as a spiritual body—the kingdom of God—is Christ's Church. And as everything related to the Jewish nation was of direct concern to Jehovah, and had his active interference as required, so everything related to the Church is of direct concern to the living Christ; and he, by his presiding Spirit, ever actively interferes, as may be required. Passing within the Church, the truth may be applied to each believer. His foes cannot be exclusively his. Being bound up with Christ, Christ is bound up with all his interests. The believer's friends are Christ's friends; the believer's foes are Christ's foes.

I. THIS RELATION CONNECTS GOD WITH THE NATION'S PROGRESS. This is illustrated in the history. A tribe of slaves came to be an ordered nation, through an experience of good and evil. God was sympathetically and actively present in all the various steps of the national progress. Apply to the development of the Christian Church through a variety of hard and anxious experiences. Foes of heresy, persecution, etc.

II. THIS RELATION CONNECTS GOD WITH THE NATION'S DISASTERS. Compare the expression, "In all their affliction he was afflicted." There had been disasters in the Jewish history, but God was in them for *recovery* and for *sanctifying*. Apply to the "dark ages" of the Christian history. Since our foes are God's foes, they cannot overwhelm us.—R. T.

Vers. 3, 5.—*Confederacy in evil designs.* "They have taken crafty counsel against thy people." "They have consulted together with one consent." Prayer-book Version reads, "cast their heads together." The Prophet Micah has a striking expression for this confederacy in evil—"And so they wrap it up" (Micah vii. 3). Cases of confederacy against God's people, that may be used as illustrations, are such as the following: Chedorlaomer's confederacy against Canaan, which swept away Lot. Combinations of northern nations against Joshua and Israel. Confederacies in times of the Judges; against Asa; and against Jehoshaphat. Schemes of Samaritan parties against rebuilding walls of Jerusalem, in the time of Nehemiah. A combination of surrounding nations, in the time of the Maccabees, when the Jews restored the altar which Antiochus had polluted. See also Eph. vi. 12 for the combinations against spiritual religion; the confederacy of chief priest, scribe, Pharisee, Sadducee, and traitorous disciple, against Christ; and the gathering together of the enemies of Christ and his Church in the last days (Rev. xx. 8, 9). Other and striking illustrations may be taken from Bunyan's 'Holy War,' which pictures various forms of confederacy against Emmanuel and his "Mansoul." The point suggested is, that neither man, nor any combinations of men, can ever get beyond God. Opening this, we may inquire—

I. HAS GOD PROVED HIMSELF ABLE TO DEAL WITH CASES OF CONFEDERACY? All the above instances may be reviewed in order to answer this question; and to them may be added cases from Church history, and from personal experience. Luther's life provides some good examples. Take the principle involved in the saying that "no chain is stronger than its weakest link," and show how God has ever broken up confederations for evil by the simplest agencies. He holds control of the forces that bind men in a common purpose, and can loosen his hand when he pleases. There

is no plotting for evil that is beyond Divine permissions. It is strange that we should fear combinations of evil more than individual foes. We need to learn God's superiority to them.

II. ARE CONFEDERATIONS FOR EVIL REALLY AS STRONG AS THEY SEEM TO BE? There is an element of weakness in all human combinations. They are attempts to unite varying wills and dispositions. This weakness is specially felt when combinations of bad men are attempted, to secure bad ends. Self-willed and wrong-purposing men find it hard to agree together. Jealousies are sure to arise. Self-interests overmaster the common interests. Elements of confusion are easily introduced. The confederates turn their swords against each other, as the mixed host of Midian did in the days of Gideon. Neither "craftiness" nor "confederacy" is out of the Divine control.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The Lord's hidden ones.* "Those whom thou hast set apart and guarded as thine own peculiar possession." Those whom thou hast undertaken in a special manner to protect. "Those whom God holds in the hollow of his hand; those to whom he is a wall of fire round about them, that none may do them hurt; those to whom he says, 'He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye.'" Confidence in the hiding of God is a familiar spirit to the saints of God. "Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings" (Ps. xvii. 8); "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me" (Ps. xxvii. 5); "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man; thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues" (Ps. xxxi. 20); "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps. xci. 1); "Your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3). This idea—that they are the Lord's hidden ones—ought to be still cherished by God's people as a source of abiding restfulness.

I. THEY ARE "HIDDEN" IN RELATION TO OUTWARD FOES. This is the point presented in the text. It is illustrated historically. There is still a sense in which the Christian may be said to have outward foes. Agents of the evil one are ever at work resisting godly living and serving. It may be said that sometimes the foes reach the "hidden ones" and injure them; but from the high standing-ground of faith we can see this distinction. When God permits a seeming foe to reach his "hidden ones," it ceases to be a foe; it becomes God's angel on a ministry of blessing. That foe's work turns out to be a part of the Lord's "hiding."

II. THEY ARE "HIDDEN" IN RELATION TO AFFLICTIVE CIRCUMSTANCES. We might think they should be hidden from all troubles and sufferings; hidden so that no afflictions should reach them. But this would be quite to misapprehend the Lord's hidings. He hides *in sorrow*, not *from sorrow*. And that hiding is altogether the more important and precious. God's hiding of a man who is placed in afflictive circumstances is the sweet marvel of Divine love. Illustrated by God's hiding of suffering Job.

III. THEY ARE "HIDDEN" IN RELATION TO PERSONAL FRAILTIES. The Lord's people carry into his "secret place" frailties of disposition and character. These may become evil forces, influencing Christian conduct and relations. So from the "unworthy self" God hides his people. Life gains a high sense of security when we can worthily realize the "Lord's hidings."—R. T.

Vers. 8—11.—*Prayer based on experience and on history.* "Do unto them as unto the Midianites." Prayers which apparently express a desire for revenge are often misunderstood. Deliverance from national enemies of necessity involves the discomfiture and destruction of those enemies; and therefore a poet may ask for that discomfiture, not because he is thinking of the harm done to the enemy, but because he wants a figurative way of asking for the deliverance and safety of his people. Revengeful utterances are often no more than poetical forms, which are quite misused when unduly pressed. And again, when we recall historical events, we are free from revengeful feeling, though the calamities of beaten foes may be specially prominent in our review. The prayer of the psalmist here is for a gracious Divine deliverance from these confederated foes that threaten Israel. He fortifies his prayer with persuasions drawn from the remembrance of God's previous deliverances, and he magnifies his

confidence in God's ability to help now, by thinking how overwhelming was the destruction of God's enemies on other occasions. Compare our anxiety to know how many were slain on the field of battle. The two victories specially recalled are those of Deborah and Barak over the host of Sisera, and of Gideon over the mingled hosts of Midianites. The subject suggested is the use we may make of Scripture knowledge; of the experiences of Christ's Church; and of ourselves and our own lives. We stand in the very midst of Divine dealings, Divine interventions, Divine deliverances. They have been abundant in the past, and they have meant the effective mastery of all kinds of foes.

I. WE MAY LEARN THAT NO STRANGE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUND US. God's people have, over and over again, been in precisely such conditions as we are in now. Our trouble is no surprise to our God.

II. WE MAY FREELY CRY FOR DIVINE HELP, AS THOSE HAVE DONE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US. They cried; they were encouraged to cry. No limit was ever put on the praying of earnest souls.

III. WE MAY USE THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS AS THE PLEA IN OUR PRAYERS. We can always say, "Thou hast helped;" and so we can make a personal plea, and say, "O Lord, the Helper, help me!" Constantly, in Bible prayers, what God has been to his people, and what he has done for them, is brought to his mind.

IV. WE MAY HAVE THE FULLEST CONFIDENCE THAT WHAT GOD HAS BEEN HE STILL WILL BE. Resister of the wicked. Overwhelmer of the proud. Defender of his people. Deliverer of the imperilled saints.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*The figure of the "rolling thing."* "O my God, make them as a rolling thing." A striking poetical figure, effective if applied to any light substance that is rolled over, whirled round, and driven forward with a high wind. Dickens has a very elaborate picture of wind-driven leaves in the opening part of 'Martin Chuzzlewit.' The figure may be that of the whirlwind, which catches up the sand and hurls it helplessly along; and this would be a good figure for the flight of a panic-stricken army. But Thomson, in his 'Land and the Book,' gives point to the poet's figure by his description of a very curious plant, known as the "gulgul," or "rolling thing." "It is a wild artichoke. In growing it throws out numerous branches of equal size and length in all directions, forming a sort of sphere or globe a foot or more in diameter. When ripe and dry in autumn, these branches become rigid and light as a feather, the parent stem breaks off at the ground, and the wind carries these vegetable globes whithersoever it pleaseth. At the proper season, thousands of them come scudding over the plain, rolling, leaping, bounding, with vast racket, to the dismay both of the horse and his rider. An Arab proverb addresses this rolling thing thus: 'Ho, 'akkûb, where do you put up to-night?' To which it answers as it flies, 'Where the wind puts up.' They also derive one of their many forms of cursing from this plant. 'May you be whirled, like the 'akkûb, before the wind, until you are caught in the thorns, or plunged into the sea!' If this is not the 'wheel' of David, I have seen nothing in the country to suggest the comparison." This "rolling thing" is wholly helpless in the strong hand of the wind. And the poet feels that even as helpless his enemies would be, if the hand of God were upon them. The idea of their helplessness interests him, because he is so full of *fear* concerning their numbers and apparent strength. A good illustration may be found in the case of the Syrians who came to take Elisha, and were helpless in his hands, and actually led by him into the capital city of their foes.

I. MAN CAN NEVER ACT AGAINST GOD'S PEOPLE, SAVE ON DIVINE PERMISSION.

II. MAN MAY RAVE IN HELPLESSNESS, IF THAT PERMISSION IS WITHHELD.

III. MAN WILL HAVE MISERABLY TO FEEL HIS HELPLESSNESS, IF HE ATTEMPTS TO ACT WITHOUT PERMISSION. That which affrights God's people *before* God arises to help them becomes pitiable in its helplessness *when* God has arisen.—R. T.

Ver. 16.—*The issue of Divine judgments on the wicked.* "That they may seek thy Name, O Lord." This is a very remarkable qualifying of our idea that psalmists prayed in a revengeful spirit for the destruction of the national enemies. In truth, their supreme idea was the glorifying of God, and they asked for judgments because

through judgments would come the honouring of God's Name; and, in this honouring, the *higher blessing* for the foes themselves. Here the psalmist prays, "Fill their faces with shame;" but he sees in their humiliation the hope that they will be drawn to God.

I. WE MAY PRAY FOR THE HUMILIATION OF OUR ENEMIES.

II. WE MAY NOT PRAY IN VIEW MERELY OF THEIR SUFFERING.

III. WE MAY PRAY, IF WE DESIRE THEIR LASTING GOOD THROUGH THEIR HUMILIATION.

IV. WE MAY PRAY, IF WE SET BEFORE OURSELVES THE GLORY OF GOD IN THEIR RECOVERY.

It is a sign of triumph over hateful and revengeful feelings if we can pray God to deal with our enemies in the wisdom of his righteous love. It is not befitting that the Christian should ever think of judgments and punishments as merely destructive. To him all judgment is remedial, all punishment is corrective. God will get honour to his Name out of all his dealings. It should be shown that the "for ever" and the "perish" of ver. 17 are to be treated as poetical terms. Or ver. 16 may be regarded as the *better view*, which the psalmist was hardly able to keep to. Ver. 17 falls back upon the harsher view of God's dealing with his foes. Christianity willingly lets pass the harsher view, and sets ever more prominently before us the better and more hopeful view. 'Speaker's Commentary' on ver. 16 says, "This is a feeling altogether peculiar to God's people." The object of all the judgments which the true prophet desires is to bring all nations into subjection to God. Their calamities will be converted into blessings, unless they persist in rebellion.—R. T.

Vers. 1—18.—*What God is to his people.* The following general truths may be gathered up from this psalm.

I. THAT SOMETIMES THE CHURCH OF GOD IS THREATENED BY A COMBINATION OF MANY DANGERS. As now—by science, philosophy, historical criticism, the spirit of commerce and the spirit of mammon, and what is called a worldly spirit.

II. GOD AND HIS PEOPLE ARE ONE. (Ver. 5.) 1. *One in the closest relation.* Father and children; Redeemer and redeemed. 2. *One in work and purpose.*

III. THIS ONENESS GIVES THEM CONFIDENCE THAT GOD WILL SHIELD THEM FROM ALL REAL DANGER. And therefore they cry to him for defence and deliverance in all times of perplexity and danger.

IV. THE PAST EXPERIENCES OF THE CHURCH STRENGTHEN THIS CONFIDENCE. The history of the Church shows that God has been her "Sun and Shield."

V. THAT THE VICTORIES OF THE CHURCH OVER VARIOUS FORMS OF EVIL ARE A REVELATION OF THE NAME OF GOD. (Ver. 18.) God thus makes himself known to wicked men. "The end of all God's judgments, as of all history, is the same—that all should confess that he is *One* and *Supreme*.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXXIV.

THIS psalm, attributed (see title) to the "sons of Korah," or the Korahite Levites (see 1 Chron. xxvi. 1; 2 Chron. xx. 19), describes the blessedness of their position as dwellers in the house of God, and keepers of its thresholds. Its date is uncertain, but must fall earlier than the Captivity, since the temple is standing (vers. 1—4, 10), and there is an anointed king upon the throne (ver. 9).

The psalm falls into three equal stanzas or strophes, each of four verses, the ends of

the first and second stanzas being shown by the pause-mark, "selah."

Ver. 1.—*How amiable are thy tabernacles! or, "how lovely are thy dwellings!"* The plural is used, as in Ps. xlii. 3; xli. 4 (also Korahite); and cxxxii. 7, either because the temple was made up of several compartments, or as a "plural of dignity." O Lord of hosts (comp. vers. 3, 8, 12).

Ver. 2.—*My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord.* These expressions do not imply that the writer is absent from the temple, but only that his delight in it is never satiated. *My heart and my flesh; i.e. my whole nature.* *Crieth*

out for the living God; rather, *rejoiceth*; or "sings out a note of joy" unto the living God. So Hengstenberg, who says, "The verb *יָשַׁח* is of frequent occurrence in the Psalms, and *always* signifies to rejoice." Compare the comment of Professor Cheyne.

Ver. 3.—*Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young.* Both sparrows and swallows abound in Palestine. Canon Tristram found the nest of a sparrow "so closely allied to our own that it is difficult to distinguish it," in a chink of the Haram wall at Jerusalem, near the Golden Gate ('Land of Israel,' p. 182). An anecdote related by Herodotus (i. 159) shows that sparrows built about the Greek temples. The general meaning of the figure in this place seems to be, "If even birds love to build their nests, as they do, in the sacred precincts, how much more reason has the believing heart to find its home in the house of its God!" But the psalmist thinks it enough to suggest the parallel, and does not stop to carry it out. *Even thine altars.* The "altar" is put, by metonymy, for the temple itself. *O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God* (comp. Ps. v. 2).

Ver. 4.—*Blessed are they that dwell in thy house.* As the Korahite Levites did, being "keepers of the gates" of the Lord's house (1 Chron. ix. 19; xxvi. 1). They will be still praising thee. It is their privilege to be always praising thee. "The speaker regards the temple as predominantly the house of praise" (Cheyne).

Ver. 5.—*Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee.* God is the "Strength" of all who trust in him. The psalmist seems to mean that mere dwelling in the house of God is not enough for blessedness. Trust in God—having God for one's Strength—is also requisite (comp. ver. 12). *In whose heart are the ways of them; literally, in whose heart are highways.* The "highways" intended are probably those of holiness (comp. Prov. xvi. 17 and Isa. xxxv. 8).

Ver. 6.—*Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; rather, through the valley of weeping (τὴν κοιλίαν τοῦ κλαυθῆντος, LXX.).* So Hupfeld, Hengstenberg, Kay, and the Revised Version; compare Hosea's "valley of Achor," i.e. "of Grief." When the righteous pass through a time of suffering or calamity, they turn it into a time of refreshment. *The rain also filleth the pools; rather, the early rain* (Joel ii. 23) *covereth it with blessings.* The rain of God's grace mantles all the valley with a luxuriant vegetation; in other words, the blessing of

God rests on those who act as above described, and causes them ever to increase in righteousness and true holiness.

Ver. 7.—*They go from strength to strength.* Their spiritual course is one of continually greater vitality and vigour. Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God. Either "Each in his turn appears to render thanks and praise before God's holy seat on Mount Zion;" or "Each in his turn shall appear before God's throne in the true Zion, heaven."

Ver. 8.—*O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer.* The prayer of ver. 9. Give ear, O God of Jacob (comp. Pss. xx. 1; xlv. 7, 11; lxxv. 9; lxxvi. 6; lxxx. 1, 4, etc.).

Ver. 9.—*Behold, O God our Shield; i.e. "our Protection and Defence" (comp. Pss. xxxiii. 20; lix. 11; lxxxix. 18).* And look upon the face of thine anointed. Regard our king with favour; let the light of thy countenance shine upon him.

Ver. 10.—*For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand; i.e. than any number of days elsewhere.* It is difficult to trace any connection between these concluding verses. They appear to consist of distinct thoughts, which arise in the writer's mind, and are jotted down as they occur to him. One is a thought of loyalty, which finds vent in a prayer for the king (ver. 9). Another is a reflection of the main thought of the psalm, the incomparable blessedness of dwelling in God's house. A third (vers. 11, 12) is the joy and glory of perpetual communion with God and trust in God. See the remarks of Professor Cheyne ('The Book of Psalms,' p. 237). I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God; literally, *at the threshold*; but the meaning is well expressed by the Authorized Version. "Door-keepers in the house of their God" was exactly what the Korahite Levites were (1 Chron. ix. 19; xxvi. 1, 12-19). Than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. As their ancestor, Korah, had done (Numb. xvi. 26).

Ver. 11.—*For the Lord God is a Sun and Shield; i.e. not only a "Shield" or protection, as he has been already called (ver. 9), but also a "Sun," the source of life and light, of joy and happiness (comp. Isa. ix. 19, 20; Mal. iv. 2).* The Lord will give grace and glory. Inward grace, outward splendour and glory (Rev. xxi. 11-24). No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly (see 1 Cor. ii. 9; 1 Tim. iv. 8; and Ps. xxxiv. 10).

Ver. 12.—*O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee* (comp. Ps. ii. 12).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 6.—*Living water from hidden springs.* "Passing . . . a well." "The valley of Baca," i.e. of weeping, or lamentation. The image is of a company of pilgrims towards the holy city, whose way lies through a desolate, sterile valley. In that "dry and thirsty land" many a traveller has fainted with thirst. On those rugged rocks many a feeble or heedless foot has slipped, many a pilgrim fallen. But if "the blessings of heaven above" and "the precious things of the earth" be denied, there is yet "the blessing of the deep that worketh under." The pilgrims gird their loins, pitch their tents, and dig deep. Cool treasures of living water from hidden springs reward their toil. At morning they go on their way with a new song of praise, and leave a blessing for those who follow.

I. OUR WAY, AS PILGRIMS TO THE BETTER LAND, LIES THROUGH THE VALLEY OF TEARS. Sometimes, thoughtlessly or bitterly (in either case ungratefully), this name is applied to human life as a whole. Untrue and unreasonable. If life has its dangers and deserts, weary wastes, gloomy gorges, perilous passages, it has also breezy sunny uplands, smiling valleys, fields of happy fruitful labour, quiet resting-places, cheered by bright hopes, warm affections, pleasant memories. Many a light-hearted company marches for leagues with unbroken ranks. It is as untrue that life is all sorrow, as that it is all joy. But the valley of weeping has to be crossed. There are lives whose whole course is within its shadow. The happiest path runs so near its border that at any moment we may enter it; perhaps soon to emerge; perhaps not till the pilgrimage be ended. No unfrequented spot. If we take account of bleeding or broken hearts and shadowed hair all over the world—a life failing with each sound—we shall acknowledge that in this wide sense earth may not untruly be called "the valley of tears."

II. HIDDEN WELL-SPRINGS OF COMFORT AND BLESSING are provided by God for his children when passing through the valley of weeping. Comfort under trial, blessing through trial, hope beyond trial. 1. *Sorrow for sin* is the condition of the joy of forgiveness (Matt. v. 4). Violent emotion is not necessary; but a true sense of the guilt, as well as evil, of sin. Peace with God precedes peace in God. The deeper the sorrow, the sweeter the joy. Shallow views of sin are one of the chief dangers of our day; begetting shallow views of atonement, and of the relation of Christ's death to our sins and "the sin of the world" (John i. 29; 1 John ii. 2). 2. *God's presence and love*, our Saviour's sympathy, the power of the Holy Spirit as "the Comforter," are felt in trouble as at no other time. In the night the stars shine (Ps. xlii. 1). To bear trouble patiently is the part of a wise brave man, Christian or not; but *comfort in trouble* is the exclusive privilege of the Christian. 3. *The discipline of sorrow produces rich fruits*—stronger faith, deeper humility, a new sense of the value of prayer and of the preciousness of God's promises; patience, courage, detachment from the world, power to sympathize (Jas. i. 2, 3; 1 Pet. i. 6, 7; Heb. xii. 10; Ps. cxix. 67, 71). 4. *"We are saved by hope."* (Rom. viii. 24.) No grief so heavy as despair. None intolerable if hope shines ahead. A hidden well (Col. iii. 3), but whose streams can refresh the dreariest, weariest stages of pilgrimage (2 Cor. iv. 16—18). Christ's atonement lifts from our heart the burden of the past. His sympathy and mediation bring every moment of the present into living happy relation to God. But his resurrection and ascension bind our own earthly life to the glorious immortal future (John xiv. 1—3, 19; Heb. vi. 19).

Ver. 10.—*Delight in God's worship and service.* "A day in thy courts," etc. Of all the hundred and fifty holy songs composing the Psalter, none breathes a more intense spirit of exalted devotion than this, or in language and imagery more poetical and musical. It shares this character with other psalms ascribed to "the sons of Korah." Their ancestor Korah perished miserably in his rebellion against Moses and Aaron, at the very door of the tabernacle (Numb. xvi.). Yet his descendants had the charge of guarding the temple gates, no mean office (1 Chron. ix. 17—19; xxiii. 5; xxvi. 1, 12); and were likewise leaders of the temple music, Heman being one of them (1 Chron. vi. 33—37; xxv. 1, 5). Although it often happens that the father's sins are visited on the children, yet there is no unchangeable doom, no *bar sinister* on their

escutcheon, no barrier against their renewed consecration and acceptance. The sentiment of the text is—*Delight in God's worship and service*. "A day," etc. Secondly, a single day so spent—in *worship*, such as every devout Israelite partook, and *service*, the privilege of a Levite—outweighs in true joy and solid worth all the time spent in mere worldly business or pleasure.

I. THIS IS THE LANGUAGE OF A HEART WHICH DELIGHTS IN GOD. Not every one can say this. For a worldling it would be rank hypocrisy. In Malachi's day there were those who said, "What a weariness!" (Mal. i. 13). Are there not even real Christians for whom such a sentiment is an exaggeration; whose sense of *duty* exceeds their sense of privilege; to whom the sabbath brings the shadows of constraint rather than the lamp of joy? Their worship has a slightly penitential flavour rather than a rich fragrance of joy. They have not learned the secret of the son of Korah (Ps. lxxiii. 4), or of David (Ps. lxxiii. 1—3). Joyless service is neither profitable nor acceptable. These are heart-searching considerations. If we can venture to think of anything as bringing sadness to our heavenly Father's heart, would it not be this—that his children take small delight in drawing near to him? We live at too low a level, among the clouds, when we might be in the sunshine and pure air of the mountain-top.

II. THE SOURCES OF THIS DELIGHT ARE MANIFOLD. 1. The joy of *praise, worship, adoration*. Notice how inseparably *praise* and *rejoicing* are united in the Bible, especially in this Book of Psalms. "That God is what he is" (says John Howe) is the source of infinite joy to his children. 2. The joy of *personal communion with God*. He is "our God" (Ps. xlviii. 14); "my God" (Ps. xlii. 1, 2, 6; Phil. iv. 19). 3. The joy of *fellowship with God's people*. (1 John i. 3.) Common prayer, harmonious praise, public worship, have blessings and promises distinctively their own. It was when all the hundred and twenty "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication," the blessing of Pentecost came. When "many were gathered praying," Peter was set free (comp. Acts iv. 24, 31). 4. The joy of *service*. A Christian, whether a minister or private Church-member, can be more than "a door-keeper"—a *door-opener*; setting wide the gate of the city of refuge to the refugee from sin; opening the door of the kingdom to the young, and leading them through the gate Beautiful into the temple; helping fellow-believers to enter with boldness "into the holiest" (Heb. x. 19, 20). All that the ancient psalmist found in the temple, we have, not in shadow, but reality—the one sacrifice (Heb. x. 2, 4, 10, 12); the Divine Priest (Heb. viii. 1, 2); the true holy of holies (Heb. ix. 8—12, 24); and in place of the ceremonial service of the Levites, to maintain which the free-will offerings of the people were dedicated, the ministry of truth, the relief of need and suffering the wide world over, and the spread throughout the world of the gospel and kingdom of Christ (1 Pet. ii. 5). Which way does the balance incline? which has really our heart's devotion and yields supreme delight—God's service or the world's?

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—12.—*The soul's sweet home*. This is one of the Korahite psalms, like Ps. xlii., xliii., and some eight others. The late Dean Plumptre, in his 'Biblical Studies,' pp. 163—166, gives reasons for concluding that they all belong to the reign of Hezekiah, and were written by members of the Levitical family of Korah. One or more of them, it may be, hindered by the presence of the army of Sennacherib from going up to the temple, as they had been wont to do, pours out his grief in these psalms. It may have been so: we cannot certainly say. There have been two great interpretations of this psalm—that which reads in it—

I. THE LONGING OF THE SERVANT OF GOD AFTER THE WORSHIP OF THE SANCTUARY. This is the most general meaning found in it, as well as the most obvious. To this day the sparrows fly round the Mosque of Omar as they flew about the precincts of the temple which once stood on that same spot, as the writer of the psalm had often noticed. There was

"No jutting frieze,
Buttress, nor coigne of vantage, but these birds
Had made their pendant bed."

The Korabites were (1 Chron. ix. 17) keepers of the door of the tabernacle, and, in Moses' time, watchmen at the entrance of the Levites' camp, and afterwards (1 Chron. xxvi. 1—19) were appointed as guardians of the temple doors (see ver. 10 of this psalm). The writer longs to be again at his loved work in the courts of the Lord. Hence he tells: 1. *Of the loveliness of God's house, in his esteem.* 2. *Of his intense desire for it.* (Ver. 2.) His soul-yearning told upon his body, that he was as one in pain, and cried out. 3. *Of the birds,* the common sparrow, the restless swallow, —even they seemed to him happier than himself, for they were where he would but could not be. They were not banished, as he was, from the courts of the Lord. They dwelt and had their home there, as he fain would. 4. *Of the blessedness of his service.* It was a life of praise, and there is no life so blessed as this. They are made strong by God; the joy of it brightened the long journeys, reached to the very roads, arid, bare, and terrible, as many of them were. Yet nevertheless, in their hearts were ever these "ways." The joy of the service to which they were going made the vale of weeping a place of joy, the sandy waste a place of fountains; yea, God did so bless them with his grace as with the soft autumnal rains the cornlands are blessed after the seed is sown. And the looked-for gladness made their numbers swell and grow by additions that came in from all sides as the happy pilgrims went along, until every one of them appeared before God in Zion. Then follows: 5. *The fervent prayer* that these hallowed seasons may be again given; the names by which he appeals to God telling probably of the hosts of enemies arrayed against the people of God. 6. *He declares the reason wherefore he thus importunes the Lord of hosts.* It was because he counted the meanest service for God better than the best pleasures of sin. The worst of the Church is better than the best of the world. And because of what God himself was. 7. *From all this learn*—that the love of God's house is one sure mark of God's people; that true worship is a well of delight, which gladdens all our life; but that only they know it who have knowledge of God in their own personal experience as their Sun and Shield.

II. The other interpretation of this psalm reads it as telling of THE BLESSEDNESS OF LIFE IN GOD. Ver. 1 distinctly affirms this: the earthly tabernacle being the type of the soul in which God dwells. Ver. 2 declares that he cannot live without God. Ver. 3: he joyfully asserts that he lives in God; his soul, though mean as the sparrow, restless as the swallow, has yet found a rest, a dwelling-place, a home in God—in God as seen in his altars, type of the sacrifice of Christ. Ver. 4: he celebrates the blessedness of such—their life is one continued song. Ver. 5: and of those whose strength—their confident trust—is in God, in whose heart are "ways" for God; he has full right of way in them, they belong to him (Isa. xl. 3, 4). Ver. 6: their sorrow is turned into joy. Ver. 7: their trust strengthens evermore; they see God as they worship. Vers. 8—11 are one fervent prayer that he who has told of this blessedness may know it for himself: "Hear *my* prayer." And all this is true: the life in God is blessed.—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*Sanctuary birds.* The sparrow and the swallow told of here are apt types of those servants of God who find in him what these birds found in the temple. The comparison of the soul of one of God's people to a bird is not unusual (see Ps. xi.). Note—

I. SOME OF THEIR CHARACTERISTICS. 1. *Such as are negative.* They are not distinguished, like the eagle and many others, but of a very humble and lowly sort; nor powerful and strong; nor beautiful; nor valuable—"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?"—nor numerous, that is, in comparison with the vast multitude of birds generally; nor, in themselves, attractive and beloved, like the dove. But neither are they cruel like the eagle, nor "foul like the vulture, nor greedy as the cormorant, nor bloodthirsty as the hawk, nor hardhearted as the ostrich, nor depending upon men for support as the fowls of the farmyard, nor loving darkness like the owl" (Spurgeon). All these negative qualities suggest the opposite ones in those who delight in God. But there are also: 2. *Such as are positive.* They are the lowly ones, restless till they find their home; seekers,—they "find" the rest they desire; true to their homes; trustful,—in what strange places their nests are often found, under the eaves of cottages, and in all manner of accessible places, where any one could reach them, but they seem

to trust that no one will harm them! Are not these characteristics like those of the souls of whom these birds are the types?

II. THEIR ENCOURAGEMENTS. 1. *There are the altars of God for them; they have not to provide such home.* 2. When they come *they are never driven away.*

III. THEIR DISCOVERIES. They find: 1. *A habitation*, strong, comfortable, abiding. 2. *A home.* The Church is a home for the soul.

IV. THEIR YOUNG. Their home is in the courts of the Lord. So will the faithful servants of God seek that their offspring shall find their home in the Church of God. "Children should be housed in the house of God. The sanctuary of God should be the nursery of the young." Happy those children whose parents seek for this above all else!—S. C.

Ver. 10.—*Strange preferences.* I. THOSE HERE NAMED. 1. *That a day spent in God's courts is better than a thousand anywhere else.* But such preference makes it certain that not *any* day in God's courts can be meant; for too many days are spent there which might just as well be spent elsewhere. They bring no good to any one, but rather harm. For the worship on such days is but formal, hypocritical, has no heart in it. But the day the psalm tells of must be one in which the soul really communes with God, in which God is worshipped in spirit and in truth. 2. *That the humblest service in the house of God is better than the most rich and luxurious life in the tents of wickedness.* But here again the service meant must be the reverse of formal, perfunctory, grudging; for if the service were of such sort, one might almost as well be in the tents of wickedness. And that dwelling in those tents cannot mean an unwilling, a forced dwelling, like that told of in Ps. cxx. 5. Many servants of God have had and still have so to dwell amongst wickedness; they are not happy in it, would not be where they are could they help it, but they cannot. Hence if they be "lights shining in the darkness," then they are rendering high service to God, and great shall be their reward. But the dwelling told of is one which is chosen and loved. But, the psalmist says, the meanest place in God's house is better than that. "I had rather be a door-keeper," etc.

II. SUCH PREFERENCES ARE VERY STRANGE. For few sympathize with them; even good people might be slow to make such affirmation about a single day in God's house being better than a thousand *anywhere* else. Most people think that those who make such choice are either madmen or fools. They are despised as enthusiasts, or hypocrites, or fanatics.

III. NEVERTHELESS, SUCH PREFERENCES ARE REAL FACTS. He who wrote this psalm was but one of myriads more. He who does not put God first may have much good about him, as had the young ruler told of in the Gospels, but he cannot have eternal life.

IV. AND THEY CAN BE ABUNDANTLY JUSTIFIED. 1. *The first-named can*—the one day over the thousand. For what gives value to time? Not its duration, but its employment, what you do with it. Which do we deem most worth—the comparatively short-lived empire of Greece, or the thousands of years of Chinese life—if life it can be called? There may be one day in your life which you remember more than whole years beside, for it more influenced and blessed you than all the myriad other days which have gone by and are forgotten. It is the day filled with energies of the mind, heart, spirit; with memories of inspiring deeds; with influences which tell upon you and others. Cf. King Henry V.'s address to his soldiers at Agincourt—

"He that outlives this day and comes safe home,
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is named," etc.

But the day of real worship and communion with God is a day more filled with energies, memories, influences, than can any others be. How many of these others only drag down the soul! but a day with God! 2. *And so the humblest service for God is to be preferred.* For such service is shared in by the noblest, unites us to God, breaks the chain of sin, prepares for heaven, robs care of its sting, etc. Therefore the psalmist's choice is right; let it be ours!—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*A test of our spiritual state.* We may not find Davidic associations with

this psalm. It was composed by one of the musically gifted family known as the "sons of Korah;" and may be compared with Ps. xlii., xlii. They were a family of Levites whose inheritance lay on the eastern side of the Jordan. "Dwelling on the other side of Jordan, it was often impossible for them to reach Jerusalem. When the river swelled and rose with the melting snows of winter, or with the heavy tropical rains which fell on the northern hills and mountains, the fords of the Jordan became impassable; and the sons of Korah, even though their turn of duty had come round, were unable to go up to the house of the Lord. So, too, when the armies of Assyria, or some other foe, were encamped round the city, and no Hebrew was permitted to pass the line of siege, they were shut out from the worship of the temple through all the summer months. Many, if not most, of their psalms appear to have been composed at such times as these." The point suggested is that the spiritual condition of this writer can be tested by his feeling when deprived of religious privileges. Was he glad of the ease and relief? Or did he pine for restoration? So it may be shown that when Christians, through sickness or travelling, are separated from their usual worshipping associations, their spiritual state may be appraised by their feeling. Do they pine for them; regretfully remember them, and wish they had made better use of them?

I. DO WE LONG FOR GOD'S WORSHIP? It may be actually a possible thing for a man to live a religious life without ever taking part in any public services. He is a *rara avis* indeed who succeeds in accomplishing it. Most men not only yield to Divine command and invitation, by sharing in sanctuary services, but they feel also the positive necessity for such services, in the culture of their religious life, and the satisfaction of their religious wants. When souls are alive unto God, they are sure to desire to worship and praise him *along with others*. This is the natural religious instinct. But it should be pointed out that the interest in God's worship may cease to be spiritual; it may become *æsthetic*; it may even sink down to be a merely "formal habit."

II. IS OUR LONGING FOR GOD'S HOUSE AND WORSHIP REALLY A LONGING FOR THE SENSE OF HIS NEARNESS? The expression in ver. 2, "for the living God," suggests the deep spirituality of the writer. It was not the ritual he longed for, or the songs; it was the conscious presence of God, as the living Helper, Guide, and Comforter. Compare the Christian yearning for the close and conscious presence of the living Christ as Saviour and Sanctifier.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*God the Living One*. The precise expression here used is only found besides in Ps. xlii. 2. "In the New Testament the name 'living God' is found in St. Matthew's and St. John's Gospels, in the speech of Paul and Barnabas in the Acts (xiv. 14), in several of St. Paul's Epistles, four times in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and once in the Revelation." It is difficult to treat this subject as a universal experience, because our hearts are so full of the risen and living Christ, God manifest in the flesh, God manifest in the spirit. He is God, the living God, ever with us, as Helper, Inspirer, Comforter, and Sanctifier; but we may helpfully try to take the position of a "son of Korah," and begin by considering what the "living God" was to him.

I. GOD THOUGHT OF IN MAN'S MEDITATIONS. Why did it not suffice this writer to read his Bible, study and think about God, in the land beyond the Jordan? A man can have feast-times, times of spiritual refreshing, in the privacy of his home, and in the midst of God's handiwork in nature. And every man ought to have such thoughts of God; nourish and cherish them. But here is the *fact* of human experience—*God thought* has never wholly sufficed and satisfied any human being yet, because man is a composite being. He is not all thought. He has a body. And this very thinking is dependent on the help that symbols—relative to the body—can bring. Devotees may strive to become *all thought*. They do not thus transcend human nature, they degrade it. We must have more concerning our God than mere thinking about him; and therefore this Korahite longs for his revealed Presence in the temple.

II. GOD REALIZED THROUGH APPOINTED SYMBOLS. Pious souls have always recognized a sense in which God is specially present in his sanctuaries, and in his sacraments. God taught this to all the ages by the manifestation of his Presence in Jewish

tabernacle and temple, by the brooding cloud and the Shechinah light. What the psalmist dwells on is, that he used to *realize* God's nearness when he looked on his dwelling-place, shared in his worship, and heard his priests. Urge that only at spiritual peril can men neglect the symbols of the presence and working of the living God.

III. GOD FELT IN MAN'S HEART AND LIFE. This is the full realization of God as the *Living One*, living and working in us. Show this is an advance on *sentiment*, or mere thought of God, and on *formalism*, or mere outward worship of God. It is God *in us*, the inspiration of all good. It is "Christ our Life."—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Envy at the birds.* The man prevented from sharing in the public worship of the temple thinks enviously of the very sparrows and swallows that fit through its courts and build their nests under its eaves. Sparrows are very abundant in the East. Swallows make their nests, not only in the verandahs, but even in the rooms, within the mosques, and in the sacred tombs. Josephus tells us that the outer courts of the temple were planted with trees. "It is a singularly natural and beautiful conception which makes the psalmist think of the birds haunting there, as seeking the protection of God's altar for their young, and so enjoying a privilege which as yet he has not." Evidently what is chiefly in his mind is the sense of peace and security which the birds have who make their homes within the precincts of God's temple. No one disturbs them. There are too many people about for birds of prey to venture near. In the temple courts the poet thinks of them as away from all the "stress and strain" of life. Compare "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

I. THE PSALMIST ENVIES THE BIRDS THEIR SECURITY. Probably he wrote when the land was in a disturbed state, and there was no restfulness or safety for any one anywhere. And he must have felt this even more in the open and exposed districts beyond the Jordan. Illustrate from the idea of "sanctuary," which was, in old times, attached to the temples. Once within them, no foe could assail. Dr. Turner tells us that in Samoa, the manslayer flies to the *house* of the chief of the village; and in nine cases out of ten he is perfectly safe, if only he remains there. See how jealously Jews guarded their temple from the intrusion of strangers. In London of the olden time, Whitefriars, Westminster, and the Savoy were sanctuaries for all criminals except traitors. This feeling of security the Christian gains out of his daily apprehension of the Divine presence and defence. Round about him are the everlasting arms. He lives within the overshadowing spiritual temple. "What can harm us, if we be followers of that which is good," and have God upon our side?

II. THE PSALMIST ENVIES THE BIRDS THEIR PEACE. Illustrate by dwelling fully on that strange, yet delightful quietness, restfulness, solemnity, which come upon us when we enter a cathedral. We feel as we feel nowhere else in the world. Our feeling answers to that of the Jew when entering his temple. Show how nourishing to all the finest elements of soul-life that atmosphere of *peace* is.—R. T.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The joy of the pilgrims.* In these verses there is a blending of the real and the figurative; the *actual* journey towards Zion is represented as accompanied with ideal blessings of peace and refreshment. The poet has thought of the blessedness of those who dwell constantly in God's house. Now he thinks of the blessedness of those who are permitted to go there, and to tarry there for a while. And this leads him to recall what happy times he had known, even in the journeys to Jerusalem. Perowne says of the pilgrims to Zion, "Every spot of the familiar road, every station at which they have rested, lives in their heart. The path may be dry and dusty, through a lonely and sorrowful valley, but nevertheless they love it. The pilgrim-band, rich in hope, forget the trials and difficulties of the way; hope changes the rugged and stony waste into living fountains." The valley of Baca was the valley which led up from Jordan toward Jerusalem, and whose famous balsam trees wept balms. The thought for our consideration is this—the hearts that are truly set on God, and filled with desire to join in God's worship, will cheerfully bear, and successfully master, all the difficulties that may be in their way. They make the very "valley of Baca" refreshing as a spring.

I. THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIM FINDS HIS WAY LIES THROUGH VALLEYS OF BACA.

Two explanations of this valley are given. Some say it means "wet, marshy places;" others say, "dry, sandy places." Clearly it means something trying and difficult for pilgrims. We know well that there are difficulties in the way of our effort to live the godly life; valleys of Baca in our pilgrim-route to the eternal temple of the holy. 1. There are valleys of weeping; sorrows, both outward and inward (valleys of balsam, or weeping). 2. Valleys of unrelieved want; desert places. Illustrate the ever-varied, ever-unquenchable thirst of the spiritual life.

II. A BRAVE, EARNEST SPIRIT WILL MAKE A WAY THROUGH THESE VALLEYS OF BACA. Times of trouble we must have, but everything depends on the spirit in which we approach them, and deal with them. The true heart is helped to triumph over the difficulties of the way, by keeping ever in mind the end it has in view. Lead on to show how the heaven of established holiness, and near communion with God, becomes the inspiration to overcoming the difficulties of the way.

III. GOD RESPONDS TO THE EARNEST MAN IN THE VALLEYS OF BACA. If they dig pools in the desert, God will be sure to fill them with his genial rains. God is to us in blessing as we are to him in trust.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Stages of spiritual progress.* "The very journeys to the temple, often toilsome and hazardous, take on a certain sacredness from memory, imagination, and desire, insomuch that they can say that 'the highways to Zion are in their hearts.' They remember how they wept with vague, almost joyful emotion as they passed through the valley of Baca, and how they went 'from strength to strength,' that is, grew stronger and stronger, more and more joyful, as they topped the hills round about Jerusalem." Illustrate by the growing excitement we feel when nearing home after a time of prolonged absence. Every mile finds us more and more anxious to catch a sight of familiar scenes. It might be reasonably expected that the long and trying journey would make the pilgrims feel weary and indifferent. Instead of that, their souls master their circumstances, and they are brighter and more cheerful at the end than at the beginning. So do we see aged Christians who, for sunny faces and happy ways altogether, put to shame young beginners in the pilgrim-path. They have evidently gone "from strength to strength."

I. SPIRITUAL PILGRIMS MUST "KEEP ON." According to the figures of the text, they must not be stopping, or idling, or taking up any interests on the way; day by day, persistently, they must be going forward; every day getting a day's march nearer Zion. A pilgrim must just "keep on." So we are called to "patient continuance in well-doing;" to day-by-day persistent goodness; and this of itself may become wearisome. It is the hardest thing given us to do, this keeping on, day by day, in the same scenes, and doing the same work. But it is never really a mere keeping on. We may not realize the joy of it, but the fact is that, in keeping on, we are going "from strength to strength."

II. IN "KEEPING ON," SPIRITUAL PILGRIMS FIND THEMSELVES EVER BETTER ABLE TO KEEP ON. Every difficulty overcome means a higher strength to overcome difficulties. Every joy felt in a spiritual triumph is cheer for dealing with new anxieties. Every day of Christian life is a step; from it we get power to take a step higher. The man who has lived well his Christian life to-day is in fact, and ought to be in feeling, a stronger man to live his Christian life to-morrow. And so, making the day's experience a step up, he finds power and joy increasing as he nears the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. A Christian life may be exhausting for the body, but "as the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day."—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*The shield-figure.* In this psalm we find three names for God, "God of hosts," "God of Jacob," "God our Shield." To Abraham God had said, "Fear not, I am thy Shield, and thy exceeding great Reward." And in the fifth psalm we read, "Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield." Moses exclaims (Deut. xxxiii. 29), "Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the Shield of thy help?" And one of the later psalms (cxv.) has this for a refrain, "O Israel, trust thou in the Lord; he is their Help and their Shield." The prayer of the text is urged by two metaphors—"Thou my Shield;" "I thine anointed."

I. GOD MAY BE THOUGHT OF AS OUR SHIELD. Shields were peculiar to the hand-to-hand warfare of ancient times. They were of two kinds—one very large, protecting the whole body; another smaller, used by light-armed troops very skilfully. They were sometimes made of light wood, covered with bull's hide of two or three thicknesses, plated with metal; sometimes they were studded with nails or metal pins. They were smeared with oil, both to prevent them from injury by weather, and to render them so smooth that missiles might the more readily glance off. Show that so varied and so complicated is religious life we are glad of the help of all kinds of metaphor. As Christ is set under many names, so God is set under many relations. Christian life, conceived as a warfare, has its *defensive* and *offensive* sides. Under the shadow of God, as a Shield, men find defence. Compare figure of the "strong Tower," into which "the righteous runs and is safe." There are times in our Christian warfare when we can only act on the *defensive*. Then God is our Shield. Under the shadow of God, as a Shield, attacks were made. Describe the ancient mode of attacking a fortress, under shields placed together so as to make a protecting roof, which secured the soldiers from hostile missiles. There is "offensive war" sometimes in Christian life. Prevailing evils must be vigorously attacked. We may be sure of God's shield in all active service. The psalmist here is writing as a civilian, and a Levite, and thinks lovingly of God as his Defence from the perils of the pilgrim-way.

II. WE MAY THINK OF OURSELVES AS GOD'S ANOINTED. It is as though the psalmist had said, "Recognize the face that is uplifted to thee." Though the term "anointed" will suit David, it will equally suit the priest and the Levite, as set apart, anointed for the special service of God's temple. If God has brought us into close and loving relations of service to him, he has given us a plea to use in prayer. We may say, "Look upon the face of thine anointed."—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*The joy of doing little things for God.* "I had rather be a door-keeper;" literally, "stand or lie on the threshold." A missionary tells us that in India the office of door-keeper is truly respectable and confidential. Door-keepers of temples are men of the greatest dignity and power; whereas the psalmist was thinking of the lowliest and most humble situation. "I would rather choose to sit at the threshold." This is the situation of the devotee and the beggar. "Excuse me, sir, I pray you; I had better lie at the threshold than do that," is a frequent mode of expression among Orientals. The psalmist prefers the situation and attitude of a beggar, at the threshold of the house of the Lord, to the most splendid dwellings of the wicked. From 1 Chron. xxvi. 12—19 we learn that the sons of Korah, or Kore, were the porters of the gates of the Lord's house. "To these ministers of the sanctuary none seem so blessed as they who dwell in God's house, and are for ever praising him. To these keepers of the temple gates one day in the sacred courts is better than a thousand spent elsewhere; and they would rather be door-keepers in the house of God than sit and be served as chiefs in alien tents."

I. LITTLE THINGS ARE AS TRULY "SERVICE" AS GREAT ONES. They are necessary in their places. They are fitted to those of moderate or small capacities. To God the little things of service are as acceptable as the great things. Find any earthly sphere, and take the little things of it away. What an upset of the whole would result! The door-keeper at the gate was as important in his way as the priest at the altar. We can do our "little things" for God cheerfully, when we can fully realize that they are service—just our service.

II. LITTLE THINGS CAN EXPRESS CHARACTER AS TRULY AS GREAT ONES. A little pool can mirror the sun as truly as the widespreading lake. A dewdrop can refresh the earth, in its way, as truly as the thunder-shower in its. God is the reader of motives, and accepts the *actor* rather than the *act*. It often, indeed, takes more and nobler character to do a small deed well than to do a large one. There is much to help a priest to be noble; there is but little to help a mere door-keeper, and he has to fall back upon *principle*. Let but a man rightly esteem doing anything for God, and he will be full of holy joy in being permitted to do some "little thing."—R. T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Conditional bestowments.* What God is to his people, and what he does for them, may be put into two figures, and expressed in two plain statements.

But what he is to them, and what he does for them, depend on what they are in themselves, and what they are toward him. 'This the sincerely good man is always willing to recognize.

I. THE DIVINE BESTOWMENTS. 1. Suggested by two figures. (1) "The Lord God is a *Sun*." This figure for God is only used in this place. The sun in nature is the source of light, life, warmth, beauty, fruitfulness. The psalmist seems, even in this figure, to have God's defendings chiefly in mind. God is Light against *darkness*, which Easterns so greatly fear. (2) "The Lord God is a Shield." See this figure treated in the homily on ver. 9. We may add the picture of the tents of the army ranged in circles round the king's tent, and forming an almost impregnable shield; so "the Lord is round about his people." Some have suggested making one figure of the two, and reading it, "The Lord God is a bright and shining Shield." They think reference may be to the brazen shields, which were kept polished, so that, catching the sun's rays, they might dazzle the enemy. 2. Suggested by two statements. (1) "The Lord will give grace and glory." We may think of Divine bestowment exactly according with human necessities. *Grace* fits into all present needs; *glory* fits into all *future* needs. But the psalmist probably used the terms as figures for the two things he needed—*help* and *success*. (2) "No good thing will he withhold." A carefully qualified promise. It does not say, "Nothing will he withhold." It is "no *good* thing;" and no one can decide what is good for us as he can who has the infinite knowledge, and is the infinite Wisdom and Love.

II. THE DIVINE CONDITIONS. "From them that walk uprightly." That being regarded as the sure sign that the heart is right with God. A man may walk uprightly before his fellows who is not heart-right with God. But this is quite certain—if a man does *not* walk uprightly, he cannot be right with God. God is an unstinted Giver; we put the limitations by the failure of our faith, love, submission, and obedience. God would have his bestowments to be the best possible blessing to us; and therefore they are withheld until it is quite plain that we are prepared to make the best of them.—R. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*The glory of worship*. I. HELPS US TO REALIZE OUR NEARNESS TO GOD. (Ver. 1.) "How lovely are thy dwellings!" or "the house where thou dwellest."

II. IT IS THE EXPRESSION OF THE DEEPEST LONGING OF THE HEART AND SOUL. (Ver. 2.)

III. IT GIVES THE SENSE OF BEING AT HOME WITH GOD. (Ver. 3.) He is at a distance from the sanctuary; and the birds of the air seem nearer God than he is.

IV. IT INTENSIFIES THE SPIRIT OF GRATITUDE AND PRAISE. (Ver. 4.)

V. WE BECOME CONSCIOUS OF A STRENGTH DERIVED FROM GOD. (Ver. 5.)

VI. IT CREATES SPRINGS OF REFRESHMENT IN THE WILDERNESS. In the weeping vale (ver. 6). "The early rain cometh in with blessings."

VII. IT CONSTANTLY RENEWS AND INCREASES OUR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH. (Ver. 7.)

VIII. IT WILL BRING US AT LENGTH TO THE VISION OF GOD IN HEAVEN. (Ver. 7).—S.

Ver. 11.—*What God is to his people*. I. GOOD MEN ENJOY THE GRANDEST EXPERIENCES. 1. *God is to them a Sun and Shield*. These figures refer to our moral state as dark and dangerous. Alienation of the soul from God is a state of *darkness*. God is the Source of our light and life and joy. Our *danger* is—life is a great battle-field. We have protection from God if we are on his side. The battle is his. 2. *He gives to them grace and glory*. Grace is unmerited favour. The favour of God to man has been in the exercise of his *mercy*. "Hath not dealt with us after our sins," etc. Glory is the perfecting the work of grace, in the revelations and rewards of eternity. The beginning, the continuance, and the end of life are from God. 3. *He holds back from them no good thing*. This includes the bestowment of all real good. And he has given us a proof and pledge in the gift of Christ. "If God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," etc.

II. SOME GOOD MEN DO NOT ENJOY THE FULL EXTENT OF THESE PROMISES. 1. *Because their characters do not answer to the description of the text*. They do not walk uprightly, or only do so very imperfectly. None of us translates the theory

of the Christian life into our actual practice. 2. *They often mistake what are the good things of life.* Many things, accounted good by the false judgments of the world, are bad. Things good for some men are bad for others. Things good for us at one time are bad at another. But the absolutely good things—good independently of all circumstances—are meant in the text. To walk in God's light; to see all things in the light that falls from his character; to enjoy his help and protection from spiritual danger; to have his grace now and his glory in prospect;—these are the good things they enjoy who walk uprightly.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXXV.

THIS is a psalm written after a signal display of God's mercy towards Israel, but when there was still much wanting to make the condition of the people altogether satisfactory. It consists of a thanksgiving for the deliverance vouchsafed (vers. 1—3); a prayer for further and more complete restoration to favour (vers. 4—7); and a joyful anticipation of the granting of the prayer, and of the bestowal on Israel, ultimately, of all temporal and spiritual blessings (vers. 8—13). There are no such distinct and definite allusions in the psalm as to tie it down to any particular date; but, on the whole, it would seem to suit best either the time of Zerubbabel (Ezra iii., iv.) or that of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra ix., x.; Neh. ii.—vi.).

Vers. 1—3.—The thanksgiving. God is thanked for two things especially: (1) for having granted his people forgiveness of their sins (vers. 2, 3); and (2) for having, partially at any rate, removed his chastening hand from them, and given them a return of prosperity (ver. 1).

Ver. 1.—Lord, thou hast been favourable unto thy land; or, "thou art become gracious" (Kay, Cheyne)—a preceding time during which God was not gracious is implied (comp. Ps. lxxvii. 7—9). Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. It is most natural to understand this of the return from the Babylonian captivity; but possible that some lighter affliction may be intended, since *שׁוּבוֹ* is used, metaphorically, for calamities short of actual captivity (see the comment on Job xlii. 10).

Ver. 2.—Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people; thou hast covered all their sin. God's remission of punishment, and restoration of his people to favour, was a full indication that he had "forgiven their iniquity" and "covered their sins." This was so vast a boon, that a pause for devout

acknowledgment and silent adoration seemed fitting. Hence the "selah," which is at the end of the second verse, not of the first, as Hengstenberg states.

Ver. 3.—Thou hast taken away all thy wrath. Forgiveness of sins implies the cessation of wrath, though it does not necessarily imply the cessation of punishment. Thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger. This expresses the meaning better than the marginal rendering.

Vers. 4—7.—The prayer. Two things are prayed for—first, that God will turn the hearts of his people wholly towards himself (ver. 4); and secondly, that he will complete his work of deliverance by removing the traces, that still exist, of his past anger (vers. 5—7). Israel is still in a state of great distress and weakness, suffering from the natural consequences of its sins, which keep it depressed and sad.

Ver. 4.—Turn us, O God of our salvation. Thou art turned to us (ver. 1); let us also be turned to thee. We cannot turn of our own mere wish to turn; we need thy helping grace (comp. Ps. lxxx. 3, 7, 19). And cause thine anger toward us to cease. Verbally, this contradicts ver. 3, whence it has been supposed by some to come from the mouth of another speaker. But really there is no contradiction, if we understand, both here and in the next verse, by God's anger, the effects of his anger, which were still continuing (comp. Ezra iii. 12, 13; iv. 4—24; ix. 2—15; Neh. i. 3; ii. 17; iv. 1—22; v. 1—19).

Ver. 5.—Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? This is equivalent to "Wilt thou still go on punishing us?" Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? or, "from generation to generation?" This suits well the first period after the return from the Captivity, when the depressed condition of Israel continued for several generations.

Ver. 6.—Wilt thou not revive us again? literally, *wilt thou not return and revive us?* (comp. Ps. lxxi. 20). So Ezra prays God

to "give Israel a little reviving in their bondage" (Ezra ix. 8). That thy people may rejoice in thee. The "revival" and "rejoicing" came in Nehemiah's time, when the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem was kept "with gladness, both with thanksgiving, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps" (Neh. xii. 27).

Ver. 7.—Show us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation. Compare the devout petitions of the Church morning and evening, "O Lord, show thy mercy upon us. And grant us thy salvation" (Order for Morning and Evening Prayer).

Vers. 8—13.—The joyful anticipation. The psalmist anticipates a favourable answer to his prayer, and proceeds to note down the chief points of it. God will "speak peace to his people" (ver. 8), bring his salvation near to them (ver. 9), contrive a way by which "mercy and truth," "righteousness and peace," shall be reconciled (vers. 10, 11), shower blessings on his land (ver. 12), and guide his people in the way marked out by his own footsteps (ver. 13).

Ver. 8.—I will hear what God the Lord will speak; i.e. "I will wait now and hear the Divine answer to my prayers" (comp. Hab. iii. 1, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me"). For he will speak peace unto his people. He will give them a gentle answer—one breathing peace and loving-kindness. And to his saints. And especially he will so answer the *dite* of his people—the *khasidim*, "his saints," or "loving ones." But let them not turn again to folly (comp. Ezra ix. 10—14). If, after the deliverance that they had experienced, they turned again to such "folly" as had brought on their misfortunes, it would make their end worse than their beginning.

Ver. 9.—Surely his salvation is nigh them

that fear him; or, *will be nigh*. The answer to the prayer in ver. 7. That glory may dwell in our land. Professor Cheyne asks, "What glory?" and suggests, "The true Shechinah, the manifested presence of Israel's God." But it may be doubtful whether anything more is meant than a return of earthly glory and prosperity, such as that for which Nehemiah laboured and prayed.

Ver. 10.—Mercy and truth are met together. God's mercy and God's truth are reconciled and brought into harmony. The psalmist does not say—probably does not know—how. He accepts the fact of the reconciliation, which is revealed to him (ver. 8) by faith, and boldly announces it. The explanation was reserved for the coming and teaching of Christ. Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. "Righteousness" and "peace" are synonymous with "mercy" and "truth." Here they are personified—"represented as angels in human form" (Cheyne).

Ver. 11.—Truth shall spring out of the earth (comp. Isa. xlv. 8). One result of the reconciliation of God's mercy and truth shall be a growth of righteousness among men. The pardoned people of God shall bring forth much fruit. And righteousness shall look down from heaven. God's righteousness "looks down from heaven" (like the sun), to draw up and mature the feeble plant of man's righteousness, which, without it, would come to nothing.

Ver. 12.—Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good; i.e. shower blessings on his land, both spiritual and temporal. And our land shall yield her increase. Other crops may be included, but the special reference is to a large increase of good works.

Ver. 13.—Righteousness shall go before him. Prepare the way, i.e., for the restoration of the people to God's favour (compare the first clause of ver. 11, and the second of ver. 12). And shall set us in the way of his steps; i.e. cause his people to walk in the way marked out by his footsteps—i.e. by the indications of his will either in nature or in the written Word.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 6.—*Revival*. "Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?" The prayers of Scripture, like its promises, never grow old. They deal not with the changing surface and circumstances of life, but with its living heart and abiding needs. So this prayer of the old psalmist is as fresh and fit for our lips to-day, as when the ink was wet in which he wrote. The same Spirit who inspired him also "helpeth our infirmities."

I. THE BLESSING SOUGHT: REVIVAL. This word has come to be often used for a season of extraordinary religious activity, attended by numerous conversions. But it properly means the quickening, strengthening, elevating, of life already possessed;

but perhaps feeble, declining, threatened with extinction. This must be God's work, by the power of his Spirit. "Wilt thou not revive us?" All life, natural and spiritual, is from God and in God. At the back of all force is his power; at the back of all causation, his will; at the back of all law, his wisdom (Pss. xxxiii. 6; civ. 30). But there is this wonderful and glorious difference between the realm of natural and of spiritual life—in the outward material world we have to deal with *laws*; the *power* working under and behind those laws is inscrutably hidden. But in spiritual life it is just *God's power* we have to deal with; the *laws* according to which it is put forth are mostly beyond our ken. In the natural world there is ample range for prayer; but in the spiritual we are shut up to prayer. We are to pray for daily bread, for which we must work, as well as for forgiveness of sin, for which we cannot work. But with this difference—the ungodly husbandman will reap his harvest, if he works for it, though he does not pray; but pardon, and the grace of God's Spirit, will not be given to those who do not ask (Luke xi. 13; Jas. i. 5; 1 John i. 9).

II. HOW WILL THIS QUICKENED LIFE SHOW ITSELF? In: 1. *Lowlier humility*. Deeper consciousness of sin, need, weakness. That Church, of all the seven addressed in the Apocalypse, which said, "I am rich, and have need of nothing," was the very one that was in the very jaws of death (Rev. iii. 17). We put this note of revival first, because our Lord puts it first in describing the character and blessedness of his true disciples (Matt. v. 3—5). The first token of revived life in a frozen limb is intense pain; the flesh that is past feeling is past cure (see Eph. iv. 19; Prov. xxvi. 12). 2. *Increased spirit of prayer*. More urgent habitual sense of need of prayer. Disposition to more frequent prayer (however brief). Perhaps at first no increased freedom and delight, but rather depressing sense of the weakness, coldness, unworthiness of our prayers. More earnestness, especially in prayer for others. Stronger faith in God's promises (*not in our own prayers*). Perseverance and patience. Out of all this must come, sooner or later, both delight and power in prayer, the presence of the Holy Spirit with our spirit, bringing our desires into harmony with God's will, and helping our infirmities. 3. *Growing love of God's truth*. The Bible will be dearer to us, fuller of light and help. Christ's word will abide in us (Col. i. 9—11). 4. *Deeper, more inspiring, controlling views of the love of God in Christ*. (Eph. iii. 16—19.)

III. RESULTS OF REVIVAL. "That thy people," etc. The psalmist was thinking of God's chosen nation, Israel. That is no hindrance to our application of both prayer and promise. The conditions and forms of national life and of Church life are wholly different from what they were then; never can be the same. But principles abide. Righteousness still exalts a nation. "Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord!" A dead or lukewarm Church cannot be a joyful Church; nor a lukewarm worldly Christian a joyful Christian. Suppose all English men, women, children, to become true, earnest, loving disciples of our Lord Jesus, "filled with the Spirit;" the whole face of society and national life would be changed, because its heart would be changed (Acts viii. 8). Meanwhile, revival, with all its fruits, either in the Church or in the nation, must begin in the hearts and homes of Christians. Then the joy of the Lord will be our strength. All turns (remember) on this word, "thou." With God is life's fountain. In him our bodies live: how much more our spirits! (John xv. 5; Phil. ii. 13).

Ver. 8.—*The purpose of God's gracious chastenings*. "He will speak peace . . . but let them not turn again to folly." The spirit of this psalm is compounded of penitence and praise, humility and hope; inspired by great troubles and great deliverances. This verse expresses what we may call the *moral*, the very heart of the psalm; the golden link between the thanksgivings blended with confessions of vers. 1—7, and the splendid promises of vers. 9—13. The lesson is twofold—first, that sin is folly, most of all in God's people; and secondly, that God's gracious purpose in chastening is to keep us from sliding back into sin, turning again to folly.

I. SIN IS FOLLY. *Q.d.* it is acting in disregard of known consequences. The Hebrew word here translated "folly" also means "hope" or "confidence"—the blind confidence of one who knows that "the end of these things is death," yet listens to the tempter who says, "Ye shall not surely die;" that "the wages of sin is death," but counts on their not being paid. He sins in spite of warning, reason, experience; hoping he may seize "the pleasures of sin for a season," and yet escape its eternal con-

sequences. No man *chooses* perdition. But it comes to the same thing whether you leap over a precipice or walk along the brink with your eyes shut. Sometimes the sinner sins with open eyes, and, just because he knows the danger, flatters himself he can stop in time. He is not on the *brink*—only on the gentle grassy slope; but involuntarily his steps quicken—he cannot stop—he is lost! A traveller through the snow knows that the one fatal danger is to yield to sleep. “Only for five minutes,” he says; and closes his eyes, never to open again. Or a thirsty wayfarer in the desert is warned that a spring is poisonous. The bones of those who have encamped near it whiten the ground. “One draught only!” he says; and presently his bones whiten with the rest. Every one is ready to say, “He sought his fate; has only himself to blame.” Are there none amongst us to whom conscience (if awake) would answer, “Thou art the man”? “Their eyes have they closed” (Matt. xiii. 15). They have “forsaken the fountain of living waters” (Jer. ii. 13). They “heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning” (Ezek. xxxiii. 5; Heb. x. 28, 29). If sin is folly, the clearer the light, the greater the folly. Therefore the sins of Christians must be the greatest folly. This does not apply to sins of infirmity, against which we are watching, fighting, praying, of which the Christian is sadly conscious, but which have not “dominion over” him. But what these lead to, if we fail to watch, fight, pray: willing yielding to temptation, wilful persistence in wrong, against conscience, loving what we are pledged and bound to hate, ceasing to strive to please God;—this is indeed to “turn again to folly.”

II. GOD'S PURPOSE IN HIS DEALINGS WITH HIS CHILDREN IS TO PREVENT THEIR TURNING BACK TO SIN. This both in his mercy and in his chastening. 1. In his mercy. “I will hear,” etc. God's purpose in forgiving sin is both to incline and to enable us to forsake it. Its guilt is cancelled, that its power may be destroyed. Else forgiveness were useless, wasted. The cross of Christ, constantly set forth in the New Testament as the atonement for our sins, the reconciliation whereby we are brought back to God (Rom. v. 9, 10), is as plainly set forth as the mightiest motive to holiness (Gal. ii. 20; see the whole of Rom. vi.). 2. God's chastening discipline has the same end in view (Heb. xii. 10, 11; Ps. cxix. 67, 71). The danger is real. Christians are exposed to the ordinary temptations which beset human nature, though with diminished force; and have some special temptations. We need constantly to open our hearts to the force of all the motives here suggested. (1) God's forgiving mercy, and our enjoyment of it (Rom. xii. 1). (2) God's chastening, and our experience of it. (3) God's promises, and our hope. (4) God's warning, “Let them not turn again to folly,” and the unspeakable folly and misery of neglecting it. For the ransomed slave to run back to slavery, the released prisoner to banker after his cell and fetters, the man restored to health to long for his sick-room, the blind whose eyes have been opened to shut himself up in the dark,—seems less insane than for those who “have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” to be “again entangled therein and overcome” (2 Pet. ii. 20; Heb. vi. 4—6).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—13.—*Temporal mercies of little avail without such as are spiritual.* There had been great outward mercies (see vers. 1—3). Probably the wonderful deliverance of Judah, Jerusalem, and Hezekiah from the threatened might of Assyria was the occasion of this burst of thanksgiving. But the psalmist—it may have been Isaiah himself—whilst grateful, indeed, for God's deliverance, as he well might be, was nevertheless sore distressed at the spiritual condition of his countrymen (see Isaiah's denunciations of the wickedness of his people, ch. i. and *passim*). There needed, therefore, to be an inward conversion as well as an outward deliverance such as they had experienced. And until this spiritual reformation was brought about, the anger of God rested on them still. Hence the prayer, “Revive us again,” etc. In this psalm we have—

I. THANKFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF MERCIES RECEIVED. (Vers. 1—3.)

II. EARNEST PRAYERS FOR YET GREATER ONES. (Vers. 4—7.)

III. CONFIDENT BELIEF THAT THE LORD WILL ANSWER. (Ver. 8.)

IV. JOYFUL ANTICIPATION OF THE BLESSINGS THE LORD WILL GIVE. (Vers. 9—13.)—S. C.

Ver. 6.—*Revival*. I. NOTE THE CHIEF WORD OF THIS VERSE: “REVIVE.” It implies: 1. *Life*. The new creation has been accomplished, the passing from death unto life has taken place. 2. *But that life has declined, and therefore needs revival*. How often this occurs! Our spiritual life is not as our natural life, which is weakest at the beginning and end; but the spiritual life is strong in the vigour of its first love, nor does it ever at the last hour fall from God, but in the midst of the years, like the wires of the telegraph between the posts, it often falls to its lowest. The causes are not a few, but may be summed up in one—the not abiding in Christ. 3. *The life which has declined can be revived*—the health and vigour come back again, the back-sliding be healed.

II. WHAT IT EXPRESSES. It is an earnest prayer, an impassioned pleading for revival. It means, “Oh that thou wouldst revive us again!” Now, this reveals: 1. *Consciousness of need*. There may be the need, as at Laodicea, and no consciousness of it; but when such prayer as this is heard, it shows that the soul is wide awake to its needs. 2. *Distress on account of it*. Earnest anxiety is aroused; the work of conviction has been done; this prayer proves it. 3. *The confession of it*, and the casting of the soul on God for its need being met; and this could not be without there being also: 4. *Confidence* that God would answer his prayer. A child must see the look of “Yes” in his father’s face, or else he will soon give over asking; but when he does see that look, what a vehemency of asking then ensues! And so with the child of God here. He has seen that look of “Yes” on the Father’s face, and hence this confident earnestness. Such are the characteristics of every such prayer as this. Note—

III. ITS PLEA. “That thy people may rejoice in thee.” So then it is plainly taught that a low religious life and a joyous one are incompatible; there must be a reviving if there is to be rejoicing. Hence it is that to so many people religion seems rather a distress than a delight. They are, as it has been said, like a man with a headache; he would not like to lose his head, but he is very uncomfortable with it. A man was once invited to eat of some apples from a certain orchard, but he promptly declined. His friend was much surprised, and asked him the reason. “Oh,” said he, “I took of some of your apples the other day, which were hanging over the hedge, and I am quite sure I do not want any more of them.” “Ah,” said the other, “I am not surprised; those apples were a poor lot; but I put them there on purpose for the boys, who are always taking what does not belong to them. But come into the middle of the orchard, and try the fruit there, which is of a very different sort.” And so it is with many Christians; they take only the hard sour fruit of the religious life; that which is full of delight is in the midst of the garden of God, whither as yet they have never entered. It is good to be God’s servants at all, better, far better, to be of those who rejoice, whose service of God is not a drudgery, but a delight; best of all when the rejoicing is in God, not in his blessings merely, but in him. God wants us to rejoice in him; the world will be more surely won for God when more joy characterizes his servants, and for ourselves, it is the surest guarantee of steadfastness.—S. C.

Ver. 8.—“*What God the Lord will speak*.” Note, by way of introduction, that we have here: 1. *A personal resolve*. “I will hear.” Some would not; others could not; others would offer to hear for him and report; but the psalmist makes the wise resolve that he will hear for himself. It is ever best to go direct to God, and employ no intermediaries. 2. It is also a *firm resolve*. Whether the word be rendered “I will,” or “I would,” or “let me hear,” it denotes resolve. And no one will ever hear what God the Lord will speak unless his will be settled in that purpose. The devil hates such hearing of God, and will do all in his power by raising up every kind of hindrance—who knows not this?—to prevent it. 3. It is a *sincere resolve*. The hearing means no mere listless listening, but it is that of the heart, with real desire to hear what God the Lord will speak. Therefore the hearing will be, as it ever should be, attentive, prayerful, obedient. Consider—

I. THE SPEAKER. God the Lord. Three things are taught. 1. *That God the Lord will speak*. His very name involves this. He is the covenant God; hence his name

Jehovah, Lord, is added, which declares him to be the God of Israel. But such name indicates that he will not be heedless of his people's prayer. And he has spoken of old time. Their records are full of the story of his interpositions in their times of need. And it is what we should expect, the need of his speaking being so great. Revelation, incarnation, atonement, the work of the Holy Ghost, are all antecedently probable; man, God's offspring, needing them so terribly. 2. *That we can hear.* This is man's distinction; he is a spiritual being, and can receive messages from God, who is a Spirit; he does perpetually receive and respond to them: "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said," etc. 3. *That what God speaks is what man needs to hear.* Man has heard enough of what his own sinful heart has to say, and of what his fellow-men say, in their doctrines, imaginations, counsels, and a miserable hubbub and confusion their discordant utterances make; but the psalmist resolves to come away from all this, and hear God. It is our wisdom as well as his.

II. WHAT HE SPEAKS. "Peace unto his people." 1. *Peace with himself.* They have quarrelled with him, rebelled again and again, but now when they turn to him his word shall be of peace. 2. *And amongst themselves.* "He stilleth . . . the tumult of the people;" the nations shall learn war no more. 3. *And in their own hearts.* "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirits," etc. (Rom. viii.; Luke vii. 48). None can over-estimate the worth of this peace, and none need be without it.

III. HOW DOES GOD SPEAK? 1. *Authoritatively.* "He speaks, and it is done." 2. *By his Spirit.* 3. *Through the Holy Scriptures,* and by the voice of his providence and the response of our conscience and reason.

IV. THE CONDITION ON WHICH HE SPEAKS. "Let them not turn again," etc. 1. It is implied that *they have now turned from their folly.* Note that name for sin; sometimes it is called by far sterner names. But is it not "folly"? All these prayers and vows show that there has been repentance. 2. *Let them not turn again.* There is no need that any should. And we never shall if we abide in Christ.—S. C.

Ver. 9.—*The saints' salvation, the land's glory.* They who fear God may be sure that he will come and save them, not alone for their own sake, but also for the sake of the land in which they dwell. The salvation of any sinner is for the blessing of very many. God has respect to others outside ourselves when he saves any one of us. The glory of the whole nation is furthered thereby; the blessing of the Church is the blessing of the land. For in such land there dwells—

I. SPIRITUAL GLORY. How God is worshipped, loved, praised; how mightily his Spirit works in men's hearts, when he comes in saving power!

II. MORAL GLORY. The work of God in men's souls ever "makes for righteousness." Vice, profanity, and all ungodliness are abashed, and slink away when the power of God is made known.

III. NATIONAL GLORY. For "righteousness exalteth a nation:" when once has such a nation perished?

IV. SANCTUARY GLORY. To the Jew, the temple of the Lord was his glory. "The joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion." And what are all our sanctuaries and services if in them God's salvation is not seen?

V. HARVEST GLORY. (Cf. Ps. lxxvii., "Then shall the earth yield," etc.) There is close connection between inward character and outward condition.—S. C.

Ver. 10.—*Our foes become our friends.* It is difficult, indeed impossible, to say what was the actual thought of the writer when he penned the words of our text; for they are true in several ways. He represents mercy and truth as going in different directions, and with opposite intent, but they meet, and are brought into harmony as though at variance before. And it is the same with righteousness and peace; there seemed no common course of action open to them; they must be opposed; but, lo! they embrace, and all discord ceases between them. Now, where is such union of opposites to be seen? And we answer—

I. IN GOD. In the wisdom of God when devising our salvation. Christ is the Wisdom of God, because in him, whilst mercy has full scope, nevertheless, the Law is magnified and made honourable. There was no compromise, no tampering with the holy Law of God, although God did so love the world as to save it (John iii. 16). Love reigns,

yet the Law is fulfilled as it never was or could be before, and is magnified in infinitely higher way than if in vindication of God's broken Law the whole human race had been for ever condemned (cf. Rom. viii. 4). All this was shadowed forth by the tables of the Law being placed within the ark of the covenant, on which rested the mercy-seat, and whereon was sprinkled the atoning blood (1 John ii. 2). Thus in God those attributes which seemed to be and were hostile to us, and those which alone seemed our friends, met together, were reconciled, and, as it were, kissed each other.

II. **IN MAN.** Probably this was the thought of the psalmist. He is exulting in the anticipation of the regenerated moral life of God's people when his salvation should come to them; cruelty and inhumanity should give way to mercy, and truth between man and man should replace their too common falsehood and lies; righteousness, justice, fair dealing, should prevail instead of fraud and wickedness, and peace should banish war. "Earth should be carpeted with truth as with fair flowers, and be canopied over by righteousness as with the beautiful sky, or as by night with the glorious stars." Men should "serve God in holiness and righteousness without fear, all the days of their life."

III. **IN CHRIST.** The text may be taken, has been so, as descriptive of the holy and beautiful life of our Lord—of him "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." In him, as in no other, those contrasted qualities of our humanity, which in us are generally so ill balanced, found perfect equipoise and harmony. The Divine symmetry and fair proportions of the holy life, "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" (Eph. iii. 18), were seen in all their beauty. He was "the perfect Man, Christ Jesus," the lovely Image on which the saints gazed with perpetual, adoring rapture, and grew towards whilst they gazed, and so became the saints, the holy ones, they were. Yes, in him our text was indeed fulfilled. And—

IV. **IN GRACE.** (See 1 Cor. i. 30.) What is the true Christian but one who has known in his own experience the power of the perfect Christ? Some believe in a Christ whom they have fashioned to themselves, as all fondness and compassion and pity, who will not be stern with any one. Others conceive of him only as an awful Judge, launching out the thunder-bolts of his wrath against wretched, sinful men. But the grace which saves is that told of Titus (ii. 11—14). Grace includes mercy and truth, righteousness and peace.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Recognition of national mercies.* This psalm belongs to the "sons of Korah," and we can hardly be wrong in associating it with the early years of the restoration from the Babylonish captivity. "The psalm shows that union of thankfulness for restoration, of sense of present distress and weakness, and of bright Messianic hope, which is especially characteristic of the writings of this period." "It opens with an acknowledgment of God's goodness and mercy in the national restoration, in terms which could hardly apply to any other event." Plumptre connects the psalm with the Assyrian distress in the time of Hezekiah. Other writers, among whom may be named Spurgeon, insist on the Davidic authorship, and connect it with distress from the Philistines. There is one grave peril attending the separation of Christianity into small sections. The *national* relations of God are likely to be underestimated, and the merely local relations of God to individual experience, and to the experience of small communities, over-estimated. While fully recognizing that God bears close and saving relations to the individual, it may yet be properly urged that he bears relation to each nation, is at the heart of its calamities and of its triumphs, working for the nation now as truly as for the nation of Israel in the olden time. God is in history. But this means that God is in history while the history is in the making. And God should be discerned in political struggles, in social movements, in philanthropic enterprises, in national deliverances. To many persons the national thanksgiving for the recovery of the Prince of Wales from imperilling illness, was a delightful proof of the readiness of the English people to respond when God's hand in the bestowment of national mercies is pointed out to them. Two things may be illustrated and impressed.

I. **RECOGNIZING NATIONAL MERCIES IS A NATIONAL DUTY.** Apply to ordinary mercies, such as are illustrated by the yearly harvest. Then the national heart turns to God; and a national voice of thanksgiving is uplifted to him. Apply to special

mercies, such as: 1. Preservation from, or removal of, epidemic disease. 2. Mastery of elements of social disturbance. 3. Hopeful changes of political relationships. 4. Victory for the national army. 5. Removal of difficulties that put the national peace in peril.

II. **HELPING THE NATION TO RECOGNIZE ITS MERCIES IS THE DUTY OF THE NATIONAL LEADERS.** More especially of those who believe in God, and are consecrated to the work of rendering witness for him. Mistake is often made by limiting the work of God's ministers to the "spiritual" and "personal" parts of their work. Every true minister is a leader of his people in recognizing God's work in the nation, and in renewing national thanksgiving and trust.—R. T.

Vers. 3—5.—*Incomplete redemptions.* While thankfully acknowledging all that God has done for his people, the psalmist clearly sees that it was but the "merceness" of God's wrath from which he had turned, and that some of his wrath remained, seeing that the work of national recovery was incomplete, and heavy burdens still pressed on the people. Perowne recalls the circumstances of the exiles as Nehemiah found them. They were "in great affliction and reproach." "It was only in the midst of perpetual opposition and discouragement that he was able to carry on his work. The bright prospect which was opening before the exiles had been quickly dashed. They had returned, indeed, but it was to a desert land and a forsaken city, whose walls were cast down, and her gates burned with fire; whilst jealous and hostile tribes were ever on the watch to assail and vex them. Hence it is that the entreaty for mercy follows so hard upon the acknowledgment that mercy has been vouchsafed." As a person might look, in a depressed mood, on the returned exiles, God's redemption was incomplete. Their restoration to their own land had brought them apparently no rest, no consolation, no hope for the future.

I. **THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH GOD'S REDEMPTIONS ARE NEVER COMPLETE.** They are always redemptions from *some* calamities, not redemptions from *all* calamities. Every redemption is a beginning, boding within it the promise of something more that God is about to do. Open this fully out by showing that a spiritual redemption is to be followed by a bodily redemption. Christ wins the soul, and then proceeds to win the whole human sphere, and eventually all creation. The great redemption removes the soul-penalties of sin; but it is not a perfect redemption until it has removed all the bodily penalties and disabilities of sin also. As a matter of Christian experience, we always feel, with the apostle, as if redemption were something yet to come. As we read our lives, they are still spheres for a divinely redemptive work. The full salvation "is ready to be revealed in the last time." Redemption thought of as complete checks a living dependence. Redemption thought of as incomplete keeps us in close reliance on the present and ever-working Redeemer.

II. **THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH GOD'S REDEMPTIONS ARE EVER IN PROGRESS.** They are only incomplete as the building at which the workmen are working. Those exiles would be comforted as they realized God with them, delivering and rescuing, and carrying, in practical detail, to its perfection his gracious redemptive thought.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Quickening as God's work.* In his very striking image of the dry bones in the valley, the Prophet Ezekiel, in a most emphatic way, declares that "quickening," "requickening," is the work of God, and of God alone. When man works he must stop short at imparting life,—that is beyond him. He may copy the forms of living things, but at the end of all his works it must be said, "There is no breath in them." God gives all life. "Thus saith the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon the slain, that they may live" (Ezek. xxxvii. 9, 10).

I. **THE CHURCH OF CHRIST CONSTANTLY NEEDS REQUICKENING.** This is true of all the ages. We have to take account of the ever-recurring tendency to flag and faint and fail. Men have never been able to keep up to the high levels which they may at times have attained. The whole history of Israel is a series of illustrations of this truth. Back from all reformations and revivals Israel constantly fell into indifference, or into formality. It may be shown that: 1. Times of special strain are followed by rebounds. An army is never in such peril as in the relaxed hours that

follow a great victory. 2. Mere continuance tends to develop into formality. As with constant practice at the piano, the player comes to play without thinking. 3. Energetic people, who must be *doing*, are always in danger of neglecting the culture of the interior life. It may be well searchingly to examine ourselves, and see whether we need requickening.

II. REQUICKENING IS IN THE POWER OF GOD ALONE. We must not only admit that as an abstract truth; we must *feel* that as a truth bearing direct relations to ourselves. The limit of man's doing may be illustrated by the garden plants. We water them, and they do not care for our work, or respond to it. We can do little more than wash the dust from their leaves, and moisten the air around them. God rains his heavenly rains upon them, and they respond at once; lift up their heads, hold out firmly their leaves, and evidently feel the thrill of new life. One of the most delightful and inspiring views we can get of God sees him ever at work, restoring things that have gone wrong, and reviving things that are flagging. He is the Source of all life,—that we admit. He is the Restorer and Requicker of all life,—that we want to feel.

III. WHETHER WE BE REQUICKENED DEPENDS UPON OURSELVES. There are conditions in us for which God ever waits. His work cannot be all that he would have it be until we are in right condition. 1. We must see our need of requickening. 2. We must put away the self-indulging things which have been injuriously telling on our life. 3. We must be in attitude of prayer—of united prayer.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Revivals; or, discerning the signs of the times.* They who read the times, with keen interest in the spiritual vitality of the Church, cannot fail to recognize the need of spiritual revival. The features of religious life may, in essence, be those characteristic of every age, but there may be subtleties and severities in their forms and settings at particular seasons which make them unusually effective for evil.

I. ONE SIGN OF OUR TIMES IS VASTLY INCREASED INTELLIGENCE. Science has developed. Literature has unfolded. Education has become a mania. In our pride we are saying, "We are wiser than our fathers." But this is attended with perilous moral evils. It is so easy now to become proud in our imaginations, confident in our reasoning, and scornful of the higher powers of the soul, in our admiration of the powers of the mind.

II. ANOTHER SIGN IS THE INTENSE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE. Facilities are now afforded for meeting the cravings of bodily pleasure which have nourished the cravings into a soul-mastering passion. The world of landscapes, of art, of science, of music, of poetry, of play, lays its treasures now at the feet of the poorest. And no good man can begrudge the world's toilers the relief which these later days can provide. But the passion for that which is pleasing is telling seriously on the sense of duty, and even on the higher moral qualities, on the reserve and self-restraint, which belong to the essence of noble character. What we *like* is coming to rule, rather than what we *ought*.

III. ANOTHER SIGN IS THE PRESSURE OF BUSINESS, AND THE HASTING TO BE RICH. Typified in the man who regretted the compulsory Sunday rest, because then he had no chance of making money. Success in life is fast becoming the modern Baal that outrivals Jehovah.

IV. ANOTHER SIGN IS THE CALL FOR INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL, RATHER THAN SPIRITUAL PREACHING. Men ask for "essays;" they chafe under "persuasions." They seek for "soothings;" they do not want "reproofs," "correction in righteousness," and inspirations to the pursuit of holiness.

V. ANOTHER SIGN IS THE MULTIPLICATION OF ORGANIZED FORMS OF CHRISTIAN WORK. Machinery taking the place of life. Men paying for the doing of what they should do themselves. Christ claims our personal service, the expression of our soul's vitality; and that claim can never be commuted for any money payment, or entrusted to any substitute. If, then, we can see signs of the Church's falling from its vocation, let us see that: 1. God must not be thought of as separated from the interests of a decaying Church. To cease to connect God with its condition is the last stage of a Church's decline. 2. God must be sought as the only Source of spiritual revival. We cannot remedy spiritual evils by any form of personal effort, if those are made

apart from dependence on God. 3. The revival of God's Church begins in the revival of individual souls.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*Expectancy of grace.* Illustrate by the words of the Prophet Habakkuk (ii. 1), "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me." The psalmist had been praying for full restoration, and gracious quickening of the national life. And the text reveals his attitude after prayer. Of answer he felt assured. Then for it he waits watchfully. His attitude is one of *expectancy*. And that attitude honours God. The New Testament commends "praying," and "watching thereunto."

I. THE ATTITUDE OF EXPECTANCY GIVES VALUE TO THE PRAYER. It declares that the man's heart was in it; that the subject was of vital interest to him; and that he believed in God as the "Prayer-answerer." It does more than this. It reveals that in the prayer there was a true *submission*. The man who watches for answer cannot but feel that the answer depends on the infinite wisdom and good will of his heavenly Father. He who truly says, "Thy will be done," watches that he may know the will, in order that he may *do* it. A prayer that is not followed by watching is a prayer of which God need take little heed, seeing it is evident that the man who prays cares but little about that for which he prays.

II. THE ATTITUDE OF EXPECTANCY SHOWS FIRM GRIP OF THE PROMISES. What the promises connected with prayer assure is *answer*—some kind of answer. But not the particular form and kind of answer which we desire. The man of faith lays hold of this promise of answer. No prayer is disregarded by God. If we may use an earthly figure which is suggestive, he never leaves his letters unanswered. But expectancy always links with submission, and leaves the form of answer to the Infinite Love. Illustrate by the response that came to the psalmist. The social and moral evils, that seemed to limit the Divine restoration, were gradually mastered, and true hearts can recognize, in *gradual* removal of evils, specific answers to their prayers.

III. THE ATTITUDE OF EXPECTANCY NOURISHES THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER. Because it keeps up the sense of dependence on God; and prayer is but the *expression* of that dependence. It is a first impulse to pray, when the soul is full of the spirit of dependence. Lose that, and the soul makes prayer the *last* thing. Keep that, and prayer is always the *first* thing. Meeting our expectancy, Christ seems to say to us, "According to your faith be it unto you."—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*Self-pleasing is folly.* "But let them not again turn to folly," or presumption. Sometimes the infatuation of sin is meant by the term "folly." Sometimes it is a synonym for "idolatry." Here the thing which is regarded as foolish is "following the devices and desires of their own heart," rather than watching for and doing the will of their God. A book was written some years ago to show that "all sin is folly." Wrong-doing, in the long run, serves nobody's real interests. And it has often been shown that the skill devoted to evil schemes would have accomplished valuable results, if only it had been devoted to right and good things. The special point in the text is, that the *saints* are those who have been *set right*, delivered from self-pleasing, and it is folly indeed for them to turn back upon the old spirit and the old ways.

I. THAT SELF-PLEASING IS FOLLY IS SHOWN BY THE NATURE OF THINGS. Man is not an independent, self-ordered being. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." He is God's child, and is no more safe, going alone, than is any other child.

II. THAT SELF-PLEASING IS FOLLY IS SHOWN BY THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE. It is but the fact that we have fallen into needless perplexities, difficulties, and sorrows, when we have tried to take our own independent course. We never have been strong and safe except when we leaned on God, and fully opened our heart and life to Divine guidance. Find the things in life which have *turned out to be foolish*; and searchingly inquire into the moods of mind and heart that were related to them.

III. THAT SELF-PLEASING IS FOLLY IS DECLARED IN THE DIVINE WORD. (See Ps. xlix. 13, "This their way is their folly.") The self-pleasing of the Israelites is represented by the expression, "a stiff-necked and uncircumcised generation;" and

in their history there are plentiful scenes of calamity into which their foolish self-willedness led them. The psalmist earnestly deprecates a return upon such self-pleasing which brings such needless difficulties. "He that sinneth," in his self-will, "sinneth against his own soul." It is true that he is wicked before God; but it is also true that he is foolish, in view of his highest interests.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*God and man working together.* "Truth springeth out of the earth; and righteousness hath looked down from heaven." This is poetic phraseology, which more prosaically may be stated thus: "When man is faithful to God, then God will be found faithful to man; and so God and man will work together for good." The psalmist sees quite plainly that the incomplete redemption can only be completed if the people put away their evils, and show themselves fully loyal to God. But he is quite confident that, if they do, then God will surely be faithful to them, and finish in them his work of grace. That God is to men as men are to him, and that he and they must work together if the full blessing is to be realized, was stated by an earlier psalmist. "With the merciful man thou wilt show thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright; with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward." Open this subject by illustrating the following topics:—

I. GOD AND MAN IN OPPOSITION. What God wants, man refusing. Show the confusion thus caused. And the hopelessness of man's state, if he persists in "running on the bosses of Jehovah's buckler."

II. GOD AND MAN IN INDIFFERENCE. This represents the more usual state of things. Men are often not strong enough to *actively resist*; but they say, "Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him?" And they say to him, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways!" But that indifference, which puts outside the Divine love and lead, is every whit as perilous for us as active opposition.

III. GOD AND MAN IN HARMONY. This is the ideal state—the relation designed in man's creation. Here naturally come in evangelical teachings respecting the way in which the designed harmony was lost, and the way in which that harmony can be recovered. The beauty of the scene suggested by these figures should be dwelt on. "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."—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*God's righteousness opening a way.* "The meaning of this difficult verse may probably be as follows: Righteousness shall go before him (Jehovah), and shall make his footsteps a pathway for his servants to walk in." "God's march of right will leave a track wherein his people will joyfully follow." Aben Ezra curiously explains this verse to mean, "He shall cause the man of righteousness to walk before him, and makes his footsteps for a way to him." Plainly the verse must be treated in the harmony of the psalm. Evidently the latter part is a vision of the spiritual and temporal deliverances and blessings which would surely come to the exiles—though now in much distress—if they turned heartily to Jehovah, and persisted in serving him in truth and righteousness. Among the blessings anticipated was prosperous harvesting from the land; and with this naturally goes safe guidance of national affairs, and a way out of national difficulties. God's faithfulness would go before the people in all their public affairs, opening for them the way in which they should go (see the term "righteousness" in ver. 11).

I. GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS, OR FAITHFULNESS, IS ACTIVE FOR HIS PEOPLE'S GOOD. It is "going before him;" it is not quiescent. "God for us" means "God working for us."

II. GOD'S ACTIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS IS TRIUMPHANT OVER DIFFICULTIES. Opening ways implies that ways have been closed. Hindrances have blocked them.

III. GOD'S ACTIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS WORKS FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE REDEEMPTIVE PURPOSE. There is an inspiring sense in which we may be sure that God must be true to himself. If he has purposed a thing, he will surely overcome all difficulties in the

way of its accomplishment. If he has planned the full redemption and sanctification of believers, it does not matter how impossible that may seem to him; "God's righteousness will surely go before him, and *make a way*."—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*Listening for God's voice.* The psalm was written on the return from Captivity.

I. THE BURDEN OF GOD'S SPEECH TO MAN. Peace. Peace with him. 1. The way of peace. 2. The nature of peace.

II. A DETERMINATION TO LISTEN. Man listens to man. 1. According to the claims of the speaker to be heard. 2. When the subject is interesting and important. 3. When the subject is important to him. Then we give the closest attention.

III. THE PRACTICAL EFFECT OF GOD'S SPEECH. "Let them not turn again to folly," i.e. wickedness. The wickedness will then be aggravated. It is then so well known to be wickedness. "If I had not spoken to them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin."—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXXVI.

THIS is the prayer of an afflicted and humble soul in a time of persecution (ver. 14), intermixed with outbursts of praise (vers. 5, 8—10, 15) and thankfulness (vers. 12, 13). It is assigned in the title to David, and contains nothing, either in matter or style, to make the ascription unlikely. Still, most modern critics regard the psalm as probably of a later date, and consider it the work of a less gifted psalmist than David. If not the production of a "great original mind," the psalm is nevertheless one of singular sweetness and beauty.

Metrically, it seems to divide itself, like Ps. lxxxv., into three strophes, two shorter, and one longer, the former being of five verses each, and the latter of seven.

Vers. 1—5.—Prayer, the predominant note of the entire psalm, holds almost exclusive possession of the first strophe, only passing into praise when the last verse is reached, where the petitioner reminds God of his loving-kindness and readiness to forgive.

Ver. 1.—Bow down thine ear, O Lord, hear me (comp. Ps. xxxi. 2; Prov. xxii. 17). For I am poor and needy; or, "I am afflicted and in misery." Poverty in the ordinary sense is scarcely intended.

Ver. 2.—Preserve my soul. It is one of the special offices of God to "preserve the souls of his saints" (Ps. xcvi. 10). He is not only man's Creator, but his "Preserver" (Job vii. 20; x. 12). For I am holy. The psalmist does not mean to claim for himself perfect holiness, but only that sincerity in religion which God's servants may rightly vindicate to themselves. O thou my God,

save thy servant that trusteth in thee (comp. Ps. xxxiv. 22; xxxvii. 40).

Ver. 3.—Be merciful unto me, O Lord; for I cry unto thee daily; rather, *all day long* (Revised Version).

Ver. 4.—Rejoice the soul of thy servant. The prayer rises from mere entreaties for relief and recovery from a state of suffering, into an earnest request for that which the heart of man is ever longing for and seeking after—gladness and joy. The faithful are promised that they shall come ultimately to a condition of exceeding great joy; but even saints are sometimes impatient, and want their joy in this world and at once. For unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul (comp. Ps. xxv. 1, entitled, like this, "a Psalm of David"). There is no more likely way of attaining to spiritual joy than to be always lifting up the soul to God.

Ver. 5.—For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive. The word translated "ready to forgive," *רָחוּם*, occurs here only; but the context sufficiently fixes its meaning, which is well expressed by the *ἐπιεικής* of the LXX. As God was "good" and "forgiving," he would be likely to grant the petitions just addressed to him. And plentiful in mercy unto all them that call upon thee (comp. Exod. xxxiv. 6; Joel ii. 13).

Vers. 6—10.—In this second strophe praise is predominant. Prayer occupies two verses only (vers. 6, 7); in the other three (vers. 8—10) God is magnified and glorified.

Ver. 6.—Give ear, O Lord, unto my prayer. An echo of ver. 1. The psalmist begins, as it were, afresh, calling God's attention to himself, as if he had not yet spoken. And attend to the voice of my supplications (comp. Ps. xvii. 1; lv. 2; lxi. 1, etc.). That God's ear is always attent to the prayers of

his people does not make it superfluous for them to entreat his attention. He will listen more favourably when besought to listen.

Ver. 7.—In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee (comp. vers. 1 and 14). The nature of the trouble is not distinctly stated; but it appears to have been caused by domestic rather than foreign enemies. For thou wilt answer me (comp. ver. 5).

Ver. 8.—Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord (see the Song of Moses, Exod. xv. 11). The imaginary gods of the heathen—not, perhaps, known to the psalmist to be wholly imaginary—are probably meant (comp. Pss. lxxvii. 19; lxxxix. 6; xc. 3). Neither are there any works like unto thy works. So in Deut. iii. 24, "What god is there in heaven or in earth that can do according to thy works?"

Ver. 9.—All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord (comp. Pss. lxxii. 11, 17; lxxxii. 8, etc.). Since God had made all nations (Acts xvii. 26), it was safe to conclude that they would all one day worship him. The prophecy, however, still remains unfulfilled. And shall glorify thy Name. Either with their lips, or in their lives, or in both ways. Compare the anticipations of Isaiah (lxvi. 23), Zephaniah (ii. 10), and Zechariah (xiv. 9, 16).

Ver. 10.—For thou art great, and doest wondrous things. The "greatness" of God, in reality most clearly manifested by the facts of his ordinary providence, seems to men in general, as it seemed to this psalmist, especially indicated by the "wonders," or "miracles"—*מוֹפְתִים*—which he wrought (comp. Exod. xv. 11; Pss. lxxii. 18; lxxvii. 14). Thou art God alone (see 2 Kings xix. 15; Isa. xxxvii. 16; xlv. 6, 8).

Vers. 11—17.—The third strophe is almost equally divided between prayer and praise, vers. 11, 16, and 17 being devoted to the one; and vers. 12, 13, and 15 to the other. Ver. 14 is of the nature of a complaint.

Ver. 11.—Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth (comp. Pss. xxv. 4; xxvii. 11; cxix. 33). Man cannot know "the way of the Lord," unless he is taught of God. The inward anointing of the Spirit is needful to teach us what God would really have us do (1 John ii. 27). It is only when we are thus taught that we can "walk in his truth." Unite my heart to fear thy Name. So Symmachus, who has *ἑνωσαν*; Canon Cook, Dr. Kay, Hupfeld, Professor Alexander, and the Revised Version. Hengstenberg prefers "incline my heart;" and Professor Cheyne would alter the text into accordance with the LXX., *ἐφρανθήτω ἡ καρδία μου*, "Make my heart to rejoice." But the textual

reading has the weight of authority in its favour, and gives an excellent sense, "Bring all my heart into unison, that it may be wholly fixed on thee." Compare the following verse.

Ver. 12.—I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart; i.e. "with an undivided heart." And I will glorify thy Name (see ver. 9) for evermore. A belief in immortality is implied, if not formally asserted.

Ver. 13.—For great is thy mercy toward me (see ver. 5). And thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell. The actual deliverance was from death (ver. 14); but death involved descent into Hades, so that those who were delivered from the one were at the same time delivered from the other. The expression translated "the lowest hell" means no more than "Hades which is beneath the earth." No comparison is made of one part of Hades with another.

Ver. 14.—O God, the proud are risen against me (comp. Ps. cxix. 51, 69, 85, 122; and also Ps. liv. 3). And the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; rather, *a crew of violent ones have sought after my soul*, or "plotted against my life" (comp. Pss. vii. 1, 2; xvii. 13; xxxv. 3, 4, etc.). And have not set thee before them; i.e. "have given no thought to God, or how he would act, whether he would allow their wickedness or prevent it."

Ver. 15.—But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion. The appeal is to God's own revelation of himself. He had declared that he was "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7); he could not, therefore, desert the psalmist in his need. And gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth (comp. above, ver. 5; and see also Numb. xiv. 18; Joel ii. 13; Jonah iv. 2).

Ver. 16.—Oh turn unto me, and have mercy upon me. God had for a time turned his face away from his servant; now he is entreated to turn it towards him, and, as a consequence, to "have mercy upon him" and deliver him. Give thy strength unto thy servant. Only in God's strength can we effectually contend against either our spiritual or our temporal foes. If, however, we ask him for strength, his strength will be "sufficient for us" (2 Cor. xii. 9). And save the son of thine handmaid. Either "the son of one who was specially religious," like the mother of Timothy (2 Tim. i. 5), or "the son of an Israelitish mother," therefore born and bred up in thy household.

Ver. 17.—Show me a token for good; i.e. give me some sign—not necessarily a

miraculous one—that thou art dealing with me, not for evil, but “for good” (Jer. xxiv. 6), and that thou wilt grant me that which I have requested of thee. That they which hate me may see it. A visible token is therefore requested, not a mere inward conviction or assurance (see 2 Kings xx. 8; Isa. vii.

11). And be ashamed (comp. Pss. vi. 10; lvi. 17; cxix. 78, etc.). Because thou, Lord, hast helped me, and comforted me. The psalmist’s deliverance would be his enemies’ shame; it would show that God was on his side, and against them.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 11.—*A comprehensive prayer.* “Unite my heart to fear thy Name,” etc. This rich and elevated psalm is well called in the title “a prayer,” rather than “a psalm.” It is more devout than poetical. Its distinctive character is the remarkable union of intense personal feeling with large views of God’s character and relation to mankind (ver. 9). This has led critics to speak of it as “liturgical,” overlooking the deep strain of personal feeling, leading the psalmist even (ver. 16) to plead that he is the child of a godly mother, as well as (ver. 2) that he is “holy”—*q.d.* either consecrated to God, or one on whom God bestows grace.¹ This petition, “Unite my heart,” etc., is one of great compass, grandeur, simplicity, bespeaking a heart already fixed on God. It seeks—

I. A SUPREME AFFECTION. A master-passion, to which all other desires and affections shall be subordinate. The worldly mind, just because it is worldly, is torn by conflicting desires—the prey of passions or feelings, each of which seeks mastery. For the world (as St. John describes it, 1 John ii. 16) has no unity; a mass of contradictions, rivalries, inconsistent objects of desire. Only the heart which has learned to say, “*Thou art my Portion*” (Ps. cxix. 57), has found the principle of unity, the key-note which can put all the heart’s pure and true affections in tune.

II. A SINGLE AIM. A master-purpose, to which all other objects must yield, and which gives back colour to the whole life. Successful men are characterized by singleness and earnestness of aim. A limited and narrow man will carry his point, if it be the *one thing* he lives for; while men of splendid genius waste their powers, and become splendid failures for lack of concentration and motive power (see Phil. iii. 13, 14). The hottest diffused sunshine kindles no flame; but concentrate but a few rays with a glass on one point, and flame bursts forth. Supreme love to Christ, and a single eye to his service and approval, give a unity to life which is a great element of success, even in what we call worldly affairs (Col. iii. 3).

III. UNDOUBTING CONVICTION. Strong, unwavering faith. Doubt distracts, agitates, unsettles, weakens (Jas. i. 8). A doubting temper, fond of dwelling on difficulties and objections, is fatal to unity of mind, heart, and will. Doubts, if they assail you, are neither to be timidly shrunk from nor idly played with, but honestly faced and fought. But the grand secret of conviction is to dwell first and constantly on the *positive evidence* of truth. If that is adequate, unanswerable, then a thousand questions we cannot at present answer need not trouble us. They can wait; but *facts* will not wait. Here is a great secret, not only of *strength*, but of *rest*. And in rest is a reservoir of energy (Isa. xxvi. 3; John xiv. 1).

What grand possibilities there are in the Christian life! If an Old Testament saint could put up such a prayer, *and have it answered*, how much more may it be fulfilled in our experience!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The psalmist’s prayers and pleas.* We do not know for certain the author, the date, or the circumstances of this psalm; nor for its ministry of help to us is it needful that we should. It is the fervent utterance of a devout and believing but distressed soul. Consider—

¹ In Isa. lvi. 1 for “merciful men” we may render literally, “men of grace,” which seems to express this double idea.

I. THE PRAYERS. Even in these few verses we note: 1. *How numerous they are!* "Bow down thine ear;" "Preserve my soul;" "Save me;" "Be merciful unto me;" "Rejoice the soul of thy servant." 2. *How substantially the same!* Repetitions need not be "vain repetitions;" they are often the reverse of vain; indeed, in many moods of our soul, they are indispensable. The soul is slow and sluggish; its *vis inertiae* hard to be overcome, and it is found by many that repetition, "saying the same words," is a great help in arousing thought and fixing the mind on the sacred duty before it. 3. *But varied in form.* This is also very helpful in prayer. Stereotyped forms, unless we be very watchful, will flow over the mind and never arouse a solitary thought. It is good, therefore, to compel the mind to express itself in varied form; for so our prayer is likely to be both more real and more helpful. 4. *And progressive in meaning.* The psalmist begins with simply entreating God to hear him, to give him audience; then he asks for his chief need to be supplied, and that he may be delivered, saved; then, that his unworthiness may be overlooked, that God would be merciful to him; and lastly, that the Lord would rejoice his soul, not merely preserve and save him, but more—give him joy. It is ever an upward advance, as our prayer should be. 5. *And confident in trust.* The opening petition is one of the many proofs that prior to the Incarnation the saints of God had come to the full conviction of the humanity of God. This cry that God would "bow down" his "ear" is one of those anthropomorphic, as they are called, expressions, of which the Old Testament is so full. How often do we read of the eyes, feet, hand, face, ear, of God! They are not mere figures; but they tell of the recognized truth that God was as we are—apart from our weakness, limitation, and sin. And the psalmist has laid hold of this truth, and it is his encouragement as he pours forth his prayer. Thus in a very real sense the prayers of the Jewish Church were, as are ours, offered through Jesus Christ our Lord. "They, as do we, came to the Father by him; for "no man cometh unto the Father but by me," said our Lord, nor otherwise have any ever come.

II. THE PLEAS URGED. They are full of power, and in them, as in the prayers they support, there is variety and advance in thought. 1. *His deep need.* (Ver. 1.) Unless this be felt, there will never be real prayer. 2. *His relationship to God.* (Ver. 2.) "For I am one whom thou lovest." This, the rendering of the margin, is preferable to the text either of the Authorized Version, which is, "I am holy," or of the Revised Version, which is, "I am godly." It avoids the self-righteous tone which seems inseparable from these readings, and declares his confidence begotten by favours received from God in the past. 3. *His trust.* 4. *His continued prayer.* He had waited on the Lord, confident that his trust would be sustained. 5. *The declared Name of God.* (Ver. 5.) He who believingly urges that cannot fail of the Divine aid according to his need.—S. C.

Ver. 9.—*Grace triumphant.* The declaration of God's ultimate possession of all hearts, which is involved in this verse, is found not here alone (cf. Pss. xxii. 27; lxxvi. 4; Isa. lxxvi. 18, 23; John xii. 32; Phil. ii. 10, 11, etc.); and, assuredly, it is the spirit of the whole Scripture. And such considerations as the following sustain such blessed belief.

I. THAT IT IS A FAITH WHICH SO COMMENDS ITSELF TO THE CONSCIENCE OF MEN. It is what ought to be, what we cannot help hoping may be, that God's will may be done everywhere and by all.

II. THE OPPOSITE BELIEF IS PRACTICALLY ATHEISTICAL. For it necessitates that we believe (1) that either God would save all men, but could not—in which case he would not be God, because some other had evidently greater power than he; or (2) that God could save, but would not, which is plainly contradictory of the whole Scripture, and, were it true, God would be no longer God. Either theory leads direct to atheism.

III. IT IS INCREDIBLE THAT GOD WOULD HAVE CONTINUED TO CREATE BEINGS WHOM HE KNEW MUST ETERNALLY SIN AND SUFFER. Creation involves redemption. Had he been unable to redeem, he would not have created.

IV. CHRIST WAS MANIFESTED TO DESTROY THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL. But if any are for ever unsaved, then Christ has not accomplished the work he came to do, and the victory belongs not to him, but to Satan.

V. THE WORTH OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT. It is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. But some may say, "It is of no use to any one unless he trusts it." That is so; but our contention is that the resources of God are adequate to bring men to give up their own evil will, and to cast themselves in penitence and trust on God. Has he not already brought round the most stubborn of human wills? He knows how to make the prodigal come to himself, and to say, "I will arise," etc.

VI. HE HAS TAUGHT US TO PRAY, "THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS," ETC. But this is what our text predicts; and he would not have bidden us pray that prayer if it was never to be fulfilled. All this is no encouragement to sin, for it teaches that God will leave no means untried, no matter how terrible they may be, and for the hardened sinner they will be terrible, to subdue to himself the perverse and unruly will of man.—S. C.

Ver. 11.—*True religion, and what it calls for.* I. THE ESSENCE OF ALL TRUE RELIGION IS THE FEAR OF GOD. "To fear thy Name," says the psalmist, and so saying he sets forth the central nature of real religion. But this fear (1) *is not the fear which has torment*; or (2) *that which is simply the reasonable dread of penalty*,—the fear of the law-abiding citizen; but it is (3) *the fear begotten of love*,—the fear of an affectionate child, which makes it careful to obey. Whatever we love we are careful to obey the laws of—whether it be art, science, parents. And so with the fear of God. It is seen in all saints.

II. THERE CAN BE NO SUCH RELIGION UNLESS THE HEART BE IN IT. Intellect may be there, Reason give her assent. Approval may be expressed—it often is. Deep feeling experienced, this not unusual; but unless the heart, the will—for this is the real meaning of the word "heart"—be in our religion, we practically have none.

III. NOR THEN UNLESS THE HEART BE UNITED IN IT. Some minds are not fixed on anything; they are perpetual waverers. Others are fixed, set, wrongly but "steadfastly to do evil." But they are blessed who are described in our text. Oh to be able to say, "O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed"!—S. C.

Ver. 17.—*Tokens for good.* We remark upon the prayer contained in this verse—

I. THAT SUCH PRAYER MAY BE AN IMPROPER ONE. Our Lord said to the people of his day, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." And how many to-day are like these people! Now, such request for tokens is wrong: 1. *When we presume to select tokens for ourselves.* God may allow this, as he did to Gideon in connection with the fleece of wool; but it is very improper for us to be stipulating for specific signs. With how many their religion is one dependent on their feelings, and varies as they do! Naaman "turned, and went away in a rage" (2 Kings v.), because God's prophet did not fulfil his idea as to the way in which he should be healed. 2. *When we trust to a token more than we do to the Word of testimony.* St. Peter, though he had seen the glorious vision on the Transfiguration mount—a token for good, if ever there was one—is yet careful to add, "But we have the more sure word of prophecy." And of all our tokens, as well as all our opinions, we are bound to bring them "to the Law, and to the testimony," and there test them; for "if they be not according to this word, it is because there is no truth in them." And not a few of men's fancied tokens have turned out to have no truth in them. 3. *When we withhold faith till we have some token which we think will justify it.* (See Luke i. 18.) And when the Jews demanded a sign from heaven, as they were perpetually doing, it was refused them, as such requests ever will be (cf. Luke i. 18).

II. SUCH PRAYER IS NEVER ONE WHOSE ANSWER IS ESSENTIAL. For without any such special tokens as we might wish for, there is no child of God but has tokens for good in abundance. 1. *There is the Lord Jesus Christ.* Is he not God's great and eternal token for good to us? 2. *And the fact that God has created us,* brought us into being. Would he have done that had he meant evil to us? "Known unto God are all his works." 3. *And the further fact that we have come to Christ,* are trusting him now, and the Holy Spirit is doing his blessed work in us still. 4. *All the promises of God,* so exceeding great and precious,—are not all these tokens for good? Assuredly they are.

III. BUT IT IS, AT TIMES, A PERMISSIBLE ONE. It was so in the case of the psalmist. For in spite of all difficulties he looked to God; his troubles drove him to God, and to God only, and not to the help of men. Such a man was not one who would arbitrarily select some given token, or who would trust it more than the Word of God, or who would withhold his belief until it was given. But he desired it for the conviction and discomfiture of his enemies, as well as for the confirmation of his own faith.

IV. AND GOD HAS OFTEN GIVEN SUCH TOKENS. Moses and the rod; Gideon with the fleece; Hezekiah with his dial. And he gives the like still, in answers to prayer, in providential help, in support under trial, in unlooked-for events.

V. THE RESULTS WHICH HAVE FOLLOWED. God's enemies have been ashamed. See in Israel's history, when God gave them such tokens, how we read of their enemies having "no more spirit in them." And still, when God visibly sustains his people, unbelievers look on and are silent in fear, because conscious of the presence of God. But let us remember that we are never without tokens for good.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Man's claims on God.* Historical associations for this psalm cannot be fixed with any confidence. It may be a fragment of David's which was enlarged and adapted, in a later age, to liturgical purposes. Its fragmentary character must strike every careful reader. It is suitable for any pious soul that is in distress, and is a fitting utterance for our burdened hearts. The point before us now is, that the pious soul feels it has claims on God, and may plead those claims in prayer before him. Right ideas of the sovereignty of the Divine mercy can be held along with clear convictions of man's claims on God, if only we keep fully before us that the claims are wholly based on relations in which God has been pleased to *set himself*. If he condescends, in his infinite love, to enter into covenant with his people, then we may recognize that he puts himself into the limitations and obligations of the pledges he takes. If we are faithful to our pledge in covenant, we can *claim* that God should be faithful to his pledge in the covenant. This is in part the feeling of the psalmist; and if associated with a due dependence, humility, and submission, it is a right and worthy feeling. A child has claims on his father; and if he does so in a childlike spirit, he may plead those claims before his father. It has been wisely said of our text, "This is not the highest ground that can be taken in pressing for an answer to our prayer, but it is a ground which God suffers us to take."

I. THE PLEAS BY WHICH THE PSALMIST'S PRAYER IS URGED. Notice that they concern the psalmist himself, and the conditions in which he is placed. It may seem unworthy thus to speak of himself; but if a man is to be sincere, he must say the truth about himself; and no harm comes when he says it out to God, because we cannot be boastful *before him*. In vers. 1—3 we find four descriptions of the psalmist himself, made into pleas. 1. He is *poor*. This may refer to circumstances, but more probably it is a word for humble-mindedness; the feeling of the man who wants God because he knows he cannot help himself. 2. He is *needy*. Which may mean in distress, or may express an actual longing for, and crying for, God's help. 3. He is *holy*; which simply means, "one of thy saints"; "one who is in the full covenant relations with thee"; "one whom thou favourest"; "one whose habit of life is piety." If this is true of us, it need not be a wrong thing to say so. 4. Trustful and prayerful. Actually reliant; honouring God by a full confidence. And God surely responds to all who put their trust in him.

II. THE PRAYER WHICH THE PLEAS ARE EMPLOYED TO URGE. For Divine help. 1. *Bow down* to the poor. 2. *Preserve* the godly. 3. *Save* the trustful. 4. Be merciful to him who cries. The requests for precisely adapted grace.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Man's soul a sphere of Divine influence.* "Preserve my soul." In the Old Testament the term "soul" is often used as we use the term "life." But there always seems within the term more or less perfect apprehension of the truth that the *soul* is the *man*. The commonly received division of man's being is into "body" and "soul;" but a more scientific analysis divides into *body*—which includes animal soul, or life—and *spirit*. The "tripartite division" is body, soul, spirit. As a moral redemption, the work of Christ has brought prominently before us that man is a *spiritual being*. As

Dr. George Macdonald expresses it, "We are accustomed to say that we are bodies, and have souls; whereas we should say—We are souls, and have bodies."

I. MAN'S SOUL IS THE SPHERE OF GOD'S MORAL TRAINING. We may see God in history; but his supreme interest is in characters, not in events. We may see God in providence; but we fail to see him aright, unless we trace the influence of incidents on our principles and on our spirit. Everything has a moral side and a moral mission. God is ever moulding disposition and character, which are the shapings of the soul. This is true of every man. Humanity to God is a collection of spirits, or spiritual beings, set for their moral training in varied bodily forms and relations.

II. MAN'S SOUL IS THE SPHERE OF GOD'S REDEMPTIONS. The mistake made about Christ the Saviour in the days of his flesh was quite a representative mistake. Men thought he came to deliver a *nation* from foreign dominion; whereas he came to save *souls* from sin. The body-redemptions follow on as the natural consequences of the spiritual redemptions. God's great work is saving *souls* from death. Therefore it is that before we can hope that Christ and his work will ever be appreciated, we are compelled to awaken soul-anxiety; or, in other words, seek to produce conviction of sin. When our Lord's saving work is fully studied as a *moral* redemption, a quickening of souls with a Divine life rather than an adjustment of broken external relations, the full mystery of it will be revealed and realized.

III. MAN'S SOUL IS THE SPHERE OF THE DIVINE SANCTIFYINGS. The present work of the living Christ, realized by us as the inworking of the Holy Ghost, is not the change of the things with which we have to do, but a change of the relations in which we stand to the things; a change wrought *in us*—wrought in the souls that we are. This change, in effect, changes the character of the *things* with which we have to do.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*God incomparable*. "Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord." It may be asked—Why should God be compared with gods that Scripture so vigorously declares are no gods? It is enough to reply that all teachers must come down to the level of those whom they would teach; and begin by accepting their ideas in order to lead them on and up to higher and worthier. Calvin puts this point well. "Should any one assert that it is unseemly to compare God to the empty fictions, the answer is easy; the discourse is accommodated to the ignorance of men, because we know how daringly superstitious men raise their whims above the heavens." The psalmist has in view a basis of comparison which is foreign to our mode of thinking. In his day the deities were conceived as limited and local beings, who belonged to particular countries. If the general name Baal was used, some qualifying name was added, which indicated the Baal worshipped in a particular district. With this idea in their minds, men might say of Jehovah, "He is only the God of Palestine." This view of God the whole Bible vigorously protests against, and claims for Jehovah sole Divinity; he is out of the range of so-called "gods;" he cannot be compared with any. This subject may be opened out, with present-day applications, by showing that—

I. God is incomparable as the ONLY UNCAUSED BEING.

II. God is incomparable as an UNSEEN SPIRITUAL BEING.

III. God is incomparable as an INFINITELY HOLY BEING.

IV. God is incomparable as the ONE BEING WHO CLAIMS UNIVERSAL HOMAGE.

V. God is incomparable as the BEING WHO HAS ABSOLUTE POWER OVER ALL THINGS.

VI. God is the BEING WHO REQUIRES A SERVICE OF CHARACTER, expressed in act and conduct—not of conduct alone.

Scriptures dwell on this uniqueness of God (see Exod. xv. 11; Deut. iii. 24; Isa. xl. etc.). Being what he is, God alone, God all-mighty, God all-holy, he rightly claims that we should love him and serve him, "with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength." He must be first with us, because he stands forth before us as *incomparable*.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*God glorifying his own Name*. By letting that Name be known among the Gentiles, so that they glorify him. At last all the world shall unite in lifting up holy hands and loving hearts to God, and unite in singing, "Praise God, praise God;"

This conception of the universal acknowledgment of Jehovah is strange for an exclusive Jew, and is a foreshadowing of Christian ideas. We are to think of God as seeking the glorifying of his Name in this—that every creature made in his image unites in the glorifying. “All nations shall come and worship.” “The Gentile deities being obviously inferior to Jehovah, the psalmist foresees that one day the Creator will become known to the Gentiles, and the Church of God be extended without limit.” “The pious Jews believed that God’s common relation to all would be ultimately acknowledged by all men.” The name of God is usually and properly regarded as any term which gathers up and expresses the attributes and characteristics of God. Illustrate by the way in which a simple term will express a scientific theory.

I. THE NAME, OR NAMES, GOD HAS GIVEN US OF HIMSELF. The earliest name men knew seems to have been *El*, which, in a general way, expresses the *Creatorship* of God. This name is common to the human race. It is found in the singular and plural forms, and in combination with some other name, as *El Shaddai*. Then, one race knew God in special covenant relations; and as the *covenant* God he is known as Jahveh, or Jehovah. As if the thing which man pledges to preserve were the truth of the self-origination, unity, and spirituality of God! Then God found a name for himself which would make constant appeal to man’s *experience* of his dealings, and called himself “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Then God found precise names for himself, suitable for individuals, or for the nation in particular circumstances. Compare the name for Abraham, “I am thy Shield;” for David, “The Lord is my Shepherd;” for the nation, “The Lord our Righteousness.” Lead up to the fixing of one name for God by the Lord Jesus Christ—“our Father.” If God gives us a name for himself, he pledges himself to all that is involved in the name. In faithfulness to what it demands and involves, he will glorify it.

II. THE NAME, OR NAMES, MEN HAVE GIVEN TO GOD OUT OF THEIR EXPERIENCE OF HIS WAYS. The work of a man’s life may be represented as “finding a name of his own for God.” It may be the same that some one else has found, and yet be the man’s own. In faithfulness to what each man’s name for God claims, each man glorifies him. Then point out that God’s name is glorified (1) by being duly sustained; (2) by being efficiently responded to; and (3) by being widely made known. “Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is King,” and they will swell the chorus of his praise.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*The desire to be whole-hearted.* This verse contains a prayer “against distraction and division of heart, of course with the desire of its being knit as a whole to God.” Perowne expresses the idea skilfully, “Suffer my heart no longer to scatter itself upon a multiplicity of objects, to be drawn hither and thither by a thousand different aims; but turn all its powers, all its affections, in one direction, collect them in one focus, make them all one in thee.” Our Lord impressed the importance of this unity of aim and purpose by his teachings concerning “singleness of eye.” And he taught us the secret of unifying all our powers and affections. It can only be done by making God and his service our Centre—“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” To the earnest, right-hearted man, the tendency to distraction of mind is a constant anxiety. He is troubled by distraction in devotion, in worship, in motive, and in service. Consciousness of this forces the prayer of our text.

I. DISTRACTION IN DEVOTION. All books on the “interior life” deal with this difficulty, and suggest methods by which it may be overcome. But even if good habits can be formed, we are always liable to the intrusion of things in which, at the time, we are specially interested—matters of business, engagements to be kept, etc. The hurried character of modern private devotion puts in serious peril the unity of our hearts in such seasons. The mind is sure to be elsewhere.

II. DISTRACTION IN WORSHIP. When the words are *known*, they may be spoken while the mind is *otherwise*. When the words are *unknown*, the mind may fail to be exercised with them. The difference between times of devotion and worship lies in this—in private devotion, the mind must be active; in worship, another mind than ours is active, and ours is passive and recipient. To the passive mind the intrusion of other interests is easier than to the active mind. Therefore our worship should be arranged so as to excite the active co-operation of all who take part in it.

III. **DISTRACTION IN MOTIVE.** Probably none of us do things from absolutely pure motives. If we read our hearts aright, we find evil and unworthy motives really swaying us, when we half deceive ourselves with the idea that our motives are high and noble. And at best the motives are "mixed." The *self* is prominent.

IV. **DISTRACTION IN SERVICE.** Our purpose may be to set God first, and with this we may begin. But division of interests soon comes in, and we find that we are but "following the devices and desires of our own hearts." There is hope in the desire to be undivided, whole-hearted. We want a single, steady aim. We want to have no object before our minds save the glory of God. And we want every force and faculty of our being brought into a unity of consecration.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*The plea for more grace.* What God has done is made into a ground for pleading that he would do even more abundantly. A psalmist can ask great things when he is well assured that he who has given *much* grace can give *more* grace. The plea based on what God has done is made to include two things—soul-redemption, life-benediction. These are well expressed in the Revised Version of Ps. lvi. 13, "For thou hast delivered my soul from death: hast thou not delivered my feet from falling?" The review is more complete in Ps. cxvi. 8, "For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling."

I. WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US SHOWS US WHAT HE CAN DO.

II. WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US SHOWS US WHAT HE WILL DO.

III. WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US GIVES US AN ARGUMENT TO URGE WITH HIM.

IV. WHAT GOD HAS DONE SETS US UPON MAINTAINING THE CONDITIONS ON WHICH THE BLESSINGS HAVE COME TO US. For we are not straitened either in God's power or God's will. If straitened, it can only be because we fail to respond to the Divine conditions.—R. T.

Ver. 15.—*God's graciousness.* "Full of compassion, and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth." The term "gracious," as applied to God, brings in ideas of tenderness, gentleness, considerateness, in dealing with those who are frail and weak. It is like "pitiful," but does not imply conditions of special poverty or distress. "Gracious" fits into God's ordinary ways with ordinary people. If we used the term of our fellow-men, we should single out those who were sympathetic and sweet-mannered and gentle-toned. It brings in a somewhat fresh, and a very attractive, view of God, thus to associate the word "gracious" with him. The precise shades of meaning that may be attached to the term will come to view upon a study of the following passages: Exod. xxii. 27, "And it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious;" Exod. xxxiv. 6, "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious;" 2 Sam. xii. 22, "Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?" Neh. ix. 17, "A God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful;" Ps. iv. 1, margin, "Be gracious unto me, and hear my prayer;" Isa. xxx. 18, "And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you;" Jonah iv. 2, "For I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." Evidently the term is used to express God's relations with *sinners*, as distinct from his relations with *sin*; and it especially describes the Divine response to *penitent sinners*. "Grace," as favour, mercy, was the highest blessing under the Old Testament dispensation. Joseph, in the fulness of his feelings on seeing his brother Benjamin, cried, "God be gracious to thee, my son!" The synonyms of the term "gracious" may be found suggestive—kindly, beneficent, benignant, condescending, pleasing. Bring out the point that not only does God save and sanctify, but he saves and sanctifies in a gentle, considerate, and delightful way. Put into a figure, he never "breaks the bruised reed, or quenches the smoking flax."—R. T.

Ver. 17.—*The cheer of God's tokens.* It is a subject of inquiry that we find God sometimes granting, and sometimes refusing to grant, signs and tokens. The reason of his various dealing appears to be this—he is willing to help weak *faith*; he is unwilling to give opportunities to *unbelief*. These points may be illustrated from Old and New Testament narrative; e.g. to Gideon God granted the sign or token of the

"fleece," because Gideon wanted to believe, but needed help to believing. The scribes and Pharisees who sought a sign, or token, of the Messiahship of Jesus were refused, because they had no intention of allowing themselves to be persuaded by it, but meant to turn it to account in intensifying their prejudice against Jesus. A pious man may always freely ask God for a token; but whether one is given to him will entirely depend upon the attitude and mood of his mind, and upon the Divine judgment that a token will be a real good to him. Withholding the tokens for which we long and pray is sometimes a form of Divine discipline. What is referred to by the psalmist here is not a miraculous sign, such as Gideon had, but some evident striking proof, in ordinary daily relations, of God's good will to him. Tholuck says, "Is it not the fact that the more we recognize in every daily occurrence God's secret inspiration guiding and controlling us, the more will all which to others wears a common, everyday aspect to us prove a sign and a wondrous work."

I. THE DESIRE FOR TOKENS OF GOD'S GOOD WILL. Those reconciled to God want to keep up the sense of reconciliation. Modern tokens may be expected in two ways. 1. In an evident ordering and controlling of our outward circumstances. We may see the "good hand of our God upon us for good." Doors opened. Ways made plain. Hindrances taken out of the way. 2. In the comfortable sense of God's love in our souls; the inward communications of Divine grace.

II. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THE DESIRE WAS CHERISHED. That God's service might be commended to others. And that the proofs of Divine favour might so influence the foes of the psalmist, that the strain of their enmity might be relieved. He felt that those who were bitter against him would change their ways if they saw, by some plain sign, that God was on his side.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*Single-heartedness*. "Unite my heart to fear thy Name."

I. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE PRAYER? 1. *It is prayer against double-mindedness*. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh," etc. Two masters in the house whom we alternately serve—the heavenly and the earthly. Two steering the boat of our lives. 2. *For wholeness or entireness of mind in the service of God*. That the divided heart may be made one. That the conflicting aims should be destroyed by the strength and superiority of the one aim—to love and serve God as our Father.

II. THE ANSWER TO THE PRAYER WOULD INCLUDE: 1. *A sense of oneness with God*. Let a man honestly and truly give himself to God, and make no reserves; let him determine to be true and faithful,—then he comes at once into the secret of *faith and acceptance and fellowship* with God, and he keeps the secret pure and bright. 2. *Triumphant strength*. Secret of strength is concentration upon a supreme aim and singleness of purpose. We cannot work out two plans of life that are in their nature *mutually exclusive*. When we can set aside all compromises and serve God with a united heart, we shall no longer be constantly baffled and defeated by our temptations, but able to cry with joy, "Thanks be unto God, that giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" 3. *This will give us real peace*. The peace of conscious *rectitude*; feeling that our purpose is honest and simple—to be Christ's without reserve. The peace of a great *deliverance*; and feel that we are the subjects of a great salvation. The peace of a great *fearlessness*; nothing to terrify the man who is at one with God; sits above all storms, and is secure and at home with God.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXXVII.

THIS short psalm, opening with the praise of Zion, or of the Jewish Church (vers. 1—3), passes into a glorification of the Church universal, when all the nations have come into it (vers. 4—7). The glorification falls under two heads—God's acknowledgment

of those who flock into his Church (vers. 4—6), and their acknowledgment of the blessings which they receive through it. The two "selahs" divide the psalm into two stanzas, each of three verses, and a short epode consisting of a single verse.

Vers. 1—3.—The praises of Zion. (1) She is built upon the holy mountains; (2)

God loves her pre-eminently; and (3) a glorious future is assigned to her in the counsels of God.

Ver. 1.—His foundation is in the holy mountains. God's foundation—the city which he has founded—is “in the holy mountains;” i.e. in the hill country of Judæa, a congeries of mountains, “holy,” since they surround the holy city and belong to the “holy land” (Zech. ii. 12).

Ver. 2.—The Lord loveth the gates of Zion (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 68). More than all the dwellings of Jacob; i.e. “more than all the other dwellings”—more than Shiloh, more than Kirjath-jearim, more than any other of the ark's resting-places.

Ver. 3.—Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. The psalmist probably refers in part to the predictions of older prophets, but also in part to the revelations made to himself, which he is on the point of recording (vers. 4-7).

Vers. 4-6.—The Almighty is introduced as making a revelation to the psalmist. He will cause the Gentiles to flock into his Church, even those who have been hitherto the most bitter enemies of Israel (ver. 4), and will place these strangers on a par with such as have belonged to his Church from their birth (vers. 4, 5, 6), admitting them to every blessing and every privilege. The Church, thus augmented, shall be taken under his own protection, and “established,” or placed on a sure footing, for ever. Compare our Lord's promise to St. Peter, “On this rock will I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. xvi. 18).

Ver. 4.—I will make mention of Rahab; i.e. of Egypt. The context requires this meaning, which is found also in Ps. lxxxix. 10 and in Isa. li. 9. Literally “Rahab”

means “pride, arrogance.” And Babylon. The fitting counterpart of Egypt, equally antagonistic to Israel, and equally lifted up with pride and presumption. To them that know me; rather, among them that know me; i.e. as belonging to them, included in their number (comp. Isa. xix. 21, “And the Lord shall be known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day;” and see also Ps. lxxii. 11, 17; lxxxii. 8; Isa. lxvi. 23). Behold Philistia, and Tyra, with Ethiopia. Other hostile nations (comp. Ps. lxxxiii. 7; 2 Chron. xii. 3; xiv. 9-13). This man was born there. There is no “man” in the original, and it is better to understand “nation;” this, that, and the other nation—all those mentioned, and others—are grafted into Zion, and have a second birth there.

Ver. 5.—And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her. A repetition, but emphatic, and perhaps intended to assert of individuals what in the preceding verse was said of nations. And the highest himself shall establish her; literally, and he, the highest, shall establish her (comp. Matt. xvi. 18). The Church is “established” on a Rock, for ever.

Ver. 6.—The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the people; rather, the peoples, (see ver. 4). That this man was born there. He shall enregister every individual among the converted nations as a true citizen of Zion, entitled to all covenant privileges.

Ver. 7.—As well the singers as the players on instruments; literally, and singers as well as dancers [shall say]. (On dancing as an element of religious service, see Exod. xv. 20; 2 Sam. vi. 16; Ps. lxxviii. 25; cxlix. 3; cl. 4.) The psalmist intends to represent the converted nations as coming in a grand procession, with songs and dances, to celebrate their admission to Zion, and there one and all exclaiming, All my fresh springs—i.e. “all my sources of life, and joy, and happiness”—are in thee. The verse is possibly but “fragment,” as Professor Cheyne supposes.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 3.—The glory of the Church. “Glorious things,” etc. It is a glorious thing to be a real Christian. Glorious because of the relation such a one holds to God and to Christ—a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. iv. 7; Rom. viii. 16, 17). Glorious also because of his relation to the Church of God—a citizen of the heavenly city, a member of the fellowship of saints, the brotherhood of the faithful, the spiritual body of which Christ is the living Head (Col. i. 18; 1 Cor. xii. 13). But it is a glory hid from worldly eyes—one of “the things of the Spirit of God” which are “spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. ii. 14). Hence St. Paul's prayer (Eph. i. 18).

I. THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH'S HISTORY. If we would earnestly and wisely study the history which the Scriptures record, the inspiration of the Scriptures would speak for itself. Because history is written on different principles here from anywhere else.

In these points (to name no others): 1. Everywhere the hand of God is seen as the supreme factor in human affairs. Not in miracle, except at those special crises and occasions where miracles were the fittest means. These, not scattered at random, but in groups, at certain junctures. But the constant presence and exercise of *God's* knowledge, purpose, power, goodness; like the pressure of the atmosphere, never felt, never absent. 2. Under God, *character*, personal and national, is seen to be the decisive force in human life. The great men of the world have been great by ability, force of will, genius, circumstances. Some distinguished men of genius, rulers, etc., have been eminent saints; but this is not the rule. Bible heroes are spiritual heroes. Their sins, faithfully portrayed, were their weakness; their victory was always the victory of faith, prayer, godly sincerity (see Heb. xi.). "Faith"—not opinion, creed, speculation, but undoubting trust in God, proved by and producing fearless obedience. This psalm refers, of course, in its first meaning to the earthly Jerusalem. But it is full of predictions to be fulfilled only by the gospel of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit "on all flesh." The great lesson of the history of ancient Israel is in reality not that which lies on the surface, in the political and national form of the Church, its rigid laws, the glories of David and Solomon, the priestly rites and material splendour of temple worship, but that which our Saviour taught, "My kingdom is not of this world." Spiritual, not material forms govern human life.

II. THE LIVING, ABIDING PRESENCE OF GOD. (Ps. xli. 5.) Under the old dispensation, every possible means was used to impress and to symbolize this central truth; and at the same time to surround and guard it with an awe and majesty, without which it would have been vulgarized and rendered spiritually powerless. Israel was never suffered to forget that *their* God was also God of the whole earth, Almighty Creator, universal Lord. The New Testament doctrine and promise of the Divine Presence is given by our Saviour in a double form (1) to individual believers (John xiv. 21, 23); (2) to his Church (ver. 18; Matt. xviii. 20). In the New Testament there are, in fact, *four* antitypes or spiritual realities typified by the tabernacle or temple; (1) our Lord's human nature (John ii. 19—21); (2) the person of every true Christian (1 Cor. vi. 19); (3) the Christian Church (Eph. ii. 20—22); (4) heaven (Heb. ix. 11, 12, 24).

III. ITS MEMBERSHIP. Christians are citizens (Phil. iii. 20, Revised Version; Eph. ii. 19; Heb. xii. 22; Gal. iv. 26). To an ancient Israelite, the glory of his citizenship was its exclusiveness; yet this psalm predicts the time when heathens and foes should become "fellow-citizens," not by national subjection, but individual regeneration. This truth, plentifully foretold by the Holy Spirit and the prophets, was yet so inscrutable to the Jewish mind, that St. Paul calls it "the mystery hid from the beginning" (Eph. iii. 4—6, 9); and the Christian Church at Jerusalem was overwhelmed with amazement when these predictions were fulfilled (see Acts x., xi.; especially x. 10, 23, 45; xi. 3, 18). It is a shame that Christians have such narrow, ignoble views of the Church of God. True views would be the death of sectarianism. The New Testament gives two canons of membership in the universal Church—one inclusive, one exclusive. (1) "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body;" (2) "If any have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

IV. THE FINAL AND ETERNAL GLORY. (Eph. v. 27.) Typified by "the bride of the Lamb," "the holy city, New Jerusalem" (Rev. xxi., xxii.).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7.—*The habitation of God.* This psalm is true, whether we apply it—

I. TO ISRAEL OF OLD, God's ancient people. That the writer had them in his mind, there can be no doubt, whatever other applications we may make of his words. Like the other psalms "for the sons of Korah," it most probably belongs to the days of Hezekiah. The sons of Korah were the keepers of those "gates" which in this psalm, as in Ps. lxxxiv., they celebrate; and the triumph of which they tell harmonizes with the glowing predictions of Israel as to the spiritual power and supremacy of Israel. 1. This psalm speaks of the *proud position of Zion*, on the holy mountains, so elevated, sacred, secure. 2. Of the *Divine delight in her*. God was to be worshipped in all the dwellings of Jacob (see Lev. xxiii. 2); but his chief delight was in the

united worship of all the people in his temple on Mount Zion, in the glorious feasts and festivals that were celebrated there. 3. *Of her glorious history.* It may have been, as some have supposed, that the psalm was sung at the public reception into the Jewish Church of a number of converts from heathen nations, and that, as our Lord saw in the coming of the Greeks to him (John xii.) the forerunners of the coming of all the Gentiles—yea, of “all men”—so the psalmist foresees the conversion of all the nations of whom he speaks to the Name of the Lord. And the change for them shall be so great that it shall be as a new birth; whatever their native country may have been, they were really “born” in Zion. And she shall produce many great and illustrious men. The word rendered “man” (ver. 5) denotes one of distinction and eminence, not an ordinary person. In the great day of manifestation and triumph of the people of God, the Lord himself shall own those born in Zion. 4. *Of her great joy.* The song and the dance and all kinds of mirth shall characterize her; she shall be a gladsome city.

II. TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST. The psalm, read as part of the record of the Church, tells: 1. *Of her foundation*, which is Christ. He is the chief Corner-stone. “Other foundation can no man lay,” etc. 2. *Her position*—in the holy mountains; that is, she is conspicuous—a city set on a hill, which cannot be hid; the mountain of the Lord’s house, high and lifted up, visible from afar and on all sides. Secure, likewise, as a mountain fortress mightily defended. Has not the Church ever been so? And holy. This is her main characteristic; she could not be the Church of Christ without this. 3. *The Lord’s delight in her.* She is the purchase of his blood, the subject of his care, the reason of his providential rule. He who toucheth her toucheth the apple of his eye. 4. *The glorious things spoken of her.* How all forms of hostility yield to her—Rahab, the proud; Babylon, the cruel; Philistia, the fierce; Tyre, the greedy of gain; Ethiopia, the degraded;—from all such she wins trophies for Christ. The Church’s mission is to gather in all nations for him. And see the heroes of the faith that are “born” in her: what a glorious roll-call that is! And the Lord himself shall attest all this. What is the Epistle to the Ephesians but a full declaration of what the Church of Christ shall be and do and enjoy? And other Scriptures declare the same. And the history of the Church is evermore confirming this word. 5. *Her abiding gladness.* Real religion is the most gladsome thing this side heaven; it is a never-failing spring of pure and elevating joy. Finally, this psalm may be applied to—

III. THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER. For he, too, is a habitation of God. 1. *Founded on the one Foundation*—Christ. 2. *Is as a holy mountain*—openly confessed, not hiding out of sight, secure in God, holy. 3. *Is the object of Divine delight.* God loves our natural life, but our spiritual life is that which he loves most—to foster and develop and save that is the meaning of all the disciplines, trials, and varied Divine dealings with us. 4. *Glorious things are spoken of him.* As to the past, all his guilt put away. As to the present, the hostile forces of the world—pride, cruelty, inward corruption, ever worrying the soul, as Philistia did Israel, the lusts of the world, the horde of degrading propensities—all these which war against the soul shall be subdued, and the varied powers they usurped shall be given to God. And as to the future, what hath God not promised for those who love him? And God will make such heart the means of blessing to many others, and will own what has been done. 5. *And he will fill such heart with joy.*—S. O.

Ver. 2.—*The principles of the Divine preference.* These are seen—

I. IN THE GREATER LOVE OF GOD FOR ZION THAN FOR ALL THE DWELLINGS OF JACOB. Not a few of those dwellings were spacious, magnificent, wealthy, adorned, and inhabited by men who feared God; but yet, because in Zion God’s glory was more revealed, his grace seen, his truth declared, his people blessed, and because there that in man which God ever most of all delights in—the spiritual life, the life of trust, of love, of devotion to God—found its chief nourishment, expression, and delight, therefore the Lord loved the gates of Zion more, etc.

II. IN THE CHARACTERS GOD APPROVES. The name of Jacob suggests one of these at first sight apparently strange preferences. “Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated.” How many people have been puzzled over that statement, endorsed as it is by the actual dealing of God with the two men? Esau was a man richly endued

with gifts such as men everywhere have highly esteemed. He had courage, affection, generosity, strength; whilst Jacob too seldom shows any quality which wins our admiration, and far too often he is guilty of that which excites contempt. And yet the Lord preferred him. The reason was that in him, however encrusted with what was sordid, base, and mean, there was yet the germ and seed, the potency and promise, of the life of God in his soul. There were reverence of and trust in God, and the yearning after the better life; there were the seeds of the life eternal, and they so sprang up at last that God's chosen name for himself was, "I am the God of Jacob." But in Esau, with all his magnificence, courage, and other virtues, there does not seem to have been anything of the kind.

III. IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE SCRIPTURES. What large space is given to what in human esteem seems the chronicling of very small affairs; whilst of the great empires, events, and personalities of the world, scarce any note is taken—none at all, except when and because they are brought into contact with the people of God! But for that they would have been passed over in complete silence. Palestine—what a little shred of the earth's surface it is! The Jews—what an insignificant people they have always been! Their great men—Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, and the rest—how small to ordinary human sight they appear! But how colossal were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome, and their heroes! Yet we learn scarce anything of them from the Bible. And the explanation is the same: in the little land, and amongst the despised people, the life of God was to be found as it was not in all the mighty ones of the world.

IV. IN OUR LORD'S PREFERENCE OF GRACE TO GIFTS. (See Luke x. 20.) His disciples were exultant over their gifts, but he tells them to rejoice rather in that grace which was the common inheritance of every faithful disciple. Gifts did not, and do not necessarily, carry along with them the life of God in the soul; but grace always does.

V. IN THE ORDERING OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE. What a series of changes does the history of the world show! Empires rising, falling, disappearing. What a fragment of the history of the whole is all that the most learned know! Oblivion has covered the records of well-nigh all peoples. They had their day; were doubtless thought much of by their contemporaries, and more of by themselves; they did, we may be sure, many things—many of them, probably, great exploits, notable deeds. But who knows anything of them now? They all have "waxed old, like a garment, and as," etc. (Heb. i. 12). But of the Church of God, the company of people who in all ages have loved and feared his Name, there has been no disappearance, their name has endured as none other has. God has preserved *them* alive, as it is this day.

VI. IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE CROSS. How contemptible that seemed in the apostolic age, and, to many, seems so still! Yet to it has been given power to effect a moral change in mankind that nothing else has ever been capable of. Philosophy has done her best; but she left, notwithstanding all her teachings, the whole world lying in wickedness. But "Christ and him crucified" was preached, and we know the result of that. It was, as it is, "the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth." Therefore has God put honour upon that preaching such as he has given to none other. Divine life is in it, as myriads of saved souls know, and it is not found elsewhere.

CONCLUSION. Remember that God acts upon these same principles in our own individual life. He loves everything, however mean it may seem, which leads our souls to him; he cares for nothing, however much esteemed, that leads them away from him.—S. C.

Ver. 6.—"The Lord shall count." There shall be a Divine census, a numbering of the people by God, such as never yet has taken place. Nothing in Hezekiah's reign, the probable date of this psalm, ever fulfilled the glorious promises here given. But it shall be when Christ shall come again. Consider—

I. THE FACT OF SUCH "WRITING UP" OF THE PEOPLE. 1. It shall be *national*. (Ver. 4.) 2. But *individual* also. The counting will be of this one, and that, and the other; there will be no passing in a crowd. 3. It is *attested by many witnesses*—Scripture, reason, history, conscience.

II. ITS PURPOSE. The gathering together of his own true people; the making up of his jewels; the manifestation of the sons of God. This is not done now, but shall be.

III. THE WRITER. The Lord himself. 1. *He only can really know* where to find his people; they are often found in strange places (ver. 4). 2. *He only can be trusted.* Bigotry, superstition, dislike, would shut many out. Partiality, fondness, love of sin, would let many in. God alone can judge.

IV. THE NAMES IN IT. Those only who have been "born" of God. Shall we be there?—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*The Divine interest in Zion.* Taking Zion as a poetical name for Jerusalem, the temple city, and as the representative of every place where public and united worship is offered to God. Zion is still, for us, the pious name for God's house. The point prominent is this—that we should love God's house and worship is not in any sense surprising; but it is a surprise of condescension and grace that *God* should love our sanctuaries, and find his pleasure in our worship. Yet even this we are permitted to realize, and this the saints of God have realized. The historical associations of this psalm cannot be fixed. It certainly does not belong to the Davidic age, for its outlook is too wide, its spirit too liberal and too comprehensive. It may reflect the more hopeful feeling of the returned exiles; it does match precisely the feeling expressed in some of the later chapters of Isaiah, notably the sixtieth. But it must be admitted that a rigid exclusiveness rather than a liberal inclusiveness characterized the returned exiles; and the psalm is altogether too generous for them. The suggestion that it belongs to the time of Hezekiah is certainly to be preferred. When the Assyrian power was humbled by the overthrow of Sennacherib, it seemed, to excited feeling, that Judah was to be the world's deliverer, and Jerusalem was likely to become the centre of a confederacy of delivered nations. That was the hope of Hezekiah; it was the promise of the moment, which gains expression in the psalm. In 2 Chron. xxxii. 22, 23, the events immediately following on the deliverance from Assyria are indicated. "And many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah King of Judah; so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from henceforth." Hezekiah piously recognized that all the honour coming to him was really due to God, who had showed such favour to his servant, his city, and his people.

I. GOD IS INTERESTED IN ZION BECAUSE OF WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR IT. Illustrate how those whom we tend and care for—the babe, the invalid—creep into our very hearts. So if we join in raising a new church building, how dear it becomes to us! God had given ages of care to his Zion, so it had become inexpressibly dear to him. See the pathetic pleadings, which reveal deep feeling, as in Hosea.

II. GOD IS INTERESTED IN ZION BECAUSE OF WHAT HE CAN BE TO IT. We specially love those for whom we feel we can do all they need. Illust.: mother's feeling for her babe. God can "supply all our need," and it must be infinitely pleasant to be able to make "all grace abound."

III. GOD IS INTERESTED IN ZION BECAUSE OF WHAT IT CAN BE TO HIM. Zion can *need*, and so draw out his fulness. Zion can *trust*, and so respond to his trustworthiness. Zion can *worship*, and so glorify him. Zion can *be beautiful*, and so show forth his praise.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*What can be said for our Jerusalem?* "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." In this joyous exclamation the poet of Hezekiah's time gathers up the joy of the kingdoms round Palestine, which were relieved of their anxiety by Jehovah's humiliation of Assyria. Jerusalem became the praise of everybody. It had become the champion-deliverer of the nations. Its God had brought it glory. To it every eye was gratefully turned. We may think what things were then said; and let them suggest things that may rightly be said now of our "city of God."

I. GLORIOUS THINGS WERE BEING SAID OF THE CITY ITSELF. Events had turned everybody's eyes towards it, and everybody began to see that "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion." Give account of the very striking position of the city; its remarkable hills, precipices, and valleys; and, according to the taste of the age, the architectural grandeur of its temple, its palaces, and its towers. When we feel kindly towards a place or person, it is astonishing what excellent and lovely

things we can find in them. The church building in which we worship may really be a very plain and poor building, but if it proves the house of God to us, we soon think it beautiful, and almost worship its very stones.

II. **GLORIOUS THINGS WERE BEING SAID OF THE GOD OF THE CITY.** Recall the idea of the age, that the gods were limited to particular cities and countries. So outsiders associated Jehovah with Jerusalem and the Israelites, and, in recognizing the deliverance which came to them through Israel, recognized it as the work of Israel's God. See by way of illustration, how Nebuchadnezzar demands praise of Jehovah, when some mighty work has shown his superiority to all surrounding gods. Work out what things the nations round were likely to say of the God of Hezekiah. His power was declared. His concern for his people was declared. His sovereign rights were declared. His mercy was declared. God as Deliverer and Redeemer was declared. So now, if the attention of men is directed to us, to our example, our enterprise, our energy, our success, it should be our supreme anxiety that the glorious things they say of us should really be said of *our God*, and of his grace in us. Observe this, too, that the triumph over Sennacherib was not something which Hezekiah's people had accomplished in their own strength, but something which Jehovah had accomplished through them and for them. They had, therefore, no right to take the "glorious things that were spoken" to themselves. Nor have we. Look as we may on what has been accomplished, we are compelled to say, "What hath God wrought?" And all the glorious things spoken of us we turn away, and have spoken of *him*.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Privileges of a birthplace.* Keeping the associations with the times of Hezekiah, we may see, in this verse, a poetical representation of the revival of the nations, when the dread of Assyria was lifted off them. It was like a new birth to them. They entered on a new experience, and on new relations. And as Zion was regarded as the centre and source of the deliverance—Jehovah from Zion—the nations are, in a poetical way, said to have their birth in Zion. It was thought of as the city of the new birth of the nations. This figure may be applied to the spiritual birth of individuals. Be they white or black, bond or free, from whatever clime they come, they may properly be thought of as born in Zion, where

"Our dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all."

The Zion birthright belongs to every redeemed soul. "Salvation is of the Jews."

I. **THE PRIVILEGES OF OUR NATURAL BIRTHPLACE.** Curious is the admiration men have for the town and neighbourhood in which they saw the light. And the places of our birth have more to do with disposition, and with genius, than we are wont to think. Our early surroundings may waken poetic or artistic instincts. Our town and country may enjoy peculiar liberty, special advantages of education, etc. Illustrate by the claims of seven towns to be the birthplace of the poet Homer, partly because it honoured them to provide the first formative influences that reached the poet.

II. **THE PRIVILEGES OF OUR ADOPTED BIRTHPLACE.** If actual life begins where we were born, our individuality, our life-work, our success, often begins somewhere else. We *begin again*, in some place of our selection and adoption. And as we look back in life, we can see how our surroundings and associations, in that new birthplace, have been privileges, helping to make us what we have become. Many of us, giving our birthplace, feel that we want to say, "We began to breathe at A, but we began to live at B, and B we think of as our true birthplace." Like these nations which felt they began really to live from the time of the Zion deliverance.

III. **THE PRIVILEGES OF OUR SPIRITUAL BIRTHPLACE.** The place where we began to live unto God—began to live the soul-life. Many keep in dearest memory the time, the place, the incidents, of their first realization of the redeeming love and sufficiency. For us that is Zion. The place where God met with us is our Zion. And, in one sense, it is always Zion, for it is always in the presence of the cross on which Jesus died. We feel we live by his "decease accomplished at Jerusalem."—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Various powers used in God's service.* "As well the singers as the players

on instruments." This expresses admiration of the services and ceremonies in connection with Jehovah's temple; and it suggests the thought that Divine worship ought to be made in every way delightful. But another thought is suggested by the marked distinction made between the "singers" and the "players." It is that the gifts and endowments of men are very various, but whatever may be their variety, they can all be taken up into the service of God and the service of God's people. Some can sing; then encourage them to sing. Some can play; then use their skill in playing. Find what a man can do, and accept, for God, just the service he can render.

I. THE REMARKABLE VARIETY OF HUMAN GIFTS. Examine them first as simply human gifts. Poetry, eloquence, art, science, government, do but, in the large, represent the thousandfold lesser forms of endowment which fit men for their varied places in life. Yet in common everyday life there is a place and a work for every one. Show that this includes kinds of gifts with which we may have no personal sympathy, such as mimicry, satire, humour, etc. Then examine those particular gifts which were granted to the early Churches—tongues, prophecy, interpretation, etc. Bring out that while each man has much in common with his fellows, each man also has something special to himself, something which constitutes his individuality. In the line of the use of *that speciality* will be found to lie his life-mission.

II. THE POSSIBLE USE FOR HUMANITY OF ALL HUMAN GIFTS. There is a danger of religious people unduly limiting the service of humanity. Sometimes, in an exclusive spirit, pious persons speak as if there were no real service to humanity save that which their religion sanctions. We may hold that all conceivable endowments may be sanctified, and ought to be sanctified, by being used for God—consciously in God's service. But we had better be more generous in our thinking, and say that everything that helps lift a human burden, cheer a human soul, brighten a human life, relieve a human strain, or perfect the human brotherhood, is the service of God. Some gifts bear a character, or are so small in measure, that men think of them as the one-talented man thought of his talent. But he thought wrongly, and so do they. In God's earth there is nothing that has not its use. In God's world of men there is no gift without an answering sphere. Singers and players shall both be there.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Joy-fountains in God.* Prayer-book Version, "All my fresh springs shall be in thee." Jennings and Lowe render, "All my well-springs [of delight] are singing aloud like instrument-players because of [literally, 'in'] thee." The "springs" are evidently our springs of gladness; and the sentence is best given thus: "Both they that sing and dance, all my fountains of delight are in thee;" with this as the meaning, "every source of pleasure, song, music, dancing, etc., was to be found in Zion." The psalmist is praising *Zion*, not directly praising *God*: so his figures are naturally taken from the pleasures of the holy city, and especially of the sacred temple and its services. Remember that David had devoted genius and skill to the improvement of worship; had introduced music and poetry, until the old sombre ritual of Mosaism had become glorified. The joy of God's everyday service ought to be illustrated by the brightness, attractiveness, and holy joy of our sanctuary services. Men ought to feel that it must be a joy to serve God always, because it is such an evident joy to serve God *sometimes*.

I. JOY-FOUNTAINS IN GOD'S WORSHIP.

II. JOY-FOUNTAINS IN DAILY LIFE.

III. JOY-FOUNTAINS IN WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US.

IV. JOY-FOUNTAINS IN WHAT GOD IS DOING FOR US.

V. JOY-FOUNTAINS IN GOD HIMSELF. "When all created streams are dried, his fulness is the same."

Impress that true religion cannot be gloomy and depressing. Its atmosphere of trust is an atmosphere of gladness. We are saddened if we look down upon the path of our feet; or in upon our frail selves; we need never be saddened if we look up—"look off unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith." We may find ever fresh-flowing springs of delight in God, and in this world of God's which is his *Zion* for us.—R. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*The glory of the Church.* I. IN ITS FOUNDATION. "In the holy mountains." 1. *It is founded in the nature of God.* In the Divine love. "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion," etc. 2. *It is founded also in the nature of man.* In his

spiritual nature, affinities, and needs. The Church, therefore, has sacred foundations: "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her."

II. IT IS CALLED THE CITY OF GOD. 1. *It consists of the highest social relationships.* Love, the bond that unites the citizens. 2. *And of the Divinest order.* Protected and maintained by the constant presence of God. 3. *And of the truest wisdom.* (Ver. 4.) "Them that know me."

III. TO BECOME A CITIZEN THERE A MAN MUST BE SPIRITUALLY BORN INTO IT. The new birth is the condition of citizenship. "This man was born there." 1. *Else it can never become a home to us.* Not a congenial place to us. 2. *We should not else be able to enter into its highest privileges, rights, and obligations.*

IV. IT IS THE HOME OF THE NEW-BORN MAN, IRRESPECTIVE OF NATIONAL DISTINCTION Jew and Gentile, bond and free, king and peasant, may find a home there.

V. IT IS THE FOUNTAIN OF ALL DIVINE AND HUMAN GOOD. (Ver. 7.) All the trust and most real blessedness.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXXVIII.

THE most mournful of all the psalms. After one almost formal "word of trust" (ver. 1a), the remainder is a continuous bitter cry of complaint, rising at times into expostulation (vers. 10—12), and almost into reproach (ver. 14). The tone is that of the earlier complaints of Job; and Job has been supposed by some to be the writer. But this is highly improbable. We may accept the statement of the title, that the monody was written by Heman the Ezrahite, who was a contemporary of Solomon (1 Kings iv. 31). It has no appearance of being composed at a time of national affliction. All the complaints are personal, and indicate long-continued personal suffering. The writer seems to be without hope. Still, he does not fall away from God, but continues to call upon him and pray to him (vers. 1, 2, 9, 13).

Metrically, the psalm is almost without divisions—"a slow, unbroken wail," expressive of "the monotony of woe."

Ver. 1.—O Lord God of my salvation. This is the one "word of trust," which some get rid of by an emendation. But the Septuagint supports the existing Hebrew text; and it is in harmony with the rest of Scripture. The saints of God never despair. *I have cried day and night before thee; literally, by day have I cried—by night before thee; a trembling, gasping utterance* (Kay).

Ver. 2.—Let my prayer come before thee; incline thine ear unto my cry (comp. Ps. lxxxvi. 1, 6).

Ver. 3.—For my soul is full of troubles (see Job x. 15). And my life draweth nigh

unto the grave; literally, unto *Sheol*—the place of departed spirits (comp. Job x. 21, 22).

Ver. 4.—I am counted with them that go down into the pit; i.e. "to the grave." I am reckoned as one just about to die. I am as a man that hath no strength. All my strength is departed from me; I am utterly feeble and weak—a mere shadow of my former self. Physical weakness, something like paralysis, seems to be meant.

Ver. 5.—Free among the dead; or, "cast out among the dead." Placed with corpses, as one that needs burial. Like the slain that lie in the grave. Like those who are thrown into a pit dug on a battle-field, among whom there are often some who have not breathed their last (see the Prayer-book Version). Whom thou rememberest no more. We have already heard the complaint that in death there is no remembrance of God on the part of man (Ps. vi. 5); now we have the converse statement, that neither is there then any remembrance of man on the part of God. The psalmist speaks, not absolute truth, but the belief of his day—a belief which vanished when life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel. And they are cut off from thy hand; i.e. severed from thee, shut up in a place where thou dwellest not (see Job x. 21, 22).

Ver. 6.—Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit. The affliction whereof the psalmist complains has come direct from the hand of God. It is some severe stroke of illness which has brought him to his last gasp. The "lowest pit" is here metaphorical—the deepest depth of calamity. In darkness; literally, in *darknesses*, where no ray of thy favour shines upon me. In the deeps (comp. Ps. lxxix. 2, "deep waters, where the floods overflow him").

Ver. 7.—Thy wrath lieth hard upon me. Here the cause of all the psalmist's suffer-

ings is touched; God was angry with him (comp. ver. 16). And thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves (comp. Ps. xlii. 7, "All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me").

Ver. 8.—Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me. Compare the similar complaint of Job (xix. 13, 14); and see also Ps. xxxi. 11; and *infra*, ver. 18. Thou hast made me an abomination unto them. So Job (ix. 31; xix. 19; xxx. 10). It may be suspected that the psalmist's affliction was of a kind which made him "unclean." I am shut up. Not in prison, as Jeremiah (xxxii. 2; xxxiii. 1; xxxvi. 5), but probably as unclean, or as suspected of being unclean (see Lev. xiii. 4—33). And I cannot come forth. I am not allowed to quit my chamber.

Ver. 9.—Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction; or, "mine eye hath grown feeble" (comp. Job xvii. 7). Lord, I have called daily upon thee; or, "all day." I have stretched out my hands unto thee. The attitude of earnest prayer (comp. Job xi. 13; Ps. lxxviii. 31, etc.).

Ver. 10.—Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Am I to receive no mercy till I am dead? and then wilt thou work a miracle for my restoration and deliverance? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? rather, *the shades (rephaim)*; comp. Job xxvi. 5. The word *rephaim* designates the wan, shadowy ghosts that have gone down to Hades (Sheol), and are resting there. Shall these suddenly rise up and engage in the worship and praise of God? The psalmist does not, any more than Job (xiv. 14), expect such a resurrection.

Ver. 11.—Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave? Wilt thou wait till I am in my grave before thou showest any mercy upon me? or, Will not that be too late? Can thy faithfulness to thy promises be shown in destruction? literally, *in Abaddon*; i.e. "perdition"—a name of Sheol (cf. Job xxvi. 6; xxviii. 22).

Ver. 12.—Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? (compare above, ver. 10). And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? "The land of forgetfulness," or "of oblivion," is another name for Hades, or Sheol—not that there are supposed to be no memories of the past in it (Isa. xiv. 16, 17), but that all is faint and shadowy there, consciousness but a half-consciousness, remembrance but a half-remembrance.

Ver. 13.—But unto thee have I cried, O Lord; literally, *but as for me, to thee have I cried*. The psalmist returns from the somewhat vague speculations of vers. 10—12 to fact and to himself. He is not yet a mere

shade, an inhabitant of Sheol; he is in the flesh, upon the earth; he can still cry, and does still cry, to Jehovah. There is thus still a faint gleam of hope for him. And in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee. The psalmist will draw out God's mercy, as it were, before its time, by importuning him with early and continual prayer (comp. vers. 1, 9).

Ver. 14.—Lord, why castest thou off my soul? The psalmist speaks here, like Job, as one aggrieved. What has he done to be "cast off"? He is evidently not aware of having sinned any grievous sin, and does not understand why he is visited with such grievous sufferings. Why hidest thou thy face from me? Perhaps it is his insensibility, his unconsciousness of real sins and shortcomings, that has drawn down upon the psalmist his chastisement.

Ver. 15.—I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up. This is a new point. The psalmist's afflictions have not come upon him recently. He does not merely mean, as some have supposed, that, like other men, as soon as he was born he began to die, but speaks of something, if not absolutely peculiar to himself, yet at any rate rare and abnormal—a long continuance in a dying state, such as could only have been brought about by some terribly severe malady. While I suffer thy terrors I am distracted; literally, *I have endured thy terrors; I am exhausted*. (On the endurance of God's "terrors," see Job vi. 4; ix. 34; xlii. 21.) The natural result would be a state, not of distraction, but of exhaustion. (So Kay, and substantially Professor Cheyne.)

Ver. 16.—Thy fierce wrath goeth over me. "Overwhelms me;" i.e. "like a fiery flood" (see above, ver. 7). Thy terrors have out me off. A different word is used for "terrors" from that which occurs in ver. 15, and one elsewhere occurring only in Job vi. 4. The verb also is one characteristic of Job (vi. 17; xxiii. 17), and means "extinguish," or "exterminate."

Ver. 17.—They came round about me daily like water. God's terrors encompass the psalmist "daily," or "all day long," like water; i.e. like an overwhelming flood (compare the first clause of ver. 16). They compassed me about together; or, "they compass me about in a mass."

Ver. 18.—Lover and friend hast thou put far from me (comp. ver. 8 and Job xix. 13). And mine acquaintance into darkness; literally, *and my intimates [are] darkness*; i.e. "when I look for a friend or an acquaintance, my eye meets nothing but darkness," or "dark space."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—18.—*The saddest psalm in the Psalter.* For in well-nigh all others, though there may be darkness of soul, a very night of darkness, yet we see the light arise; though we see “weeping endure for the night,” yet we see also that “joy cometh in the morning.” But in this psalm we do not see such coming of joy. The believer who wrote it was one who was called to “walk in darkness, and had no light.” But he is holding on; he prays, and perseveres in prayer; he recognizes the hand of God in his trouble. “*Thou hast laid me,*” etc. (vers. 6—8). He confesses that God is the Lord God of his salvation (ver. 1); he attributes to God loving-kindness, faithfulness, power, and righteousness (vers. 11, 12); and he declares his purpose (ver. 13) to continue in prayer. No doubt the light did come, though the psalm ends first. “The believer in his worst time still continues to pray; God’s rod flogs his child not from him, but to him. Our griefs are waves which wash us on to the rock. But nevertheless, the best child of God may be the greatest sufferer, and his sufferings may be, as those told of here, utterly crushing, killing, and overwhelming.” Now let us inquire—

I. WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SUCH SUFFERING TO COME TO HIS PEOPLE? We may reply: 1. *Suffering is the lot of all.* The men of this world do not escape it more than the servant of God, and, all things considered, probably they suffer more, because the alleviations and consolations which belong to the child of God they know nothing of. But if suffering, which is the lot of all, did not come to the child of God; if faith were the passport to immunity from those varied ills which flesh is heir to, what a crowd of mere loafers and fishes seekers we should have! 2. *For spiritual discipline.* The soul needs training, exercise, and development as much as the body, and how but by trial can this be secured? There is not one fruit of the Spirit that can be fully perfected save in this way. 3. *In self-revelation.* Many men live continually in a perfect mist of mistake about themselves. How strong Peter thought himself! But his trial and his sad fall revealed him to himself as nothing else could. 4. *For driving us nearer God.* We do not wrench ourselves away from God, but we are perpetually in peril of drifting, and this unconsciously. Hence we need to be from time to time roused to this fact—that we have got away from God, and that we must come back. 5. *That we may give testimony.* The world marks how the Christian bears trial; if meekly, patiently, both towards God and towards men, the world notes it, and confesses the grace of God. 6. *And that we may learn to sympathize.* How could we if we knew nothing of suffering?

II. HOW ARE SUCH CONDITIONS BROUGHT ABOUT? Through: 1. *Circumstances.* The troubles of life, personal or relative—losses, bereavements, sickness, etc. 2. *Wrong thoughts of God.* How many such there are in this psalm! A great deal that the psalmist has said is exaggerated and untrue. What he says existed not in reality, but in his own bewildered imagination. 3. *Failure of hope for the future.* What terrible things he says about death! To him the grave is all dark and dreadful. It is “the pit,” a mere charnel-house. Now, the Old Testament writers, though they had not our fulness of hope, yet had hope. But in this psalm the writer seems to have lost it. Perhaps there had been: 4. *Neglect of communion with God.* If we fail here, farewell to all joy in God, and when trouble comes it finds us all unprepared, and we go down before it into the depths. 5. *Love.* For that which touches the beloved touches the heart that loves. Christ loved us intensely, and became of necessity “the Man of sorrows;” for he saw and pitied our misery so much that it led him straight to Gethsemane and the cross. And all love links itself to pain.

III. WHAT TO DO UNDER SUCH CONDITIONS. 1. *Inquire of God as to the cause of your trouble,* if you do not know what it is. 2. *Humble yourself beneath his hand.* Say over and over again, until your heart assents, “Thy will be done.” 3. *Get nearer God than ever.* This is what he desires to see you do. 4. *Be careful to obey his every command.* 5. *Go and try to comfort other troubled ones.* 6. *Meditate much upon Christ’s sufferings.* Along such channels as these help, peace, rest, relief, will come.—S. C.

Vers. 10—12.—*Mournful views of death.* These verses are by no means the only

ones which set forth similar views. Their melancholy is very profound. See this in—

I. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE HABITATION OF THE DEAD. The terms they use are all sad. As: 1. "*The pit.*" (Ver. 4.) "The lowest pit" (ver. 6). The idea is of a vast profound subterranean cavern, into which no ray of light entered. Infernal regions indeed. 2. "*Destruction.*" (Ver. 11.) A place where all living powers came to an end, and death only reigned. 3. "*The dark.*" (Ver. 12.) And "darkness" (ver. 6). 4. "*The land of forgetfulness*" and silence. God had been their Light, their Joy, their Life; but now they should know him no more. What wonder that they so shrank from death!

II. THE BLESSINGS OF WHICH THEY WERE DEPRIVED. The living might rejoice in them, but never the dead. These blessings were: 1. *Knowledge of God's wonders.* The memory and experience of these were to the living their perpetual gladness; but the dead know and can know nothing of them. They are unhappy beings who know not anything, clean forgotten, out of mind—beings whom God himself remembers not. 2. *God's loving-kindness.* (Ver. 11.) They had been wont to exclaim, "How excellent is thy loving-kindness!" to pray that God would "continue" it; to declare that they would "not conceal" it from all men, that they continually "thought of" it, that it was "good," that it was "life," yea, "better than life." But now they were shut off from it altogether. 3. *God's "faithfulness."* (Ver. 11.) This, too, they were wont lovingly to extol (cf. Pss. xxxvi. 5; xl. 10; lxxxix. 1, 5, 8, 24, 33, etc.). But it was gone from them in the grave. 4. *God's righteousness.* (Ver. 12.) This had been all their trust and stay when living, but in the grave they knew it no more.

III. THEIR LOSS OF ALL POWER. 1. *They cannot praise God.* (Ver. 10.) This had been their joy on earth. 2. *They cannot see.* It would be in vain that God's wonders were displayed before them. 3. *They cannot hear.* Therefore it would be of no avail to declare God's loving-kindness to them. 4. *They cannot know* either the wonders or the righteousness of God. 5. *They have no power even to stand on their feet.* Body, mind, and soul all stripped of their former powers. No wonder that Hezekiah cried, in his dread of death, "The living, the living, he shall praise thee!" And this was the belief of all the saints of the Old Testament.

IV. QUESTIONS THAT ARISE FROM THE FACT OF THESE VIEWS ABOUT DEATH. 1. *Are they true?* Certainly not. In no one single particular are they true. The believer does not after death abide in the grave, nor in any pit, nor in the land of destruction, of darkness, and of forgetfulness. He is "with Christ, which is far better" (see New Testament, *passim*). 2. *Were they ever true?* In part they were. Christ opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He was the Forerunner. None entered into the heavens until Christ, "the Way," first entered. Until then the spirits of the just were being safely guarded—the rendering (1 Pet. iii. 19) "in prison" is surely a misleading one, suggesting, as it does, the idea of punishment, whereas the word only signifies being "watched over," "guarded," "kept"—in the invisible world, in Hades, the place of departed spirits. They were in an inferior, but not in an unhappy, condition. It was called by the Jews "Abraham's bosom," "Paradise" (Luke xvi. 23; xxiii. 43). And again and again in the Psalms we have utterances of bright though not definite hope as to the future (Pss. xi. 7; xvi. 8—11; xvii. 15; xlix. 15, etc.). But they had their seasons of despondency, and then this hope fled away, and they could speak only as in these verses before us, which are so very far from the complete truth. Even then, blessed were the dead who died in the Lord! 3. *Why was our better, brighter hope withheld from them,* so that they could hold such sad views as these? The reply is to be found in God's method of educating the race. Step by step, here a little and there a little, progressively—such seems to have been the Divine plan. As we educate our children, so did God educate man (cf. Heb. i. 1). Our Lord taught the people, when he was here on earth, "as they were able to bear it." And such seems ever to have been God's way. It has been suggested (J. A. Froude) that, seeing how Egypt had perverted the doctrine of a future life, making it the minister of all kinds of wrong, God kept any clear knowledge of this life from Israel, concentrating their attention upon the present life and its duties by means of present temporal rewards and punishments. It may have been so; but the question is one beyond our power to fully answer. 4. *Why is the better hope given to us?* To vindicate God (cf. 1 Cor. xv. 12—19). To sustain

men's hope. "We are saved by hope." To quicken the love and pursuit of believers. To deliver from the fear of death. All this our hope does.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Personal relations with God made a plea.* "O Lord God of my salvation." This has been called "the saddest of all the psalms." But it represents mental rather than spiritual distress. It belongs to such an age as that of Solomon, and classes with the Psalms of Asaph, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and the Book of Job. It is a psalm of Heman the sage; but his wisdom is spoiled by the pessimistic view he takes of his circumstances and surroundings. The man who believes in God does not see *clearly* unless he sees *hopefully*. Things never can be "going to the bad" if God is in them. Dr. S. Cox calls this psalm, "Heman's Elegy," and he carefully marks its distinguishing feature, and this helpfully aids the pulpit treatment of it. "Its sadness is that of one who has wearied himself by much study of a large and varied experience, who has thought of all things till all things have grown doubtful to him, till he finds the trail of the serpent in all the fairest scenes of human life, till he doubts his very doubts. It is the intellectual sadness of one who, in long brooding over the wrongs and sorrows of time, the frailty of man, the limitations of human thought, the vanity of the ends which men commonly pursue, the cravings which importune a satisfaction which they never find, the mystery by which our being is encompassed, the impenetrability of a future which nevertheless we *must* try to penetrate, has lost touch with the warm and breathing activities of human life, and has sunk towards a pessimistic despair of the life which now is on the one hand, and, on the other, into a prying and credulous curiosity as to the conditions of the life which is to come. And that, happily, is a misery which is comparatively rare." The point proposed for illustration is the way in which a personal anchorage of the soul in God may keep it steady under all kinds of soul-distress, and even the distress arising from mental perplexity.

I. OUR PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH GOD MAY BE RECOGNIZED AND FELT. Illustrate from the expression, "*My God*," in Ps. xxii. 1, as repeated by the Lord Jesus when on the cross. See experience of Bible saints.

II. THE PERSONAL RELATION BRINGS A SENSE OF SECURITY, BECAUSE IT IS BASED ON GOD'S RELATION TO US. We *feel* him to be our God only because he is graciously *pleased to be* our God. "We love him because he first loved us."

III. THE SENSE OF PERSONAL RELATION WITH GOD STEADIES US AMID THE CHANGING SCENES OF LIFE.

IV. THE SENSE OF PERSONAL RELATION WITH GOD KEEPS OUR MIND WHEN WRESTLING WITH DIFFICULTIES.

V. THE SENSE OF PERSONAL RELATION WITH GOD GIVES US AN UNFAILING PLEA IN SEEKING DIVINE HELP.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The fear that prayer will not be answered.* With what historical conditions may we fairly associate and illustrate this psalm? Suggest—Uzziah smitten with leprosy. Jeremiah cast into the dungeon. Hezekiah humbled by sickness. Job crushed by accumulated sufferings. Probably the case of Job provides the most effective and varied illustration. When it pleases God to delay the answer, or to send the answer in unexpected forms, it is our common temptation to think that he does not *mean* to answer. The plaint of the psalmist is that he "had cried unto God day and night," and nothing seemed to have come of his crying. Happily this only drives him the more earnestly to seek an answer. "Oh let my prayer come into thy presence!" Spurgeon says, "His distress had not blown out the sparks of his prayer, but quickened them into a greater ardency, till they burned perpetually, like a furnace at full blast."

I. FEAR THAT PRAYER WILL NOT BE ANSWERED MAY BE REASONABLE. There may be good ground for the fear in the character of the prayer itself. 1. Its tone may indicate that we are not greatly interested in it ourselves. We cannot expect *God* to be if *we* are not. 2. The prayer may have in it no note of submission. God cannot heed prayer that does not express the cherished feeling, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." Delay often means God's waiting until we are in right moods. 3. There may be in prayer a dictating to God the time and the way in which he shall answer. If so, and his delay excites fears, those fears are most reasonable.

II. FEAR THAT PRAYER WILL NOT BE ANSWERED MAY BE UNREASONABLE. That is

God's ways with us, though somewhat strange, may really give no occasion for such fears. 1. Delay is not refusal. We know that our delay in responding to requests is not refusal, and we are grieved if it is so taken. But in our case, too often, delayed answer means neglect, which may be more cruel than refusal. It is full of gracious assurance that, with God, delay no more means *neglect* than it means refusal. 2. Delay may be answer. At least, it may be if we can see that the moral answers God sends are always more important than the material. Delay sets us upon thought, self-searching, clearing of ourselves, and makes us at once simpler minded and more earnest; and that is God's first *soul*-answer to our prayer. 3. Delay prepares for answer. It may be God's time for looking round, so that the answer may be a better one than he could have sent at once.

III. FEAR THAT PRAYER WILL NOT BE ANSWERED MAY BE UNWORTHY. It will be if in it there is any cherished doubt of God's power, or wisdom, or willingness to bless us.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*A soul full of troubles.* These plaints are such as could only be uttered by a diseased man—diseased in body or diseased in mind. The man felt "satiated with evils." Hezekiah, suffering from his carbuncle, or Job, as he "scraped himself with his potsherd," might be expected to read life as drearily and despondingly as the psalmist did. "The psalm accumulates images to describe the pressure of trial upon the frailty of human nature." Look at some of the troubles.

I. THE BREVITY OF HUMAN LIFE. That does not impress us so much when the aged are taken away, because we have become familiar with seventy as man's allotted years; and the aged seem to have completed their time, and rounded off their lives. Nor does it impress us when young children die, because we have become familiar with the perils of infancy. We feel it most when men are taken away in the "midst of their days." Hezekiah, smitten in the prime of life, walls over the brevity of life, saying, "I said, in the cutting off of my day, I shall go to the gates of the grave; I am deprived of the residue of my years. Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent. I have cut off like a weaver my life." See the similar plaints of Job. The corrective of this trouble is to measure life by *deeds*, not by *years*. He lives long who does much.

II. LOSS OF BODILY AND MENTAL STRENGTH. "I am as a man that hath no strength." Perhaps there is nothing harder for active-minded, energetic men to endure than conscious weakness. To many persons mental depression, resulting simply from lowered vitality, is the supreme distress. Yet in these days the human trial often takes this form. It is a triumph of grace to hold fast integrity even when the very mind is clouded with weakness, and "like a mist our vigour flees away," until all that remains to us is "a fragile form, fast hasting to decay." The corrective is to see that even *weakness* is in the list of God's disciplinary agents.

III. SEPARATION FROM ORDINARY DUTIES AND RELATIONS. From ver. 8 we gather that this was complicated by the fact that disease had taken offensive forms; and this brings to view the very marked and distressing features of Job's disease. No one can fail to feel it hard to retire from loved scenes and associations, and to loose out of hand loved duties. We think that no one can do them but ourselves, and no one can be to our friends what we were. The corrective is to remember that God may provide rest-times for his servants; but he never bids them put their tools down, once for all, until he knows that their work is done; and *then* no true-hearted man could wish to stay. It may come to be the form of our final struggle with self, that we are called to give up life's duties and life's relations at God's bidding. There is possible triumph even over soul-troubles.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Affliction conceived as Divine wrath.* "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me." The word "wrath" has now such meanings and suggestions for us, that it cannot be wisely applied to God. The Prayer-book Version reads, "Thine indignation lieth hard upon me, and thou hast vexed me with all thy storms." The word "indignation" better suggests *official* feeling in response to wrong-doing. "Wrath" suggests *personal* feeling. It would be well, however, if we could keep "wrath" as the special term to indicate the response of God to man's sin. "He is angry with," wrathful

towards, "the wicked every day." Perowne translates by a very unsuitable word, "Upon me thy *fury* lieth hard." In his moments of deepest depression the man of God ought not to associate *fury* with his God, because it indicates feeling that is beyond control, passion; and we may never think of God as having lost self-control. It must be borne in mind that we have in this psalm passionate utterances, not calm and sober judgments. These are not the quiet, settled opinions of the psalmist; they are only passing feelings, belonging to a time of strain. They are his "infirmity." Two things lead him to think and speak thus.

I. THE SENSE OF SIN MAKES AFFLICTION SEEM LIKE DIVINE WRATH. When the son of the widow of Zarephath died, she rushed into the presence of Elijah, saying, "O thou man of God, art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" Her feeling is that which comes to us all in times of affliction. We ask what we can have done to need this visitation of Divine wrath. The Jews were sure that either the man born blind or his parents must have sinned. The friends of Job could find no explanation of Job's afflictions, save that he had come under the wrath of God for some special sin. The Book of Job is written to show that this *may be* the explanation of suffering, and it may *not be*. All through life, and often very painfully at the close of life, the sense of sin embitters trial and suffering. Our relief comes from feeling that all God's "wrath," shown in the afflictions of his people, is *disciplinary* and *corrective* (see Heb. xii. 5—11).

II. THE SPECIAL FORMS AFFLICTION SOMETIMES TAKES COMPEL US TO THINK THEY ARE SIGNS OF DIVINE WRATH. It is not so much their intensity as it is their special character. Some kinds of affliction are specially distressing; they are unsightly, or offensive, or disgraceful. This is hinted at in the psalm. Even relatives shrink from the sufferer. Take the case of Job. This was the bitterest feature of his trouble. Illustrate from such disease as leprosy, or from offensive forms of skin-disease. Surely some special "wrath" in God must appoint us such a lot. And yet the truth may be that this is but a burden of love. We are only being shown "how great things we may be able to suffer for his Name's sake."—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*Peerings into the future*. "Wilt thou show wonders unto the dead?" "It is both curious and instructive to mark how, throughout the psalm, whether it is his own infirmity which he bewails, or the loss of friends, the mind of this wise man is straining toward the great darkness in which so many of his lovers and companions have been swallowed up, and into which he is himself about to pass. He is for ever speculating on the physical and moral conditions of the world which lies in or beyond that darkness. He cannot get away from the theme. He is for ever fingering it, and returning to it." "He was for ever asking—Is the life beyond death a true life? is it a life worth living? Will it redress the wrongs of time, and vindicate the ways of God with men? Is the world to come a world of righteousness and charity and peace, in which Truth will lift her veil, and all alienations and enmities will be swallowed up in love?" Peerings into the future are natural; they may be healthy, they may be unhealthy; they depend very much on personal disposition, and quite as much on particular circumstances. Concerning the future, enough is known to prove a constant incentive to moral goodness; so much is unknown that faith may be kept in lively exercise. These points may be illustrated.

I. PEERINGS INTO THE FUTURE ARE NATURAL. Man has never been able to accept the idea that his life ends at death. Heathen and pagan religions meet the cry for light on the world beyond death. Our friends die, but we cannot think them lost. So many die young, just fitted for life; there must be life for them beyond. We must die, but we cannot admit the idea that our real life ends at death. We are consciously fitted, by our earth-life, for something more.

II. PEERINGS INTO THE FUTURE MAY BE HEALTHY. They will be if they bring a vivid sense of the relation of the coming life to this life. If we see that the powers of that life are the powers gained in this.

III. PEERINGS INTO THE FUTURE MAY BE UNHEALTHY. They will be if they become time-consuming, vague, impractical speculations, which fritter away the powers of the soul, and make present duties seem dull. The sitting in a window-seat and dreamily peering into the west may be all very well, supposing the dreamer has got no house-

work to do. She would be wise to do her duty and leave the future alone. Unhealthy speculation on the future is a modern religious epidemic, seriously injuring the vitality of our Churches.

IV. PEERINGS INTO THE FUTURE DEPEND ON DISPOSITION AND CIRCUMSTANCE. Some are speculative; they cannot live in the actual, they are always imagining the possible. They are always away yonder. No doubt they have their mission; but we are glad not to have too many of them, or the work of to-day would never get done. When men are in illness, or at gravesides, or set thinking by national calamities, then "peerings into the future" are befitting, and may be helpful things.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*Prayer getting in front of God.* "In the morning shall my prayer prevent thee." The idea is a singular one, based upon the older meaning of the word "prevent." Thinking of God under the figure of an earthly King, he conceives of himself as a petitioner who is so intense in his desire that he reaches the palace gate *before the King is up*. His prayer is there before the King is. To "prevent" now means to "hinder." In older days it simply meant to "go before," to "anticipate." The word is never used in the sense of "hinder," either in the Bible, as we have it, or in the books of the age in which it was translated. But it should further be observed that getting up very early in the morning to do a thing is a frequent Bible figure for doing a thing earnestly, doing it with all your heart. It is still true of us that if we are thoroughly in earnest about a matter, we can easily get up early in the morning to attend to it. So this figure of the psalmist does but express his intense earnestness in prayer, the fervency of his desire, his almost passionate waiting on God, that makes him feel as if he could get before God, as if he could be there to plead before God was there to hear. It can be but a figure of man's feeling. He never can be ready before God is; he cannot get before God. Man is always second in prayer; God is always first in waiting to receive prayer.

I. MAN THINKING HE CAN BE FIRST WITH GOD. He can get before his fellow-man, and ask what his fellow has not thought about, and is not quite prepared to give. And so, in his intensity, man thinks he can even be first with God; he thinks he can ask what God has not thought about. He can tell God something. God does indeed gently and graciously deal with impetuous and impulsive souls, and let them freely speak out all their hearts, and even think they have informed him a great deal. He loves our confidences, even if they are intense; but he must often smile as the mother smiles on her impetuous boy, who tells her, as if it was something quite new, what she has suspected or known for a long time. But the earnestness that tries to be first with God cannot fail to be acceptable to him.

II. MAN FINDING OUT THAT GOD IS ALWAYS FIRST WITH HIM. It comes to us occasionally as a great surprise, that what we have asked God about so intensely, he has been a long while attending to. He knew our need before we felt it, and let it take shape as prayer. And that is one of the most important blessings that follow prayer. Asking God's help in *some things*, we find out that God's help has all the while been in *everything*.—R. T.

Ver. 14.—*God's hidden face.* "Why hidest thou thy face from me?" The shinings, or the hidings, of the face are frequently referred to in the Psalms. Masters and kings in the East show their dignity by *speaking* as little as possible. They convey their wishes, and express their feelings, by their looks, or by simple movements of their hands. So their servants and their courtiers anxiously watch their faces, to see in them signs of approval, acceptance, and favour. If the king does not look at them, turns his face away, hides his face from them, they know that they are out of his favour; they fear that some mischief will befall them. And so, if a man brings a petition to a king, it is enough answer if the king simply turns his face away, hides his face; that is a virtual refusal. Compare such poetical expressions as "Make thy face to shine upon thy servants;" "Lift up the light of thy countenance upon us;" "Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?" "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself."

I. GOD'S HIDINGS ARE NEVER MERE ACTS OF SOVEREIGNTY. A thoughtful writer says, "I know that some have maintained that God sometimes forsakes his people in

the exercise of his sovereignty. I confess I do not understand this. It appears to me that undue and unwarrantable liberties are often used with the sovereignty of God, and that many things are laid to its account with which it is not chargeable. We speak of the Divine sovereignty. But sovereignty is not an arbitrary, capricious thing; it is a righteous and holy thing; and God must ever act in conformity with the unalterable principles of his character. Believe it, there is no such mystery as some would make us think in those temporary desertions with which God sometimes visits his own people. The reason of them is to be found in themselves—in their sinfulness, in their unsteadfastness, in their unfaithfulness."

II. GOD'S HIDINGS ARE ALWAYS EXPRESSIONS OF DIVINE WISDOM. They are special modes of dealing, arranged in precise adaptation to particular persons, at particular times, and under particular circumstances. Comfort lies in clearly seeing that God's hidings are not common and usual dealings, and therefore if God deals thus with us, it must be in wise and gracious adaptation *just to us*.

III. GOD'S HIDINGS ARE THE BEGINNINGS OF HIS ANSWERS TO US. This may be effectively illustrated by our Lord's treatment of the Syro-phenician woman. He began his answer by seeming indifference, and even seeming refusal, which drew forth her noble intensity.—R. T.

Vers. 1—18.—*Light in the darkness*. This is the darkest, saddest psalm of all the Psalms.

I. A PICTURE OF THE MOST DESPAIRING MISERY. Scarcely possible to think that such unalleviated misery ever existed. 1. *Utter physical and mental weakness and prostration*. (Ver. 6.) As good as dead. 2. *Utterly forsaken of all his friends*. (Vers. 8, 18.) And God had put them from him. 3. *Cast off from God, by reason of his wrath*. (Vers. 7, 14, 15, 16.) He is abandoned utterly both of God and man; i.e. he thought so. But no one really is. 4. *This misery had been nearly lifelong*. (Ver. 13.)

II. RESOLUTE PRAYER IS THE LAST RESOURCE OF THE PROFOUNDLY MISERABLE. 1. *His prayer was persistent*. (Vers. 1, 13.) Day and night, morning and evening. 2. *He makes the greatness of his affliction an argument for being heard*. (Vers. 2, 3.) 3. *He prays to know the "why" of God's wrath towards him*. (Ver. 14.) The affliction is a mystery the reason of which he would have made clear. He makes no confession of sin as explaining the terrors of God from which he is suffering.

III. SOME GLEAMS OF FAITH AND HOPE BREAKING THROUGH THE DARKNESS OF HIS DESPAIR. 1. *God is the God of his salvation*. (Ver. 1.) Notwithstanding all he says of his abandonment. 2. *God is worthy of praise for his loving-kindness and faithfulness*. (Vers. 10, 11.) He could still believe in these. 3. *He prays for the righteousness of God to be manifested to him*. (Ver. 12.) He cannot help uttering these deep-grounded faiths that made him still cling to God in the most despairing moments. None can abandon themselves to utter despair who have seen God in Christ as the Father.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM LXXXIX.

AT first sight, a psalm of praise; but, in reality, one of expostulation and complaint. The praises of God are sung in the opening section (vers. 1—37); they culminated in the Davidical covenant. But this covenant has been "made void," annulled. The existing state of things is directly contrary to all its promises (vers. 38—45). How long is this to continue? Does not God's faithfulness require the deliverance of Israel and of the Davidical house from their

calamities, and their speedy restoration to his favour (vers. 46—51)?

Ver. 52 is no part of the psalm, but the doxology which concludes the Book.

Vers. 1—4 are introductory to the first section (vers. 1—37). They strike the keynote, which is, first, praise of God's faithfulness generally (vers. 1, 2), and secondly, praise of him in respect of the Davidical covenant (vers. 3, 4).

Ver. 1.—I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever. "For ever" is the emphatic

phrase. The psalmist will commemorate God's mercies, not only when they are continuing, but always. With my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations; literally, *to generation and generation*.

Ver. 2.—For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever. A time shall come when, out of whatever ruins, mercy shall be "built up"—raised from the ground like a solid edifice, and, when once raised up, shall stand firm for ever. Thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. At the same time, God's faithfulness to his promises will be established "in the very heavens," i.e. conspicuously (see ver. 37).

Ver. 3.—I have made a covenant with my chosen. There is an ellipse of "for thou hast said," which Professor Cheyne supplies. God's promise to David is the entire foundation of the psalmist's hope and confidence. He therefore places it briefly in the very forefront—afterwards expanding it into the beautiful passage, which forms more than one-third of the entire composition (vers. 19—37). I have sworn unto David my servant (comp. 2 Sam. vii. 11—16; Ps. cxxxii. 11).

Ver. 4.—Thy seed will I establish for ever (see 2 Sam. vii. 12, 13; Ps. cxxx. 12). And build up thy throne to all generations. The promises to David were not fulfilled in the letter. After Zerubbabel, no prince of the Davidic house sat on the throne of David, or had temporal sway over Israel. The descendants of David sank into obscurity, and so remained for five centuries. Still, however, God's faithfulness was sure. In Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, the true King of the everlasting kingdom was raised up—every pledge made to David was fulfilled. "Messiah the Prince," eternal King of an eternal kingdom, appeared as the true "Seed" intended, and began his spiritual reign over the spiritual Israel, which still continues, and will continue for ever.

Vers. 5—37.—The psalmist carries out the intention proclaimed in ver. 1, and proceeds to "sing of the mercies of the Lord" at great length. His song of praise divides into two portions. From ver. 5 to ver. 18 it is a general laudation of the Almighty for his greatness in heaven (vers. 5—7), in nature (vers. 9, 11, 12), and in the course of his rule on earth (vers. 10, 13—18), after which it passes into a laudation of him in respect of what he had done, and what he had promised, to David (vers. 19—37).

Ver. 5.—And the heavens shall praise thy

wonders, O Lord. "The heavens" here are not the material heavens, as in Ps. xix. 1, but the company of the dwellers in heaven. God's praise fittingly begins with them. Thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints. The "congregation of the saints" is the company of angels (comp. Job v. 1; xv. 15). Not on earth only (vers. 1, 2), but in heaven also, God's "faithfulness" is the theme of song.

Ver. 6.—For who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord? God's angels praise him, and only him; since there is none in heaven or earth to be compared to him. Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord? "The sons of the mighty" are the angels (comp. Ps. cxxxix. 1).

Ver. 7.—God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints; rather, *in the council of the holy ones* (see the Revised Version). And to be had in reverence of all them that are about him; or, *above all them*, etc.

Ver. 8.—O Lord God of hosts; i.e. God of the angelic hosts just spoken of. Who is a strong Lord like unto thee? rather, *Who is strong like unto thee, O Jah?* (comp. Exod. xv. 11). Or to thy faithfulness round about thee? rather, as in the Revised Version, *and thy faithfulness is round about thee*. It has been said that "the two words 'mercies' and 'faithfulness' are the refrain of the psalm." The latter occurs six times (vers. 1, 2, 5, 8, 24, 33), and "faithful" in ver. 37.

Ver. 9.—Thou rulest the raging of the sea. There is no reason why this should not be understood literally. God's power over the sea is constantly put forward by the sacred writers as very specially indicative of his might and greatness (comp. Job xxxviii. 8—11; Ps. cvii. 29; Prov. viii. 29; Jer. v. 22, etc.). When the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them (comp. Ps. lxxv. 7; cvii. 23—30; Matt. viii. 26, 27).

Ver. 10.—Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces; or, "thou didst break" once upon a time, i.e. at the Exodus. (For the designation of Egypt under the term "Rahab," i.e. "arrogant," see Job ix. 13; xxvi. 12; Ps. lxxxvii. 4; Isa. li. 9.) As one that is slain; i.e. completely, utterly. Thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm (see Exod. xiv. 27—31; xv. 6).

Ver. 11.—The heavens are thine (comp. Ps. viii. 3; xxxiii. 6; cxv. 16). The earth also is thine (see Ps. xxiv. 1). As for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them (see Ps. i. 12).

Ver. 12.—The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy Name. As in ver. 11 "heaven and earth" stand for all creation, the whole

of the material universe, so here the four points of the compass designate the same. Tabor and Hermon undoubtedly represent the west and the east. They present themselves to the poet's mind as standing over against each other, one on this side, and the other on that side, of Jordan.

Ver. 13.—Thou hast a mighty arm; literally, *an arm with might*. Strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand. These anthropomorphisms will disturb no one; they pervade the whole of Scripture.

Ver. 14.—Justice and judgment; or, *righteousness and justice* (Cheyne). The psalmist here rises to a higher level—from that of might to that of right. God is not merely strong to do whatever he wills; but all that he wills is consonant with right and justice. Are the habitation of thy throne; rather, *the basis*, or “*foundation*.” (So Kay, Cheyne, and the Revised Version.) *Meroy and truth shall go before thy face*; i.e. shall stand ever in front of thee: be thy inseparable companions. Whatever thou doest shall be done “in truth and equity.”

Ver. 15.—Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound. The sound of devotional joy appears to be intended—the sound which went up from the sanctuary in the great festival-times (see Numb. x. 1, 9; Lev. xxv. 9; Ps. xxvii. 6; lxxxi. 1, etc.). They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. Herein consists especially their blessedness (comp. Ps. iv. 6).

Ver. 16.—In thy Name shall they rejoice all the day; and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. The “Name” and the “righteousness” of God form the glory of the Church, and are a perpetual source of rejoicing to her.

Ver. 17.—For thou art the Glory of their strength; or, “the Ornament”—that in which their strength and might as a people culminate. And in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. Thy favour towards us exalts us among the nations.

Ver. 18.—For the Lord is our Defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our King; literally, *for to Jehovah belongs our shield, and to the Holy One of Israel belongs our king*. The meaning seems to be that he who is Israel's king and shield—i.e. the Davidical monarch at the time—being under the constant protection of the Almighty, all must necessarily go well with the people at last.

Ver. 19.—Then thou spakest; rather, *once*, or “once upon a time,” as Professor Cheyne suggests. The allusion is to the occurrence related in 2 Sam. vii. 4—17. In vision (see 2 Sam. vii. 7). To thy holy one; i.e. to Nathan the prophet. And saidst. The psalmist reports the words of the vision very freely, interweaving with

them thoughts drawn from various psalms; expanding them, and sometimes heightening the colours. I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people (comp. 1 Sam. xvi. 1—13). David was a “mighty” from his youth—even before he slew Goliath, as appears from his slaughter of the lion and the bear (1 Sam. xvii. 34—36).

Ver. 20.—I have found David my servant (comp. 1 Sam. xvi. 1; Acts xiii. 22). With my holy oil have I anointed him (see 1 Sam. xvi. 13).

Ver. 21.—With whom my hand shall be established; i.e. “to whom I will give continual support” (see 1 Sam. xviii. 12, 14; 2 Sam. v. 10; vii. 9). Mine arm also shall strengthen him (comp. ver. 13).

Ver. 22.—The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him (see 2 Sam. vii. 10, which has supplied the very words of the second clause).

Ver. 23.—And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him (comp. 2 Sam. vii. 9).

Ver. 24.—But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him (comp. Ps. lxi. 7). And in my Name shall his horn be exalted (see 2 Sam. vii. 9).

Ver. 25.—I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers (comp. Ps. lxxii. 8). “The sea” is probably the Mediterranean, and “the rivers” the Euphrates, with its canals and affluents (see 1 Kings iv. 21, 24; Ps. cxxxvii. 1). The promise of an extended dominion is implied in 2 Sam. vii. 9.

Ver. 26.—He shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father (comp. 2 Sam. vii. 14). My God, and the Book of my salvation (see 2 Sam. xxii. 2, 3, 47).

Ver. 27.—Also I will make him my first-born. There is but one true “Firstborn”—“the Only Begotten of the Father.” All other so-called “firstborns”—as Israel (Exod. iv. 22), Ephraim (Jer. xxxi. 9), David—are reflections or representatives, in some way or other, of the real and only true “Firstborn.” Higher than the kings of the earth; literally, *the most high above the kings of the earth*; i.e. standing to the other “kings of the earth” as “the Most High” to his angelic ministers.

Ver. 28.—My mercy will I keep for him for evermore (comp. 2 Sam. vii. 15, “My mercy shall not depart away from him”). And my covenant shall stand fast with him (see 2 Sam. vii. 16; xxiii. 5).

Ver. 29.—His seed also will I make to endure for ever (comp. 2 Sam. vii. 16, “Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before me”). And his throne as the days of heaven. “Thy throne shall be established for ever;” “I will

establish his kingdom" (2 Sam. vii. 12, 16).

Ver. 30.—If his children forsake my Law, and walk not in my judgments (comp. 2 Sam. vii. 14, "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men"). Solomon himself began the falling away (1 Kings xi. 1—8). He was followed by Rehoboam (2 Chron. xii. 1), Ahaziah (2 Kings viii. 27), Joash (2 Chron. xxiv. 17—24), Uzziah (2 Chron. xxvi. 16—20), Ahaz (2 Kings xvi. 2—18), Manasseh (2 Kings xxi. 2—16), Amon (2 Kings xxi. 20—22), Jehoahaz (2 Kings xxiii. 32), Jehoiakim (2 Kings xxiii. 37), Jehoiachin (2 Kings xxiv. 9), and Zedekiah (2 Kings xxiv. 19), all of whom "did evil in the sight of the Lord"—forsook his Law, and walked not in his judgments.

Ver. 31.—If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; rather, *if they profane my statutes*; i.e. make light of them, either in their words or in their lives.

Ver. 32.—Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod (comp. 2 Sam. vii. 14). "The rod" was used upon Solomon (1 Kings xi. 14—40), Rehoboam (1 Kings xii. 16—20), Ahaziah (2 Kings ix. 27), Joash (2 Kings xii. 17—20), and all the wicked descendants of David, as sufficiently appears from the history of the divided kingdom in Kings and Chronicles. God visited their iniquity with stripes time after time, and generation after generation.

Ver. 33.—Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. Compare the original promise (2 Sam. vii. 15); and see also 1 Kings xi. 12, 13, 34—39; xv. 4, 5, etc. The seed of David was not allowed to fail, but was continued on, until, in the fulness of time, there was born into the world, of David's seed and in David's city, One in whom all the promises made to David could be, and were, accomplished in their utmost fulness.

Ver. 34.—My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips (comp. ver. 28, and the comment *ad loc.*). With God is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas. i. 17).

Ver. 35.—Once have I sworn by my holiness; rather, *one thing have I sworn*. (On God's oath to David, see vers. 3, 49, and Ps. cxxxii. 11.) The present passage shows that it was sworn "by his holiness"—i.e. by his absolute moral perfection. That I will not lie unto David; i.e. that I will keep all my promises to him. God, no doubt, always and in every case "keepeth his promise for ever" (Ps. cxlvi. 6); but in his mercy and loving-kindness he condescended to give David a special guarantee of his faithfulness in respect of the promises made to him.

Ver. 36.—His seed shall endure for ever (comp. ver. 29). And his throne as the sun before me; i.e. shall endure as the sun (comp. Ps. lxxii. 5 and 2 Sam. vii. 13).

Ver. 37.—It shall be established for ever as the moon (comp. Ps. lxxii. 7). And as a faithful witness in heaven. Some understand this expression of the moon; but, as Professor Cheyne comments, "Who could witness (or declare) that such great things were true but Jehovah?" (So too Delitzsch, Kay, and Canon Cook.) If this be regarded as the true meaning, it will be better to translate, "the true witness." Job's citation of God as his witness (ch. xvi. 19) is scarcely parallel.

Vers. 38—45.—A sudden and complete change here sets in. Rejoicing is turned into mourning, eulogy into complaint. Notwithstanding all the promises of God, notwithstanding his inherent and essential "faithfulness," the Davidical king and his kingdom are at the last gasp. *Seemingly*, every promise made has been broken, every hope held out of good turned into an actuality of evil. God is wroth with his anointed, has made void the covenant with him, profaned his crown and cast it to the ground, turned the edge of his sword, and made him not to stand in the battle; he has laid his land open to the enemy, broken down its defences, brought its strongholds to ruin, given it as a spoil to all who pass by; he has set up the right hand of Israel's adversaries, caused them to rejoice and triumph in Israel's disgrace and suffering; he has covered the king with shame, and cut short the days of his youth. How is this? And what is to be the end of it?

Ver. 38.—But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed. The first "thou" is emphatic—*תוּ, תוּ*, "the faithful Witness;" *תוּ*, who hast made all these promises, art thou the very One who has falsified them all—who hast "been wroth with thine anointed," abhorred (or rejected) him, and cast him off.

Ver. 39.—Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant; or, "abhorred" (Cheyne, Revised Version). The verb is a very unusual one, occurring only here and in Lam. ii. 7. Thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground (comp. Ps. lxxiv. 7). The theocratic crown was so holy a thing, that any degradation of it might be regarded as a "profanation."

Ver. 40.—Thou hast broken down all his hedges; i.e. "all his defences"—the strong-

holds, that guarded the frontiers of the land, were brought to ruin (comp. 2 Chron. xi. 5—10).

Ver. 41.—All that pass by the way spoil him. This feature of the situation recalls 2 Kings xxiv. 2, but might, no doubt, suit also other times of distress. He is a reproach to his neighbours; or, "he is become a reproach" (comp. Neh. i. 3; ii. 17; Ps. xlv. 13; lxxix. 4, etc.).

Ver. 42.—Thou hast set up the right hand of his adversaries; i.e. "thou hast increased their power and strength, exalted them, and depressed him." Thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice (comp. Ps. xxxv. 15, "In mine adversity they rejoiced;" and see also Micah vii. 8; Obad. 10—12). Every depression of Israel caused the neighbouring nations, who alike feared them and detested them, to rejoice.

Ver. 43.—Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword; literally, *the rock of his sword*. It is not quite clear whether a "blunting of the sword," or a "turning to fight of those who drew the sword," is intended. In either case the phrase implies military disaster. And hast not made him to stand in the battle; i.e. "hast caused him to give way before his enemies." The words imply defeat in the open field.

Ver. 44.—Thou hast made his glory to cease; literally, *thou hast put an end to his brightness*; but the meaning is that given in the text. And cast his throne down to the ground (comp. ver. 39).

Ver. 45.—The days of his youth hast thou shortened. This does not seem to mean an actual cutting short by death (since the Davidical king has been spoken of as alive in vers. 38, 41, 43), but rather a cutting short of youthful energy and vigour, a premature senescence, such as may well have fallen upon Jehoiachin or Zedekiah. Thou hast covered him with shame; or, "heaped shame upon him"—"covered him up with shame." The phrase would suit Jehoiachin, who was kept in prison by Nebuchadnezzar, and in "prison garments" (2 Kings xxv. 29), for the space of thirty-five years.

Vers. 46—51.—The psalm ends with an appeal to God—"How long" is the present state of things to continue? How long is God's wrath to endure? Will he not remember how weak and futile, how short-lived and fleeting, the whole race of man is? Will he not bethink him of his old loving-kindnesses to David, and of the promises made to him, and confirmed by oath? Will he not therefore remove their reproach from Israel, and

especially from his anointed, on whom the disgrace chiefly falls? To these questions there can be but one answer. God will assuredly make his faithfulness known (see ver. 1).

Ver. 46.—How long, Lord? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? (comp. Ps. xlii. 1; lxxiv. 10; lxxix. 5). Shall thy wrath burn like fire? i.e. furiously, without cessation, till all be consumed.

Ver. 47.—Remember how short my time is. Consider how short-lived is the whole race of men. Come, therefore, to our deliverance quickly. Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? literally, *for what vanity thou hast made all the sons of men*. Another point suggested for God's consideration, as fitted to call forth his compassion.

Ver. 48.—What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? An expansion of the first clause of ver. 47. Man's littleness, feebleness, and fleetingness should draw forth the pity and loving-kindness of God.

Ver. 49.—Lord, where are thy former loving-kindnesses? or, "thy ancient mercies," those "sure mercies of David," whereof Isaiah spoke (ch. lv. 3). Which thou swarest unto David in thy truth (comp. ver. 35 and Ps. cxxxii. 11).

Ver. 50.—Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants; i.e. the reproach under which all thy people lie so long as their enemies are allowed to plunder and oppress them at their pleasure (see vers. 40—44). Remember also how I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people. The reproach under which his countrymen lie—a reproach laid on them by "all the mighty people" among whom they dwell—falls on the psalmist's heart with especial weight through his deep sympathy with all of them.

Ver. 51.—Wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O Lord; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed. The reproach which rests upon the people rests no less upon their king—upon his "footsteps," his movements, all that he does, "every step he takes" (Bishop Perowne). This is an additional affliction to the psalmist, and emphasizes his last cry to God for mercy.

Ver. 52.—Blessed be the Lord for evermore. Amen, and Amen. This detached verse, not necessarily from the same hand as the rest of the psalm, winds up, with the usual refrain, the Third Book.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 7.—*The fear of God.* "God is greatly to be feared," etc. True religion contains three indispensable elements—right beliefs concerning God; right feelings; right conduct. If either be deficient, our religion will be proportionately injured or worthless. Religion without faith is impossible. Religion without morality is a mockery. Religion without feeling is lifeless and powerless. Preaching commonly deals more with faith and duty than with feeling—*i.e.* affection, desire, emotion—for two reasons: (1) Faith and duty supply the motives to feeling; faith works by love. (2) If we concentrate too much attention on our feelings, and cultivate them for their own sake, they grow morbid or exaggerated. Yet this vast region of Christian experience is far too important to be left unexplored, uncultivated. The affection referred to here is often spoken of in Scripture as synonymous with true religion—the *fear of God*. Consider (1) its nature; (2) its motives.

I. ITS NATURE. 1. *It is not terror*; the fear which "hath torment," which "perfect love casteth out" (1 John iv. 18). Terror would drive us from God; the fear the Bible teaches begets trust, and draws us near to him (Pss. cxv. 11; xxii. 23; xxv. 14, etc.). Ungodly men, in the presence of sudden danger or impending death, often pass in a moment from impious carelessness or defiant blasphemy to abject terror; but there is no more religion in the latter than in the former. 2. *It is not a passing feeling, but a permanent habit of mind.* It is central and fundamental; for without it love, trust, gratitude, hope, obedience, would lack their truly religious character. Yet we cannot sum it up in any single, simple phrase. It is the temper which prompts and inspires worship (Ps. xcv. 6). It is awe of God's greatness, reverence of his majesty. It is reverence for his authority, prompting obedience to his Law, submission to his will. It is sensitiveness to his praise and blame, making the thought of displeasing him intolerable. There is in it ever some mingling of that sort of terror with which we contemplate tremendous power or awful danger, though in safety; the precipice over which we nearly fell; the avalanche that swept by without touching us; the storm in which our frail boat would have been wrecked had we not come ashore in time (Luke xii. 5).

II. ITS MOTIVES. 1. The revelation of God's omnipotence, omnipresence, infinite wisdom, eternal being in the vastness, order, variety, unity, of the universe (Ps. viii. 3, 4). 2. Our personal relation as creatures to our Creator (Acts xvii. 28). By "saints" ("holy ones") angels may here be meant; they share with us this awful, incomprehensible, ineffably intimate relation to God. 3. God's holiness, in itself and in contrast with our selfishness (comp. Exod. iii. 5). 4. God's goodness and mercy (see Hos. iii. 5, where Revised Version is a paraphrase, Authorized Version more literal; Jer. xxxiii. 9). Our Saviour's presence, gracious as it was, inspired intense awe (Luke v. 8).

In former times, harsh and terrible views of God were often preached, out of all harmony with not only New Testament, but Old Testament teaching (1 John iv. 8; Exod. xxxiv. 6). At present an exaggerated reaction tends to thrust out of view the awe-inspiring teaching of both Law and gospel as to the evil of sin and its penalties, and to lose sight, in curious speculation about the nature and duration of future punishment, of the two most important facts—its *certainty*, and its *righteous severity* (Rom. i. 18; ii. 4—12).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2, 5, 8, etc.—*God's faithfulness.* This is the key-note of the psalm, the beautiful strain which is heard over and over again in varied forms throughout. There are pieces of music in which some one sweet air recurs repeatedly, now as if amid the rush and roar of a tempest, anon, when the music has sunk down into quietness; you hear it now loud, now soft, now stirring in sonorous strains, now soothing in plaintive gentle tones; but it is the same air still. And the blessed thought of the faithfulness of God thus recurs throughout this psalm. In ver. 1

praise celebrates it. "With my mouth will I make known," etc. Does it not deserve this? Who is there can deny the faithfulness of God? He is ever true to his word. Let us, then, openly confess it, and in the very confession the conviction of it in our own souls shall be deepened. In ver. 2 *faith stays itself upon it.* The verse seems to be a sort of soliloquy. The speaker is encouraging his own trust by asserting his belief that mercy *shall be* built up for ever; it shall not crumble away and come to nought, but, like some glorious fabric that may take a long time for its completion, it shall, nevertheless, be built up, and so built that it shall eternally abide. And as to God's faithfulness, it shall be as are the heavens themselves—the very type of all that is abiding, unchangeable, and the reverse of "the restless vicissitudes, the ever-shifting shores, of earth." So did the soul of the psalmist speak to itself of God's faithfulness, and thereby encourage itself to trust in him. Well will it be for us to talk to ourselves in a similar way. In ver. 5 *the angels of God praise it.* "Thy faithfulness also is praised in the assembly of the holy ones" (Perowne). That is, in the midst of the angels of heaven, in that Church of the Firstborn, God's faithfulness is the theme of their song. Compare the songs of the redeemed as given in the Apocalypse. Let us get ready to join in that blessed choir by our now beginning a like song. In ver. 8 *no human faithfulness can be compared with it.* "What faithfulness is like unto thy faithfulness?"—so a great scholar renders the last half of ver. 8. And may we not all of us ask the like question? Not but what human faithfulness is a blessed fact; there have been those who have been faithful unto death to God and to their fellow-men. Paul, when ready to be offered up, could declare, "I have kept the faith." And there have been many such. But what is the fidelity even of the best of men, much more of the mass of men, as compared to that of God? Hence are we bidden, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help." Would that we trusted God as we do men! In ver. 24 *it is promised to his people.* "My faithfulness shall be with him." What a rebuke is this to our wretched yet ever recurring misgivings and fears! It is one of the gifts of God that are "without repentance" (cf. Rom. iii. 3). In ver. 33 *the sins of God's people do but change its form, not its substance.* God was equally faithful in the sore distresses which he sent to Israel, as in the great benefits and blessings which, when they were obedient, he bestowed upon them. He *will* have all men to be saved (1 Tim. ii. 4). Therefore, if gentle means will not serve, stern ones shall. In vers. 38—51 *believing prayer pleads it as an all-prevailing plea.*—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*Mercy built up for ever.* The psalmist seems to have before his mind the picture of some glorious palace, whose foundation, laid broad and deep and strong, was now uprising in majesty and beauty before him. He seems to see it rising tier on tier, and course on course, and as he beholds it being gradually and gloriously up-built, his adoration and praise burst forth, and he exclaims, "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever." What did he mean? Probably the remembrance of God's mercy to Israel was present to his thought—how that had been "built up;" more and more added; new favours, new enlargements, new communications of the Divine bounty continually given, until Israel had risen to the height of her national glory;—so had God's mercy gone on, building up their state and filling them with good. In their own history the text had been shown to be true. But it has other illustrations. Take—

I. THE SALVATION OF THE HUMAN RACE. It is the supreme instance of mercy being built up for ever. 1. *It began in the nature of God.* For God is love, and love longs for objects on which to lavish itself. Hence came creation, and then redemption in all its successive stages of mercy. 2. *The first promise* after man had fallen. 3. *The preservation of a righteous seed* in such as Seth, Enoch, and those who "called on the Name of the Lord." 4. *The call of Abraham,* the father of the faithful, in whose seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. 5. *The multiplication and redemption of his seed.* 6. *The giving of the Law.* This was to be for the nations as "a child-leader to lead us to Christ." And in spite of all corruptions, this knowledge of God was preserved, and by the providence of God spread abroad widely. 7. *Then the coming of Christ,* of whom all the Law and the prophets did testify. 8. *The baptism of the Holy Spirit* at Pentecost, and the creation of the Christian

Church. Thus step by step the glorious fabric of redeemed humanity has been thus far built up; and the building is still going on, and will go on

"Till the whole ransomed Church of God
Be saved, to sin no more."

II. THE PERFECTING OF THE INDIVIDUAL SOUL. Trace the history of any one of those whom God has redeemed, and in that individual's experience of the ways of God there will be found further illustration of how "mercy is built up for ever." 1. *In the circumstances, whatever they were, which led the soul to realize its deep need.* The Holy Spirit uses all manner of means to bring this about. 2. *In the surrender of the will to Christ.* Faith, believing, coming to Christ, are all, with other such expressions, only different forms of stating that the soul has given up its will to God. 3. *Then the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.* From this results that sanctification which is the "being changed into Christ's image, from glory to glory." 4. *The disciplines of God's providence.* All these are parts of the building process, unsightly, unlovely, repellent, having no form nor comeliness in them, and yet in and through them mercy is being built up, the work of God in the soul is advanced. 5. *The means of grace*—prayers, sacraments, Scriptures, work for God, to which he calls us—all are for our perfecting.

III. THE RECOMPENSES OF MERCY. "Blessed are the merciful," said our Lord, and it is so. Take as an historic illustration the founding of Pennsylvania, and the way in which the Quakers dealt with the Indians. Other methods are but demonstrations of the truth that they take that take the sword perish by the sword. And it is so with individuals. God loves mercy, and recompenses it; he will build it up for ever.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Render praise to the Lord.* For mercy is ever needed by us all. 2. *Hope continually.* For mercy is to be built up for ever: it wearies not; it will, it must, have its way at length. Hope, then, for the myriads yet unsaved; God knows how to build them in. And never despair of yourselves. 3. *Get employed in this blessed building work.* There is room for us all. 4. *Weary not in showing mercy.* It is to go on for ever. If we meet with rude rebuff, still go on with the sacred toil. God's mercy is built up for ever: be ours likewise!—S. C.

Vers. 15, 16.—"*The joyful sound.*" We do not know the circumstances which occasioned this psalm, but we may fitly apply the words of our text to the revelation of God in Christ. Now—

I. THE GOSPEL IS A JOYFUL SOUND. For: 1. *It tells of forgiveness.* This is the need of all, the indispensable need, and is met only in Christ. Therefore the gospel, which tells of Christ, and his atonement, and the full free forgiveness granted in him to every penitent, believing soul, is a joyful sound. 2. *Of a new nature.* Forgiveness apart from this would be of little avail. But Christ is "made unto us . . . sanctification" (see Ezek. xxxvi. 25—31). 3. *Of peace of soul*—that inward calm and rest of faith which, combined with the consciousness of pardon and purity in Christ, constitute here and now a real heaven in the soul. 4. *Of eternal life.* Our joy abides. For all these reasons the gospel is a joyful sound.

II. THE PEOPLE ARE BLESSED WHO KNOW THIS JOYFUL SOUND. 1. *In what they possess.* A new and happy relationship with God. 2. *In what they are.* 3. *In the influence they exert.*

III. THE EFFECTS THAT FOLLOW FROM SUCH KNOWLEDGE ARE VERY PRECIOUS. They concern: 1. *A man's life.* "They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance," etc. A man must get through life some way: the question is—How? But here is a way told of which is, indeed, a good way. To walk in the light of God's countenance is to have the consciousness of God's love resting on one. To know you have the love of a valued friend is good: how much more that of God! It gives serenity of heart, freedom from fear, confidence of deliverance from all evil. 2. *A man's spirit.* "In thy Name shall they rejoice," etc. Joy is essential to the healthy life of the soul, as light is to that of the body. Now that in which they who are spoken of here rejoice is the Name of God: "thy Name." But by the Name of God is meant all that which we find in God. "He hath done all things well" is the verdict which their souls promptly and steadily pronounce. The man is born again, renewed in the spirit of his mind, and hence God is no longer a terror or a dislike to him, but "his exceeding Joy." 3. *A*

man's condition. "In thy righteousness shall they be exalted." Before their own conscience; for it is kept pure and void of offence. Before their fellow-men. Is not that so? "Them that honour me I will honour," saith God. We see this every day. And in the presence of God at last. "They shall be mine in the day when I make up my jewels" (Mal. iii. 17).

IV. BUT IN ORDER TO ALL THIS WE MUST KNOW, REALLY AND INWARDLY, THIS JOYFUL SOUND. 1. *For many professed Christians do not*; and hence they show a sad and unhappy contrast to what has been said. They do not seem blessed any way—not in their daily life, nor in the spirit of their mind, nor are they "exalted" at all as is here said. 2. *The reason* is that, though they may be familiar with the letter of the gospel, they yet do not really know it. For to know the joyful sound is to realize and to appropriate it, to heartily believe and obey it. 3. *The conditions of such knowledge* are: We must greatly desire it; we must prepare for it, for however large our heart may be, the Lord's grace will want all the room; therefore if it be cumbered with other and evil things, there will not be room for him. The Israelites at the Passover were to put away the leaven. So must we put away all known sin. And then believe, trust, and for yourself, the glad gospel message. So shall you come to really know it, and our text shall be fulfilled for you.—S. C.

Ver. 17.—*The exalted horn; or, the secret of strength.* The horn is a constant symbol of strength; the exalted horn, therefore, of strength triumphant. Now, we observe—

I. STRENGTH IS THE GREAT NEED OF THE SOUL OF MAN. Not physical strength, nor intellectual, nor social, but spiritual. There may be knowledge, and good desire, and religious emotions, and holy resolve; but all these things leave a man weak unless they be rendered effectual by a fervent will.

II. ITS SECRET IS THE FAVOUR OF GOD. For that favour: 1. *Restores it.* 2. *Sustains it.* 3. *Inspires it.* 4. *The loss of God's favour paralyzes it.* We know how the favour of men, their applause and encouragement, puts strength into us: how much more the conscious favour of God! With that there is nothing a man will not do and dare and be.

III. THOSE WHO ARE IN THAT FAVOUR ALONE POSSESS THIS SECRET. We may know of it, speak of it, extol it, commend it, and yet not be "in" it. We enter into it: 1. *By coming away from whatever cannot dwell with it*; from all known sin especially. 2. *By surrender of our will*—our heart, that is—to God. 3. *By keeping touch with God*, in habitual prayer, praise, and obedience. So we enter this favour, and abide there.—S. C.

Ver. 19.—*"Chosen out of the people."* This declaration, besides its main theme, teaches us much concerning God's exaltations of men. As: 1. *Wherefore God exalts men.* It certainly is not to gratify mere selfish ambition. Those who climb up to high places from such motives are certainly not set there by God, and will soon have to climb down again. All history teaches the short-lived power of mere selfish ambition. But one motive we may regard as moving the Divine mind would be his love for the exalted one. Now, there is no greater joy that ever comes to a good man than that of being the means of great good to others. It is a pure delight, and of intense kind. The love of God would, therefore, bestow such delight on his chosen ones. His chief motive, however, is the good of others. What would have become of Israel but for David? Saul's rule was but another name for shipwreck of the state. David saved it from such ruin. And the good of others, the people at large, is the motive of all God's exaltations; other ends may be proposed and secured, but this is assuredly the chief. The possession of power is, therefore, a tremendous responsibility, and happy are the peoples whose rulers ever remember and practically recognize this. And it is true of all power whatsoever, whether little or great. "No man liveth to himself." 2. *Such exaltation generally means great suffering.* He who is the supreme illustration of the truth of our text was "made perfect through suffering." And it is ever so. What a terrible discipline David went through ere he attained the throne! Moses too, and Paul, and God's heroes generally. Let us, then, remember wherefore suffering is sent to any of us—that it is for our uplifting; let us take care not

to hinder this purpose. 3. *How God exalts*—by choosing those whom he exalts not *by*, but *out of*, the people. The people can rarely be trusted. Go over the list of mankind's greatest helpers and saviours, right up to our Saviour himself. Would the people have chosen them? They would far more likely have crucified them, as they did the greatest of them all. The *vox populi* is the *vox Dei* only when it endorses the previous choice of God. For men have seen that God has chosen for them, and they willingly accept his choice. But the main theme of our text concerns: 4. *Whom God chooses*—from "out of the people." Now, consider in this statement—

I. ITS TRUTH. See this: 1. *In the history of David.* (Ps. lxxviii. 70, 71.) 2. *In well-nigh all deliverers* of the people, from Moses downwards, from Gideon to Garibaldi—they have been ever "chosen out of the people." 3. *In Christ our Lord.* He was indeed thus chosen. His royal descent from David availed him not, for the glory of that race had utterly disappeared. Hence he was altogether of the people—by birth; associates; social rank; habits; education; by his teaching, which was not at all "as the scribes," but understood and welcomed by "the common people;" by his life of poverty; by his death; all the way along, from "the bare manger to the bitter cross," he was one of the people. It was a slave's death that he died. "He was rich, yet for our sakes," etc.

II. THE REASONS OF THIS CHOICE. 1. "The people" were the mass of mankind, who needed to be saved. 2. One from themselves would better understand them. 3. More readily sympathize. 4. God is wont to choose the foolish things of this world (1 Cor. i. 27). 5. Christ's sharing the people's lot assured them of the love of God, and so led them to turn to him, which is salvation. They learned so that "God is love."

III. ITS LESSONS. They are such as these: 1. *The approachableness of God.* Christ has shown us that he keeps no state to frighten us from his presence. Everybody came to him, and may come to God. 2. *The indispensable condition of rendering real help.* (See Mark x. 43—45.) We must go down among those whom we would bless. 3. *How little worth are the great things of the world!* Power, wealth, rank—God chose none of them. 4. Christ knows all about me; for he, too, was one of the people. I need not keep away. 5. *Adore him.* Does he not deserve it? O thou ever-blessed Lord! 6. *Help in the exaltation.* For his throne, the throne of his exaltation and which he delights in, is made of human hearts. Enthroned him, then, in your heart.

"Take my heart, it is thine own;
It shall be thy royal throne."

S. C.

Ver. 20.—"*David my servant.*" The text reads on, "With my holy oil have I anointed *him*," and right down to ver. 37 we have the repeated declarations of God's favour towards him. Now, this has seemed to many a choice most strange, and sorely needing vindication. The statement concerning David—that he was "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. xiii. 14; Acts xiii. 22)—has perplexed not a few. And we unreservedly admit that—

I. GOD'S CHOICE OF DAVID DOES APPEAR STRANGE. For what a category of crimes his career as recorded in the Scriptures declares! In cold blood he slays two hundred Philistines (1 Sam. xviii. 20—27). He leaves his wife Michal to face her father's rage, when she had risked her own life to save his (1 Sam. xix. 11—17). He bids Jonathan lie to his father (1 Sam. xx. 5, 6). He lies cruelly to Abimelech and the priests at Nob, and then left them to Saul's vengeance (1 Sam. xxi. 1, 2; xxii. 9—19). He deceives Achish (1 Sam. xxi. 10—15). He would, in revenge, have slain Nabal and all his house (1 Sam. xxv. 2—38). He lies to King Achish, who had given him Ziklag, by pretending that he had fought against Judah; and, to conceal his lie, he cruelly slaughters the Geshurites and others (1 Sam. xxvii.). He takes terrible revenge on Amalek (1 Sam. xxx. 1—17). Instead of punishing Joab, as he ought to have done, he utters terrible imprecations against him (2 Sam. iii. 28, 29). He tortures the Ammonites (2 Sam. xii. 27—31). He deals cruelly with Mephibosheth, stripping him of all his property, and giving it to Ziba (2 Sam. xvi. 1—4; xix. 24—30). He violates his oath to Saul, that he would not slay his children; nevertheless, he afterwards gave them up to

the Gibeonites, who hanged them (1 Sam. xxiv. 21; 2 Sam. xxi. 1—9). And then his great sin in the matter of Uriah—a sin in which no element of baseness, treachery, cruelty, and lust was wanting; and yet all the while he was a great psalm-singer (2 Sam. xi. 2—17). He piously exhorts Solomon to walk in the ways of the Lord; and yet he himself kept his harem crowded with ever more women (2 Sam. v. 13; 1 Kings ii. 3). His terrible death-bed charge to Solomon to slay Joab and Shimei. His imprecatory psalms (see Ps. cix.). And we have no record of any great good deeds to set off against these other terrible ones. Yes; it must be admitted that the choice of David needs vindication. A loud professor of religion, and yet, etc.

II. BUT IT CAN BE VINDICATED. 1. *Because the expression so much complained of—David's being "a man after God's own heart"—refers, not to his personal character, but to his official conduct.* "He was called of God to restore the kingdom which Saul had destroyed, to subdue the Philistines, etc. These purposes he accomplished. So far he was a man after God's own heart. His moral delinquencies are recorded that we may know where the Divine approbation stops short" (F. D. Maurice). But we confess we do not lay much stress upon this. 1 Kings xv. 1—5 does not bear it out. We prefer to vindicate the Divine choice of David in another manner. 2. *He was worthy when the words were spoken of him, and for a long while after.* Had he been always what he afterwards became, such high commendation would not have been given. Then: 3. *He knew no better than to do as did all others.* As to his life as an outlaw, a kind of Oriental Robin Hood, he was driven to it by the jealousy and hate of Saul; and as to his lies and stratagems, his ferocities and tortures, all such things were held lawful in his day; and, though they shock us as we read of them, they were held as altogether right by his contemporaries. We must distinguish between the *vitia temporis* and the *vitia hominis* (Farrar), and not condemn the man for not being altogether different from and beyond the public sentiment of his age. 4. *What he did know of right he mainly did.* See his patriotism, his courage, his military ability, the salvation of his country from ruin. See his delight and his trust in God, and his deep penitence for his sin. And see the unbounded honour and love of his people which he won and kept. Is all this to go for nothing? 5. *And remember how he was punished for his sins.* In his family. His sons had seen their father indulge himself: why shouldn't they? (Kingsley). And in his nature he was punished. Its bent and bias became horribly sensual. Indulgence increased the evil, and so came about the shameful tragedy of his adultery and Uriah's murder. It was not a sudden fall, he had long been tending that way. And in his character. He never really recovered. He shuffles shamefully to his grave; his courage, his self-control, his nobleness, well-nigh all gone. One is reminded of King Lear—

"Vex not his ghost; oh, let him pass;
He hates him,
That would upon the rack of this rough world
Stretch him out longer."

He dies a miserable and pitiful man, his last words being his charge to Solomon about Shimei: "His hoary head bring thou down to the grave with blood." Think of that as the last words of the David of the twenty-third psalm! What a melancholy falling away! There is no favouritism in God. If his children sin, they suffer, and that supremely. God loves them too much to let it be otherwise.

III. AND IS FULL OF INSTRUCTION FOR OURSELVES. We learn: 1. *Thankfulness* that we are born in a more enlightened age; that there would be shame now where there was then no shame. 2. *Strong religious feeling and profession are no certain safeguards* against sin, but only heighten its guilt. 3. *Repentance may be real, yet the results of sin not be recalled.* 4. *We dare never remit even for one day the waiting of our soul upon God in watchfulness and prayer.* 5. *The judgments of God against our sin are his mercy to our soul.* 6. *He who forgave the contrite David forgives still.*—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*A singer in the dark.* The previous psalm was written by a man in the dark, who could pray, but could not sing. The writer of this psalm can both pray and sing. But there is an important difference between the "darknesses" of the two

psalmists. Heman suffered from severe bodily afflictions, such as are often attended by severe mental depressions. Ethan was distressed by anxious public or national conditions, which concerned him in an official rather than in a personal way. His hope in God was not clouded by bodily weakness. In him faith could triumph over fear.

I. **ETHAN'S TIME OF DARKNESS.** "Ethan was born in the time of David, but moulded chiefly by the influences, literary and religious, which characterized the age of Solomon." There is no reason for rejecting the ancient reference of this psalm to the reign of Rehoboam; to the breaking up of the Davidic kingdom; and to the humiliating invasion of Shishak, the Pharaoh of Egypt. Exactly what would then come to the mind of the pious man was that the Davidic covenant seemed to have failed; God was not fulfilling the promise to establish David's seed for ever. "It was in the reign of Rehoboam, when ten tribes had forsaken their allegiance to the Davidic dynasty, and the promise of the steadfastness of David's throne seemed suddenly revoked, that the faithful worshippers would most readily recall the vision of Nathan, with its attendant promises, and wonder where were the former loving-kindnesses which God swore unto David in his truth. Appropriate to this period is the apparent allusion to the raids of a foreign army." Distress that comes from public circumstances is rather intellectual than emotional, and the struggle cannot be so severe as when there is introduced the element of personal suffering. But they do invaluable service who can inspire the hope of a nation in its dark hours; for nations, too, "are saved by hope."

II. **ETHAN'S SONG IN THE TIME OF DARKNESS.** A song of faith in a time of fear. A song of thankful memories in a time of present calamities. A song of joy in God himself, when God's ways seemed "past finding out." A man can sing in the dark, however dark it may be, and whatever form the darkness may take, only if he has right thoughts of God, and can keep firm hold on God. Things may be perplexing; but if we know the *doer* of the things, and have full confidence in him, we can quietly wait until his issues can be unfolded. Our song stops when we lose the sense of God's relation to our circumstances. Keep the relation, and we can always sing of God, and then we soon come to sing also of God's ways.—R. T.

Vers. 2—4.—*The security of God's pledged word.* "Thy seed will I establish for ever." The key-note of the psalm is the "faithfulness" of God to his word. "God had entered into 'an everlasting covenant' with David, and had confirmed that covenant with an oath. In the most absolute and unconditional form, God had pledged himself to establish the kingdom of David and his seed for ever, to beat down all their adversaries under their feet, and to maintain their throne as long as the sun and moon should endure" (see 2 Sam. vii. 8—16; Isa. lv. 3). The psalmist lived when men were tempted to think God was forgetting his word, or failing to fulfil it. But he persisted in it that, whatever appearances might suggest, God never forgot his word, never failed to fulfil his word, and the covenant with David was being kept, in the fullest and best sense, though it might prove to be a spiritual rather than a material sense.

I. **GOD'S WORD MUST ALWAYS BE TAKEN WITH GOD'S MEANING.** So often men fix *their own meanings* to what God says or promises, and then they are surprised and disheartened because that does not happen which they expect. Take two illustrations. Men said that God's covenant with David meant that there should always be a Davidic kingdom, and always a member of David's house on its throne. That was man's meaning put on God's words; that was not God's meaning put into his own words. So the Jews read into the prophecies their expectations of a temporal, delivering Messiah, and the Messiah who came was no fulfilment of their dreams. We need to learn that, whatever God says, using material terms and figures, is but illustrative of spiritual fact or truth. David's perpetual kingdom is Messiah's spiritual kingdom. Read with God's meaning, God's word stands eternally true. And if spiritual sensibilities are duly awakened and cultured, the spiritual meanings and spiritual fulfilments come to be regarded as really the only important ones.

II. **GOD'S WORD TO SOME MUST BE TAKEN TO REPRESENT GOD'S PURPOSE FOR ALL.** Much mistake has been made by regarding God's covenants with individuals as mere privileges of the individual. God puts his covenant into a form for *some*, that all men may be helped to understand what his covenant with *all men* is. The illustrative

character of all local covenants needs to be more fully apprehended, and more clearly pointed out. "Every Divine promise is but a limited expression of a general principle; every Divine covenant, even if it be made with a few, is nevertheless made for the benefit of the many, and can only be an instance of his ways, an illustration of a mercy as wide as the heavens, and of a faithfulness which extends to all generations of mankind."—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*The Lord's saints.* The Bible writers seem to think that the angels must be referred to by this term. But God's people are certainly called "saints" in the Psalms, as in Ps. cxvi. 15. There may be intended a contrast between heaven and earth in this verse. Heaven above and the earth below unite to praise the faithfulness of God. The term "saints" is one that we find difficult to apply, in a general way, to God's people, because it seems to assume an actual and perfect holiness, which we can neither find in ourselves nor ascribe to others. And, on the other hand, the term "saints" has been deteriorated by its application to the hermit class, who, by bodily austerities, have endeavoured to cleanse away sin and master passion. We have but little admiration for "saints" after that pattern. The Old Testament term has a clear, well-defined meaning. Its idea is "separated ones." It stands for all the people of Israel regarded as separated unto God—his peculiar people. Then as "holiness" is specially associated with God, and is his supreme requirement of those who belong to him, God's saints, or separated ones, come to be thought of as "holy ones," and so we get our modern idea of the saint. Giving the widest, and yet most searching, application of the term, we may say—

I. THE LORD'S SAINTS ARE THOSE WHO ARE SEPARATED FROM SELF. Illustrate this by the contrast of the Israelite nation with the Gentile nations. God left the Gentiles to a free experiment. By self-effort and self-service they were to win the highest possibilities of humanity, if they could. Israel was taken out of this self-experiment, separated from the nations and from the self-service. So now the Christian is the man who, in the world of self-interests, is separated from the self-seeking principle. The Christian's Lord "pleased not himself." Christians do not "seek their own." Their saintliness lies in this: "By love they serve one another."

II. THE LORD'S SAINTS ARE THOSE WHO ARE SEPARATED UNTO GOD. (1) That they may praise his Name; (2) carry out his mission; (3) witness for his truth; (4) obey his will; (5) catch and reflect his Spirit. So their saintliness comes to be godliness, God-likeness, and this really is Christliness, Christ-likeness. The Christian saint is the man in Christ.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Comparisons with Jehovah.* "Who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord?" It does not come to our minds to attempt any comparisons of God with any one, because, according to our associations, there is no one on the same plane with him, and so no comparisons are suggested. But in ancient times every nation had its separate deity; these deities were thought, by their worshippers, to be real and supreme, and so comparisons with Jehovah could be made. They were made, by outsiders, to his disadvantage; and they might well be made, by psalmist and prophet, to his honour (see the eloquent comparisons in Isa. xl.). Here the psalmist is but assuring himself by thinking high things of God, because the actual present dealings of God suggested doubting thoughts. What God *is* always steadies our thinking when we are perplexed by what God *does*. The comparison need not be fully elaborated; the following points may be illustrated.

I. GOD IS INCOMPARABLE IN POWER. If God does a thing, we may first of all say he was under no compulsion to do it. He *could* have done otherwise. If he has put forth his power in this particular way, we may be sure he *willed* to act this way, and his will is based on perfect knowledge and absolute wisdom. Of no created being, of no so-called deity, can it be declared that he has uncontrolled power, and yet the power is in no way to be feared, because it is in the control of perfect intelligence, absolute wisdom, and infinite love.

II. GOD IS INCOMPARABLE IN PURITY. Here the one idea on which we may dwell is God's truthfulness, faithfulness, to his word. Scripture constantly asserts that God never disappoints men. He is true to his word. This cannot be asserted of any created

being, or of any so-called deity, whose word can only be the word of some created being representing him. "Hath he said, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" "God is not a man, that he should lie."

III. GOD IS INCOMPARABLE IN PITY. It seems to the psalmist of Rehoboam's distressed age as if God "had forgotten to be gracious." But he may rest his soul in the confidence that none can pity like God; and if Divine action should ever seem strange, it can only be said that *God's* pity is checking the action of what, in God, *men* may think to be severity.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*Ancient sentiments concerning the sea.* Throughout the Scriptures the sea is regarded as an object of fear; its majesty, greatness, masterfulness, seem mostly to have impressed men. It had not then been tamed by human skill; the compass was not known; the few vessels were inefficiently constructed for ocean sailing, and they seldom ventured out of sight of land. Scripture speaks of "the raging of the sea," of "the raging waves of the sea," of its voice "roaring," of the "floods lifting up their voice," of the "wicked being like the troubled sea," of "those that go down to the sea" seeing "the wonders of the Lord, and his judgments in the deep," of the "great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable." And even when it seems to have a gentler thought, and says, "There go the ships," immediately it adds a note of power and fear, "There is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein."

I. THE SEA WAS A SYMBOL OF SEPARATION, AND SO OF THE EARTHLY TROUBLES THAT CAME OUT OF SEPARATIONS. When friends in those days were carried away over the sea, they seemed to be utterly, hopelessly lost. We may have to some extent mastered this feeling by making of the ocean a highway, and yet still our friends are more truly lost to us when the sea divides us than when the land does. And yet, in family life, there are worse dividers than the sea.

II. THE SEA BROUGHT THE SUPREME SENSE OF DANGER, AND SO SYMBOLIZED THE PERILS TO WHICH DAILY LIFE IS EXPOSED. The sea is ever raging as if it would devour. The waters sink as if they would swallow us up, or rise as if they would cast us out. In our boats there is but an inch of wood between us and death. Yet our real perils are those which come to our soul's life. "Fear not them who can but kill the body." What the sea may typify is far more important than what the sea can do.

III. THE SEA SEEMED TO EMBODY THE IDEA OF MYSTERY. We can never seem to understand the sea; never account for the sea; never feel sure what it is going to do; never read the secrets it holds in its bosom. It is the symbol for us of the mysteries, often so distressing, so agonizing, with which we are surrounded—mysteries of life, of truth, of duty, of ourselves, of God, of eternity, which compel our life on earth to be a "life of faith."

IV. THE SEA WAS AN EMBLEM OF THE CHANGEABLENESS THAT CHARACTERIZES ALL EARTHLY THINGS. It is well called the troubled, restless sea; and this we feel quite as truly in summer calm, when only gentle winds blow across it, as in winter conflicts, when wild winds raise high the tides. It ever reminds us that "the fashion of this world passeth away." Yet the psalmist could see God restraining and using even the sea, and with this thought encourages our fullest confidence in him.—R. T.

Ver. 14.—*Equity and righteousness.* Prayer-book Version, "Righteousness and equity are the habitation of thy seat;" Revised Version, "Justice and judgment are the foundation of thy throne." The terms "justice," "righteousness," stand for the abstract virtue; the terms "judgment," "equity," stand for the applications and adaptations of justice to times, circumstances, and men. Equity is the law of right applied to particular circumstances. The double assertion made concerning God is that what he does is always right judged by the standards of righteousness, and always right judged by the frailties and infirmities of men. Both these considerations help to bring men full confidence in him, and assurance concerning his ways with them.

I. GOD'S WAYS ARE ALWAYS RIGHT TO THE STANDARD. "Righteousness is the basis of his throne;" the distinguishing feature of his rule. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" If it be asked—Where is the standard of righteousness? we may reply—In man's own moral sense. If he knows right from wrong, he must

know right. The appraisalment man can make of his own acts involves his power to appraise acts which are said to be acts of God. But this caution needs to be fully presented and illustrated—that the standard of right is not the sentiment of any single individual, but the harmonious sentiment of all the race in all the ages. It is a human standard, not an individual standard. There has grown up in the world a standard of righteousness, which is now well established; by it the acts declared as God's may be judged; and it will always be found that inspired descriptions of righteousness are, in effect, descriptions of the established human standard; and that all acts of God commended in the inspired record will stand the test of that established human standard. It should be carefully shown that there is not one standard for man, and a differing standard for God. Right for God is right for man. Cases that seem doubtful are simply cases misapprehended. Poets may say, "Whatever is is right." Pious men say, "Whatever God does is right."

II. GOD'S WAYS ARE ALWAYS RIGHT TO THE CIRCUMSTANCE. There is a temporary right as well as an eternal right. There is an uneducated right, and a cultured right, dependent on conditions of conscience. There is a right at the moment, and a right for ever. There is a right absolute, and a right in adaptation. Illustrate from the mother's idea of right in relation to her child. She has to fit her right to the capacity and condition of her child. There is a right form and setting and clothing of the eternal right. So the psalmist may find God's right in the adjustment of his dealings with the wilful and wayward Davidic king, Rehoboam.—R. T.

Ver. 38.—*Perplexities of present appearances.* "But thou hast cast off, and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed." The psalmist may have been reminded of the first king, Saul, from whom the favour of God was wholly removed, and he may have feared that the same sad fate was reserved for David's grandson, Rehoboam, in spite of the very remarkable and apparently ever-enduring promises made to David. Certainly, when he composed this psalm, everything did look very black. Rehoboam was acting very foolishly and very wilfully, and bringing himself and the nation into what seemed overwhelming judgments. The king was humiliated, the kingdom was prostrated, the people were perplexed; all the world seemed out of joint. All depended on the point of view from which the psalmist regarded these "present appearances." He might stand beside his fellow-countrymen, and see them as they saw them, in a strictly human light. Or he might try to rise up to a place beside God, and see them as God saw them—see them in the Divine light. Then he would know that "things are not what they seem."

I. PERPLEXITIES OF PRESENT APPEARANCES PARTLY ARISE FROM MAN'S IMPERFECT VISION. He never sees more than parts of a thing at a time; even as, with his bodily vision, he can only see a front, a little of two sides, and nothing at all of the back. What man cannot see often holds the key to the meaning of what he sees. Man's mistakes are imperfect apprehensions. Concerning God, man may search all ways, and yet be compelled at last to look on all the product of his toil, and say, "These are *parts* of his ways." We never really know a thing until we know it all round, and all through; and we mistake when we attempt to judge appearances. If it seems that God has forsaken David, and forgotten his covenant, we may confidently say, "Since God is what he is, that cannot be which seems." Appearances here are deceitful.

II. PERPLEXITIES OF PRESENT APPEARANCES ARE RELIEVED AS WE CAN ENTER INTO GOD'S PURPOSES. Once apprehend that God is the Lord of *discipline*; the eternal Father who chastises and corrects and trains his children, and then strangest appearances begin to gain their meanings. They are seen to be as temporary as a boy's flogging, and as truly the sign of a Father's anxious love. They are proofs that God has not "forgotten to be gracious." "How did Ethan, in this psalm, find ground for faith, for trust and hope? Simply in the conviction that God had sent these calamities in mercy, for correction, for discipline, and not for destruction." We can never read appearances aright until we read them in the light of what we do know, or may know, of God.—R. T.

Ver. 47.—*The argument from the brevity of life.* "Remember how short my time is." This is the argument of an old man, who knows there can be but a "little while"

before his passing time, and is supremely anxious to see the ways of the Lord justified while he is "in the land of the living." Compare Hezekiah's exclamation, when told that he must die. As Ethan was born in the reign of David, and lived through the forty years of Solomon's reign, he must have been an old man in the later time of Rehoboam. In this psalm he gives us the last results of a long life of observation and experience. Trusting fully in God's faithfulness, Ethan could grasp the idea that the present depression of the nation was a temporary discipline; but this only made him the more earnestly plead with God that the discipline might be completed, and the restoration might be granted, before he passed away.

I. First argument: BECAUSE LIFE IS SO FRAIL, DO NOT OVER-TRY IT WITH PERPLEXING DEALINGS. The psalmist says, "How fleeting and frail life is!" It is a poor thing, very weak; it cannot stand over-much strain. He deprecates too severe trial in the Divine discipline; afraid of himself, lest faith should fail. The calamities falling upon David's nation seemed more than he could bear. He thought about them day and night; they suggested painful doubts. So he pleads his frailty before God, begging that the calamities may not be carried to extremes, and the faith in God, which he longs to keep, be quite overwhelmed. We can sympathize with Ethan. The strain of modern conflict often seems as if it would overwhelm us. We are too weak, we think, to bear any more. Learn of Ethan that we *may* plead our frailty with God, and ask for gracious limitations of the strain under which we are put.

II. Second argument: BECAUSE LIFE IS SO SHORT, FINISH THE COURSE OF DISCIPLINE SPEEDILY, SO THAT I MAY UNDERSTAND THY DEALINGS, AND REJOICE IN THE ISSUES. It is the argument of one who intensely longs for the honour of God to be manifested, and for the highest well-being of God's people to be secured. Indeed, his very intensity puts his faith in peril; for he wants to *see for himself*, while he lives, God's honour vindicated, and God's word fulfilled; he cannot be quite content with the assurance that God is jealous of his own honour, and supremely concerned in his people's well-being. It is impatience, but it is the impatience of a thoroughly earnest soul. God's work will go on, God's glory will be advanced, whether we die or live.—R. T.

Vers. 1—52.—The general subject—*God's promise to David and his seed*—but the present state of things is a bitter contrast to the promise, and a prayer that God would remove the contrast. Suggests—

I. THAT GOD HAS ENTERED INTO A GRAND COVENANT WITH MANKIND. Given us the greatest and most precious promises. 1. *Promises that relate to our highest nature.* "I will be a Father to them, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." 2. *That relate to our greatest calamity.* Redemption from sin and pardon to the penitent. 3. *That relate to our endless being.* The completeness and glory of the Divine work begun in us here.

II. THAT GOD FULFILLS HIS PART OF HIS COVENANT COMPLETELY AND PERFECTLY. 1. *Because the covenant was made out of his love, voluntarily.* 2. *Because God is true and faithful, and cannot deceive.* 3. *Because God has the power and ability to do all that he promises.* Not like men.

III. IT IS WE WHO DEFEAT THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S COVENANT. 1. *We transgress, and bring upon ourselves punishment.* The consequences which God has attached to transgression. 2. *Our unrepented sins take from us the power to receive the Divine promises.* "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God."

IV. BUT OUR SIN CANNOT ALIENATE GOD'S LOVING-KINDNESS FROM US. (Ver. 33.) 1. *He has sent Christ as the proof of this to a sinful world.* 2. *He sends his Spirit into the heart to plead with us.* 3. *He is infinitely patient, waiting for our penitent return.*—S.

BOOK IV.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM XC.

THE ascription of this psalm in the title to Moses must be admitted to be very remarkable. No other psalm is so ascribed. Nor indeed is a date given to any other earlier than the time of David. The psalm itself, however, when examined, is found to accord with the traditional date. Professor Cheyne notes in it a "roughness," which is presumably a sign of antiquity. Ewald says of it, "The poem has in it something uncommonly striking, solemn, sinking into the depth of the Godhead. In contents and language it is throughout original and powerful; and, as it is undoubtedly very old, it would have been universally considered as correctly derived from Moses, had we known exactly the reasons which guided the collector." Hengstenberg, Kay, Professor Alexander, and Dean Johnson accept unhesitatingly the Mosaic authorship.

The psalm is termed, "A Prayer of Moses, the man of God." It is, however, only in part a "prayer." Meditation occupies the opening portion (vers. 1—6); complaint follows (vers. 7—11); it is only with ver. 12 that prayer begins. (For the application to Moses of the phrase, "man of God," see Deut. xxxiii. 1; Josh. xiv. 6; Ezra iii. 2.)

Ver. 1.—Lord, thou hast been our Dwelling-place in all generations; or, "our habitation" (see Ps. xci. 9); comp. Ps. xxxii. 7, "Thou art my Hiding-place." For well-nigh forty years Moses had had no fixed material dwelling-place.

Ver. 2.—Before the mountains were brought forth (comp. Prov. viii. 25). The "mountains" are mentioned as perhaps the grandest, and certainly among the oldest, of all the works of God. Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world; literally, or thou gavest birth to the earth and the world (comp. Deut. xxxii. 18). Even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God (comp. Ps. xciii. 2; Prov. viii. 23; Micah v. 2; Hab. i. 12).

Ver. 3.—Thou turnest man to destruction; or, "to dust" (comp. Gen. iii. 19). And sayest, Return, ye children of men; i.e.

"return once more, and replonish the earth." There may be an allusion to the destruction of mankind by the Deluge, and the re-peopleing of the earth by the descendants of Noah, as Dr. Kay supposes; or the meaning may be that God is continually bringing one generation of men to an end, and then setting up another, having the same control over human life that he has over inanimate nature (ver. 2).

Ver. 4.—For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday. Time has no relation to God; it does not exist for him. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. iii. 8). Therefore we must not judge his methods of working by our own. When it is past; rather, as it passes. And as a watch in the night. To the sleeper a night-watch seems gone in a moment.

Ver. 5.—Thou carriest them away as with a flood. This verse is to be connected with ver. 3, "Thou sweetest mankind away;" i.e. removest them from the earth, when it pleases thee. They are as a sleep. Fantastic, vague, forgotten as soon as it is over. In the morning they are like grass which groweth up (comp. Ps. xxxvii. 2; lxxii. 16; xcii. 7; ciii. 15; Isa. xl. 7).

Ver. 6.—In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withered (comp. Ps. cii. 4, 11; ciii. 15; Isa. xl. 7; Jas. i. 10, 11).

Ver. 7.—For we are consumed by thine anger. From the general reflections, and the general consideration of human weakness, which have hitherto occupied him, the psalmist proceeds to speak particularly of the weakness and sin of himself and his own people, which have brought upon them a painful visitation. God's anger is hot upon them, and has "consumed" them—not utterly, but so that they are greatly "troubled" and cast down. By thy wrath are we troubled. The expressions used suit the time of the later wanderings in the wilderness, when the generation that had especially sinned was being gradually "consumed," that it might not enter the Holy Land.

Ver. 8.—Thou hast set our iniquities before thee. Instead of hiding his face from their iniquities, turning away from them and overlooking them, God has placed them steadily "before him," in the full searching and scorching light of his own

purity and holiness. And not only has he done this with the sins which they know of, and whereof their consciences are afraid; but he has set their secret sins also in the light of his countenance. (On man's "secret sins," comp. Ps. xix. 12, and the comment *ad loc.*)

Ver. 9.—For all our days are passed away in thy wrath; or, "*under thy wrath*"—"whilst thou art still angry with us" (comp. Deut. xxxii. 15-25). We spend our years—rather, *bring our years to an end* (Hengstenberg, Kay, Revised Version) as a tale that is told; rather, *as a reverie*, or "as a murmur."

Ver. 10.—The days of our years are three score years and ten. This seems a low estimate for the time of Moses, since he himself died at the age of a hundred and twenty (Deut. xxxiv. 7), Aaron at the age of a hundred and twenty-three (Numb. xxxiii. 39), and Miriam at an age which was even more advanced (Numb. xx. 1; comp. Exod. ii. 4). But these may have been exceptional cases, and we have certainly no sufficient data for determining what was the average length of human life in the later period of the wanderings. The suggestion has been made that it was probably even shorter than that here mentioned. And if by reason of strength they be four score years; i.e. "if, through exceptional strength in this or that individual, they occasionally mount up to four score years." Yet is their strength labour and sorrow; rather, *yet is their pride then but labour and vanity*. They may boast of their age; but what real advantage is it to them? After seventy, the years draw nigh when each man is forced to say, "I have no pleasure in them" (Eccles. xii. 1). For it is soon out off, and we fly away. Moreover, even if we live to eighty, our life seems to us no more than a span, so soon does it pass away, and we take our departure.

Ver. 11.—Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Who can duly estimate the intensity of God's anger against such as have displeased him? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath; rather, *or who can estimate thy fury as the fear of thee* (i.e. the proper fear) *requires?* The verse is exegetical of ver. 9, and is intended to impress on man the terribleness of God's anger.

Vers. 12-17.—From complaint the psalmist, in conclusion, turns to prayer—prayer for his people rather than for himself. His petitions are, (1) that God will enable his people to take to heart the lessons which the brevity of life should teach (ver. 12); (2) that he will cease from

his anger, and relent concerning them (ver. 13); (3) that he will once more shower his mercies upon them, and cause their affliction to be swallowed up in gladness (vers. 14, 15); (4) that he will show his glorious doings to them and to their children (ver. 16); (5) that he will let his beauty rest upon them (ver. 17); and (6) that he will bless their doings, and establish them (ver. 17).

Ver. 12.—So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. "Teach us," that is, "so to reflect on the brevity of life, that we may get to ourselves a heart of wisdom," or a heart that is wise and understanding.

Ver. 13.—Return, O Lord, how long? rather, *turn, O Lord*; i.e. "turn from thy anger—how long will it be ere thou turnest?" And let it repent thee concerning thy servants. God "is not a man, that he should repent" (Numb. xxiii. 19); and yet from time to time "it repents him concerning his servants" (Deut. xxxii. 36; Ps. cxxxv. 14). He relents, that is, from his fierce anger, allows himself to be appeased, and has compassion upon those who have provoked him.

Ver. 14.—Oh satisfy us early with thy mercy; literally, *satisfy us in the morning with thy mercy*; i.e. "after a night of trouble, give us a bright morning of peace and rest." That we may rejoice and be glad all our days; rather, *and we will rejoice and be glad, etc.*

Ver. 15.—Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us. Proportion our time of joy to our time of sorrow: as the one has lasted many long years, so let the other. And the years wherein we have seen evil; or, "suffered adversity."

Ver. 16.—Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. The "work" and the "glory" are the same thing—some vast exertion of the Divine power and majesty, which will result in great good to his people. If we accept the Mosaic authorship of the psalm, the establishment of Israel in the land of Canaan may reasonably be taken as the "work" spoken of.

Ver. 17.—And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us (comp. Ps. xlv. 24, "Thou art fairer than the children of men;" Ps. xxvii. 4, "To behold the beauty of the Lord;" Isa. xxxiii. 17, "Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty"). The "beauty of God" is upon us when we see and realize the loveliness of his character. And establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish

thou it. The repetition adds nothing, except it be emphasis. God is asked, finally, to "establish the work" in which

his servants are engaged—to bless it; that is, to advance it and prosper it. The nature of the "work" is not mentioned.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The fundamental truths of all religion.* "Lord, thou hast been our Dwelling-place," etc. This psalm is a monument of spiritual power. It possesses in eminent degree the perennial freshness which so wonderfully belongs to Scripture. Generations pass. Centuries mount up into thousands of years; but this ancient psalm lifts up its voice with undecaying strength and sweetness. It reminds us of a granite pillar which casts its unchanging image on a river which flows past, as it has flowed for ages. The inscription, cut thousands of years ago, is unworn by the finger of time; it is clear and sharp, as if cut yesterday. The psalm has been spoken of as "perhaps the most sublime of human compositions, the deepest in feeling, the loftiest in theologic conception, the most magnificent in its imagery" (Isaac Taylor). Even those who question the tradition that it was written by Moses (perhaps more from the habit of questioning than for any solid reason) are utterly at a loss to suggest who else can have been its author. Whether Moses or not, he "wrote as he was moved by the Holy Ghost." These opening verses express the fundamental truths of all religion: the eternal existence of God; the dependence of all other existence on him as Creator, and our personal relation to him as our Almighty Father and Friend—"our Dwelling-place in all generations."

I. THE ETERNITY OF GOD. His underived, unchangeable, self-existent being; independent of time. "From everlasting . . . thou art God." The Hebrew word means "duration," past or future; here, evidently, unlimited duration, or, as we say, eternity. The eternity of God, like his immensity, his omniscience, omnipotence, one of the truths reason cannot grasp, but is compelled to affirm. If we try to think of boundless, actually infinite space, we are baffled. Yet the moment we try to imagine a bound, thought overleaps it. So we cannot comprehend a past eternity; yet the moment we suppose a *beginning*, we cannot help asking—What was *before that*? The greatest philosopher of Germany thought he had got rid of the perplexity by asserting that time and space have no existence except in our minds. But this ignores the plain fact that the whole universe, from the movement of suns and systems to the growth of a grain of seed or the ticking of a watch, is based on the reality of time and space, and governed by them. Faith accepts what reason cannot grasp; and falls down and worships "him that liveth for ever and ever."

II. THE DEPENDENCE OF ALL OTHER EXISTENCE ON THE SELF-EXISTENT, THE ETERNAL. "Ere ever thou hadst formed," etc. All things, God excepted, had a beginning (Heb. xi. 3; Rev. iv. 11; Rom. xi. 36). Here, again, philosophy has striven hard to get rid of the necessity for creation; to lead us to believe matter and force eternal, and the parents of life, order, beauty, happiness. But the deepest science assures us that the universe in its present state is far enough from either immutable or everlasting; that life can spring only from life; and that the primary material of the universe—atoms, or whatever else we like to call it—bears as clearly the marks of being fitted to its work, by weight, measure, number, exact proportion, as the rudder and screw of a ship, or the beam and fly-wheel of a steam-engine. Science, which is nothing but the study of God's plans and methods of working, leads us back from all vain imaginings to the throne of God. Our deepest thought, our widest, most searching questionings of nature, cannot take us outside of St. Paul's simple, profound declaration, "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28).

III. OUR PERSONAL RELATION TO GOD. "Lord, thou hast been our Dwelling-place." Our Refuge, our Rest, our Home. All that we can learn of God, or conjecture concerning him, would profit us nothing, if we do not say, "This God is our God for ever and ever" (Ps. xlviii. 14). The same word and thought meet us in the sublime blessing (Deut. xxxiii. 27). (Internal confirmation of Mosaic authorship.) The thought of God dwelling with his people, is frequent; the great purpose of the tabernacle, with its

covering cloud, and all connected with it, was to impress this idea (for the highest fulfilment of which, see Eph. ii. 22; Rev. xxi. 3). But here God is himself our Habitation. The whole range of Gentile religious thought cannot (I believe) produce a parallel to this tender, attractive, yet glorious representation of God as the Eternal Home of his people. In that most mournful, though beautiful psalm, in which the psalmist can see nothing but the frailty and vanity of human life, and Faith struggles not to lose her hold, he thinks of himself as "a sojourner" with God (Ps. xxxix. 12). His fainting faith would have revived, had he said, "No! a sojourner with men, a pilgrim on earth; but at home with thee!"

REMARKS. 1. How close, tender, full of encouragement, is this relation! To what does the heart cling more lovingly, trustfully, restfully, than to our home? 2. This looks beyond this fleeting life, the shadowy brevity of which is so powerfully contrasted, throughout the psalm, with the opening thought of God's eternity. We are never to leave home (cf. Ps. xlviii. 14). Our Guide till death; our God for ever. Compare our Lord's argument (Luke xx. 37, 38). 3. The unity of the Church: "all generations" of the long succession of believers have one Home (Heb. xi. 13, 16, 40). 4. Our Lord Jesus claims to sustain this relation (John xv. 4—7; 1 John ii. 28).

Ver. 8.—"*Secret sins.*" Nothing perishes. Nothing is forgotten. Things lost to us are found elsewhere. Things that seem to perish do but pass into new forms. The bursting bubble, the smoke scattered by the wind, the fallen leaf trampled into the mire, vanish from our sight and sense; but the atoms of which that puff of smoke is made are as old as the world, and will endure while the world endures. The image of that bubble, with its lovely colours, most lovely just before it bursts, may remain in our memory, or may exercise the thought of scientific minds, for years. The bud which the perished leaf nourished may grow into a bough that will be green when generations have passed; and the dust into which the dead leaf moulders may feed new life. How much more in the spiritual realm! The acted deed, the spoken word, the conscious thought, may seem to perish the instant it comes to birth. Memory may blot it that moment from her tablet. But it is indestructible. It survives in its results. There is a *memory* in which nothing ever fades; an eye nothing is quick enough to escape or baffle; a light from which no secret thing is hid. "*Thou hast set,*" etc.

I. SIN NATURALLY SEEKS CONCEALMENT. The first impulse of the first sinners—very foolish, but very natural—was to hide themselves from God (Gen. iii. 8—10). Some sins those who commit them are anxious to hide from human knowledge. Shame is the natural attendant of consciousness of wrong-doing. Only the most hardened and debased "*glory in their shame.*" Other sins, through self-ignorance, self-deceit, carelessness, or dulness of conscience, are a secret from the sinner himself (Ps. xix. 12). Some sins—*e.g.* fraud of all kinds—are possible only by concealment. Self-interest, not shame merely, prompts secrecy. So subtle is sin, that it often disguises itself as virtue. Covetousness poses as prudence, spite as candour, pride as a delicate sense of honour, obstinate ill temper as honest independence, envy, malice, and all uncharitableness, as zeal for truth and for God. Even the sincerest Christian has cause to pray, "*Who can understand,*" etc.? (Ps. xix. 12).

II. NO SIN IS HIDDEN FROM GOD. An appalling contrast! What darker hiding-place conceivable than the secret, silent depth of the heart? But not only is it transparent to God's view (Ps. cxxxix. 1, 12), he brings our secrets to light in the full blaze of omniscience. Elsewhere the "*light of God's countenance*" means his favour, the sunshine of his loving-kindness. But that is a different word in Hebrew; the one used here means not mere *sunshine*, but the *sun* (Gen. i. 14—16). God's knowledge of men's sins is such as is possible to God alone; he knows each sin in its motives, its exact magnitude, its issues in the sinner himself and towards others, its desert. Yet this tremendous thought has its side of comfort. "*He knoweth our frame*" (Ps. ciii. 14)—our weakness, ignorance, temptations. His justice excludes harshness. He "*has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.*"

III. THIS KNOWLEDGE IS NOT TO BE KEPT SECRET. It is to be published to the universe (Eccles. xii. 14). The frequent detection and punishment of the most carefully concealed crimes is a faint anticipation of "*the day*" (Acts xvii. 31; 2 Cor. v. 10· Rev. ii. 23).

IV. SIN CANNOT BE HIDDEN; BUT IT CAN BE "COVERED." (Pss. xxxii. 1; lxxxv. 2.) It can be "blotted out" (Isa. xliii. 25; Acts iii. 19), "washed" (Ps. li. 2; 1 Cor. vi. 11; Rev. vii. 14). Only he who knows our sins could forgive or atone (Rom. v. 8).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—17.—*The Lord our Dwelling-place.* There is no need to doubt the assigned authorship of this psalm. It is in entire harmony with the facts and surroundings of Moses' and Israel's life in the wilderness. Observe—

I. THE BLESSED FACT. The Lord our Dwelling-place, which this psalm tells of at its beginning. Weary wanderers as the Israelites were, with no settled resting-place, here to-day, gone to-morrow, how blessed for them that there was refuge, a dwelling-place, a home, in God! And this, Moses and such as he had realized and may realize still. 1. Here there may be, there is, perpetual change; but in God a *settled abode*. 2. Here, weariness and turmoil; in God, *rest and peace*. 3. Here, continual disappointment; in God, *the soul's satisfaction*. (Cf. Ps. lxxiii. 5.) 4. Here, perpetual peril; in God, *perfect security*. 5. Here, the coldness and enmity of men; in God, *unfailing sympathy and love*. Yes, God is the Home of the believing soul.

II. THE SUSTAINING POWER OF THIS FACT. It enables us to meet with calmness the heart-breaking events of life. The psalmist enumerates a number of them. 1. *The brevity of our life*. (Vers. 3—6.) 2. *The real cause of human misery*. (Ver. 7.) It is our sin, and God's displeasure thereat. Hence is it (ver. 9) that the sense of that displeasure overwhelms us as with lightning-flash, and our lives are as a breath. And so all life is sad, even at the best (ver. 10). 3. *The fearfulness of the Divine anger*. (Ver. 11.) "Who knoweth the might of thine anger and thy wrath, according to the fear that is due unto thee?" (Pewee). None can even rightly estimate it, much less over-estimate it.

III. THE BELIEVING PRAYER TO WHICH IT LEADS. 1. *That we may not miss the instruction which these sad facts should impart*. The "wisdom" craved is that we may make the Lord our Dwelling-place. 2. *For brighter days*. (Vers. 13—15.) 3. *For the promised salvation*—the work and the glory of God (ver. 16). 4. *For the beauty of holiness*. There had been none of this in Israel in all these many years. 5. *That life may be worth living*. Not a perpetual disappointment, such as it had been hitherto, but that the work of their hands might be established (ver. 17). Such are some of the prayers which the soul whose home is in God will be led to offer in view of the brevity, the frailty, and the sinfulness of life. Let the Lord be our Dwelling-place, and all is well. "Our life is hid with Christ in God."—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The glorious habitation.* It has been remarked that we have Moses presented to us in three aspects—as poet (see his song at the Red Sea); as preacher (see Deuteronomy and elsewhere); and as a man of prayer (see the closing verses of this psalm). These three characters are not often combined, but when they are they make the subject of them very powerful with God for man, and with man for God. And the secret of his eminence in each character was that his spirit's home was in God. Note—

I. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? How can the Lord be our Dwelling-place? 1. It is evident that a *spiritual dwelling-place* is meant. It is not a material habitation, such as the body needs, but one for the spirit of man. 2. *And the Lord is such a Dwelling-place* for our spirits. For if we be such as Moses was, men of God, then God will be our spirits' home, because there they continually abide. Christ said, "Abide in me," and this they do, as a man's home is his dwelling-place. And chiefly because it is there he not only dwells, but loves to dwell. Home is not a mere place: it is only home when love dwells there. A man's habitation may be a hell for him, and it will be if it be without love. But it is his home when his affections centre there, when it contains those whom he dearly loves, and who in like manner love him. Then, whether rich or poor, great or small, a palace or a pauper's hut, it is yet his home. Now, God is the home of his people, not alone because they do dwell there, but because they love to dwell there (cf. Pss. lxxiii. 5; xliii. 3, 5). 3. *For in God there is rest for*

our intellects. Even unbelievers have recognized this. A French philosopher in the days of the Revolution said, "If it could be shown that there was no God, we should have to invent one." They felt that for the satisfaction of the understanding God was a necessity. In him we can see the adequate Cause and Creator of all things, and in his wisdom and power and goodness the mind finds rest. 4. *And in him also there is met the cravings of our affections.* Even the contemplation of God in his spiritual attributes, in his exalted character, has been found to be full of delight to God's servants; but how much more when he is revealed to us in Christ! Then the heart goes out to him in a great rush of affection, as it beholds his infinite purity and goodness and love as these are seen in Christ our blessed Redeemer. The heart of the believer gazes upon him until it grows toward him as the flowers grow toward the sun. 5. *And the will*—that lordliest faculty of our nature—finds in him its Inspiration, Strength, and Guide, and loves to lose itself in the will of God. Thus is the Lord our Dwelling-place, our spirit's Home, where it dwells, and loves to dwell.

II. WHO ARE THEY THAT DWELL IN GOD? St. John, in his First Epistle, lays down the marks of these blessed ones. 1. *They are they who dwell in love.* (1 John iv. 16.) He who loveth not his brother cannot dwell in God, nor God in him. 2. *They who possess the Spirit of God.* (1 John iv. 13.) 3. *They who openly confess him.* (1 John iv. 15.) 4. *They who keep his commandments.* (1 John iii. 24.) Thus may we test our right to say, "Lord, thou hast been our Dwelling-place."

III. WHAT COMES OF THIS DWELLING IN HIM? 1. *The unity of God's people.* 2. *The world's conversion,* when it sees all God's people thus united (John xvii. 21).

IV. HOW CAN WE ENTER INTO AND ABIDE IN THIS BLESSED HOME? (John xiv. 6.) Christ is the Way. Give yourselves up to him.—S. C.

Ver. 4.—*God's estimate of a thousand years.* Note—

I. THE GROUND OF THIS ESTIMATE. It is the eternity of God. He who is from everlasting to everlasting—God, the Eternal. There never was a period in which he was not. He is more permanent than the most changeless things. 1. *History teaches us this.* Push back so far as we can into the remote past, there we find the sure proof of the Divine existence and work. 2. *Science teaches it yet more powerfully.* Whether we investigate the old rocks beneath our feet, or gaze upon the stars on high, both alike tell of vast ages, millenniums upon millenniums, in which they have had their being, and alike they proclaim God. 3. *Revelation affirms the same.*

II. ITS REASONABLENESS. Human analogies help us here. For our ideas of time are: 1. *According to our own length of life.* To short-lived creatures, such as the insects, a day appears a vast stretch of time; but to us, the days of whose years are three score years and ten, and perhaps four score years, a day is scarcely any time at all. We think a great deal of half a century, but what would one like Methuselah have thought of it? Only an insignificant fraction of his life, not needing to be much counted of. The angels of God also, what are our centuries to them? Above all, God the Eternal, how could it be otherwise than that a thousand years should be to him as one day? 2. *According to the magnitude and multiplicity of those matters which demand and occupy our attention.* There are people who live in very limited spheres, and who have scarcely anything to do—the idle rich, and many more. Their one idea is how to kill time; they hardly know how to get through it—their days are miserably long. But take the man of affairs, who has large responsibilities resting upon him, the statesman, the merchant, the governor of wide areas and of great numbers of men;—these have so much to attend to that the days are all too short and too few, and are gone long before they can accomplish what they have to do. Apply this to the idea of God. How vast his dominion! how infinite the demands upon his thought and energy! To him, therefore, a thousand years would be as one day. 3. *Happiness or misery* also cannot but affect our estimate of time. The sufferer tossed with pain, the prisoner in his dungeon, the exile, the miserable ones of all kinds,—how long, how wearisome, are their days (Job vii. 4; Ps. cxxx. 6; Luke xvi. 23—25)! On the other hand, the happy ones,—how time flies with them! And God is the blessed God—"the blessed and only Potentate." All that can contribute to his joy is present to him increasingly; the evil that exists is but the evolution of good. Why should he not be

blessed? Our sad days of pain, therefore, which seem to us like a thousand years, he knows not, but only the joy which reverses such estimate of time.

III. ITS BENEFICENT REMINDERS. All truths of Scripture have practical bearings, and this one assuredly has. 1. *It deepens in us the spirit of holy reverence.* (Ps. viii. 3, 4.) 2. *It loosens the power of this world over us.* What poor things are all the world's gifts, when seen in the light of God the Eternal! 3. *It bids us be patient,* and not fret ourselves at the seemingly slow progress of good. 4. *It ministers unspeakable consolation.* We die, and leave our loved ones and our work; but God ever liveth, and they are in his charge.—S. C.

Ver. 9.—“*As a tale that is told.*” Yes, it is true; we do spend our lives as is here said. I know the word rendered “tale” may bear other meanings—a thought, a breath, a meditation, a numbering (Exod. v. 8). But this in our text sets forth the psalmist's thought as well as, if not better than, any other. His view of life is a very sad one, and is by no means true as concerns the blessed dead who die in the Lord. Their lives are not all “labour and sorrow;” still less are they “all passed away in” God's wrath; nor are they so vain and worthless as, in his sadness, the psalmist represents them. His idea, in the similitude he here employs of “a tale,” has in view the brevity, the trifling character, the speedy forgetfulness into which they fell; but these are not all the characteristics of a tale that is told. Oriental peoples are very fond of short bright stories, and one who can tell such stories well is ever welcome amongst them. The psalmist had no doubt often heard such recitals, and he says—So is man's life. Well, it is so—

I. IN THAT OUR DAYS ARE SOON OVER. The tale that was told was never long, but soon done, and room made for another. And so it is with our life, even at the longest, and especially that portion of our life which is of paramount importance—the formative character-fixing years. How soon they are over! And the life takes its bent and bias from them, and generally continues so to the end. In the tale of most lives you know very soon how it will go on. The child is father to the man, and you can generally foretell how it will wind up. Let such as are young, therefore, take heed to their days, the days of their youth—they are all-important.

II. IN ITS VARIED CHARACTER. There are tales told that are poor, mean, hurtful, not worth the telling; that stain the imagination, that incite to evil, and are doomed to a speedy and contemptuous oblivion. But there are others of an entirely different character. And so it is with men's lives—some evil, some blessed and good.

III. IF EITHER IS TO BE WORTHY, THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS ARE THE SAME. 1. *Energy and activity.* 2. *Thoughtfulness.* 3. *Character must be revealed.* 4. *The aim must be generous and high.* 5. *It must end well.*—S. C.

Ver. 11.—*Man's under-estimate of God's anger.* “Who knoweth,” etc.?

I. SOME DO NOT KNOW IT AT ALL. They do not believe in God at all, or in a very faint way. Hence they turn at once to what they term “natural causes,” when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth. “The fool hath said in his heart,” etc.

II. MOST MEN HAVE SOME IDEA OF IT. 1. *From the Bible.* The records of God's wrath are there writ large—the Fall; the Flood; the destruction of Egypt; the deaths in the wilderness, which were probably the occasion of this psalm. 2. *From what they see.* Vice and villainy come down with a crash from time to time, and men are forced to confess, “Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.” 3. *From sad experience* in their own hearts and lives. 4. *From the frenzied fears of many godless ones when death seizes them.* Their last awful hours betray the knowledge of God's wrath.

III. BUT NONE KNOW IT ACCORDING TO THE FEAR OF GOD THAT IS DUE. 1. *They cannot,* because of the limitation of human faculties. 2. *But they will not know it* as they might and should. The thought of it is a terror and torment to them. 3. *But they must,* if they are to be saved. If we see not our need of Christ, we shall never seek him. “Spirit of God's most holy fear,” come to us, that we may come to theel—S. C.

Ver. 12.—*The right numbering of our days.* There are certain seasons which come round to men—birthdays, anniversaries, the close of the year, and the like—which

seem to compel some sort of numbering of our days. The giddiest, the most thoughtless and worldly, are, for the moment, constrained to recollect the flight of time, the passing away of their life. Like as in dead of night, in the heart of a great city, when its business is hushed, and the traffic of its streets is still, the almost solitary passenger, though thinking of quite other things, is startled and arrested by the sudden simultaneous sounding of the hour of the night from the multitudinous clocks and bell-towers which are on every hand. In the rush and roar of the midday business, when the full tide of the city's trade is sweeping on, their stroke and chime would hardly have been heeded. But in this quiet hour, when all is still, the boom of the cathedral bell or the chime from yonder tower floats along the deserted streets, and the wayfarer cannot but take notice that another hour is gone. So in the quiet of thought, to which such seasons as those I have referred to incline us, the evident fact of the passing away of our days strikes upon our mind, and leads us to some sort of numbering of our days—a numbering which may or may not be profitable, and which can only be so according to the manner in which it is done. And this is the teaching of our text. It craves the teaching of God, that we may so number our days as to apply, etc. That, then, is the right numbering of our days which leads us to apply our hearts unto wisdom. Therefore let us inquire—

I. WHAT IS THIS WISDOM TO WHICH WE SHOULD APPLY OUR HEARTS? It is that which leads us to so use this life as the preparation for the life eternal. This life is our school, our training-ground, the scene of our education for eternity. What folly, then, to waste and squander such a season! We chide sternly the boy who wastes his school-time, but how many men throw away the opportunities which are given to them in this school of life to prepare them for the real life which awaits us when this is over! To the foolish child we say, "School-time does not come twice." To many men the same needs to be said. But we shall never use this life aright until we have surrendered our wills—given our hearts—to God, that by his wonder-working grace he may cleanse, and sanctify, and keep, and use them for himself. Then all will be well.

II. HOW DOES THE RIGHT NUMBERING OF OUR DAYS LEAD TO THE APPLYING OF OUR HEARTS TO WISDOM? Because it makes us realize how transitory our life is. This is the burden of this psalm. But to really see this, to absolutely believe it, as few do, is to *think but little of this world*. 1. *Of its riches and glory*. For if I know—not merely think, but know certainly—that I must have done with them all in a very little time, shall I care very much for them? Would a prisoner in the condemned cell be greatly elated if, the day before his death, he was left a fortune? Would any struggle as they do for this world's wealth if they knew that their lease of it was so brief? 2. And so, too, *of this world's sorrows*. Should we be so moved by them if we knew how little time they lasted? The martyrs were wont to strengthen their minds by this thought as they anticipated their cruel tortures and death. Paul says, "Our light afflictions which are but for a moment." Hence he who rightly numbers his days lives above the world, is independent of it, is free from its terrible down-drag and tyranny. 3. And he will, knowing the transitoriness of this life, *seek for that which is eternal*.

III. WHY ARE WE SO SLOW TO NUMBER OUR DAYS? 1. *Because we do not like the task*. It breeds melancholy and fearful thoughts. 2. *We persuade ourselves there is no need*. We shall have plenty of time (cf. the rich fool). 3. *We so love the world*. 4. *Doubt*. The teachings of Holy Scripture and the Church are dimly seen, or doubted, or, it may be, absolutely denied. Many more than we think are practical atheists. Therefore we need to pray, "So teach us to number our days," or else we shall never do it at all.—S. C.

Ver. 14.—*The secret of satisfaction*. I. MAN CRAVES FOR SATISFACTION. He may have many advantages and gifts, much wealth, friends, health, and much beside; and these may divert, interest, and absorb him; but they cannot really satisfy. His soul will hunger still.

II. GOD'S MERCY ALONE CAN MEET THAT CRAVING. For: 1. *It puts out of the way all that hinders* our satisfaction. The sense of guilt; the tyranny of sin; the burden of care; the fear of death. 2. *It brings along with it the true elements of the soul's satisfaction*. Sense of acceptance with God; uniform victory over sin; perfect peace; the will and power to bless others; communion with God; abiding hope.

III. BUT IT MUST BE SOUGHT EARLY. "In the morning" is the literal rendering. 1. Each day should be begun with the seeking with all intensity this blessed mercy of God. 2. But especially should each life be so begun. The parents for their child at its birth; the child itself as soon as it is able to understand. What ills will be escaped, what good ensured, if this be done!

IV. THE RESULT SHALL BE THE BLESSED LIFE—heaven before you get there.—S. C.

Ver. 15.—"*Make us glad.*" None can over-estimate the blessing that God's gift of gladness is to us. How it sweetens intercourse, encourages work, lightens our burdens, and helps us over many a difficult place! But there are forms of gladness to which no praise can be given. The laughter of fools is like "the crackling of thorns under a pot"—so says Ecclesiastes. And the gladness of evil men over evil has poison in it, notwithstanding all its loudness. And all mere man-made gladness is without permanence or power to really help. The gladness that is of God's making, that is what the psalmist prayed for, and for which we also may well pray. Therefore let us observe its elements, in what it consists. And the following verses of the psalm clearly tell this.

I. GOD'S WORK MUST APPEAR TO US. That is, God's salvation—for that is emphatically his "work," and must be seen by us, and seen as our salvation. Here is the primary essential of all true gladness.

II. HIS GLORY ALSO. "And thy glory unto," etc. That is, God must be seen to be the delight and joy of the soul. David speaks of God as "God, my exceeding joy." This is what is craved in Ps. lxxiii., "To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have," etc. The soul must learn to delight itself in the Lord, as it will if the glory of God be seen.

III. THE BEAUTY OF THE LORD OUR GOD MUST BE UPON US. That is, the graciousness, gentleness, and goodness of the Lord's character; its purity, holiness, truth, and righteousness;—these, which constitute the beauty of the Lord, and which are so mighty in their attraction, that one asks, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" (Ps. xvi.); these must be upon us. They are the adornment of the doctrine of God our Saviour. They were, and are, all seen in Christ, and they irresistibly draw all men unto him. And unless in some measure they are upon us, God cannot make us glad. Their absence kills all gladness.

IV. OUR WORK MUST BE ESTABLISHED. "The work of our hands, establish thou it." To know that we are not labouring in vain, that when we let down the net Christ will give the draught, yea, does so; this is his establishing our work, and by it God does make us glad.

CONCLUSION. Pray this prayer for your own sake, for your work's sake, for Christ's sake; for gladness wins many hearts.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*God a Dwelling-place.* God our Home; the soul's Home. There seem to be no sufficient reasons for rejecting the Mosaic authorship of this psalm; but this much appears to be certain—the associations of the time of Moses form the machinery of the psalm; and there are no other associations which fit to it so well. During the last forty years of his life, and during the long years of the desert-wanderings for Israel, the people had no home, no resting-place; they were constantly moving to and fro; and yet God was caring for them, preserving them from harm; God was their *Home*. A modern preacher has said, "There is one thing runs through the whole of the Scriptures which is above every other that was ever before the Hebrew mind—it is that in which God is represented as the Dwelling-place of his people, as the Home of the soul. It is an awful, incomprehensible, infinite thought; yet we can feel it and know it, not in the same sense as if we were Buddhists or Brahmins, but, while awed by the grandeur, never losing our personality in the infiniteness of the thought. All things in nature seem to abide ever, constant and unchangeable, but they only *seem*. All things have the stamp of insecurity upon them; but how confidently secure God's people stand in the eternal relationship of God to them!" See what thoughts we associate with home, and how far these may be applied to God as our "Home," our "Dwelling-place."

I. HOME IS A PLACE OF RELATIONSHIPS. Man enters into a variety of connections with his fellows; but his relationships, sanctified by love and service, centre in his

home. Relationship to God as "our Father" makes his house our home, and our brothers' home.

II. HOME IS A PLACE OF SECURITY. It is our sanctuary. There we feel not only that none *will* harm us, but that none *ever want* to harm us. We even feel that nothing *can* harm us if we only are safe at home. And nothing ever can harm the soul that is in the shelter of the "everlasting arms."

III. HOME IS A PLACE OF PERSONAL INTERESTS. Each one is concerned in the best welfare of each of the others. It is full of mutual love-service. Nothing is paid for, save by responsive love and service. So God may be thought of as personally concerned, personally interested, in all for whom he finds a home.

IV. HOME IS A PLACE OF REST. For those wearied and worn by toil or by trouble. So we sing, "Oh rest in the Lord!"

V. HOME IS A PLACE OF REFUGE. To which the traveller gladly returns from the fatigue and peril of the way. To which the erring child, the prodigal, turns in the penitent hour. So God is the Home of the sinful soul, ever the Father.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The past, present, and future eternity of God.* "There is something in the psalm that is wonderfully striking and solemn, acquainting us with the profoundest depths of the Divine nature" (Ewald). In contrast with the ever-passing, ever-changing generations, God is the Abiding, Never-changing One. Independent of all things that exist, God is before all, and is the absolute Creator and Controller of all. The mountains have ever been man's best image of the stable and permanent, yet he is helped to conceive of God as before the mountains, more stable than the mountains, more enduring than the mountains. "From everlasting to everlasting" is, poetically, "from hidden time to hidden." There are *time*-measures which we can use. There are *eternity*-measures of which we can only think; they are now beyond our mental grasp. The eternity-measures alone can be properly applied to God. Two things are the subjects of meditation in the first two verses of this psalm—the Divine independence, and the Divine relations. God is the Absolute Being—the "I am." God is in gracious, voluntary, relations—the "God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." Beyond us as the subject suggested may be, it does us good to try our minds with it, and fill our souls with the wonder and the glory of it.

I. GOD WAS BEFORE ALL THINGS. Philosophers try to persuade themselves that matter is eternal; or they fix upon the atom, or upon water, as the essential primary thing. They are always driven back behind their conclusions, and urged to say whence comes the atom or the moisture. There is no consistent thinking that does not bring us to the conclusion that there was some self-existent, immaterial Being, who was the absolute originator of all material existence, and still exists in complete and conscious independence of everything he has made. He is beyond and above all the chances and changes of his own handiwork.

II. GOD IS IN ALL THINGS. Separable from them, but voluntarily interested in them. The life and light of all this wondrous world we see. The poetical faculty discerns his presence. Human experience attests his practical working. The religious sentiment opens the eyes, and makes the recognition of God easy. When we say *all things*, we mean absolutely *all*, not merely those which we are pleased to call religious.

III. GOD WILL BE AFTER ALL THINGS. This can but appeal to faith. To us the time is inconceivable when things will no longer exist. Conceive the time when material things exist no longer, you must think of God as still the One Being. In the One who never passes, never changes, we may put the perfect trust.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*The lesson of the grass.* "And fade away suddenly as the grass." The strength of this poetical figure can only be fully recognized by those who know the peculiarities of grass in the hot Eastern countries. "In the East one night's rain works a change as if by magic. The field at evening was brown, parched, arid as a desert; in the morning it is green with the blades of grass. The scorching hot wind blows upon it, and again before evening it is withered."

I. A LESSON FROM THE FRAILTY OF THE GRASS. It is little more than a blade. Compare with plant, shrub, or tree. A delicate trembling thing. It comes too sud-

denly, and grows too quickly, to give us any impression of strength. So the apostle reminds us that "all flesh" is as frail as grass. We are here to-day, tremble to-day, and are gone to-morrow. "Surely every man's life is but a vanity."

II. A LESSON FROM THE PERILS OF THE GRASS. From insect, from flood, from drought, from wind, from the scythe of the mower. So are the perils that attend human life many and varied. Hereditary tendencies, diseases, results of vice, unhealthy situations and occupation, accidents. Well did the hymn-writer say—

"Strange that a harp of thousand strings
Should keep in tune so long."

A considerable proportion of a population die in infancy or in youth; a vast proportion die of preventable disease; an alarming proportion die of Divine judgments on sinful indulgence; and a considerable proportion die through the uncertainty that attaches to the working of man-made machinery. "In the midst of life we are in death." "Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."

III. A LESSON FROM THE BRIEF LIFE OF THE GRASS. Growing up in the morning, and withered by night, it has but its little day in which to do its work. There can be no wasting of the few moments, the "little while," which represent the human life of even the longest-lived. The brevity of our life puts supreme importance into the passing moment. "Now is the accepted time."

IV. A LESSON FROM THE MISSION OF THE GRASS. Frail as it is, brief as is its life, the grass has its work; and it has but to be faithful to the measure of power it has, and the length of time it abides. It has a mission to the soil, to the atmosphere, to the cattle, and to man. So we have our mission; it is precise to our powers; it is limited to the time of our sojourn. And, however little, it fits into the great plan of God for the well-being of the race.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*Secret sin.* The word used is a singular one, and may be rendered "our secret" (character). "God needs no other light to discern our sins by but the light of his own face. It pierceth through the darkest places; the brightness thereof enlighteneth all things, discovers all things. So that the sins that are committed in deepest darkness are all one to him as if they were done in the face of the sun. For they are done in his face, that shines more, and from which proceeds more light than from the face of the sun. So that this ought to make us the more fearful to offend; he sees us when we see not him, and the light of his countenance shines about us when we think ourselves hidden in darkness." "These words have a singular force if written by Moses, who saw the splendour of God, and carried away upon his person its manifest tokens."

L SECRET SIN REGARDED AS THAT WHICH WE WOULD GLADLY CONCEAL FROM OTHERS. Secrecy is always suspicious. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." Secrecy may be duty; in public spheres it may be wise policy; but when a man, in private life, does not wish any one to know what he is doing, he is generally found to be doing something wrong. The burglar, the coiner, the sensualist, want secrecy. They work in the dark; they go under feigned names; they hide themselves in the great cities; they devise all sorts of excuses to account for their time. If they succeed in deceiving their fellows, surely their ways and works are "naked and open" to God, whose "eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

II. SECRET SIN REGARDED AS THAT WHICH WE TRY TO CONCEAL FROM OURSELVES. This point requires more searching treatment. 1. Natural disposition, and errors in education, prevent men from recognizing the sinfulness of their own sins. 2. Conscience may be blunted so that it is no longer keen to witness against sin. 3. Strong will to continue in sin sets men upon persuading themselves that their sin is not sin. Illustrate from the sins of drinking, slandering, envying, etc. A man may deceive himself, but God quickly tears away his "refuges of lies." God knows the man who does not know himself. He puts the secrets into the "light of his countenance."

III. SECRET SIN REGARDED AS THAT WHICH WE TRY TO CONCEAL FROM GOD. As did Adam, by hiding among the trees. Men say, "The Lord shall not see;" but no man ever yet succeeded in closing the eye of Heaven. Men's most desperate effort is to assert and prove that there is no God, and so no observer of their sin. They never

really succeed. Infidelity is the hopeless attempt to get rid of a God who sees, and will be sure to judge.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*Brief life as judgment on sin.* This is the point that is specially present to the mind of the author of the psalm; and it is the point specially impressed by the historical associations of the psalm. "Human transitoriness, the creature made subject to vanity, death in its much-disregarded connection with sin,—these and the awful contrast, God's eternity, his absolute disposition of men's lives, his mindfulness of their misdeeds, are here the theme of melancholy contemplation." Recall the fact that during the thirty-eight years of the Israelite wanderings in the wilderness, they were subject to an extraordinary mortality, which was a direct judgment of Jehovah on their rebellion. A whole generation was punished, for the sin at Kadesh, by premature death. All from twenty years old and upward perished during the following years, so that only two representatives of the entire generation, Caleb and Joshua, actually entered the promised land. It is true that Moses himself lived to be a hundred and twenty years old, but his generation could not have reached a higher standard than seventy or eighty years. The truth that "the wages of sin is death" is forcibly illustrated by the historical record of the wilderness-generation. We may trace the Divine wisdom in giving the judgment on sin this particular form, of shortened life.

I. PROLONGED LIFE GIVES OPPORTUNITY FOR INCREASE OF SIN. See the case of the antediluvian sinners, who went on sinning through long lives until they became hopelessly corrupt, and had to be swept away by the Flood. It may, indeed, be a severe judgment to *prolong* a life, and a gracious judgment to shorten it.

II. THE LOVE AND CLINGING TO LIFE MAKE SHORTENING LIFE A VERY EFFECTIVE JUDGMENT. Love of life is natural to man. It is the expression of his consciousness of immortality, only it leads him to want his immortality *here*. The things which man *begins* to do make it extremely trying to have to leave them unfinished. Life means pleasant relationships, which man feels it a very bitter thing to break off.

III. MAN'S UTTER HELPLESSNESS IN THE PRESENCE OF EARLY DEATH MAKES THIS FORM OF JUDGMENT SPECIALLY HUMILIATING. To conquer, rise above, mate and master everything, is man's supreme passion. Early death is God—it may be the neglected God—mastering him.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*Length of life a doubtful good.* Yet every one wishes to live long. Every one imagines for himself an old age; and an ideal human life includes it. And yet there are but few who have the experience of old age who would really wish others to share it. Not without good reason did the ancients say, "Those whom the gods love die young." Length of life is a doubtful good, because—

I. THE AGED ARE PUT ASIDE FROM THE ACTIVITIES OF LIFE. Life goes past them: opinions change; customs change; business is changed. The old man no longer fits; he must stand aside; if he persists in keeping his place, he ruins his business, and worries everybody. It is hard to have to live on into a time when we shall no longer be of any use.

II. THE AGED MUST BEAR THE BURDEN OF FAILING POWERS. See the description of old age in Ecclesiastes. See the force of the terms "labour" and "sorrow" in the text. The necessary weakening of the bodily faculties is accompanied—save in very extreme cases—with corresponding failing of mental powers, and a trying limitation of human interests. The old man ceases to belong to his day, and lives over again his childish years. Sometimes aged helplessness, with disease, is most pitiful.

III. THE AGED SOMETIMES HAVE TO BEAR THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE SINS OF YOUTH. All sins of sensuality and self-indulgence carry their inevitable penalties; and if the pressure of them be delayed by a well-regulated manhood, they come on a man with a rush when the vitality is lowered by advancing age. A man bears "the sins of youth in the bones of old."

IV. THE AGED OFTEN FIND THEIR HEAVIEST TROUBLE TO BE THE LONELINESS IN WHICH THEY ARE LEFT. He who has had troops of friends dies at last tended by the hireling. Loved ones die away or remove out of reach. The old man often says, as did the Rev. William Jay, of Bath, in his advanced years, "My burying-ground is richer than my church." To sensitive, affectionate souls, aged loneliness must be the

supreme woe. Wife, children, friends, gone on before. How the old man must say to himself continually—

“What is my nest to me?—my *empty* nest?”

V. THE AGED SOMETIMES HAVE TO BEAR DISTRESSING CIRCUMSTANCES AS WELL AS BODILY FRAILITY. To live on means exhausting the savings; to be unable to earn; to have none to work for us. But life is in the Lord's hands, not ours. “If life be long, we will be glad, that we can long obey.”—R. T.

Ver. 12.—*Numbering our days.* That cannot mean merely counting them. Whether they are to be few or many we know not. The rich and self-centred farmer thought he could count his days, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years.” But the truth was that for him there was not even a “to-morrow.” “This night thy soul shall be required of thee.” We can value, estimate, appraise our days. We can realize their responsibilities, their work, their possibilities, their issues. When should the numbering work be done? Will it do to leave it until we are on the threshold of eternity? In this matter “*now* is the accepted time.” Number them as you number the days of a holiday-time, so that you may crowd every day with the best and worthiest things. Number them aright, and you will not fail to ask grace of God, saying, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

I. Days, to be well numbered, must be ESTIMATED IN THE LIGHT OF ETERNITY. How changed a thing life would become to us if there were no eternity! Compare two lives, one without, and one with, the thought of eternity. 1. Days may seem many; they are really but few. Seventy years is but a little while to look back on. See striking Bible figures of our life—weaver's shuttle; passing shadow; shepherd's tent; breath of mouth in winter. The generations are like the changing sentinel-watch in the night. 2. Days may seem to go slowly; they really hurry by. “Thou carriest them away as with a flood.” Swifter than the post. 3. Days may seem to be made up of little things; really there is nothing little; because everything has its bearing on the future, on character; and everything has eternal issues. It is a cause with a consequence. A little pebble may make ripples that shall never die away.

II. Days well numbered will not allow THE PUTTING OFF OF DUTY. Every day has its work. There is no possible overtaking the ends of life, save in daily faithfulness. If we are faithful every day, life cannot be unfinished. A faithful man can be stopped at any time. He wants no time in which to get himself ready.

III. Days well numbered must seem TOO SOLEMN FOR UNAIDED SELF-EXERTION. The man who rightly values them will tremble to step on them alone. Even the lesser claims of life overwhelm a thoughtful spirit. We all fail to be what we desire to be, even in common life. Much more the *higher*. We have a soul to save, a crown to win; and there should be jewels in the crown. Can we do it alone?—R. T.

Vers. 16, 17.—*Prayer for Divine revealing of the mystery of life.* This prayer, as referable to the Israelites, is a presage of the end of their pilgrimage, of their forgiveness, and of their settlement in Canaan. The issue of present Divine dealings was a *glory* which could only come to the *children* of the Mosaic generation. But Moses could properly pray that what God was actually then doing—his *work* by his disciplinary dispensations—might at once be revealed to his servants. To know what God is doing with us is our best help in bearing what burdens God lays upon us. And when we do know, we can even pray God to keep on his corrective work, whatever it may cost us, and let our children realize the issues. The “beauty” of the Lord may be taken as the Divine *favour*; or it may be a figure for the glory of the Divine presence. The prayer seems to embrace two things.

I. THAT GOD'S PURPOSE SHOULD BE MADE TO APPEAR. “Thy work.” That prayer is constantly rising from the hearts of men. We are always wanting to know the meaning of life; the meaning of our lives; the meaning of our lives at particular times. What is God doing with us? Unto what, into what, is God leading us? This is only made known in answer to prayer, which reveals to God an attitude of mind and feeling to which his purpose and his work can be explained. God holds the key to every life-story.

II. THAT MAN'S WORK SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED. This is the prayer of those who feel the uncertainty of life, and fear that they will be unable to complete what they have begun. The prayer may take two forms. 1. Permit me to finish the work I have started. 2. Let my children carry on to completion my work. Do not let it be lost and useless, as an unfinished thing. "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us." "When Moses prays that the 'children' of the present generation may see God's glory, he perhaps has in mind the exclusion of the latter from entrance into the land of Canaan. It was only to their children that this, the culminating and most glorious blessing, was to be vouchsafed."—R. T.

Ver. 17.—*Prayer and work.* "And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

I. THAT GOOD MEN ARE ENGAGED IN IMPORTANT WORK. *God has a work to do*; and the psalmist prays that it may be made manifest to their eyes. We desire to see God's work—the revelations and exercises of his great power and love. But the thought here is of *our work*. 1. *It is divinely appointed.* Not self-chosen. The great aim of it is the same as God's—to save men, by our giving them all possible help. 2. *This work gives to life its chief value and interest.* Living for the bodies and souls of others is intrinsically more valuable than all the private ends we pursue.

II. GOOD MEN FEEL ANXIOUS FOR THE SUCCESS OF THEIR WORK. They want it established, made strong, prospered. Even as they aim to succeed in their temporal work. On account of the *intrinsic importance* of the work itself. Because of the *consequences* of the work in the future. "And thy glory unto their children." Good men think not only of their own future, but of the future of Christ's Church. Because of *our future*. It will soon be of the utmost consequence to us whether our work has been established or not. Have we done anything, are we doing anything, that will last—of a beneficent kind?

III. GOOD MEN FEEL THAT THE SUCCESS OF THEIR WORK DEPENDS ON THE BLESSING OF GOD. "Let thy beauty be upon us, and establish thou the work of our hands." If our work is to be *strong*—be established—the strength must come from God. The utmost we can do is to accomplish the outward conditions of success; but God alone can reach the heart of the sinner and sufferer to cleanse and comfort. Our work ought to be beautiful, but God alone can give the beauty. If our work be the work of gratitude, love, humility, and self-sacrifice, it is God that has made it beautiful.

IV. THAT THE DIVINE BLESSING ON OUR WORK IS OBTAINED BY PRAYER. 1. God has made prayer necessary to the success of spiritual work. Christ taught this constantly, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest," etc.; "Thy kingdom come." 2. As a matter of experience, the men who have prayed most over their work have succeeded best. Their prayer expressed their *earnestness* and *faith*—trust and spirit of dependence. Observe how work and prayer are here conjoined. Prayer useless where there is no work on hand.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM XCI.

THIS psalm, like the majority in the present Book, is without a title. Jewish tradition, however, ascribed it to Moses—a conclusion which Dr. Kay and others accept as borne out by the facts, especially by the many close resemblances between it and Deut. xxxii., xxxiii. Other critics, and they are the majority, trace in it a different hand, but regard it as suggested by Ps. xc.

The subject is the security of the man

who thoroughly trusts in God. This subject is worked out by an "antiphonal arrangement" (Cheyne)—the first speaker delivering vers. 1, 2; the second, vers. 3, 4; then the first responding with vers. 5—8; and again the second with vers. 9—13. In conclusion, a third speaker, making himself the mouthpiece of Jehovah, crowns all by declaring the blessings which God himself will bestow upon his faithful ones (vers. 14—16).

This psalm is, apparently, liturgical,

and is "the most vivid of the liturgical psalms" (Cheyne). It has a certain resemblance to the speech of Eliphaz the Temanite in Job v. 17-23, but stands at a higher elevation.

Ver. 1.—**He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High** (comp. Ps. xc. 1). He who has his thoughts always on God is said to "dwell in him"—to "make his abode with him"—to "sit down in his secret place." He has the Almighty, as it were, for his constant companion. **Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.** This is not "tautology." What is meant is that "loving faith on man's part shall be met by faithful love on God's part" (Kay). God will extend his "shadow" over the man who places himself under his protection.

Ver. 2.—**I will say of the Lord.** The general sentiment is followed by a personal application. "I, at any rate," says the first speaker, "will place myself under this powerful protection." He is my Refuge and my Fortress (comp. Pss. xviii. 2; cxliv. 2). **My God; in him will I trust** (comp. Psa. xxix. 2; xxxi. 6; lv. 23; lvi. 3; lxi. 4, etc.).

Ver. 3.—**Surely he shall deliver thee.** The second speaker takes up the word, and naturally changes the person. Addressing the first speaker, he says—Yes, assuredly, God shall deliver thee from whatever dangers beset thee: as, first, from the snare of the fowler (comp. Ps. cxiv. 7; Prov. vi. 5); and, secondly, from the noisome pestilence (comp. ver. 6), i.e. from all dangers whatsoever—not more from these than from others.

Ver. 4.—**He shall cover thee with his feathers; rather, with his pinions** (see the Revised Version; comp. ver. 1; and see Exod. xix. 4; Deut. xxxii. 11). **And under his wings shalt thou trust; rather, shalt thou take refuge.** His truth—i.e. "his faithfulness, his fidelity"—shall be thy shield and buckler; i.e. "thy protection."

Ver. 5.—**Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night.** Robbers constituted the chief "terror by night" (see Job xxiv. 14-16; Jer. xlix. 9; Obad. 5); but night attacks on the part of a foreign enemy were not uncommon (Cant. iii. 8; Isa. xv. 1). **Nor for the arrow that flieth by day.** Open war is probably intended, not srocco, or pestilence, or "the arrows of the Almighty" (Job vi. 4). The man who trusts in God will be specially protected in the peril of battle.

Ver. 6.—**Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness.** The plague-god is personified and represented as stalking

through the land in the hours of darkness. Parallels have been found in the literature of the Babylonians (see 'Babylonian and Oriental Record,' vol. i. p. 12) and elsewhere. Nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. The rare word, נִכְסֵּף, translated "destruction," here and in Deut. xxxii. 24, is rendered by the LXX. δαίμωνιον, and the entire phrase, "for the destruction that wasteth at noonday," becomes ἀπὸ συμπτώματος καὶ δαίμονιον μεσημβρινοῦ—"from ruin and the demon of the midday"—by which sunstroke would seem to be meant (comp. Ps. cxi. 6, "The sun shall not smite thee by day").

Ver. 7.—**A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand.** The meaning is, "Though a thousand, or even ten thousand, should fall beside thee, in battle, or through pestilence, or sunstroke," yet—It shall not come nigh thee—the danger, whatever it be, shall not touch thy person; thou shalt be protected from it.

Ver. 8.—**Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward** (or, "the recompense") of the wicked; i.e. without suffering anything thyself, thou shalt look on, and see the punishment of the ungodly. So Israel in the land of Goshen "looked on," and saw the calamities of the Egyptians.

Ver. 9.—**Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my Refuge, even the Most High, thy Habitation; literally, for thou, O Lord, art my Refuge; thou hast made the Most High thy Dwelling-place,** which can scarcely be made to yield a tolerable sense. It is supposed that a word—מִשְׁכָּנִי—has dropped out, and that the verse originally ran thus: "Because thou hast said, Jehovah is my Refuge, and hast made the Most High thy Dwelling-place" (comp. vers. 1, 2). The second speaker for a second time addresses the first.

Ver. 10.—**There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.** The faithful man is to be preserved from evil of every kind. His very "dwelling" is to be protected so that his family may suffer no hurt.

Ver. 11.—**For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways** (comp. Ps. xxxiv. 7). The faithful are under the constant care of angels (Heb. i. 14), who guide them and direct them perpetually. Satan made a crafty use of this promise when he tempted our Lord (Matt. iv. 6; Luke iv. 10, 11). No doubt it applies to him pre-eminently, as the specially "Faithful One."

Ver. 12.—**They shall bear thee up in their hands; rather, upon their hands—lifting thee over difficulties and stumbling-blocks. Lest thou dash thy foot against a**

stone (comp. Prov. iii. 23, 24). Moral impediments are, no doubt, chiefly meant.

Ver. 13.—*Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder.* Conquered enemies prostrated themselves before their conquerors, who, to mark the completeness of the subjection, placed a foot upon the prostrate form. From this practice the metaphor of “treading under foot” for conquering became a commonplace (see Ps. vii. 5; xlv. 5; lx. 12, etc.). The “lion” here represents all open and violent foes; the “adder,” all secret and malignant ones. The young lion (*képhir*, the lion in the height of his strength) and the dragon (*tannin*, the most dreadful form of serpent) shalt thou trample under feet. An emphatic repetition, with a certain heightening of the colour.

Ver. 14.—*Because he hath set his love upon me* (see Deut. vii. 7; x. 15). “By a sudden and effective transition,” as Professor Cheyne remarks, “Jehovah becomes the speaker” of the concluding strophe. It is not enough that the faithful should encourage each other by their anticipations of God’s coming mercies, God himself now speaks by the mouth of his prophet, and makes promises in his own Person. *I will deliver him.* A ratification of vers. 3, 7, 10—15. *I will set him on high; i.e.*

“exalt him above his fellows”—“bring him to honour.” *Because he hath known my Name.* “Knowing God’s Name” is nearly equivalent to knowing him. It implies, besides knowledge, faith and trust in the Almighty.

Ver. 15.—*He shall call upon me, and I will answer him.* This is equivalent to, “Whenever he calls upon me, I will answer him,” or “I will grant all his prayers.” *I will be with him in trouble* (comp. Ps. xlv. 1). *I will deliver him* (see above, ver. 14). *And honour him; or, “bring him to honour”* (compare “I will set him on high,” in the preceding verse).

Ver. 16.—*With long life (or, length of days) will I satisfy him.* Length of days is always viewed in the Old Testament as a blessing, and a special reward for obedience (Exod. xx. 12; Deut. v. 16; 2 Kings xx. 6; 2 Chron. i. 11; Ps. xxi. 4; Prov. iii. 2, 16, etc.). It is only in the New Testament that we learn how much “better” it is “to depart, and be with Christ” (Phil. i. 23). *And show him my salvation* (comp. Ps. l. 23); i.e. “make him experience what salvation is.” “Salvation,” as Professor Cheyne observes, “is both an act and a state”—an act on God’s part, a state on man’s.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 11.—*The angels.* “He shall give his angels charge,” etc. The restful spirit of absolute trust in God rises in this psalm to its loftiest height. It is a glorious commentary on Isa. xxvi. 3. The Divine answer at the close (vers. 14—16) shows how near the Lord is to the soul that trusts him. Compare, as an equally glorious New Testament parallel, Rom. viii. 31—39. St. Paul defies “angels and principalities” of evil to harm God’s children. Here holy angels are declared to be their watchful helpers and guardians.

I. HIS ANGELS. Angels sustain a most close, happy, exalted relation to God, of nearness, love, service (Ps. ciii. 20; Luke i. 19; Rev. v. 11).

II. THEY ARE OUR FELLOW-SUBJECTS AND FELLOW-SERVANTS IN THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM OF OUR RISEN LORD. (1 Pet. iii. 22; Rev. xxii. 8, 9.) Jesus, who received their ministry on earth (Matt. iv. 11; Luke xxii. 43), commands it now (Rev. xxii. 16).

III. THEIR MIGHTY POWERS ARE WILLINGLY AND OBEDIENTLY EXERCISED IN MINISTERING TO THE WELFARE OF GOD’S CHILDREN. (Heb. i. 14.) Note: They minister *to* God *for* his children. Their power is inconceivably great. One angel was able to destroy Sodom and the other guilty cities. The same angel gently, though firmly, led Lot out. One angel smote the firstborn (comp. Matt. xxviii. 2, 5; Acts xi. 7, etc.; Matt. xxvi. 53).

IV. ANGELS ARE TO BE OUR FELLOW-WORSHIPPERS AND ASSOCIATES IN THE ETERNAL HOME. (Luke xx. 36; Heb. xii. 22.)

REMARKS. 1. This case is minute as well as mighty (ver. 12). One false step may be fatal. Angels are examples of that thorough obedience which is “faithful in that which is least.” 2. It is our Father’s care we are to recognize. “*He shall give his angels charge.*” All their power, wisdom, care, love, flow from *him* as their Source. His care and love are over each one of his children every moment. “*Over thee to keep thee.*”

Ver. 15.—*True prayer.* “He shall call,” etc. This is the simplest view of prayer. And in our present weakness, sin, need, that which comes most home, suits us most. Prayer may extend far beyond the range of our own need, as in the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. It may rise above petition into converse with God, adoration, thanksgiving, consecration. But this is the alphabet of those loftier lessons, “Ask and receive” (Luke xi. 9, etc.; Ps. l. 15).

I. PRAYER IS A LAW OF GOD’S GOVERNMENT. He has ordained it among the conditions of the blessings he is ready to bestow, as surely as he has ordained sowing as the condition of reaping, or the dependence of the child on the parent (Matt. vii. 11). We hear much in our day of *laws*; and no wonder, for the progress of science depends on the discovery of the laws which regulate nature. Rightly understood, they are the glorious witness of which Ps. xix. 1 speaks. The mischief and folly come in when men erect “laws” into an imaginary *self-existence*, and worship them as a sort of fetish, just as in old times people worshipped imaginary *powers* in nature. A strange idolatry! Laws can have no existence but in *mind*. In our minds they are *truths* which we discover as constant amid the infinite, ever-changing variety of nature. In the *Divine mind* they are the principles and rules according to which the Creator has made, upholds, and rules the universe. Now, if prayer be one of the great laws which God has ordained for human life, it must needs be in perfect harmony with all nature’s laws. God’s laws cannot contradict one another. The so-called “scientific” objection against prayer (which has really nothing scientific in it) amounts to this—that if *God* is influenced by prayer, so that he causes events which would not have happened had prayer not been offered, nature must be irregular, and God irresolute. The answer is—It is God’s will that “men pray everywhere,” as much as that the sun shall shine and rain fall. He has built this universe as a temple. All nature is so under his eye, hand, will, that it is no more deranged by his granting our petitions than by a parent granting a child’s request (1 John v. 14, 15). Men can disobey, disbelieve, despise, this great *law of prayer*. The difference between natural laws and laws for intelligent beings is just this—*things* cannot disobey God. *Men* can; but they must take the consequences.

II. THAT GOD ANSWERS PRAYER IS A FACT OF EXPERIENCE. The truth of any law is verified by experience. So God says, “Prove me.” The law of prayer is established by the teaching of the whole Bible, by abundant express promises, by our Saviour’s example as well as teaching. It has been tested constantly for thousands of years; is being tested hourly—nay, every minute. And the immense witness of experience is, “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him.” If experience can establish any fact, it is this. But here is a *difficulty*. All prayers are not answered.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—16.—*The man that trusts in God.* I. WE HAVE HIS DESCRIPTION. 1. *He dwells in the secret place, etc.* 2. *He abides under the shadow of the Almighty.*

II. HIS CONFESSION OF FAITH. (Ver. 2.) The Lord is his Refuge, Fortress, the Joy of his soul, his God, his constant Confidence.

III. HIS COMMENDATION OF GOD TO OTHERS. (Vers. 3—13.) 1. *As a sure Deliverer* from the hidden foe and from the devouring pestilence. 2. *As Protector*; like that of the mother-bird over her young; like that of shield and buckler to the soldier. 3. *As the Inspirer of confidence.* (Ver. 5.) Against the midnight attack—the terror by night (cf. Judg. vii.). Against open war, when the flight of arrows almost darkened the sky. Against secret disease (ver. 6) and sudden death—the sickness that wasteth at noonday. 4. *As rescuing from the very jaws of death.* Thousands falling all around, but God’s servant kept unharmed (ver. 7). Seeing only, but never experiencing, the awful recompense of the wicked (ver. 8). 5. *He gives the reason of this.* (Ver. 9.) He made the Lord his Refuge and his Habitation; there no evil could come, nor any plague. 6. *He tells of the angelic ministries* through which God thus guards his people; they keep and they appear, so that no hurt shall come. Still more, they render the man invulnerable (ver. 13). Forces terrible as the lion and subtle like the adder cannot

harm. Thus, from his own experience, the man that trusts in God commends him to his fellow-man. And next—

IV. THE DIVINE APPROVAL AND DELIGHT IN BOTH THE MAN AND HIS TESTIMONY. At ver. 14 God begins to speak. 1. *Declaring his mind towards his faithful servant.* We may regard these verses (14—16) as a Divine soliloquy, in which God, well-pleased, meditates what he will do, and why, for his servant. He will deliver, exalt, answer, keep near to, honour, satisfy with long life, and reveal to him the fulness of his love. 2. *Endorsing the testimony in the mind of him to whom it has been given.* Making him feel that it is all true, and that much more is true. Thus does God deal with his faithfully witnessing servants, and for and through them to others. This psalm is as true for to-day as for the day when it was written. Let us but thus trust in God, confess, and commend him.—S. C.

Vers. 1—3.—*Abiding under God's shadow.* In order to understand this most precious promise, inquire—

I. WHAT IS THE SECRET PLACE OF THE MOST HIGH? The idea of this “secret place” is frequently met with. 1. Sometimes it tells of *some secret hiding-place*, such as David often resorted to when a fugitive; and the sure protection of God is likened to such safe shelter. 2. At other times, *the central tent of the commander of an army* seems to be meant, as in Ps. xxvii. 5, “He shall hide me in his pavilion,” etc. The enemy would have to break through rank after rank of the encamped army ere he could reach the well-guarded central tent of the leader. So inaccessible to the foe, so strongly placed was it, that it is taken as an emblem of our security in God. 3. But it is to *the most holy place of the tabernacle and temple* that we think allusion is here made. That sacred chamber was emphatically the secret place of the Most High. It was entered but once a year, and then only by one person, the high priest, bearing the blood of atonement. For all the rest of the year no footfall was heard in that secret place, no eye looked upon the glory of God that shone forth there. That loneliness told of the sad alienation that had sprung up between God and man through man's sin. But that secret place was the earthly dwelling-place of God. There, between the cherubim, his glory shone forth, and there he was said to dwell.

II. BUT WHAT IS IT TO DWELL THERE? Literally, no man ever dwelt there. We are driven, therefore, to seek the spiritual meaning of this word. And we note that: 1. *Israel entered there in the person of the high priest*, when he bore in his hand the atoning blood, which he was about to sprinkle upon the mercy-seat. All Israel found entrance there in their high priest, their representative. And whilst they continued in the faith of God, obeying and trusting him, they spiritually dwelt in that secret place, and, as a fact, were under the shadow—the high priest was so literally—of the Most High. No evil befell them, no plague came nigh their dwelling. It was well with them indeed. 2. *And we enter and dwell there* when, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we come to God, pleading his all-sufficient sacrifice and atonement, of which the blood borne by the high priest told. And we dwell there as we continue in that precious faith. Then we, too, are under the shadow of the Almighty. The Law's condemnation, sin's power, earthly care, death, and the grave, can do us no harm; we are under the sure and blessed shelter of our God: Next let us note—

III. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS INDWELLING. 1. *The Lord is to us our Refuge.* The Law's condemnation would fasten upon us but for this. And he is our Fortress—the place of vantage whence we fight successfully the spiritual warfare. And he is our God, in whom we trust; he is the confidence, the delight, the joy of our souls; so that we say of him, “He is *my God*.” 2. *And all this we take personally*, each of us individually appropriating it. The Lord is not merely “a Refuge,” but “*my Refuge*,” “*my Fortress*,” etc. 3. *And we confess it.* “I will say of the Lord,” etc.; “With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

IV. THE SURE FRUIT OF SUCH DWELLING IN THE SECRET PLACE OF THE MOST HIGH. We shall commend God to others. The rest of the psalm is one prolonged testimony to the blessedness of thus dwelling in God. “Surely he shall deliver *thee*,” etc. Are we, then, thus individually and avowedly dwelling in God?—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*A sacred resolve.* “I will say of the Lord.” Consider—

I. SUCH RESOLVES GENERALLY. It is good to make them; for: 1. *They are really prayers.* Underlying them there is the desire of the heart that God may give the help needed to fulfil such resolve. 2. *They are a blessed stirring up of the grace of God that is in us.* The will summons the soul to energy by means of such holy resolves. 3. *They are well-pleasing to God,* for they are an actual endeavour to do his will.

II. THIS RESOLVE. 1. *See its nature.* He would take the Lord as his "Refuge." It is a confession of need and of trust. And as his "Fortress." He would need help in his warfare; he would rely on the Lord for it. As his God, his soul's Centre, Strength, and Joy. 2. *He would do this now.* 3. *Openly.* 4. *Personally.* 5. *Habitually.*

III. WHAT LED TO THIS RESOLVE. The experience of God's sheltering love of which he tells in the first verse. He was dwelling in the secret place, was abiding in Christ, and he found, as a fact of his experience, that he was sheltered from all evil.

IV. HOW THIS RESOLVE WAS SUSTAINED. By going and telling others of what God had done for him, and would do for them.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—"My God." These words come as a climax to all that profession of faith which the former part of the verse contains. It is good to say of the Lord, "He is my Refuge"—to have gone to him, and found in him deliverance from all the guilt and condemnation due to our sin, which otherwise would have overwhelmed us. But it is better to have him as "our Fortress," so that, strong in his strength, we may fight successfully the great battle against all the might of the wicked one. But it is best of all, because a yet higher attainment, to be able to say of God, "He is my God," as the psalmist does here. All that is contained in the former declarations is included in this, and much besides. Blessed, indeed, is he who can say of the Lord, "He is my God." We all know what a charm belongs to that which we can call our own. Even a child delights in any gift far more if it can call what is given its very own. And it is the same with men. Possession enhances preciousness, and causes what is our own to be clung to with a tenacity that would be wanting were it not "our own." We know the poet's challenge to our patriotic pride when speaking of "my own, my native land." And the man who will delight in God and cleave to him at all times is he who most of all is able to say of him, "He is my God."

I. Let us EXPLAIN THE MEANING of such saying. 1. *It does not mean that any man can have a monopoly of God* so as to exclude all others. It is so with many of our earthly possessions, but not at all so in our possession of God. On the contrary, he who says of the Lord, "He is my God," is generally one who has learnt to say this by the blessed influence of some other who himself has been able to say it. And he is always one who desires that all others should be able to say it likewise. 2. *But it means that he has such conscious possession of and delight in God that he could not have more were God his God only,* and not the God of any one else. As with the eye, it could not enjoy more of the light of the sun even if no other eye rejoiced in its light. The joy of the light is not lessened, but greatly increased by, yea, is largely dependent on, others enjoying it also.

II. OBSERVE SOME OF THOSE WHO HAVE SAID THIS. 1. *Jacob.* At Bethel he had been made to feel his deep need of God, and hence he vows that if God would bring him back in peace, "then God shall be my God," etc. And this is the deep longing of every convinced soul. 2. *Miriam and Israel at the Red Sea.* They sang, "He is my God, and I will prepare him a habitation," etc. They knew of his redemption, and in the joy of it claimed God as "my God." It is the spontaneous utterance of the redeemed soul. 3. *Nehemiah, and many others,* who thus continually speak of God. They show how God is the abiding Trust of the believer. 4. *Our Lord on the cross* cried, "My God, my God," etc.! And in him we learn how this precious truth is the solid rock on which, in times of extremest distress, the soul rests itself. 5. *And it is the seal of salvation.* In the Apocalypse we read amongst the promises "to him that overcometh," there shall be written on him "the name of my God," as if the fact that he had so regarded and rejoiced in God were, as it is, the sure token of his belonging to the city of God. Thus from the dawn of the Divine life in man to its consummation in glory, the people of God have ever said of the Lord, "He is my God."

III. WHAT IS INVOLVED IN SUCH SAYING. 1. The man feels it; he has the witness

of the Spirit to the fact that God is his God. 2. *He asserts it*—openly confesses and professes this truth. 3. *He delights in it*. It is no mere abstract proposition, but a perennial spring to him of peace, purity, and power. 4. *And others recognize it*. When no one but ourselves believes that that which we call ours is so, our possession of it is doubtful and insecure; but when all acknowledge our possession, then it is ours. And so with him who rightly says of the Lord, "He is my God."

IV. HOW MAY ANY MAN COME TO SAY THIS? The steps are: 1. *Conviction of your need*, leading to fervent desire. 2. *Consecration*. This includes the renunciation of all that would displease God, and the prompt obedience to all his will so far as you know it. 3. *Confession* of this to God first, and then to man, that God is your God. 4. *Confidence*. You are to keep believing that God accepts the surrender you have made. And then comes: 5. *Consciousness* that it is so. The Spirit testifies to you. May we all make this blessed ascent!—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*The fowler's snare*. It is a frequent usage of the psalmist's to compare the soul of man to a bird (cf. Pss. xi., lxxxiv., etc.). In the next verse God himself is likened to the mother-bird that shelters her young under her wings. And, like a bird, the soul of man is exposed to many dangers. Not alone such as are open and known, but such as are hidden, secret, and subtle; not alone from the hovering hawk, but also from the crafty snare of the fowler. And with such souls as are contemplated in this psalm, it is this latter peril which is the true image of that against which they need to guard, and from which God alone can deliver them. The snare of the fowler—it is a very suggestive similitude. Consider, therefore—

I. THE DANGER THAT THREATENS THE BELIEVER. It is as a snare. 1. *A concealed peril*. For the fowler to show himself, or to spread his snare in the sight of any bird, would be to defeat the very object he has in view. Hence he conceals himself and his snare both. And so also doth that crafty hunter who seeks for souls that he may destroy them—

"Satan, the fowler, who betrays
Unguarded souls a thousand ways"—

he does not venture to display openly the evil which he intends by the suggestions he plies us with and the temptations which he puts in our way. Rather he transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. xi. 14). Thus craftily does he hide away from us the real nature of the sin into which he would betray us. 2. *Adapted to our nature*. The fowler does not seek to snare all birds in the same way, but he studies their nature and likings and haunts, and so sets his snare. And is it not just thus with our great adversary? He knows our weak points, where the chink in our armour is through which his darts may enter. He knows where we are vulnerable, how we may be best ensnared. That which would tempt one man would have no attraction, or but little, for another. And Satan knows that. Ah! where should we be were it not for the safe keeping of God? 3. *Attractively baited*. How the devil lured Saul to persecute the Church, by persuading him that he was "doing God service"! How Christian people are often led to mingle in strange scenes, and to associate with those who are no friends to Christ in their amusements and ways, on the pretext that so they may bring these ungodly ones under good influence, and thus lead them on to something better! The result is generally the reverse of what was expected. Satan has a vast variety of these baits, and the souls are not a few that he has snared by means of them. "It is only for once;" "Don't listen to narrow, prejudiced people;" "You can't help your nature and disposition;" "You can repent, and get forgiveness;"—these are some of the fowler's baits with which he tempts us into his snare. 4. *Sometimes he uses decoys*. "Religious people do such things: why shouldn't you?" 5. *Sometimes he employs several of them together*. Old Master Quarles says—

"The close pursuers' busy hands do plant
Snares in thy substance; snares attend thy want;
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; snares attack thy word;

Snarcs in thy quiet; snarcs in thy commotion;
 Snarcs in thy diet; snarcs in thy devotion;
 Snarcs lurk in thy resolves, snarcs in thy doubts;
 Snarcs lie within thy heart, and snarcs without;
 Snarcs are above thy head, and snarcs beneath;
 Snarcs in thy sickness; snarcs are in thy death."

There is not a place in which a believer walks that is free from them. Therefore let us watch and pray.

II. OUR RICH CONSOLATION IN VIEW OF THESE DANGERS. God will "surely" deliver us from them. 1. *He has promised to do so.* 2. *He has done so* for his people in all ages who have sought such deliverance. 3. *Christ came to destroy the works of the devil*; therefore, certainly, these snarcs.

III. THE NATURE OF HIS DELIVERANCE. How does the Lord fulfil this word? 1. *By not letting us fall into them.* He keeps us from the evil, that it shall not touch us. This is very blessed—more blessed than to be delivered out of the snare when we have fallen therein. The elder brother was, after all, more to be envied than the restored prodigal. We too much forget this. God has many means of holding us back from sin. Chief of all, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, giving us, as to Joseph, a holy fear and an abiding love of God. 2. *By rescuing us out of the snare.* Yes, he stands ready to do this. You fallen ones, he will do this for you.—S. C.

Ver. 4.—"*Just as a hen protects her brood.*" This is undoubtedly the image here. Not the outspread wings of the cherubim, which overshadowed the ark of the covenant. Nor the mighty pinions of the eagle, whose home was on the lofty crag, and her path through the sunlit sky. But it is the homely image taken from the familiar scenes of the farmyard and the barn. It is in keeping with the gracious condescension of God to employ such an emblem; it is like the Lord himself, "full of grace and truth." We would not have dared to make such a comparison; but he has done so, likening himself to the mother-bird, which fosters, cherishes, and protects her young. Let us note—

I. THE SPECIAL BLESSING HERE PROMISED. It is the gracious protection of God. In the closing sentence of this verse it is likened to "shield and buckler." To Israel it meant protection from outward calamity, such as pestilence and the destruction caused by war; but to us it tells of all that spiritual guardianship we enjoy. From all the guilt of former sin; from the power of sin now; from the might of temptation; from the crushing power of sorrow; from the misery of a useless and, still more, a harmful life; from the fear of death; from all these, and, when it will be well for us, from outward ill as well.

II. THE MANNER OF ITS BESTOWMENT. It comes through: 1. *The all-availing atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.* When this is pleaded and trusted in by the sinner, his guilt is all taken away. 2. *From the power of sin, by the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit,* cleansing the heart and sanctifying our whole nature. 3. *From sorrow, by his providence keeping it away*; or giving, as to Paul, grace sufficient to sustain it; or by removing its cause. 4. *From the misery of a useless life, by inspiring the soul with a desire for others' good,* and by his Spirit, fitting for service. 5. *From fear of death, by the revelation of the far better life with Christ,* to be entered on at once when this life is done.

III. OTHER BLESSINGS THAT COME ALONG WITH THIS ONE. For the emblem employed suggests not only protection from enemies, but much more than that. Picture to yourself what the shelter of the wing of the mother-bird is to her young, and it will tell of what the precious promise of our text means to the believing soul. 1. *It means happy content and comfort.* "My soul shall be satisfied," and that richly—so Ps. lxxiii. declares. And the emblem of our text suggests it, even as the experience of God's saints confirms it. The soul is happy in God. Dungeons as at Philippi and Rome, deathbeds, and desolations of all kinds have been irradiated with the blessed content of those whom God has covered with his feathers, and who have put their trust under his wings. 2. *A life hidden with God.* See how the young brood are hidden away under their mother's wing! A life hidden from strife and malice and the world. 3. *Nearness to the heart of God.* The young birds can feel the beat of their mother's

heart. So the soul of the sheltered one beholds and feels the love of God. 4. *Perfect peace.*

IV. To WHOM ALL THIS IS PROMISED. Not to any and everybody, but to those only who dwell in the secret place of the Most High; that is, who abide, ever trusting, in the Lord Jesus Christ.—S. C.

Vers. 11.—13.—“*His angels.*” The mention of them is introduced here in order to show how the blessed promise of ver. 10 is fulfilled. The angels are continually spoken of in Scripture. First of all, we read of them in connection with the story of Hagar, and from thence onward the pages of Holy Scripture make perpetual references to them. It, therefore, cannot but be important to us that we should understand, so far as we may, what is written concerning them. For we cannot think that their work and ministry are finished, and that now they have nothing to do with us, nor we with them. We feel sure that the reverse is the truth. True, there has been much of mere imagination in the representations that have been given of angels by poets, painters, and preachers alike. They have been the makers of men's common ideas concerning the angels, and have caused not a little misunderstanding and loss thereby. But a careful study of the Scriptures will show that truth on this confessedly mysterious and difficult theme is both attainable and full of profit. Consider—

I. THE REALITY OF THE ANGELIC WORLD. 1. This *the Scriptures plainly assert.* They are spoken of there in clear and positive manner, as to their high dignity, their sanctity, power, blessedness, their heavenly home, their employments, vast numbers, and immortality. All this is told of the *holy* angels. But there are evil ones likewise, who are represented as serving under their prince, Satan, as the holy angels under God. They are evil, wretched, full of malignity, and reserved for everlasting punishment. 2. *And this teaching is to be regarded as literally true.* It is not, as some have said, an accommodation to the popular beliefs of the day. 3. *Analogy also confirms this.* Is not all life, from the lowest zoophyte up to the most gifted of the sons of men, one continual ascent? But why should the progression halt with man? Why should there not be an ascent beyond, as there is up to, ourselves? All analogy leads us to think there is, and to be on the look out and expectation for orders of beings that may span the vast distance that separates man from God. And the Bible confirms this.

II. THEIR NATURE. 1. *Who and what are they?* Much has been assumed concerning them; as that they existed long before the creation of man; that they are altogether different in nature from man; that some of them kept not their first estate, etc. 2. *But may it not be that angels are perfected men?* The poet Young thus writes—

“Why doubt we, then, the glorious truth to sing?
Angels are men of a superior kind;
Angels are men in lighter habit clad,
High o'er celestial mountains winged in flight,
And men are angels loaded for an hour,
Who wade this miry vale, and climb with pain
And slippery step the bottom of the steep.”

Why may not this be true? For there is no being higher in nature than man, except God himself. If angels be different from men, why, then, were men created at all? If, without all man's toil and pain, beings existed who could render to God the love, worship, and service he desired, wherefore man's much sorrow and misery? But if, on the other hand, it be true that there is no other entrance on the angelic state than by this weary life of ours, the mournful mystery of life has some light shed upon it. And angels are often called men, and appeared as such. And our Lord said that in the resurrection we shall be as angels; and in the Epistle to the Hebrews (xii.) we are said to have come to myriads of angels, and the following sentence shows that they are the same as “the Church of the Firstborn, and the spirits of just men made perfect.” And the quotation by the writers of 2 Peter and Jude, from the same passage in the apocryphal and unauthoritative Book of Enoch, need not stand in the way of the reasonable and helpful belief we have been maintaining. Milton—that mighty manufacturer of so much mischievous mistake—is the real author of men's common beliefs about the angelic world. And they who hold such beliefs lose much.

III. THEIR OFFICE. They are said, in these verses: 1. *To have charge of the people of God.* "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth," etc.? 2. *They keep God's servants in all their ways.* Perhaps by suggesting thoughts, purposes, and resolves. But we do not certainly know. If we could see them at their work, we should be in peril of worshipping them, as St. John was. 3. *They sustain them,* uphold them, so that not alone by great ills, but by little ones, they shall be unhurt. 4. *They give victorious power* over all kinds of spiritual foes (ver. 13).

IV. THE HELP THAT THESE TRUTHS RENDER. 1. *The heavenly world and its employments become more real to us.* We know that our work shall not be perpetual singing, but high, holy, blessed service. 2. *The mystery of life is lightened.* We see whither we are going, and wherefore here we have to suffer. 3. *One chief pain of death is lessened.* For we are not debarred from rendering service to those we leave behind. The thought that we can no more help our loved ones is one of the pains of death. But by this blessed teaching it is taken away.—S. C.

Ver. 12.—*The angels' charge of little things.* To whom is this promise addressed? Not to any and everybody indiscriminately, but only to those who dwell "in the secret place of," etc. (ver. 1). Therefore it was especially applicable to our Lord. Some have concluded, that, as this verse was made use of by Satan when he tempted our Lord, the psalm is to be limited in its application to him only. But this is an error. Satan quoted it; but, as he always does when he quotes Scripture—a not uncommon custom of his—he alters it; he left out the qualifying clause, "in all thy ways." It is not in *any* ways that we can have the angels' care, but only in those that are right. The promise is for all God's people, as they go about their own proper and appointed ways. Next, let us ask, what is the meaning of the text? Our word "dash" is not a true rendering; the Hebrew word used is generally rendered as in John xi., where our Lord speaks of a man not stumbling if he walks by day, but as sure to do so if he walks at night in the dark. It means that then he would be likely to strike against some stone in the way, and so be tripped up. There is no idea of violence in the word. When Satan used it, he meant to suggest to our Lord that if the promise was that he should not even stumble over a stone, how much more might he be sure of protection were he to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple! The word, therefore, points to a very small and ordinary matter—the being kept from falling over a stone, as a mother would hold up her child from such mishap. Now, the text teaches us—

I. ANGELS CONCERN THEMSELVES ABOUT SUCH LITTLE THINGS AS THESE. This is very wonderful. For think of who and what the angels are; how great, glorious, holy, blessed; how high and august the office they fill, and the employments in which they engage. And then think of their stooping to such work as this—the preventing of a man stumbling against a stone. We know they concern themselves about the salvation of the soul, for that is a great matter; the soul so precious, that Christ was content to die to redeem it. But that our feet may not even come in hurtful contact with a stone—surely that seems beneath and unworthy of them. But this same truth is told of in many other Scriptures; cf. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered;" "Not a sparrow falls to the ground without your Father," etc. Therefore it is true the holy angels have charge over the minute details of our lives, as well as over great events. The Lord's loving providence reaches down to all these little things, of which our life is mainly made up. How blessed this truth is! All our life cared for by the Lord!

II. BUT WHAT IS LITTLE IN ITSELF MAY NOT BE SO IN ITS CONSEQUENCES. How mighty are little things in the results that often flow from them! For the body, a slight stumble may have lifelong consequences. For the soul, men fall little by little, not by great crimes, but by a series of little sins. And so, too, for the rise of the soul. We do not leap into heaven; but we "*grow in grace*"—ever slight increase and advance.

III. OUR REAL DIFFICULTIES ARE IN CONNECTION WITH THEM. Otherwise angels would not be put in charge over us. Many can keep from great sins who allow themselves in little ones. "Take me the little foxes," etc. We either think we can manage the little affairs of life, or we neglect them.

IV. OUR STRENGTH AGAINST BOTH LITTLE AND GREAT PERILS IS IN CHRIST. (Adapted from the late Canon Melville.)—S. C.

Vers. 14—16.—*The beloved of the Lord.* The marks and tokens of these are set forth here.

I. THEY HAVE SET THEIR LOVE UPON THE LORD. Their hearts have turned to him, away from sin, and now are "set," firmly fixed, upon him. Numbers of people feel a passing affection for Christ; their hearts burn within them for a while; but the fire soon dies down and out. But these have set their love, not their mere thought or approval, upon him.

II. THEY HAVE KNOWN HIS NAME. This is a higher degree. Their love has led to their keeping near to him, and to constant intercourse with him; and so now they have come to know him, as we say we know a dear and honoured friend, whom we have tested and tried and never found wanting. So these have come to know God; and, of course, they are "set on high." Such knowledge lifts the soul above the cares and trials, the temptations and sorrows, of life. As the small birds, whom the hawk seeks to prey upon, avoid their foe by keeping high above him, so do these, the Lord's beloved, live above where the sins, snares, and sorrows of this world can do them harm.

III. THEY PRAY EFFECTUALLY. "He shall call upon me, and I will answer." The life of prayer, the walk with God, ever characterizes these people. And they have power in prayer—their prayers are answered. This cannot be said of all or most prayers, of which, so often, nothing seems to come. But it is otherwise here.

IV. IN THEIR TROUBLES THE LORD IS WITH THEM. "I will be with them," etc. They will have trouble. They are God's jewels; but as the jewel needs to be put on the lapidary's wheel and ground ere it will reveal its brilliancy and worth, so do God's jewels. Therefore trouble cannot be escaped. But bearing it alone may be, and is, by these people. See Paul and Silas in the dungeon at Philippi, and the experience of all the saints in all the ages all along.

V. AND BECAUSE THEY ARE THE LORD'S BELOVED, THERE COMES TO THEM: 1. *Deliverance.* How could it be otherwise? deliverance real, though not always visible to our eye. 2. *Honour.* See the golden cross on the top of St. Paul's Cathedral: how that tells of what this nation thinks of the Crucified One! All the nations praise him. 3. *Eternal life.* Long life indeed! 4. *Satisfaction.* "Thou, O Christ, art all I want." 5. *The vision of the salvation of God.* For himself; for those dear to him; for the world.—S. C.

Ver. 15.—*The response of God to his people.* I. WHAT THIS RESPONSE IS. 1. *That God will answer prayer.* But on this, note: (1) That it is not the prayer of every man, but only of those who have set their love upon God, and who dwell in the secret place of the Most High. (2) That to them prayer is answered, but often in ways other than they have expected. God will always give to them what is best; but that may be far different from what they have thought. 2. *He will be with them in trouble.* God is always with us; but in our trouble he is more especially with us. This is shown sometimes by his providential help, or by his grace sustaining us. 3. *He will deliver and honour.* See this in such histories as that of Joseph.

II. WHAT FOLLOWS FROM IT. That to the man of God the following things are impossible: 1. *Disappointment*; because God will answer. 2. *Loneliness*; for God is ever with him, and especially in trouble. 3. *Disgrace*; for how can that be to those whom he honours? 4. *Defeat*; for God will deliver.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Our place of safety.* The construction of this psalm is peculiar (see exegetical notes). Ewald gives the best suggestion concerning its structure. Partly the poet expresses his own feelings as from himself, and partly as if they were uttered by another. He seems to listen to the thoughts of his own spirit till they become clear and distinct, like some prophetic words, or some Divine oracle speaking to him from without, and giving him thus the assurance and the consolation afresh which had already sprung up in his heart. The associations of the psalm, and the authorship, cannot with any certainty be traced, but the Jewish idea that it belongs to the age of

Moses deserves consideration. Certainly the experiences of the wilderness-life give the most effective illustration of both the figures and the sentiments of the psalm. Bishop Wordsworth says confidently, "The scenery of the psalm is derived from the circumstances of the sojourn of Israel in the wilderness." Dean Plumptre says, "The psalm is an echo, verse by verse almost, of the words in which Eliphaz the Temanite describes the good man's life (Job v. 17—23)." Perhaps the two sentences of ver. 1 would be better read as a repetition, according to the customary construction of Hebrew poets. "He that dwelleth . . . he that abideth . . . shall say unto the Lord." Working out the Mosaic association, show—

I. THE WILDERNESS-PERILS. As Moses would be impressed by them. Limited food. Dangers of pestilence by remaining too long in a place. Active enemies. Local difficulties, as from serpents. Temper of the people. Influence of mixed multitudes. Wearing effect of constant changes, etc. We seldom fully realize the persistent and exhausting anxieties of Moses. Sometimes even his life seemed to be in danger.

II. THE WILDERNESS-SAFETIES. Moses could not help contrasting the holy quiet of those forty *days* he had spent in the "secret place" with God, and the forty *years* of strain and stress he had spent with the stiff-necked and rebellious people. He must often have yearned for a renewal of those restful hours. And yet the spiritual fact and truth for him was that he did still "dwell in the secret place," he did still "abide under the shadow of the Almighty;" for this, in very truth, is a mood of soul-experience, and not a mere bodily relationship. Moses with God in the mount does but illustrate Moses with God always, resting and safe in his "shadow."—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Many names for God.* Finding various names is a common device of love. The names seem to express the many-sidedness of our relationship. It must be specially true of God that we stand in various relations to him, and are helped by a variety of terms and names, which express those relations. There are four names given to God in vers. 1, 2. God the Concealer is the "inaccessibly High One." God the Shadower is the "invincibly Almighty One." God the Covenant-maker is "Jehovah, the Lord." And God personally appropriated is "my God." Or it has been put in this way: 1. We commune with him reverently, for he is the Most High. 2. We rest in him as the Almighty. 3. We rejoice in him as Jehovah, or Lord. 4. We trust in him as El, the mighty God. Perowne's suggestion is more directly in harmony with the psalm. "God is 'Most High,' far above all the rage and malice of enemies; 'Almighty,' so that none can stand before his power; 'Jehovah,' the God of covenant and grace, who has revealed himself to his people; and it is of such a God that the psalmist says, in holy confidence, 'He is "my God," in whom I trust.'" Trying to find the thoughts which one so circumstanced as Moses would attach to the terms, we may say—

I. THE "MOST HIGH" IS ABOVE ALL EARTHLY CHANGES. Unaffected by them in such sense as can weaken his relations to them. We cannot interfere in disputes and difficulties without prejudice. Often we cannot keep calm to form good judgment. God can.

II. THE "ALMIGHTY" IS ABLE TO DEAL WITH ALL EARTHLY CONDITIONS. They can never be so complicated that he cannot unravel them; never so desperate that he cannot master them. "With God all things are possible." If God *does not* interfere in a case, the reason must be that he *will not*, because he *can* if he please.

III. THE "LORD, JEHOVAH" IS UNDER PLEDGE TO INTERFERE FOR HIS PEOPLE'S GOOD. The name "Jehovah" was taken as the sign and seal of the covenant, as the rainbow was taken as the sign of the nature-covenant. God, as Jehovah, may be thought of as the "Faithful Promiser."

IV. THE TERM "MY GOD" IMPLIES THAT GOD HAS BEEN, IN ACTUAL EXPERIENCE, WHAT THE PSALMIST FELT CONFIDENT THAT HE WAS. It is an important advance to be able to say, "I know not only what God is, I know also what he has been to me."—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Limitations of temporal protection.* The fact is patent. It demands consideration. God does not always give protection from bodily evils to his saints. On a house at Chester, that was spared in the time of plague, is the inscription, "God's

providence is mine inheritance." But the man who lived there was not the only good man in Chester at the time. Other good men were not thus protected. Evidently the psalmist "accepts in all simplicity the belief in that which, but for sin and its consequences, would be the law of human life—that visible blessing, and obedience to the Supreme Ruler of the world, must always go together. To us the faith is rather that whatever betides us of outward fortune cannot touch the *true life* which is hid in God." What we need to see is that the psalmist asserts the ever-working law, and leaves us to find the limitations and exceptions that arise in its practical working.

I. THE EVER-WORKING LAW. Temporal good attends upon piety. The world is constructed and arranged to give this law a sphere. Just so far as natural relations are kept simple, the law does work. "Honesty is the best policy." Goodness does bring reward. Chastity does secure health. The fear of God does prove to be practical wisdom. The man of wise and restrained habits does stand the best chance in time of epidemic disease. The diligent in business does succeed. "Right is right." Right comes right. "Godliness has the promise of the life that now is."

II. THE EVER-MANIFEST EXCEPTIONS. These occasion the distress of men like Asaph, who are too keen to detect the dark side of things. Righteous Job suffers. The wicked are in great power. The exceptions come through the disturbance of Divine arrangements by man's wilfulness and sin. He makes *his* law cross the *Divine* law. Then arises the necessity for modifications in the working of the Divine law. 1. The allegiance of the good must be *tested*. 2. The results of that testing must be used as persuasive *example* to others. The Book of Job really wrestles with this difficulty. The man who is "upright, fears God, and eschews evil" does *not* find himself protected from all harm. And yet it is still true, Job in trouble *was* abiding in "the shadow of the Almighty."—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The shielding of God's faithfulness.* "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler." God's *truth* here is the certainty that he will keep to his word; the psalmist's conviction of his "truthfulness," "faithfulness." The "shield and buckler" represent the defensive weapons of the older day of hand-to-hand fighting. Both a large shield covering the whole body, and a light, quickly-moved shield, fastened to the left arm, are included; suggesting that the defencings of God are various, and in precise adaptation to his people's need. He is their Defence, both in little perils and in great ones. Get at the thought suggested by this expression of the text, by realizing what our absolute confidence in the integrity of an earthly friend and fellow-worker does for us. Take the case of a trusted servant in a house of business. That man's unquestionable uprightness is his master's shield. It shields him from anxiety and care. It shields him from over-pressure of toil. It shields him from all robbery and wrong. So, too, with the faithful and honoured wife. Her "truth" shields her husband from home worries, and all home disabilities. "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her;" and so he can be shielded and at peace. Apply this to God. It is not possible to think he can ever be below himself, or forgetful of his word, "on which he has permitted us" to hope. We may get beyond all mere promises, and assure our hearts in what God *is*. Illustrate by Luther's time of despondency. On returning home, he found the house shut up, as if some one was dead in it, and his wife dressed in mourning. He inquired what had happened, and she quietly and solemnly replied that "God was dead." It was an object-lesson for the desponding Reformer, which he promptly learned. Long as God lives—and he lives for ever—he surely is the Hiding-place and Shield of his people. To remove God, to bring down our high thought of him, our absolute confidence in his eternal truthfulness and integrity, would be to take away our shield, and leave us helplessly exposed to the assaults of all our foes.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*Angel-agencies.* For associations of "angels" with Moses and his times, we may recall the New Testament saying, that the "Law was given by the disposition of angels." Moses had associated angels with Abraham and Jacob; and when God proposed to withdraw his personal guidance of Israel, he offered Moses to send "an angel" before them. It was a common belief, even among the heathen, that human beings have each their guardian genius; but the psalmist here does not appear to refer

to any such belief. We should obtain a worthier idea of the Bible representations of angels, if we regarded their *sensible appearances* as designed to illustrate God's abiding, unseen spiritual agencies in the blessing of men. The term "angel" is properly applied to any and every agency God uses to do his work of keeping, guiding, comforting, or correcting men. God has redeeming angels, afflicting angels, destroying angels. "He maketh winds his angels, flaming fire his ministers."

I. THE ANGEL-CHARGE. Illustrate from the time of the destruction of the Egyptian firstborn. Then Israel in Goshen was in the charge of God's angel. Or refer to the preservation of Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua in the times of sudden pestilence in the desert. These were in the angel-charge. Or take the case of Elisha at Dothan, when, seemingly in the power of the Syrians, he was really safe in the angel-charge. Or see Peter in prison, likely enough to follow James to his fate. He really was in the angel care and deliverance. Or take the case of the Covenanters, who, escaping from his foes, climbed into the hollow of an old tree, over the hole of which a spider at once spun a great web, which made the pursuers feel sure no one could have crept inside. That spider was God's angel.

II. THE CONDITIONS OF THE ANGEL-CHARGE. These the tempter kept back when he urged Jesus to rely on, or rather presume on, the angel-charge. He repressed the words, "Keep thee in all thy ways," which distinctly mean "a good man's ways," "the ways a good man ought to be taking." "Only in the ways of God's vocation, and with a view to progress in those ways, have we a right to the promise." If we want to do right, we may be sure of God's angel-help. We have no claim if we want to do wrong.—R. T.

Vers. 12, 13.—*Typical perils of the saints.* (See also vers. 5, 6, 10.) Those dealt with may be read in the light of wilderness-experiences. Then we have: 1. The common Eastern terror of the night, both as time of insecurity and time of spread of disease. Thieves work at night; sudden attacks of enemies are made at night; the angel of pestilence strikes at night; wild beasts roam at night; fires mostly break out at night. 2. The dangers of sunstroke and lightning-flash, which are the "arrows that fly by day." 3. The diseases that breed in unsanitary conditions, and gain force to sweep thousands away. 4. The open and subtle attacks of the animals of the desert. The lion that attacks in front; the adder that bites the heel. Bonar tells us that "the putrid plague-fever often comes on in the night, while the patient is asleep; the solstitial disease seizes in heat of harvest upon a man in open air, and cuts him off, perhaps, ere evening. Now what of spiritual peril may these typify?"

I. THE PERILS THAT CONNECT WITH THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF HELPLESSNESS. At night we can do nothing to ward off evils. So there are times in life when we feel to be in circumstances which we cannot even try to control. The good man would be hopelessly distressed if he were compelled to think he was at the mercy of circumstances. The psalmist knows that darkness and light are both alike to his protecting God.

II. THE PERILS THAT COME THROUGH THE OVERMASTERING OF OUR EFFORTS. In the day we can watch, we can resist, we can order our conduct wisely, we can act promptly; and yet we are constantly finding the forces round us are bigger than we. Sunstroke and lightning typify the things that will not be "according to our mind." But the psalmist knows nothing is beyond the Divine restraint. That which happens is permitted.

III. THE PERILS THAT COME TO US VICARIOUSLY. We are constantly suffering from the sins and neglects of others. If we do right and our neighbour does wrong, both may have to suffer the consequences that result. As in case of infectious diseases. So national troubles reach the evil and the good alike.

IV. THE PERILS THAT COME THROUGH WILFUL WRONG-DOERS. Represented by the violent "lion," and the insidious, treacherous "adder." The psalmist believes in God as Restraint of the wrath of men.—R. T.

Ver. 14.—*Reasons in man for the Divine favour.* "Because he hath set his love upon me." This verse begins what may be regarded as a poetical setting of the answer which God gives to the fully-trusting soul. "God himself comes forward to establish the faith of his servant, writes deeper in the soul so great a consolation, and confirms

the testimony of his servant. 'He hath set his love upon me; he knoweth my name; he calleth upon me.' These are the marks of a true servant of God." It has been noticed that the words, "I will," are repeated six times in the last three verses of this psalm: "I will deliver;" "I will set him on high;" "I will answer;" "I will be with him in trouble;" "With long life I will satisfy him;" "I will show him my salvation."

I. THE POSSIBILITIES OF OUR FEELING TOWARD GOD. We may feel toward God all we can feel towards our fellow-men—faith, admiration, devotion, etc. We may even go so far as to "set our love upon him"—make him to be our chosen one, our specially loved one. What we do to help ourselves, in the effort to "set our love" on our fellow-men, we may do to help in setting our love on God. Such things as (1) cherish the thought of them; (2) seek their company; (3) try in every way to please them.

II. THE RESPONSE GOD MAKES TO MEN'S RIGHT FEELING TOWARDS HIM. This response is found indicated in the assurances of this passage. 1. He gives to them an answering affection. 2. He guards them with an ever-watchful defence. 3. He accomplishes for them mighty deliverances. 4. He grants them gracious exaltations. The Divine favour comes on men because: 1. They make him their choice. 2. Because they seek intimacy with him (implied in "knowing his Name"). 3. Because they are ever making signs of their dependence on him. The signs being their daily and their special *prayers*.—R. T.

Vers. 15, 16.—*God's presence in time of trouble.* "I will be with him in trouble." Illustrate by presence of a friend in the time of sickness and distress. That friend may be unable to help, and yet the best of help comes from that friendly presence. If God is with us in trouble, we are sure he can help and deliver. If he does not, it can only be because he is doing kinder things for us, by letting the trouble stay. The strain of feeling *alone* in time of trouble may be illustrated by a lonely walk through a strange and dangerous country. "Have you ever walked on, mile after mile, until it grew very dark, and there were no stars overhead, and no friendly voice or guide anywhere; and, as you grew very tired and faint and footsore, did it not seem as if the way became more rough and stony at every step? You can remember each time you stumbled in the weary darkness against a stone, how the pain seemed to shoot hotly through every nerve; and the lack of light, and the uncertainty lest each step might bear you over the precipice,—all this unnerved you. But how different if a loved friend had been with you! and especially if it so happened that he knew the road and the country well!" God's presence is the *summum bonum*. All we can need is included and involved in it. He really need not tell us what he will do for us; it is enough if he will be there. And so the Lord Jesus wrapped up everything for his disciples in this one assurance, "Lo, I am with you all the days."

I. GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US MEANS THE BEST POSSIBLE LIMITATION OF OUR TROUBLE.

II. GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US MEANS ABUNDANT COMFORTING UNDER OUR TROUBLE.

III. GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US MEANS THE FULFILMENT OF THE MISSION OF OUR TROUBLE.

IV. GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US ASSURES OF A "HAPPY ISSUE OUT OF ALL OUR AFFLICTIONS."

God with us in trouble *is the fact*; but everything for us depends on our sensible realization of the fact.—R. T.

Vers. 9, 10, 11.—*The security of the saints.* I. THE DWELLING-PLACE OF THE GOOD MAN—GOD. In such an abode we find: 1. *Shelter, protection.* (John xiv. 23.) 2. *Nutritment.* 3. *Rest.* 4. *Companionship.*

II. THE SAFETY OF THIS ABODE. 1. *Omnipotent love encompasses him.* 2. *The power of the good man to convert all things to his welfare.* "All things are yours."

III. THE GUARDS AND SERVANTS OF THE GOOD MAN. The angels are God's messengers and ministers. 1. *God employs innumerable invisible ministries to serve us.* Angels and unseen powers "that walk the earth both when we wake and when we sleep." 2. *Innumerable visible ministries.* "More servants wait on man than he'll take notice of" (see George Herbert's poem).—S.

Vers. 14, 15.—*The reward of trust in God.* “Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my Name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.”

I. WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES THAT GOD VALUES MOST IN CHARACTER? 1. *The knowledge of his Name*; i.e. of his nature and character, now revealed to us more fully than then, in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. 2. *The setting our love upon him.* Because he is what he is, and because our love is the surest pledge of obedience to his will. 3. *Dependence upon God.* Expressed by the habit of prayer—calling upon him.

II. IN WHAT WAY GOD HONOURS AND REWARDS THOSE QUALITIES. 1. *He will deliver him in trouble.* By giving him strength superior to all his trials. We cannot escape trouble, but we can conquer it by the aid of the Spirit of God. 2. *He will exalt him to the possession of high honours.* Give him a position of great security—high above all danger. And of great influence and usefulness. This is high honour. 3. *He will answer his prayers.* In the only ways in which a supremely good and wise Being will answer the prayers of the erring and sinful—by giving them what they need, and not always what they ask for.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM XCII.

THIS psalm is entitled, “a Psalm or Song for the sabbath day,” and was therefore, we may conclude, intended for liturgical use in the temple on that weekly festival. Jewish tradition says that it was sung in the morning at the time of the drink offering of the first lamb. It was also, we are told, recited on the second day of the Feast of Tabernacles (*‘Middoth,’* ii. 5). The psalm is altogether one of praise and thanksgiving. It is optimistic, looking forward to the complete destruction of all God’s enemies (vers. 7—9), and the complete triumph and happiness of his faithful ones (vers. 10—14). Some Jewish commentators viewed it as descriptive of the final sabbath of the world’s rest; and so Athanasius, who says of the author, Αἰεὶ ἐκείνην τὴν γυναικὸν ἀνέπαινον.

Metrically, the psalm seems to divide into three portions, the first and second of four verses each (vers. 1—4, 5—8), the third of seven verses (vers. 9—15).

Vers. 1.—It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord (comp. Ps. cxlvii. 1). By “a good thing” is meant that which is at once right and pleasant. And to sing praises unto thy Name, O Most High. Israel’s Lord, Jehovah, is also “the Most High over all the earth” (Ps. lxxxiii. 18), and should at all times be thought of as both.

Vers. 2.—To show forth thy loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every

night. The suitability of worship every morning and evening has been almost universally felt. The Mosaic Law provided for it by the establishment of the morning and evening sacrifice (Exod. xxix. 38, 39), with the accompanying ritual. Jewish piety added a noonday prayer (Ps. lv. 17; Dan. vi. 10), and Christian zeal established the “seven hours of prayer.” Morning and evening still, however, remain, by common acknowledgment, the most appropriate times for worship.

Vers. 3.—Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery. Some think that only one instrument is intended here, and translate, “Upon an instrument of ten strings, *even upon the psaltery*” (or, “the lute”). (On the character of the psaltery, see the comment on Ps. xxxiii. 2.) Upon the harp with a solemn sound. The reference is clearly to the public service of the temple, since in the private devotions of the faithful instruments were not likely to be used.

Vers. 4.—For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work. It is difficult to say what “work” is intended. Some have supposed “the work of creation,” as the psalm is one “for the sabbath” (see title); but perhaps the general “working” of God’s providence in the world is more probable. (So Hengstenberg, Kay, and Cheyne.) I will triumph in the works of thy hands. A repetition for the sake of emphasis.

Vers. 5.—O Lord, how great are thy works! (comp. Ps. xl. 5). Mighty and wonderful, i.e., are the ways of Providence. And thy thoughts are very deep (comp. Job xi. 8).

Vers. 6.—A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this. A rude, uncultivated man has no conception of the wonderful depth of God’s thoughts—

the marvellousness of those counsels which underlie the general scheme of things, and make it what it is (comp. Rom. xi. 33, 34).

Ver. 7.—When the wicked spring as the grass; i.e. "spring up"—"flourish" (see ver. 12). The difficulty is that which disturbed Job (xxi. 7—21) and Asaph (Ps. lxxiii. 2—15), viz. the prosperity of the wicked. The present writer, however, is not disturbed—he sees in their prosperous condition nothing but a prelude to their overthrow. And when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; or, "do blossom." It is that they shall be destroyed for ever; literally, *it is for their destruction for ever* (comp. Ps. lxxiii. 18—20).

Ver. 8.—But thou, Lord, art most high for evermore; rather, *art on high*; i.e. remainest seated upon thy throne, unaffected either by their efforts or by their fall.

Ver. 9.—For, lo, thine enemies, O Lord, for, lo, thine enemies shall perish. What-
ever else is uncertain, this at least is sure, that ultimately God's enemies will perish. The repetition adds the greatest force to the passage. All the workers of iniquity (comp. ver. 7) shall be scattered. All of them—every one (comp. Matt. vii. 23, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity").

Ver. 10.—But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn; rather, *of a wild ox*. The Hebrew, like the Assyrian, *reym*, is certainly a species of wild cattle, whether the aurochs, or the bison, or the buffalo, may be doubted. The psalmist speaks in the name of Israel, or of God's faithful ones generally, and confidently predicts their exaltation to glory and honour simultaneously with the destruction of God's enemies. I shall be anointed with fresh oil. Oil was supposed to give vigour to the frame; and "fresh oil," or "green oil," would be the most efficient and the best.

Ver. 11.—Mine eye also shall see my desire on mine enemies (comp. Ps. liv. 7; lix. 10). The "desire" is probably that expressed in Ps. xci. 13. And mine ears shall hear my desire of the wicked that rise up against me. This is an unusual phrase, but sufficiently intelligible. Triumph over enemies is perceived both by the eye and by the ear.

Ver. 12.—The righteous shall flourish like

the palm tree. To an Oriental the palm is the queen of trees. "Of all vegetable forms," says Humboldt, "the palm is that to which the prize of beauty has been assigned by the concurrent voice of nations in all ages" ('Aspects of Nature,' vol. ii. p. 20, Engl. trans.). Its stately growth and graceful form, its perpetual verdure, its lovely and luxuriant fruit, together with its manifold uses (Strabo, xvi. 1, § 14), give it precedence over all other vegetable growths in the eyes that are accustomed to rest upon it. It is rather remarkable that, in the Old Testament, it is used as a figure for beauty only here and in Cant. vii. 7. Man, in his most flourishing growth, is ordinarily compared either to the cedar (2 Kings xiv. 9; Cant. v. 15; Ezek. xxxi. 3—9; Amos ii. 9, etc.) or the olive tree (Judg. ix. 8, 9; Ps. lii. 8; Jer. xi. 16; Hos. xiv. 6, etc.). He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon (see, besides the passages already quoted, 2 Kings xix. 23; 2 Chron. ii. 8; Jer. xxii. 23; Zech. xi. 1).

Ver. 13.—Those that be planted in the house of the Lord; rather, *Planted* (or, *Being planted*) *in the house of the Lord, they*. This does not refer to the "trees" of the preceding verse, but to the "righteous," who are viewed as passing their days almost continually in the temple courts, and so as (in a certain sense) "planted" there. The passage has no bearing on the question whether the temple courts were or were not planted with trees. Shall flourish in the courts of our God (comp. Ps. lxxxiv. 2, 10).

Ver. 14.—They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; i.e. "even when they are old, they shall still bring forth fruit"—they shall still glorify God by their good works. They shall be fat and flourishing; literally, *fat and green*. The metaphor of ver. 12 is still kept up.

Ver. 15.—To show that the Lord is upright. The happy and flourishing old age of the righteous (ver. 14; comp. Ps. xci. 16) is a strong indication of God's faithfulness and truth, showing, as it does, that he keeps his promises, and never forsakes those that put their trust in him (comp. Ps. xxvii. 10; xxxvii. 25; Isa. xli. 17, etc.). He is my Rock—rather, *that he is my Rock*—and that there is no unrighteousness in him. Both clauses depend on the "show" of the preceding hemistich.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*Psalmody*. "It is a good thing," etc. Songs of praise are a very ancient custom in the Church of God. David, "the sweet singer of Israel," and his brother psalmists (Asaph and the rest) were inspired to provide a manual of devotion, public and private, which will never fall into disuse while there is a Church on earth. But long ages before, when Israel for the first time stood on safe ground, breathing free air,

a mighty song of praise went up on the Red Sea shore; in remembrance of which, in St. John's visions of the heavenly glory, he heard the ransomed in the heavenly temple sing "the song of Moses the servant of God" as well as "the song of the Lamb" (Rev. xv. 3). There have been times in which the voice of holy song—at all events, of congregational psalmody—has fallen silent, or nearly so. But these have not been times of flourishing life, of growing piety. Times of great spiritual revival have commonly been associated with a great outburst of praiseful song. "It is a good thing to give thanks and to sing praises."

I. First, because THIS PART OF WORSHIP MOST DIRECTLY SEEKS GOD'S GLORY. Prayer glorifies God *indirectly* in acknowledging our dependence on him, our sin and unworthiness, our faith in his promises, and desire to serve him; glorifies Christ, as our Mediator, Sacrifice, Redeemer, Master, "the Light of the world;" glorifies the Holy Spirit, by whom alone we can pray aright. So, again, the reading of Scriptures as *God's Word*; the preaching of the gospel as *God's message*; and devout hearing, all glorify God. But praise glorifies God directly as its sole purpose. We ourselves fade out of view, or at least fall into the background. God fills our whole prospect, absorbs our thoughts. We praise him, not only because "he is our God," "the Father of spirits," but "for his excellent greatness"—*for what God is in himself*. We praise the Son, not only as our own Saviour, but as "the Brightness of the Father's glory, and the express Image of his Person." We praise the Spirit as "the Lord and Giver of life." Praise is therefore the highest exercise of our powers; the sublimest attitude of a created spirit.

II. The singing of praise is PUTTING TO THE BEST USE ONE OF OUR NOBLEST FACULTIES. God might have given us hearing without any sense of melody and harmony; speech without song. By the wonderful structure of our organs of speech and hearing, and the capacity of harmonious vibrations bestowed on air and other substances, God has prepared an inexhaustible store of music, a whole world of delight, of which we might have been left without the slightest conception. And he has so tuned our nature that joyous or pathetic emotions naturally break into song. "Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (Jas. v. 13).

III. PRAISE IS MEANT AND FITTED (FITTED, AND THEREFORE DESIGNED) TO BE THE MOST DELIGHTFUL PART OF WORSHIP. In prayer we gird on our armour, lay bare our weakness, take hold on God's strength to save us. The Word read and preached gives us manna from the skies, water from the rock; but also smites with the "two-edged sword," and at times lays us in the dust. But praise gives us wings; lifts us into the sunshine of God's countenance, within sight of the pearly gates and jasper walls, within hearing of the "new song before the throne." It is that part of earthly worship in which we come nearest to the worship of heaven.

IV. Lastly, PRAISE IS A RICH MEANS OF GRACE, CAPABLE OF A POWERFUL REFLEX ACTION ON OUR OWN SOULS; helping to fill us with "love, joy, peace." Paul and Silas felt this when in the dungeon they not only prayed, but "sang praises to God."

CONCLUSION. Enforce the duty of cultivating musical gifts and consecrating them; and of taking earnest part in Church psalmody.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—15.—*The eye-salve of praise.* In this psalm we have—

I. THE SPIRIT OF GLADSOME PRAISE. (Vers. 1—4.) The writer had evidently tried what praise could do, and the result of his testing it was this joyful outburst of praise concerning praise. He tells of its essence—giving thanks; of its expression—singing; its object—the Lord; its seasons—morning and night; its aids—music of all kinds; its inspiration—the gladness that came to him through the works of the Lord.

II. A DARK PROBLEM. (Ver. 7.) The seeming triumph of ungodliness. This is a problem which has baffled many, and the pain of it is heard in many a lamentation, expostulation, and prayer. For good men have trembled lest it should be believed that God was on the side of the ungodly.

III. THAT PROBLEM SEEN THROUGH by help of the spirit of praise. 1. *It is seen through.* The psalmist has no doubt of what is the meaning of all that prosperity of

wickedness—"it is that they shall be destroyed for ever," "perish," and be "scattered." The very climax of their exaltation had ushered in the moment of their fall. It is so that God forces ungodly men to consider their ways; less terrible appeals too often stand no chance of any heed being given to them. 2. *But for the spirit of praise, this would not have been seen.* The mist and fog of unbelief would have continued to blind the soul's vision, and have left men in the darkness of doubt and despair. But the heart that is glad in the Lord is quick-eyed to see the Lord's mind, and to discover his purpose as none others can; for praise is faith in vigorous activity, and before such faith the tangled problems of life smooth themselves out.

IV. THE RECOUNTING OF THE REASONS OF PRAISE. (Vers. 8—15.) The victory over doubt which has just been gained lends added vigour to the spirit of praise, and hence follows the recital of the many sources of praise which gladdened the psalmist's heart. 1. *That God was over all*—Most High for evermore. "The Lord reigneth"—that has been the solace and the joy of many a soul. 2. *That the Lord's enemies*, the men who do their bad best to turn earth into hell, *shall utterly perish.* Blessed be God that they shall, since they will not repent. 3. *It shall be well with the righteous.* (Vers. 12—14.) They shall flourish in beauty, permanence, glory and strength, like the palm tree; as the cedar they shall branch out on every side; the house of the Lord shall be their home, and, nurtured there, they shall not cease to enjoy and to impart rich blessing from God.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*It is good to give thanks.* It is so for many reasons.

I. BECAUSE IT IS RIGHT. God deserves our thanksgiving. 1. Did he not create us, and so start us on the road to eternal life? 2. Does he not preserve us, and bless us daily with gifts innumerable? 3. Has he not redeemed us by the sacrifice of his Son? "For God so loved the world," etc. 4. Is not the Holy Spirit with us still, ever seeking to lead us nearer God, and to sustain us in every hour of trial and sorrow? 5. And have we not the blessed hope which stretches on into life eternal? Yes; it is right to give thanks.

II. AND IT IS PLEASANT. "Is any merry? let him sing psalms,"—so said St. James. And they who know affirm that the sense of God's love, which is the substance of praise, is joy indeed.

III. AND IT RIDS US OF OUR PERSISTENT TORMENTOR—SELF. Self sinks out of sight, and God alone is seen, and that is blessed.

IV. DOUBT CANNOT ABIDE IT. "Come, Melancthon, let us sing a psalm, and drive away the devil,"—such was one of Luther's sayings. And praise does drive doubt away.

V. SOULS ARE WON TO GOD BY IT. It is winsome, comely, irresistibly attractive.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Singing praise.* An old writer, one John Wells, in his 'Morning Exercises,' published in 1676, thus speaks on this theme.

I. SINGING IS THE MUSIC OF NATURE. The mountains sing (Isa. xlv. 23). The valleys sing (Ps. lxx. 13). The trees sing (1 Chron. xvi. 53). And the air is the birds' music-room, where they chant their musical notes.

II. SINGING IS THE MUSIC OF ORDINANCES. It is told of Augustine how he was moved to tears when he went into the church at Milan, and heard the singing there. Beza relates a similar experience of himself. Jesus at the Last Supper sang the hymn: it was the hundred and eleventh psalm and five others.

III. SINGING IS THE MUSIC OF SAINTS. They have performed this duty when in their greatest numbers (Ps. cxlix. 1). And in their greatest straits (Isa. xxvi. 19). And in their greatest flight (Isa. xlii. 10, 11). And in their greatest deliverances (Isa. lxx. 14).

IV. SINGING IS THE MUSIC OF ANGELS. (Job xxxviii. 7; Luke ii. 13; Rev. v. 11, 12.)

V. SINGING IS THE MUSIC OF HEAVEN.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*Morning and evening exercises.* I. FOR THE MORNING. 1. *It is to show forth the Lord's loving-kindness.* What a beautiful word this "loving-kindness" is!

It has been noticed by all devout readers of these psalms. One says, "It is a duplicate deliciousness; there are within it linked sweetnesses long drawn out. It is a kind of word with which to cast spells which should charm away all fears." Some have derived the word "kindness" from "*kin*nedness," the feeling which we cherish to those who are near to us in our own families. And God's kindness to his people is because he has made them of his own kin. He bids us call him "Father," and he has given us "power to become sons of God" (John i. 12). And so much as amongst us the fact of being a man's "kin" may not involve, often does not, that he should be to us "kind," therefore God's kindness is spoken of as loving-kindness. A woman may show kindness to poor people, but to her own dear child she will show loving-kindness—a much warmer and more tender feeling. And this is that which God cherishes and manifests towards us. Nature, providence, and grace all attest this. It is not true that Nature is immoral, harsh, bitterly cruel, "red in tooth and claw," and needing to be supplemented by the gospel of Christ, if the character of its Creator is to be regarded as beneficent (see Drummond's '*Ascent of Man*'). There is another and a gentler side belonging to it. And providence, if we will but remember its educational purpose, and the graciousness of its common dealings, will give clear testimony to the loving-kindness of the Lord. And so, chief of all, will the grace of God attest this. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that," etc. 2. *And this is to be our morning theme.* (1) For then are we fresh and vigorous, and the firstfruits of the day should be offered. The dews of the Holy Spirit fall then especially. (2) And we need preparation for all the day may bring; it is sure to bring temptation, and it may bring trial and trouble; yes, disaster and death may come. But if our hearts be filled with the sense of the loving-kindness of the Lord, we are ready for all that may be in store for us. (3) And we have had fresh proof of it in the fact of spared life and renewed strength (cf. Keble's morning hymn). Now, all this is true of the literal morning. But if we understand by the "morning," the beginning of our life, its earlier days, what more fitting theme could there be for this morning than the loving-kindness of the Lord? And so, too, of the morning after the night of sorrow, when God has cleared the clouds away. And without doubt we shall find it good to do this in the blessed resurrection morn. Let us prepare for this by showing forth God's loving-kindness now.

II. *FOR NIGHTFALL* God's faithfulness is to be our theme then. And it is most fitting. For we have experienced more of it. What he promised to give he has given—provision for our wants; protection; guidance; and deliverance from many a snare of the devil. He has been faithful all along.

III. *THE EXERCISE IS TO BE A SHOWING FORTH.* In praise of heart and lip and life rendered unto him; and in open confession, and grateful obedience.—S. C.

Ver. 10.—*The holy oil.* We have here—

I. *A VERY BLESSED THING SPOKEN OF.* Under this emblem the Holy Spirit is set forth (Luke iv. 18). 1. *The holy oil told of was especially sacred.* (See Exod. xxx. 33; Ps. lxxxix. 20.) 2. *It ennobled those on whom it was poured.* Constituting them prophets, princes, priests. 3. *It invigorated and empowered for high service.* This is especially true of the Holy Spirit (Luke xxiv. 49). 4. *It was a bond of union.* (Ps. cxxxiii. 1, 2.) And so the Holy Spirit (John xvii. 21; Eph. iv. 3). 5. *It is gladdening.* (Ps. xxiii. 5; Heb. i. 9.) 6. *Illuminating.* (1 John ii. 27.) 7. *Sweetly fragrant.* (John xii. 3.) In all these and yet other respects did the holy oil tell of the blessed Spirit of God.

II. *A VERY JOYFUL CONFIDENCE EXPRESSED.* "I shall be anointed," etc. He does not say, "I hope;" but he is sure of what he affirms. Now, the grounds of this confidence are: 1. *That it rested on God.* He could not have spoken thus had it been resting only on man. 2. *We are united with Christ, the Anointed One.* "Of his fulness we all receive." 3. *The Holy Spirit dwells within us.* 4. *The promises of God.* So full, numerous, clear, strong. 5. *The experience of God's people in all ages.* Daily strength has been given for daily need. Therefore we may well believe the text.

III. *AN INVALUABLE HELP TO OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE PROMISED.* 1. *It banishes fear.* (1) The fear of poverty. Israel, though they had only the day's supply of manna, did not fear for the morrow. Nor need we, for we know that, though the sun will set, there

shall be light to-morrow. (2) The fear of temptation. We pray, "Lead us not into temptation;" but in spite of that, we may be so led; but we need not fear—we shall be anointed with fresh oil. (3) Of backsliding—that we shall fall away. (4) Of great trials; if they come, it will be well with us. (5) Of bereavements. We say, "What shall we do then?" But when one prop is taken, another is given. 2. *It inspires glad hope.* Of usefulness in Christ's service continued. Of full attainment in grace. Of strength sufficient for all need.

IV. A PAINFUL CONTRAST SUGGESTED. The godless have no such hope. All that sustains them is fast running out, and there is no further supply. What shall they do in the end thereof? They will have had their good things, and there are no more.—S. C.

Ver. 12.—"*Like the palm tree.*" So do the righteous flourish. The parallels are many and striking.

I. FOR UPRIGHTNESS. The palm tree rears itself straight up into the air, erect, stately, strong. True image of the really righteous. Crooked ways are not his.

II. FOR USEFULNESS. "The extensive importance of this tree is one of the most curious subjects to which attention can be directed. A considerable part of the inhabitants of Egypt, Arabia, and Persia subsist almost entirely upon its fruits. They boast of its medicinal virtues. The camels feed upon the date stone. From the leaves they make a variety of articles for domestic use. From the fibres of the boughs, thread, ropes, and rigging are manufactured; from the sap, a spirituous liquor is prepared; and the body of the tree furnishes fuel." And so in all departments of life—the influence, the example, the spirit, the words, and works of the righteous man are full of blessing. See this supremely in Christ, *the Righteous*.

III. FOR BEAUTY. In the Canticles the palm tree is often taken as an emblem of beauty, as it well may be. And on the righteous man "the beauty of the Lord our God" is seen, as in our Lord above all (John i. 14). Moral beauty is as real as physical.

IV. FOR POWER. See its victory over all kinds of foes which threaten its life. It is a root out of a dry ground: the choking sand surrounds it, the burning heat scorches it, the fierce tempest beats upon it; it is often wounded—its roots crushed with all manner of weights, the elements, man, the beasts of the desert, all combine to injure it; but in spite of them all it rears its beautiful corona of leaves far on high, and flourishes still. And so is it with the righteous (cf. Paul's psalm of praise, his challenge to earth and hell to harm him if they can, Rom. viii. 35—39).

V. FOR FRUITFULNESS. It is the staff of life to the peoples amongst whom it is found. And so the righteous (cf. John xv. 1—8).

VI. FOR GUIDANCE. It is the sure sign of the presence of water (see Elim, Jericho, etc.). Across the burning sands the caravan, parched with thirst, make for the cluster of palms they see afar off, for they know that water is there. And so the righteous should be and is a sign to the sin-wearied heart, which tells him where the living waters are. "Let him that heareth say, Come."

VII. FOR PERMANENCE. It continues right on to old age to be all that has been said. True emblem of the perseverance of the saints of God.—S. C.

Vers. 13—15.—"*Planted in the house of the Lord.*" Five subjects fall to be considered here.

I. THE PLANTED ONES. The similitude is taken from the fact of trees being commonly planted in the quadrangles of Eastern houses; there were trees in the temple courts. Now, from this emblem we learn much about those persons whom it represents. 1. *They must have had life in them.* People do not plant dead things. So ere ever any soul is planted in the house of the Lord, the Divine life must have begun. It may have been very feeble, but it was there. Many come to church, and regularly, who have never been planted in the house of the Lord, because they are not "born again." 2. *They are where they once were not.* The tree had been transplanted, moved from one place to another. So the soul of the man spoken of here. He has been "translated out of the kingdom of darkness into," etc.; he has passed "from death into life;" he has undergone a great and wonderful change. The process may have been

very painful; the roots of our life seemed so to cling to our old state. But by one means and another we have been transplanted. "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; old things have," etc. 3. *And it was done for us*, not by ourselves. We were "born, not of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of the will of God." Unless Christ saves us, we shall never be saved. We owe our all to the grace of God. 4. *The roots have taken hold of the soil.* (C. H. Spurgeon.) We often make use of the expression that a man has taken root in a place, meaning that he has settled down there, and has found pleasure and good in his surroundings, and is at home there. So these people, these planted ones, find their home in the house of God. 5. *And they stay there.* They are no mere birds of passage, but they dwell in the secret place of the Most High, love the habitation of God's house, their soul's home is there. In body they must often be absent, but in spirit never.

II. THE PROSPERITY PROMISED THEM. They "shall flourish in the courts of our God."

1. *As a fact they do.* What great saint ever set light store by the sanctuary of God? 2. *And it is certain they will.* There is the promise of God. There is the soul-nurture which the sacred services of the sanctuary supply. There is the shelter and retreat from the hostile forces of the world outside. There is the ever-watchful eye of the husbandman. God cares for the trees planted there. He watches over them night and day.

III. THE PERMANENCE OF ALL THIS. "They bring forth fruit in old age" (see homily on this clause).

IV. THE PROOF HEREBY GIVEN OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD. 1. *They show "that the Lord is upright."* They do this, for they, being righteous themselves, prove that he who made them so is righteous. We judge by deeds. Righteous souls are God's deeds. 2. *And they show his love also;* for he does not cast them off in the time of their old age, as most men do their servants; but he puts yet more honour on them.

V. THE PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF THE PSALMIST. "He is my Rock," etc. It is as if he would say, "I know all this is true, for he is *my* Rock, and there is," etc. It is good to proclaim the truth of God, but he does it the more powerfully who can bear testimony from his own experience. Then, are we willing to be planted in the house of our God? Go and tell him so, and it shall be done unto you.—S. C.

Ver. 14.—"*Fruit in old age.*" This is one of the blessed promises of God to his faithful people. Consider—

I. WHAT THIS FRUIT IS. 1. *Much knowledge of God's ways.* What are many years granted to man for, but that he may attain to this knowledge and the practical wisdom thence ensuing? 2. *Sanctity of character.* The long discipline of life should have trained his spirit to this, and confirmed him in the ways of God. 3. *Patience.* Old age should "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." 4. *Heavenly mindedness.* They cannot but know how soon their hold on this world will be loosened; and hence it should be their endeavour to be ready for the better world of heaven; their conversation should be much in heaven. 5. *Concern for the salvation of others.* Their exhortations and testimony will have power, and should not be withheld. God will be glorified and souls eternally blessed. Such is the fruit which old age should bring forth.

II. THOUGH SUPERNATURAL, IT IS NOT UNREASONABLE. 1. *It is supernatural.* Old age is not the natural season for fruit. In the tree we do not look for it. The palm tree is a rare exception. Nor in men. The outward man perishes. Decay of nature sets in. (See for beautiful description of old age, Eccles. xii. 1—7.) The mental faculties and force become feeble. The courage and fearlessness of former days lapse into the caution and timidity of old age. Only of God's people can it be said—

"Time, that doth all things else decay,
Still makes them flourish strong and fair."

2. But though fruit in old age be supernatural, *it may be reasonably looked for.* From the nature of religion, the Divine life in the soul must grow, if it lives at all. Where there is spiritual life there must be growth. From the force of holy habit, which enables the righteous to be righteous still, and the holy to be holy still. From the subsidence of the bodily passions, and so the absence of strong temptation, and from the special aid of the Spirit of God according to his sure promise.

III. SOME TROUBLE THEMSELVES ABOUT IT WHO SHOULD NOT. Many aged people of God are distressed because they cannot—so they think—see any of this blessed fruit. But this may be owing: 1. *To mistaking feeling for fruit.* They cannot summon up those strong rapturous feelings in worship and prayer, and hence they fear lest they have lost their religion. It is not so, for God looks not at feelings—they come and go like the clouds—but at the heart, the will which alone is the true man. That may be true to God when feeling is but faint and fitful, and has but little rapture and glow. 2. *To forgetfulness of the fact that “they also serve who only stand and wait.”* Activity and toil are possible only to the strong and vigorous. Patient waiting upon God, meek resignation to his will,—these are the fruits of old age, and are no less acceptable to God than the strenuous activity of the young and strong.

IV. SOME DO NOT TROUBLE THEMSELVES ABOUT IT WHO SHOULD. For they bring forth no fruit. The world has them too surely; their hearts are not right with God. They find fault with others, and complain that the former times were better than these. The means of grace they do not avail themselves of, and they present the sad spectacle of men from whom much might have been expected, but who yield little or no fruit in old age.

V. IT IS INFINITELY DESIRABLE. 1. *For our own peace and comfort*, the esteem of our fellow-Christians, and the approval of conscience, depend upon it. 2. *Our power to help and bless others.* For they will see and reverence fruit in old age, and will own the power of Divine grace and the blessedness of it; whilst, on the other hand, where there is little or no such fruit, they will be confirmed in their own sin and harden themselves yet more against God. 3. *For Christ’s sake.* It will gladden and glorify him.

VI. ITS GREAT GUARANTEE AND AIDS. 1. *The abiding grace of God.* “Without me,” said Christ, “ye can do nothing.” 2. *Self-examination.* Ask of yourself whether you are bringing forth fruit. 3. *Diligent use of means of grace*—prayer, study of the Scriptures, attendance at the house of God, Holy Communion. 4. *Definite endeavours to bring others to God.* Great is the help of such faithful aggressive work. 5. *Bringing forth fruit now ere old age comes.*—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*A daily good work.* Something the good man does every morning and every night. The Talmud speaks of this psalm as being sung on the morning of the sabbath at the drink offering which followed the sacrifice of the first lamb. What is here said to be “a good thing” is the act of recognizing and acknowledging God’s direct relation to our lives. He is closely related to them. We may, and we ought to, feel the relation, but it is right to *say so*, and it does *us good* to say so, day by day. The psalm may be used as a plea for the value of morning and evening devotions and worship. When Richard Baxter exerted so gracious an influence at Kidderminster, one important part of his work was securing family prayer in every house. It is said of the Christianized Fiji Islanders, that in every family there is morning and evening worship. Moses provided for thank-offerings, because he understood human nature, and knew that to the thankful the outward sign of thankfulness would be an addition to thankfulness. “At all times man has mercies enough given him to make them a subject of thankfulness unto God.” In saying that giving thanks daily is a “good thing,” two ideas may be included. (1) It is a *right* thing. (2) It is a *desirable*, delightful thing. If begun as duty, it will soon come to be a personal joy. We have always abundant (1) *cause* for gratitude to God. We ought always to cherish (2) the *feeling* of gratitude. And we only satisfy right impulses when we (3) make due *expression* of our gratitude. But the point which may be opened with some freshness is suggested by the two terms used in ver. 2. The word “loving-kindness” is associated with our morning praise; the word “faithfulness” is associated with our evening praise.

I. WHAT IS GOD TO US WHEN WE MAKE NO CONSCIOUS DEMANDS ON HIM? We make no demands in our sleep. And what seems first to come to our thought, when we wake in the morning, is the “loving-kindness” of God’s preservations and restorations.

“Through sleep and darkness safely brought,
Restored to life, and power, and thought.”

II. WHAT IS GOD TO US WHEN WE MAKE CONSCIOUS DEMANDS ON HIM? That we do for every day, and all day long: for all the activities and relations of life. So

what comes to mind "every night" is God's "faithfulness" to the promises on which we have been relying.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The sanctifying ministry of music.* "Upon the harp with a solemn sound." There seem to have been trumpet-blasts connected with the worship of Jehovah from the time of its orderly arrangement by Moses. But what may be called distinguishing music, the accompaniment of intelligent song, seems to have been introduced by David. The association of music and song with worship changed public worship from a *ceremony* to a *service*, from something done *for* men to something done *by* men. It made public worshipping personally pleasant to the worshipper; glorified duty; kindled and exercised holy emotion. It seems a strange thing that objection should ever have been made to the introduction of instrumental music into Divine worship. On the principle of consecrating the use of all gifts and talents to the Divine service, the gifts of varied music should have been taken over and sanctified. And the lutes, and psalteries, and harps, and cymbals, of the older time, do but represent the cornets and violins and organs of this newer time. Not only artistically, but also devotionally, music is a most valuable background to song, and it may be fairly urged that the most beautiful, the most perfect, the most varied music the world can produce should be associated with the sanctuaries of the Most High.

I. Music ministers to our sanctifying by its **RESTFULNESS**. Nothing in the world is so soothing to us. David's power on the half-mad king Saul is but a type of the influence of music that we feel. How often nothing will quiet the tossing, restless sufferer, until some one croons a holy song! Who does not feel the cathedral song steal into his very soul, hushing down every passion, and breathing peace? And surely, tempest-tossed every week, we need sabbath music.

II. Music ministers to our sanctifying by its **RELATION TO OUR EMOTIONS**. Illustrate by the march of a regiment to its music. The instant effect produced by dance-music. The influence of tunes in the minor key, etc. Then our sensitiveness makes music, well chosen and well rendered, an actual, moral, and religious force. Music may be a means of grace.

III. Music ministers to our sanctifying by its **WINSOMENESS**. See the crowds attracted by Salvation Army bands; or by services of song. The power of music to *win* has not yet been fully realized by the Christian Church.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*God's thoughts seen in God's works.* "How great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep." Reminding us of the fine passage in Isa. lv. 8, 9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." The "thoughts" of God, his purposes and plannings, bring him before us as a moral Being, the sublime-moral Being. And just as we read a man's character by his acts, so we may know God's mind by the study of his works. A man is always greater, always better, than anything he does; and yet it is only from what he does that we can gain our apprehension of the man. So God is infinitely above and beyond anything of his handiwork; and yet only through the handiwork can we get to know him. It is not enough to say that God's moral government is illustrated in nature; we must say that God himself—and it is in what God is we find the secret of the character of his government—is known through the works of his hands. The point suggested by the first sentences of this verse is that the more man studies God's works, the more he feels their greatness, their mystery, their beyondness. And then he can no longer be surprised that God's thoughts and purposes, the higher moral ends he ever keeps in view and works towards, should be deep, altogether out of his reach.

I. **THE KNOWN REVEALING WHAT CAN BE KNOWN OF GOD.** We can understand much of God's handiwork. We can see God's purpose in much, and use many things as God designed they should be used. We can see the moral message in much of God's work. So argues St. Paul, in Acts xiv. 15—17; Rom. i. 19, 20. We may know, thus, all the *natural* attributes of God, and gain also some apprehension of the *moral* attributes. But what can be known of God in this way must always be incomplete.

II. *THE UNKNOWN REVEALING THAT THERE IS AN UNKNOWN IN GOD.* "His thoughts are very deep;" quite beyond man's plummet. There is mystery in Nature. She holds secrets which even man's science cannot force her to disclose. And those mysteries declare that there must be deeper mysteries in him who holds the secret of them all. *He is more mysterious than they.*—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Eyes dimmed to spiritual things.* Two terms are used to describe those who are unable to discern either the greatness of God's works or the depth of God's thoughts. "A brutish man." "A fool." The distinction between them seems to be this—a "brute" *cannot*, and a "fool" *will not*, see spiritual things. But both incapacity and self-willedness are regarded as sins. The brutish man has made himself brutish; and the fool encourages his self-will. The Prayer-book Version gives "unwise" for "brutish." But the Hebrew words suggest, for "brutish," the mere animal nature, the man who lives for his appetite; and for "fool," the stupid, inconsiderate man. "In the one case the moral sense has not come into play at all; in the other it is overgrown by sensuality, so that spiritual discernment, insight into the glories of the Divine mind, are impossible."

I. *IN SOME MEN THE FACULTY OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT NEEDS TO BE AROUSED.* In a sense this is true of every man. The spiritual faculty is dormant, as is the mental faculty. The educational element has its place in material as well as in spiritual knowledge. Usually, in religious spheres, the spiritual faculty is cultured. But vast masses of humanity, at home and abroad, have little chance of getting beyond the animal stage. The psalmist, however, is evidently thinking of those who voluntarily imprison their thoughts and interests in the things of the flesh and sense. To be a natural brute when we may be a man, is an infinite pity; to be a willing brute when we might be a son of God, is an infinite shame.

II. *IN SOME MEN THE FACULTY OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT NEEDS TO BE DELIVERED.* It has been aroused. It has had times of power. But business, pleasure, intellectual pride, material interests, have dimmed it. The man has become a "fool" to his best interests. He has persistently limited his vision to this world, until he has come really to believe that there is no world but this.

Press this conclusion: We are responsible for our attitude towards spiritual things; and for our capacity to apprehend spiritual truths. If we pamper the body, we shall be sure to dim the spiritual vision.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*The instability of the success of the ungodly.* "Spring as the grass." In Eastern countries, after a time of drought, the grass responds with marvellous suddenness to the refreshing rains. But the grass which grows so swiftly is as swiftly cut down by the blazing sunshine or the scorching wind. The sudden success of the ungodly was a surprise and distress to God's people, who looked on temporal success as a special sign of Divine approval. It seemed to them as if, after all, God was practically on the side of the wicked. In drearier moments they might even think that God made fair promises to the good, but gave the actual blessings to the ungodly. The relief which the saints of olden time found for this their distress is not just the relief which we should provide now. They, like Asaph, went into the sanctuary of God, and there they came to understand the *end* of the wicked. Really, their high places were slippery places; and in God's time they were "cast into destruction." There is a certain measure of comfort in the thought that things gained by unrighteousness are insecure. But it is a higher standpoint that enables us to see that no success is worth having that has no righteousness at the heart of it. God is the secret of all stability, and God is not in a thing, unless goodness is the characteristic of the thing. Goodness always tends to permanency. Bible history is full of illustrations of the instability of all success attained by the ungodly. If a man's gains are secure for his own life, they are squandered by his sons. In the north of England the uncertainty of sudden prosperity is enshrined in a popular saying, "The first generation buys the carriage; the second generation rides in the carriage; the third generation pawns the carriage." See the cases of Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Haman, Herod; and note also our Lord's parable of the "rich fool."

I. *THE SUCCESS OF THE WICKED IS UNSTABLE IN THE NATURE OF THINGS.* 1.

They who overreach are always in danger of being overreached. 2. The wicked are always making enemies, who are quick to avenge themselves, if opportunity offers. 3. The wicked make mistakes which dissipate all their gains.

II. THE SUCCESS OF THE WICKED IS UNSTABLE BECAUSE, SOONER OR LATER, GOD IS SURE TO DEAL WITH IT. He tests foundations; if they are not found righteous, the grandest houses of attainment will surely fall.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*The stability of human good lies with God.* God exalts the horn. God anoints with oil. "The horns in animals, where the Creator alone planted them, were their weapons of defence; and man, who lays all nature under tribute to enrich his stores of images and figures, very early made it synonymous with power, and then for what that will always confer upon the possessor. To exalt the horn means to advance in power, honour, and dominion." The unicorn of Scripture is, in all probability, the wild buffalo. Abbé Huc, in his travels, tells of having heard of an animal resembling the unicorn of heraldry; but we can hardly regard his work as trustworthy. Horns were, and are still, worn by the women of the Lebanon; but the psalmist is much more likely to take his figure from the common features of animal life than from merely local customs of women. The figure of "anointing with fresh oil" is not easily explained. Attention is due to the suggestion that the use of oil in the toilet was the sign that a man was *in health*. When a man was sick, he refrained from his customary use of oil. So being anointed came to be the sign of *good health*. And established health is one of God's best blessings. So we get the two ways in which God secures the stability of the good.

I. HE LIFTS THEM OUT OF, KEEPS THEM ABOVE, THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES. Things may be always tending toward pulling down, depressing their horn. God is always raising it up, and keeping it up. This is a familiar thought to the psalmists: "He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings;" "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

II. HE RENEWS THEIR OWN VIGOUR AND VITALITY. And so his people are able to keep wrestling with evils, and winning victories over circumstances. God is the secret of stability, because he is both in the *circumstances* and in *us*. "What can harm you, if ye be followers of the thing that good is?" What, indeed, seeing that "he who is for you is more than all that be against you"! They who upset your good, must shift God's relations to it, before they can reach you.—R. T.

Ver. 12.—*Grace and strength characterizing the righteous.* Palm trees are types of *grace*. Cedar trees are types of *strength*. The palm gracefully rises from the plain, and bears a beautiful crown of fruits and leaves. The cedar strikes its roots wide and deep into the everlasting hills, and securely spreads forth its great branches through ages of winters. Perhaps trees were actually planted in the courts of the temple, as they are in the courts of mosques nowadays; but the characteristic forms of palm and cedar are alone required for the teaching of this verse, which will go into this sentence, "They who by daily worship rest their life in communion with God, shall find the secret of unbroken freshness and undying stability."

I. THE BEAUTY OF THE RIGHTEOUS. Observe the distinction between the two "flourishings"—the flourishing of the wicked, and the flourishing of the righteous. The one is wholly a matter of outward, material good; the other is primarily a matter of personal character. The wicked may flourish by reason of what he *has*; and that can be easily taken from him. The godly man flourishes by reason of what he *is*; and that can never be taken from him. Against that the "gates of hell cannot prevail." The figure of beauty given in the palm suggests uprightness, gracefulness, gentleness, aboveness, fruitfulness, and secret sources of renewal for its life. If the palm tree was an ideal for a poet, we have a better model than they; we may say, "The righteous shall flourish as did the Man Christ Jesus." And what grace and beauty shone forth from him! It is not enough that we who bear his name are *good*, we must be *beautiful*.

II. THE STRENGTH OF THE RIGHTEOUS. Strangely men associate weakness with gentleness; and think beautiful Christly souls are out of place in this workaday world. So the figure of the "cedar" is joined to the figure of the "palm." The cedar

is the strongest of all the trees. Not only is there the great grip of the mountain, but the wood is firm and lasting. So we need to have the texture of our souls firm and strong—the strength of our grip of God ever behind and supporting all our beauty of form and grace of relation.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*The testimony of old age to God's faithfulness.* Perowne thinks allusion may be to the "date-palm, which, when it reaches maturity, produces three or four hundred pounds weight of fruit, and has been known even to produce six hundred pounds weight." In contrast with the prosperity of the wicked, which is but for a moment, the prosperity of the righteous is declared to be long-lived. The aged are spared among us, not for any direct work they can do, but for the testimony they can render to the faithfulness and mercy of God. Over and over again we may hear them saying, "I have been young, and now am old, yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Godly old age testifies, on the basis of its personal, lengthened, and varied experiences, of three things.

I. **GRACE EVER ADAPTED.** According to the promise, "As thy day, so shall thy strength be."

II. **GRACE EVER ABOUNDING.** According to the promise, "God is able to make all grace abound, so that ye, having all sufficiency unto all good things, may abound unto every good word and work."

III. **GRACE EVER CONTINUING.** As we sing in our hymn—

"His grace shall to the end
Stronger and brighter shine."

And according to the promise, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." John Owen says, "When believers are under all sorts of bodily and natural decays, and, it may be, have been overtaken with spiritual decays also, there is provision made in the covenant to render them fat, flourishing, and fruitful—vigorous in the power of internal grace, and flourishing in the expression of it in all duties of obedience. Blessed be God for this good word of grace that he hath given us such encouragement against all the decays and temptations of old age which we have to conflict withal."—R. T.

Vers. 1—8.—*Joyful worship.* "Celebrates in joyful strain the greatness of God's works, and especially his righteous government of the world, as manifested in the overthrow of the wicked, and the prosperity and final triumph of the righteous."

I. **A GOOD MAN REJOICES IN THE RIGHTEOUS WORK OF GOD.** (Ver. 4.) 1. *Because God's work is a work of loving-kindness.* (Ver. 2.) 2. *It is a work of faithfulness or truth.* (Ver. 2.) He fulfils every word of promise and every threat of judgment. 3. *God's good work is on a vast scale.* (Vers. 5—8.) It is universal, embracing the heavens and the earth, extending throughout the universe. "God is in the height, supreme for evermore." 4. *But God's way of accomplishing his righteous purpose is not always openly manifest.* (Ver. 5.) "His thoughts are very deep." His methods of work are often deeper than we can fathom.

II. **THAT THE JOY OF THE GOOD MAN IN GOD SEEKS EXPRESSION AND UTTERANCE IN WORSHIP.** "It is a good thing." 1. *It becomes a necessity of our nature.* If the emotion of praise is in us, it demands expression; as the poet must sing, and the artist must paint. Worship thus becomes acceptable to God, and a means of our own elevation. 2. *Worship such as this becomes the habit of the soul.* "In the morning . . . every night," and on the sabbath day. 3. *The true worshipper will call to his aid all that will help him to utter his emotions.* The voice and other instruments—public service and ministry. 4. *But it is only to our spiritual intelligences that worship becomes necessary.* (Ver. 6.) "A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this."—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM XCIII.

LIKE the preceding, a psalm of praise. Jehovah is set forth as manifesting himself in the character of King. He robes himself in majesty, and reigns openly. The world, unstable as it may seem, is in reality fixed under his sway. His throne, *i.e.* his rule, has been established from everlasting (vers. 1, 2). Yet there is resistance to his sway. The waters toss themselves; *i.e.* the powers of the world array themselves in opposition to God (ver. 3). Vainly, however; God in heaven is mightier than they (ver. 4). His might is especially shown in his "house" and in his "testimonies." The latter are "sure," the former is inviolate.

Ver. 1.—*The Lord reigneth; rather, is become King* (*ἔβασιλευσεν*, LXX.); comp. Ps. x. 16; xlvii. 6; xcvi. 10; xcvi. 1, etc. God is regarded as having for a time laid aside, or hidden, his sovereignty, but as now at length coming forward and inaugurating the theocracy. The writer may have in his mind some recent manifestation of Divine power, or he may be anticipating the final establishment of the reign of Messiah. *He is clothed with majesty*; or, "he hath robed himself in majesty" (Cheyne). The Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself; literally, *the Lord is clothed, he hath girded himself, with strength* (comp. "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord," Isa. li. 9). *The world also is established, that it cannot be moved*. When God "takes his kingdom," he firmly establishes his sway over the earth, with its inhabitants, in such sort that "it cannot be moved"—it can suffer no violent agitation or disturbance.

Ver. 2.—*Thy throne is established of old*.

Though God from time to time comes forward, as it were, and asserts his sovereignty, yet it is no new rule that he sets up. He has always been the King both of heaven and earth. *Thou art from everlasting*. Not merely from "of old," but from all eternity (comp. Ps. xc. 2; Prov. viii. 23; Isa. lxiii. 15; Micah v. 2; Hab. i. 12).

Ver. 3.—*The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice*. By "the floods" seem to be meant the world-powers, God's enemies; perhaps especially Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. Invading hosts are constantly compared to "floods" or "rivers" in Scripture (see Isa. viii. 7, 8; xxviii. 2; xvii. 12, 13; lix. 19; Jer. xli. 8, etc.). *The floods lift up their waves*; or, "their din," "their roaring" (comp. Ps. lxxv. 7, "Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people").

Ver. 4.—*The Lord on high* (comp. Ps. xcii. 8) is mightier than the noise of many waters; literally, *than the voices of many waters* (comp. ver. 3). As the waters represent angry nations, the poet speaks not only of their "noise," but of their "voices." Yea, than the mighty waves of the sea; or, "the glorious breakers of ocean" (so Kay; and comp. Exod. xv. 10).

Ver. 5.—*Thy testimonies are very sure*. God's "testimonies" are his commandments, considered as witnesses to man of his nature and his will respecting them. They are "very sure," *i.e.* firm and unalterable, partaking of his unchangeability (Jas. i. 17). Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever. "Holiness" here seems to mean "sanctity," "inviolability" (Kay, Cheyne; comp. 1 Sam. vi. 20; Isa. vi. 13). This is a tacit appeal to God to keep his temple free from all profanation and pollution in the future. The psalmist does not really ask that it shall continue inviolate "for ever," but "to length of days," *i.e.* for an ample period.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*The eternity of God*. "Thou art from everlasting." There are truths self-evident, yet incomprehensible. We can neither doubt nor grasp them. Light, which reveals all things else, dazzles, even blinds, if we gaze on it. So these truths, in whose light reason sees all things, baffle and confound our reason. One of these is *the eternity of God*. We speak of time sometimes as "flying," as though we ourselves stood still. Sometimes of ourselves as "travelling on." Either way, we feel that eternity is *behind* us, not increased by our past years; eternity is *before* us, undiminished as the future becomes present. God fills eternity (Isa. lvii. 15). Human language is employed in the Scriptures (Rev. i. 4; iv. 8). But with *God*, reason assures

us, can be no past, present, future, as with creatures. He *is* (Ps. xc. 2). The *eternity of God*, as taught in the Scriptures, is—

I. A PROOF OF DIVINE INSPIRATION. The wonder of God's works is never so clearly seen as when we compare with man's (e.g. in the microscope). Heathen mythologies and philosophies utterly fail here. Painful, pitiable, to see the struggles of the ancient Greek mind to grapple with this problem, in the monstrous fables of the origin of the gods, or in its ever-shifting theories and guesses of philosophers. The Oriental mind, mystic, subtle, contemplative, lost itself in labyrinths of speculation. The Hindus distinguish the original fountain of being from the Creator, and even to the Creator no temples are built, nor worship offered. "Gods many and lords many" come between him and the worshipper. The Bible only shows us the eternal Creator as the Father of spirits. Its whole purpose is to teach us how near God is to us, and bring us near to him. This could never be man's invention; it is God's own voice.

II. Yet this is a CONTEMPLATION FULL OF AWE. One of the strongest motives to *worship*. Our cold Northern temperament, commercial hardness, keen pursuit of knowledge we can prove and analyze, frigid *intellectualism*, indispose us to worship. An Englishman may have "an idol in his heart"—something he puts in place of God; but he cannot comprehend why a Hindu falls down before an image. Yet worship is a real, deep need of the human heart. God's eternity is presented in the Scriptures, not as mere doctrine to be believed, but in the language of worship (see texts quoted above).

III. A BEAUTIFUL, REASSURING CONSIDERATION. 1. Rest for our thought, our heart, our love. Let all else change, *God abides*. "God is love." 2. Light on the mystery of God's dealings. If at such a moment, or critical turn, *we could see* good emerging from evil, the perplexity caused by the long continuance of sin and misery would be almost removed (Ps. xciv. 3). But God is working for eternity, *in eternity* (2 Pet. iii. 8, 9).

IV. This glorious attribute is ASCRIBED TO THE LORD JESUS, and CLAIMED BY HIM. (Heb. xiii. 8; Rev. i. 8, 11; xxii. 13, 16.)

CONCLUSION. Show the bearing of this doctrine on sin; on salvation; on Christian work.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—"The Lord reigneth." Note—

I. THE PROPOSITION TO BE PROVED—that "the Lord reigneth." The psalmist describes: 1. *The royal robes*. "He hath clothed himself with majesty." The sacred writers seem to have drawn their ideas of the regal splendour of God, not so much from the magnificence of Oriental potentates, as from the gorgeous glow of the heavens—the sun by day, the moon and stars by night. Further, "he hath girded himself with strength." This seen in the steady march of the heavenly bodies, never breaking rank, never failing to appear in due course, never wearying by long continuance. 2. *The permanence of his rule*. "The world established, that it cannot be moved." The order of his universe cannot be broken. And so it has ever been, "from everlasting."

II. THE PROOF. The psalmist likens the wild tumult of the peoples in rebellion against God to the fury of a storm at sea. The roar of the breakers dashing against the rocks, the thunder of the surf upon the shore, the fierce agitation of the storm-tossed waves as they lift themselves on high,—all this is the vivid picture which suggests to the mind the worse, because the wicked, rage of a rebellious people or of a rebellious soul. And how terribly true the likeness is! The souls of men setting themselves against God, in wrath and rage against him, and scornfully rejecting and renouncing his authority! But as he hushes the storm so that there is a great calm, in like manner doth he still the wrath of man, and makes it to praise him (ver. 4). How often he has done this!

III. THE DEDUCTION. It is twofold. 1. *That God is faithful*. Men may utterly rely upon his word. Fools that we are, we often fail thus to trust him, and follow instead the miserable maxims of men of the world. But, nevertheless, God remaineth true. 2. *That holy obedience is our wisdom*. We cannot have God on our side if we wander from his ways—it is impossible. Let us, then, be on the side of God. Wisdom, gratitude, duty, love for our fellow-men, all urge this.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—“*Is God dead?*” Mrs. Beecher Stowe relates an incident which once gave to a speech which Frederick Douglass was delivering a startling and almost overwhelming power. Douglass was descanting, in his usual impassioned manner, upon the wrongs and miseries of the negro race. Warming with his subject, and waxing more and more indignant with their persecutors, he seemed to lose all patience, and at last said that they must henceforth trust in the strength of their own right arms, seeing that it was in vain otherwise to hope for deliverance. At this moment there arose a tall, aged negress, who, while perfect silence reigned in the hall, said, in a voice not loud, but deep, “Frederick, is God dead?”—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The God of vengeance.* To many it seems a strange prayer that God should show himself in this character. Therefore consider—

I. WHAT VENGEANCE IS. 1. *It is not the same as revenge*, a human, an evil, and often unjust thing. Revenge is what men delight in when they have received some injury at the hands of their fellow-men, and hence is never right, but ever condemned of God. But: 2. *Vengeance is the avenging of public wrong*, the upholding of justice and righteousness, and essential to the preservation of society and of all human well-being. Therefore it may well be prayed for. See Milton’s appeal, “Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints,” etc. Now, concerning this vengeance of God, note further—

II. ITS REALITY. The history of mankind is marked by it. Again and again has God thus visited guilty men. The Bible, secular history, personal observation, experience, all attest it. Therefore when in the future life the Scriptures warn us of like vengeance, how can any dare to regard it as impossible?

III. ITS ONE AND ONLY EXCITING CAUSE—Human sin. Not a man’s circumstances nor anything that he cannot help, but only his sin, conscious, wilful, persisted-in sin. In this psalm there are set forth some of these sins, which cry to God for vengeance.

IV. ITS RIGHTEOUSNESS. We confess this now when we see men who have steeped themselves in crime brought to judgment, and just doom passed upon them. And in the future there will be no vengeance that does not command the heartfelt confession from all beholders, that God is righteous who judgeth so.

V. ITS TERRIBLENESS. “Fools make a mock at sin;” did they know its doom, their mockery would soon cease. Even in this world the vengeance of God often utterly overwhelms the sinner. Well may the psalmist ask (Ps. xc. 11), “Who knoweth the power of thine anger?” etc. It is immeasurable.

VI. ITS CERTAINTY. It may be delayed, and for a long while seemingly evaded, but sooner or later it surely comes.

VII. ITS CHOSEN HIGHWAY. It is along the path of little sins. The ungodly falleth by little and little. The mere cobwebs of separate single sins become at length twisted and transformed by the law of habit into the strenuous ligaments which bind the soul over to eternal sin.

VIII. ITS ARREST. Let the sinner repent and flee for shelter to Christ.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The King-figure for God.* Prayer-book Version, “The Lord is King.” The sentence would be more precisely rendered “has become King,” for some particular manifestation of Jehovah’s kingly rule was then occupying the psalmist’s attention; but what that manifestation was cannot be discovered. Some associate the psalm with the returned captives, who, in some sense at least, re-established the theocracy. It represents the religious joy of the people in the setting up of Jehovah’s kingdom, and the realized presence of Jehovah as the spiritual King; but the setting is that of a poet, who has a wider sphere from which to draw his figures than the religious man has. It needs attention that the King-figure for God is not altogether satisfactory, because kingship is not a natural relation; it cannot be either a permanent or universal relation. Kingship represents a human expediency. God made families; these naturally organize into tribes. For families and tribes the rulers are fathers and patriarchs. Men made cities and nations, and invented kingships to centralize the governmental systems which they designed. The figure of king should therefore always be applied to God, and to the Messiah, with great care and caution. The actual kings who have ruled over nations, though they may, in some things, fitly represent God, in other things are wholly unworthy of him. And an ideal king is difficult to create mentally. It was

the peculiarity of the Jew, that he had no earthly, visible king. Jehovah unseen yet ever present, was to the nation of Israel, all, and more than all, that human kings were to the nations around them. But this high view of the Divine Kingship Israel proved unable to maintain. It is that spiritual theocracy which the Lord Jesus came to restore.

I. THE KING-FIGURE FOR GOD DECLARES HIS AUGUST POWER. Take the Eastern, rather than Western, idea of the king. In the East kings are regarded as the embodiment of all kinds of power. At first they were chosen because of bodily size and strength, as was king Saul. Notions of Divine power were connected with them. So Israel's God was thought of as the Omnipotent, All-controlling One.

II. THE KING-FIGURE FOR GOD DECLARES HIS ABIDING PRESENCE. A king absent from his kingdom is inconceivable. If he is away, some one must take his place. So God as King is *with his people*.

III. THE KING-FIGURE FOR GOD DECLARES HIS GRACIOUS PURPOSE. For a king ought to be the "father of his people;" supremely concerned for their highest well-being. And God reigns with a view to securing righteousness, which is, for man, the supreme blessing.—R. T.

Ver. 1.—*The completeness of Divine Creation.* "The world also is established, that it cannot be moved." It is a remarkable illustration of the mistakes made in explaining the poetical figures of God's Word, that Calvin appealed to this passage as proving that the earth is motionless, which it is not. What the psalmist rejoices in is the completeness of the Divine creation. It needed no one to put to it a *finishing touch*. Man's handiwork always needs *finishing off*. We may illustrate by the complicated machine which man may make. However complete it may be, no one thinks of its going alone, without any supervision and attention; and no one thinks of doubting its completeness because it receives such attention. Yet men so often persist that if God's creation is perfect, it must be independent; it must need no attention and no repair, even if self-willed men do interfere with it.

I. COMPLETENESS MEANS THAT THE THINGS MADE ARE PERFECT AND SUFFICIENT. We may not think that God made all he could make. What he made was relative to the particular moral beings he designed. They were to be beings with five senses, and creation was to be fitted to those five senses. Of everything God made it was declared that it was *good*, not necessarily the best possible to God's thought, but the best possible for God's purpose. Show that man, in all the ages, has never of himself been able to improve a single thing God has made. He has only improved things by bringing out the latent possibilities God put in the things. As with developed flowers, roses, etc.

II. COMPLETENESS MEANS THAT THE LAWS RULING THE RELATIONS OF THINGS ARE ONCE FOR ALL FIXED AND DEFINED. Much is made of the fixity and certainty of the "laws of nature." Too much cannot be made of it. "The law of the Lord," in creation, "is perfect." But in every set of laws it will be found that law qualifies, and limits, and even crosses, law in actual working. It is so with the laws of nature. And the best perfection is seen in the fact that the laws will work with each other harmoniously. Illustrate how the laws of life and of death work into each other throughout creation.

III. COMPLETENESS MEANS THAT A LIVING WILL PRESIDES OVER ALL THINGS AND THE WORKING OF ALL LAWS. Nothing can be moved, in the sense of being changed; but everything is within the Divine *adjustment*, and the confidence of the psalmist arises from the conviction of the actual present Divine rule.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The distinction between God and God's handiwork.* "Thou art from everlasting." Thou wast before the world was. He was. He made the earth, and all that therein is. "In the beginning God." His name is the "I am." "The first and foundation-stone of the great temple of revealed truth is a declaration which grasps all space, all being, all time, and bids us see before them, above them, and altogether independent of them—One lonely, infinite Being, having life in himself. When there was no heaven and no earth, in the silent dark eternities, in the *beginning*, there was God. The first chapter of Genesis is evidently "designed to impress on us that the world was

not created by chance, by self-generation, by impersonal powers of nature, or by many agents acting either in harmony or in antagonism. God is distinct from all that he has made." Bishop Wordsworth says, on Gen. i. 1, "The declaration of this verse opposes the Pantheist, who says, 'The world is God'; the Peripatetics, who say, 'The world exists from eternity'; the Stoics, who say, 'The world was made by Fate and Necessity'; the Epicureans, who say, 'It arose from a fortuitous concourse of atoms'; the Persians and Manichæans, who say, 'It arose from the antagonism of two rival powers'; the Gnostics, who say, 'It was made by angels, or emanations of æons'; Hermogenes, who says, 'It was made out of matter co-eternal with God'; and the modern notion, that it arose out of the spontaneous agency and evolution of self-developing powers." The distinction between a man and the machine he makes is clear enough; but the complication of thought, in relation to God, arises from the fact that he makes the material of which he makes the machine of creation. Illustrate the distinction along the following lines.

I. CREATION HAD A BEGINNING; THE CREATOR HAD NONE.

II. CREATION IS A MATERIAL THING; THE CREATOR IS A SPIRITUAL BEING.

III. CREATION, AS WE KNOW IT, MAY BE ONE OF MANY CREATIONS; THE CREATOR, AS WE KNOW HIM, IS THE ORIGINATOR OF THEM ALL.

IV. CREATION IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE; THE CREATOR IS UNCHANGEABLE.

V. CREATION HAS BUT A TEMPORARY EXISTENCE; THE CREATOR IS ETERNAL. "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God;" "Of thy years there is no ending" (2 Pet. iii. 10).—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The irresistible power of floods.* Though we have experience of disastrous floods, the full force of the figure can only be felt in Eastern and in mountainous lands. The "spate" in Scotland, the wady-floods of Palestine, and the gigantic overflow of such rivers as the Tigris and the Euphrates, or the awful desolations of Chinese rivers when the embankments give way, alone provide adequate illustration of such texts as this now before us. If we take Mosaic associations for this psalm, then desert wady-floods will be in the poet's mind. If we take the associations of the returned captives, then the awful floods of the Babylon rivers will be in his mind. In a previous homily the Jewish dread of the sea has been recalled. The Mosaic associations may include reference to God's control of the waters of the Red Sea, and using them as agents of his judgment on Pharaoh. One forcible illustration of a wady-flood will indicate the force of this poetic figure, and help us to realize what he must be who can mate and master even such floods. A traveller was at Nazareth when a sudden but violent storm arose. The rain fell in torrents; and in the course of an hour a river flowed past the convent door, along what lately was a dry and quiet street. In the darkness of the night were heard loud shrieks for help. The flood carried away baskets, logs of wood, tables, and fruit-stands. At length, a general alarm was given. Two houses, built on the sand, were undermined by the water, and both fell together, while the people in them escaped with difficulty. Loosened waters have been for man, in every age, the type of the masterful, the uncontrolled. Man never feels his helplessness so much as in presence of loosened waters. He can fight with fire; he can do nothing with water, when it once gets free.

I. THE POWER OF GOD IS SEEN IN HIS MASTERY OF WATERS. See especially the impression produced by the crossing of the Red Sea, and the destruction of the Egyptians. See same impression from crossing of Jordan. Great nations are likened to floods. And they too are fully within Divine control.

II. THE POWER OF GOD MANIFEST IS SEEN IN HIS MASTERY OF WATERS. Two striking scenes: Walking on the waters. Quelling the storm on Galilee with a word of command.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*God in revelation the same as God in nature.* "Thy testimonies are very sure." The use of this word "testimonies" in other psalms suggests that God's witness to man in his revealed Word is meant by it. The unity of the psalm would, however, be preserved if we regarded the "testimonies" here as those which God makes to man through nature. The point of the verse is usually set forth in such a way as this: "The permanence of the covenant, and of the outward signs that attest

it, is to the Israelite proof of the superiority of the Divine power over the forces of nature." "The moral Law is a truer evidence of the existence of God than the uniformity of natural law."

I. REVELATION NEVER CONTRADICTS NATURE. When there are seeming contradictions, it is necessary to inquire whether we have the testimony of nature clear or confused. For man, interfering with Nature's order, has confused her witness. And so it is necessary to inquire whether we have the revelation pure and simple, since there is often a material difference between what God has revealed, and what *man makes of* that which is revealed. The contradictions belong to the *man mark* put on revelation and nature. Both are from one hand and mind, and are in absolute harmony.

II. REVELATION CONFIRMS NATURE. Set out an orderly scheme of nature-religion; carefully fix its principles; and you will surely find they are the first principles of revelation. Indeed, revelation only comes to support primary principles of nature-religion, because men overlay them with manufactured religious systems. Nature-worship is quite a different thing from natural religion.

III. REVELATION ENLARGES UPON NATURE. Nature sets forth mainly what may be called the physical attributes of God—power, wisdom, etc. In a general way it shows God's goodness, and, declaring that qualities attach to actions, prepares for the realization of God as Judge, Rewarder, and Punisher. Revelation deals fully with God's moral qualities and relations; and has for its climax the disclosure of the Divine redemptive purpose, which, as wrought out, upholds every primary attribute of God that nature exhibits.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*Holiness the characteristic of Divine authority.* The word "house" has been taken to mean God's earthly temple. And some writers can see an allusion to the newly built temple of Zerubbabel. But it is better to regard the term "house" in the light of the psalm; and then it evidently means this world of created things and created beings, which God controls and rules. The psalm deals with the Kingship of God; his absolute power and authority in his world; and this last clause seems designed to meet the question which is at once called forth by the comparison of Jehovah with earthly kings. It would be an awful thing if we could know nothing of the *character* of the Being set in rule over us, who has such absolute, such irresistible, power. Our God may have it; for he is "holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works."

I. HOLINESS RULES ACCORDING TO THE PERFECT STANDARD.

II. HOLINESS WORKS TOWARDS THE HIGHEST ENDS.

III. HOLINESS IS CONSISTENT WITH NEEDFUL SEVERITIES.

IV. HOLINESS INCLUDES PATIENT CONSIDERATIONS.

The rule of God can therefore be fully acquiesced in. Infinite goodness unites with infinite wisdom; these combine with infinite power; and all are toned by the infinite righteousness, which proves to be the infinite charity. Men may say rejoicingly, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth," because they may be quite sure that "holiness characterizes his rule."—R. T.

Vers. 1—5.—The psalm celebrates the majesty of *Jehovah as Creator and Ruler of the universe*. Three principal thoughts—

I. GOD IS ABLE TO OVERCOME THE FIERCEST OPPOSITION OF HIS FOES. The "floods" and "many waters" and "mighty waves" are figures denoting the angry and turbulent opposition of his foes. But he is mightier than and high above them all. 1. *He is actual King, and reigns over the whole universe.* (Ver. 1.) He hath girded himself with strength for the subjugation of his enemies. 2. *He created man and nature.* (Ver. 1.) "The world is established, that it cannot be moved." It stands fast by his will and power. 3. *His righteous sway and government are of eternal duration.* (Vers. 2, 4.) And cannot be overthrown by the utmost power of man.

II. GOD IS NOT ONLY ABLE BUT FAITHFUL TO FULFIL THE PROMISES HE HAS MADE. (Ver. 5.) Promises of deliverance from captivity, and of safety and salvation.

III. BECAUSE GOD IS MIGHTY AND FAITHFUL AND HOLY, HE WILL PRESERVE HIS CHURCH INVIOLENT. (Ver. 5.) God dwells with his Church and people, and is the guarantee of their holiness and perfection.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM XCIV.

THIS psalm is primarily (vers. 1-11) a "cry for vengeance on Israel's oppressors, passing into an appeal for more faith to God's own people" (Cheyne). In the latter half (vers. 12-23) the psalmist comforts himself with the thought that God will assuredly protect his own, and bring destruction upon the evil-doers (vers. 12-23). Metrically, the psalm is made up of four strophes—the first of seven verses (vers. 1-7); the next of four (vers. 8-11); the third of eight (vers. 12-19); and the last of four (vers. 20-23).

Vers. 1-7.—*The cry for vengeance.* Israel is suffering oppression—not, however, from foreign enemies, but from domestic tyrants (vers. 4-6). Innocent blood is shed; the widow and the orphan are trodden down. God, it is supposed, will not see or will not regard (ver. 7). The psalmist, therefore, cries out to God to manifest himself by taking signal vengeance on the evil-doers (vers. 1, 2).

Vers. 1.—*O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth* (comp. Deut. xxxii. 35, "To me belongeth vengeance and recompence;" and Jer. li. 56, where God is called "the Lord God of recompences," as he is here—literally—"the Lord God of vengeance"). *O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself*; or, "shine forth"—make thy justice to appear; show thyself in thy character of a God who will by no means clear the guilty (Exod. xxxiv. 7).

Vers. 2.—*Lift up thyself* (comp. Ps. vii. 6; Isa. xxxiii. 10). "Rouse thyself," that is, "from thy state of inaction"—come and visit the earth as Judge. *Thou Judge of the earth* (comp. Gen. xviii. 25; Ps. lviii. 11). *Render a reward to the proud*; rather, *render a recompense*—as the same phrase is translated in Lam. iii. 64.

Vers. 3.—*Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?* "How long?" is the continual cry of the psalmists to God, as it is of the souls under the altar (Rev. vi. 10; comp. above, Pss. vi. 3; xiii. 1, 2; xxxv. 7; lxxiv. 10; lxxix. 5; lxxxix. 46; xc. 13). It is a cry of weakness and impatience, but has an element of faith in it, on which God looks with favour.

Vers. 4.—*How long shall they utter and speak hard things? rather, they pour forth, they utter arrogant things*; literally, *arrogance*. *And all the workers of iniquity*

boast themselves; or, "carry themselves proudly" (Cheyne).

Vers. 5.—*They break in pieces thy people, O Lord*; or, "crush," "oppress" (comp. Isa. iii. 15; Prov. xxii. 22, where the verb is evidently used, not of foreign foes, but of domestic oppressors). *And afflict thine heritage*; or, "thine inheritance"—those whom thou hast taken to be thy "peculiar people" (Deut. xiv. 2), thine own exclusive possession.

Vers. 6.—*They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless* (comp. Isa. i. 17-23; x. 2; Ezek. xxii. 6-9; Mal. iii. 5; also Ps. x. 8-10).

Vers. 7.—*Yet they say, The Lord shall not see* (comp. Ps. x. 11, 13). Foreign enemies did not suppose that Jehovah would not see, but trusted that their own gods were stronger than he, and would protect them (2 Kings xviii. 33-35). *Neither shall the God of Jacob regard it*. "The God of Jacob" would not be a natural expression in the mouth of Israel's foreign foes. They knew nothing of Jacob. But it was an expression frequently used by Israelites (Gen. xlix. 24; Psa. xx. 1; xlv. 7; lxxv. 9; lxxvi. 6; lxxxii. 1, 4; Isa. ii. 3; xli. 21; Micah iv. 2, etc.).

Vers. 8-11.—*The appeal to Israel.* The oppressors thought that their conduct would not be observed by God, or would not be taken into account. The psalmist appeals to them not to be so brutish and foolish (ver. 8), and argues, from the first principles of natural theology, that God must see and hear (ver. 9). If he chastises the heathen, why should he not also punish them (ver. 10)?

Vers. 8.—*Understand, ye brutish among the people* (comp. Ps. xcii. 6). That there were among God's people some so "brutish" as to suppose that God either did not see or did not regard their misdoings, appears also from Ps. x. 11, 13. *And ye fools, when will ye be wise?* When will ye put away your folly, and allow Wisdom to enter into your hearts? She is always crying in the streets: when will ye consent to listen (comp. Prov. i. 20-23)?

Vers. 9.—*He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?* This argument for a real, personal, intelligent God appears here, for the first time. It is of irresistible force. "Can it be possible that God, who planned and made the curious mechanism of hearing and vision, is himself without those faculties, or something analogous to them? Must he not

hear those cries, and see those outrages, which men, who are his creatures, see and hear? Is it conceivable that he can be an unobservant and apathetic God?" (Cheyne).

Ver. 10.—**He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct?** *i.e.* if God does not leave even the heathen without rebukes and chastisements, shall he not much more punish those among his own people who do amiss? **He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?** Our version supposes an ellipse, which it fills up with great boldness, producing a very excellent sense. But the insertion made does not appear necessary (see the Revised Version).

Ver. 11.—**The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man.** Not only does the Almighty see and know all the actions of men (ver. 9), but he is even acquainted with their thoughts (comp. Ps. vii. 9; xxvi. 2; cxxxix. 17; Isa. lxvi. 18; 1 Cor. iii. 20). **That they are vanity** (comp. Eccles. ii. 14, 15).

Vers. 12—19.—*The blessedness of the righteous.* The psalmist proceeds to console and comfort himself by considering in how many ways the righteous man is blessed. 1. God chastises him. 2. God teaches him. 3. God gives him a time of rest. 4. God never forsakes him. 5. God judges him righteously. 6. God helps him against evil-doers (vers. 16, 17). 7. God upholds him when he is in danger of falling. 8. God inwardly comforts his soul.

Ver. 12.—**Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord.** The blessedness of chastening appears in Deut. vii. 5; 2 Sam. vii. 14, 15; Job v. 17; Ps. lxxxix. 32, 33; Prov. iii. 12; and is the main point of Elihu's teaching in Job xxxiii. 15—30. It is not, as some have argued, entirely a New Testament doctrine. Unassisted human reason might discover it. Greek poets noted the connection between *παιδεία* and *μακαρία*. Our own great dramatist draws upon his experience when he says—

"Sweet are the uses of adversity;
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Bears yet a precious jewel in his head."

And teacheth him out of thy Law. The existence of "the Law," and the general knowledge of it by God's people, is assumed here, as elsewhere in the Psalms (see especially Ps. cxix.). Also it is assumed that "the Law" is a revelation from God.

Ver. 13.—**That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity.** Trials and afflictions are means to an end, and the intended end is "rest" and peace. "There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of

God" (Heb. iv. 9). **Until the pit be digged for the wicked** (comp. Ps. ix. 1; xxxv. 7, 8).

Ver. 14.—**For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance** (comp. Deut. iv. 31; 1 Sam. xii. 22; 1 Kings vi. 13; Isa. xli. 17). However long God's chastisements continue (see ver. 3), the faithful may be sure that God has not forsaken, and never will forsake, them, since "he forsaketh not his saints, but they are preserved for ever" (Ps. xxxvii. 28). The promise is made equally to the faithful individuals ("his saints") and to faithful Churches ("his people," "his inheritance").

Ver. 15.—**But judgment shall return unto righteousness.** "Judgment," *i.e.* God's actual award of good and evil upon the earth, which has seemed to be divorced from justice, while the ungodly have prospered and the pious been afflicted (vers. 3—6), shall in the end "return unto righteousness," *i.e.* once more, evidently, conform to it and coincide with it. **And all the upright in heart shall follow it;** *i.e.* "and then all honest-hearted men shall recognize the fact, see it, and rejoice in it."

Ver. 16.—**Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers? or, who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?** But meanwhile, until this happy time come, what is the condition of the godly? Are they not left a prey to the evil-doers, at their mercy, without a champion? The answer is given in the next verse.

Ver. 17.—**Unless the Lord had been my Help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.** No; they are not without a champion; Jehovah is their Help. It is a part of their blessedness (ver. 12), that they are preserved in life and protected from the wicked, by God himself. Otherwise they "had soon dwelt in silence." Their soul had gone down to the pit, to the abyss of Sheol, the silent land (comp. Ps. cxv. 17).

Ver. 18.—**When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.** Another respect in which the godly, even though suffering affliction, are blessed. God upholds their tottering feet, and, when they are in danger, keeps them from falling.

Ver. 19.—**In the multitude of my thoughts within me; rather, my various thoughts, "my busy thoughts." Saráppim** (as Dr. Kay observes) "are anxious, perplexing, branchings of thoughts," such as continually vex faithful yet doubting souls. **Thy comforts delight my soul.** Internal comfort is given by God himself to the perplexed and troubled in spirit, whereby they are "delighted," or, rather, "soothed and solaced."

Vers. 20—23.—*The destruction of the evil-doers.* There can be no fellowship between

light and darkness—between God and evil-doers, especially those who carry out their wicked purposes under the forms of law (ver. 20), and go the length of condemning innocent blood (ver. 21). Such persons God, who defends the righteous (ver. 22), will assuredly bring to utter destruction (ver. 23).

Ver. 20.—*Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee!* The interrogative is here, as so often, an emphatic negative. By "the throne of iniquity" is meant iniquity in high places, wickedness enthroned upon the judgment-seat, and thence delivering its unjust sentences. Oppressors in Israel made a large use of the machinery of the law to crush and ruin their victims (see Isa. i. 23; x. 1, 2; Amos v. 7; vi. 12, etc.). Which frameth mischief by a law; i.e. which effects its mischievous purposes by means of the decrees of courts (comp. 1 Kings xxi. 10—13).

Ver. 21.—*They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood* (comp. 2 Kings xxi. 16; xxiv. 4; Ps. x. 8; Prov. vi. 17; Isa. i. 21; lix. 3, 7; Jer. vii. 6; xxii. 3, 17, etc.). A Messianic allusion is possible, but not necessary.

Ver. 22.—*But the Lord is my Defence; and my God is the Rock of my refuge* (comp. Ps. xviii. 2).

Ver. 23.—*And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity.* Most manifestly when he makes them fall into their own snare (Ps. vii. 15; xxxv. 8; lvii. 6; cxli. 9, 10), but really also whenever he punishes them for their sins. *And shall out them off; or, "destroy," "exterminate" them. In their own wickedness; or, "by their wickedness."* The wicked man is often "hoisted with his own petard." Yea, the Lord our God shall out them off. The repetition, like that in ver. 1, is emphatic, and solemnly confirms the entire section (vers. 20—23).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 3.—*The saint's perplexity at the triumph of sin.* "Lord, how long?" etc. This question, which the inspired psalmist, in the anguish of his spirit, could not help putting, is not one of those which are solved by the lapse of time. Rather it grows more urgent. Thousands of years have rolled by since these words were written, and still the awful mystery confronts us which St. Paul so forcibly describes—*sin reigning unto death*. It is true that in each particular case "the triumphing of the wicked is short"—at least, compared with eternity. True, also, that nothing can shake the truth of the promise, which runs through the whole Bible, that, come what may, "it shall be well with the righteous"—eternally well—and that "all things shall work together for good to them that love God." Nevertheless, when we think, if we could wield absolute power with unerring knowledge, how eagerly we should make short work with injustice, cruelty, tyranny, lawless crime, we cannot but marvel at the spectacle, prolonged age after age, of our heavenly Father "making his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sending rain on the just and on the unjust." The psalmist assumes the fact as unquestionable, and reverently, yet urgently, appeals to God, as the Judge of the earth—How long is it to be suffered to continue?

I. First, HERE IS THE UNDENIABLE FACT, WHICH WOULD ASTONISH US INFINITELY MORE THAN IT DOES, IF WE WERE NOT SO FAMILIAR WITH IT. "The wicked triumph." 1. They do so every day, often for long years, in two ways—when they are strong enough, by defying justice; and when they are crafty enough, by evading justice. It is the former of these which especially awakens the indignation and distress of the psalmist. He sees might, which ought to be the servant of right, become the ally of wrong; and justice poisoned at its fountain. It is the spectacle which meets us on every page of history. *Joseph* a slave and an exile in the dungeon, while his brothers are peacefully feeding their flocks in Canaan, and his wicked, false accuser is dwelling in a palace. *Pharaoh* blaspheming on the throne, and God's people bleeding and weeping under the lash. *Saul* in his court, and *David* hiding in dens and caves. *Nebuchadnezzar* at the height of earthly glory, and God's faithful servants in the fiery furnace. *Herod* worshipped as a god, and *James* slain with the sword. *Nero* on the judgment-seat, and *Paul* a prisoner at his bar. Popes receiving Divine honours, and martyrs for Christ burning at the stake. Ages roll on, and still, in one form or another, this hideous anomaly bears witness that we live in a world whose whole moral frame is disordered. True, as those ages roll, they show us another side to the picture. *Joseph*

In power, and his brethren trembling before him. Pharaoh's host buried in the waters or bleaching on the shore, and Israel free. Saul stark on Gilboa, and David crowned and victorious. Nebuchadnezzar a maniac, herding with beasts. Herod eaten of worms. Nero a wretched suicide, hooted out of life with curses. But still, successors arise. History repeats itself. The One Arm which could strike down oppression, not only here and there, now and then, but everywhere and for ever, seems to delay the blow (Eccles. viii. 11). Still the cry goes up, which St. John heard from the souls beneath the altar, "How long, O Lord?" In our own land, thanks be to God, we must look back two hundred years if we would see tyranny and injustice openly triumphing on the throne and on the judgment-seat, and God's servants exiled, starved, imprisoned merely for preaching the gospel. Englishmen have almost forgotten that such things ever were in England. But we see crime continually evading justice, and even successfully concealing itself behind a mask of respectability. One terrible vice—drunkenness—has this mitigating circumstance, that it cannot long be concealed, and the mischief and misery it works cannot be denied. But if dishonesty, extortion, gambling, false speaking, secret immorality, could in like manner be brought to view, it would be found (alas!) that the crimes human law can reach are but a fraction of crimes actually committed against the Law of God. 2. There is a wider and deeper view we cannot help taking. The power of sin is the power of *Satan*. He is expressly declared to be "the prince of this world," "the god of this world," who blinds the minds of "them that believe not." Apart from this, neither the extreme wickedness of men nor the slow progress of Christ's kingdom and gospel can be accounted for.

II. IS THERE NO ANSWER TO THIS CRY WHICH HAS GONE UP FOR SO MANY AGES FROM GOD'S PEOPLE TO HIS THRONE? The tempest of his vengeance does not awaken. The lightning does not strike the tyrant, the slave-dealer, the seducer, the assassin. The earthquake does not yawn under guilty cities. Satan is not yet chained. But yet, to the ear of faith there comes from God's Word an answer; not, indeed, such as to end the trial of faith, by clearing away the whole mystery of God's dealings; but enough to sustain faith, nourish patience and courage, kindle hope and stimulate labour. *How long?* 1. Long enough to answer those Divine purposes for which sin was at first permitted to enter, and the wicked—wicked men or wicked spirits—ever to exist at all. We cannot avoid seeing that it was possible for God to have prevented sin from ever existing; if in no other way (of which we cannot judge), at all events by refraining from creating beings, angels or men, capable of sin. The lower creatures are incapable of sin, and, therefore, incapable also of obedience to moral law and of likeness to God. God has seen fit to create beings capable of loving him, knowing him, obeying him; therefore capable of sinning against him. Knowing infinitely better than we the mischief and misery of sin, he has seen it worth while to allow room for sin to display its character and consequences. And we may well believe the lessons thus taught will never be forgotten or need repeating in eternity. 2. Long enough to reveal the infinite preciousness of the Divine atonement for sin—the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth from all sin; and the glorious power of Divine love, truth, and grace; the power, that is, of God's Spirit to restore even souls dead in sin to God's likeness. 3. Long enough to perfect that trial of faith and discipline of character, by means of which God is training, in a world of temptation, sorrow, sin, and death, those whom he redeems "from this present evil world," for a life of perfect holiness and endless joy. 4. Long enough to show beyond all question God's patience and long-suffering, "not willing that any should perish;" and to justify his righteousness when at last he will "render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. ii. 2—11; John v. 22; 2 Pet. iii. 9, 10).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 3.—"*How long shall the wicked triumph?*" I. SUPPOSE THEY NEVER DID. 1. *Then the devil would be right when he asked, "Doth Job serve God for nought?"* He meant to say that men serve God only from selfish, interested motives. 2. *Men would want to sin, though from fear they held back.* The heart would remain

unchanged, character would be the same. 3. *The essential discipline and test of the righteous would be destroyed.* We are tested when, though we see the wicked triumph, we still cleave to God. 4. *The wicked would wax worse and worse.* "The strength of sin is the Law." 5. *It would be a confession that men cannot be governed by higher motives than earthly gain.*

II. SUPPOSE THEY ALWAYS DID. 1. *Earth would become hell,* because of the wickedness of them that dwell therein. 2. *The faith and fear of God would disappear.*

III. SUPPOSE THEY SOMETIMES DO. This is the case. And sometimes they appear generally to triumph. Nevertheless, it is not always, nor for long. But the present order avails: 1. *To glorify God by the fidelity of his people.* 2. *To lift them to a higher life.* 3. *To convince the world of the reality of the faith the believer holds.*—S. O.

Vers. 8—10.—*An argument all should understand.* I. ITS NATURE. It is an argument from what we see in ourselves to what exists in God. If God has given to us certain powers, such powers must exist in him.

II. ITS FORCE. It is inconceivable that it should be otherwise. A man must have brutalized his soul, and become a fool, not to see this. God is not as man is—the mere employer of force which he does not and cannot create, but he is behind all force, its Creator and Source.

III. ITS SAFEGUARD. 1. *For this argument needs guarding.* If it be said that the presence of faculties in ourselves proves the existence of them in God, which is the argument in these verses, then might it not be said God is the author of the sin that is in us as well as the good, of that which is wrong as well as of that which is right? The heathen thought so, and hence they regarded their gods as altogether like themselves—embodiments of not merely good qualities, but also of lust and hate and all abomination. The idea of a holy God they never knew. And sinful men now often say, "God made us so," and thus cast on him the responsibility for their sin. "He that planted in me the love of sin, doth he not love it too?" So they falsely reason. 2. *But how must such wrong extension of the argument of these verses be met?* By noting that man has not merely the powers of thought, feeling, will, but also of conscience. This last is the regal, the judicial faculty, and decides what is of God, and what is only the product of our corrupt nature. Apart from conscience, there could be no right or wrong, but it infallibly tells, by its "excusing and accusing," how far we may go in arguing from what we see in ourselves to what exists in God. Else a man might say, "He that made me to lust, shall he not lust?" The ancient Greeks and the whole heathen world did say this.

IV. ITS MINGLED COMFORT AND WARNING. 1. *As to the comfort this argument supplies.* (1) It shows that all our gifts are of God. "It is he that planted the ear," etc. (cf. Jas. i. 16—18). As we think of the manifold advantages that come to us through these gifts of God, and what joy, can we fail to see the beneficence of our God? (2) That they are reflections of God, mirrors, minute indeed, but yet true, of what he is. Therefore my thought tells of thought in him; my love, of his, my conscience, of moral judgment in him. It is our Lord's argument (Matt. vii. 9—11; Luke xv.). But: 2. *There is warning likewise.* Against pride: "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" Against envy. We are as God willed us to be, and, if we be but obedient, equally well-pleasing in his sight. Against trifling with sin. If we condemn it, and will to punish it if unrepented of, that condemnation and that will reveal what is yet more in God. They tell of judgment to come.—S. C.

Vers. 12, 13.—*A strange Beatitude.* These verses contain more than this, but all they contain is linked on to this. Therefore consider—

I. THE STRANGE BEATITUDE. "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest." Wherein is the blessedness? We reply: 1. *Because of what such chastening often reveals.* If he were not really a child of God, he would not endure it; he would start aside and rebel. An infidel told a minister of Christ, who has been stricken with total blindness, that if God served him so, he would curse him to his face. Then this minister—well known to the writer—bore his testimony to the wonderful grace of God, how his soul had been kept in peace, and that he could and did rejoice in God, notwithstanding all his trouble. The text is like the last of the Beatitudes, "Blessed are ye when men shall persecute

you," etc. (Matt. v.). The endurance, and yet more the meek acquiescence in it, are a real revelation from God, that such a man is one of the Lord's very own. To know that is blessedness indeed. 2. *Because of what it is followed by.* The Lord teaches him out of his Law. We are all of us laggard scholars; some of us are too proud to learn. But God's chastenings have a wonderfully humbling and softening effect, and bring the soul into the blessed and indispensable condition for receiving the teachings of God. 3. *Because of what it ministers.* "Rest from the days of adversity." They cannot trouble him. A while ago some works were being carried on at Dover pier; the men had to go down deep in diving-bells to reach their work. One evening one of the men was drawn up, the day's work being done, and went to his home. It suddenly occurred to him that he had left one of his tools on the stone which he had been working at. That night a furious storm raged, and the sea was lashed into a wild tumult. When at length on the following day the man went back to his work, he made up his mind that he should never again see the tool he had left the previous day. But lo! when he got down to the depths where he had been at work, there was his tool, just where he had left it the night before. The fury of the storm had not penetrated so far down; it only had power on the surface; in the depths beneath all had been quiet and still. So is it with the soul of him to whom God gives rest from the days of adversity. His soul is in the depths of God's love, where no power of adversity can reach. And this has been proved true a thousand times, and will be for us all if we be really the Lord's. And by-and-by the adversity itself shall depart; it continues only "until the pit be digged for the wicked." Then there shall be rest without as well as within. Now he can have only the inward rest, and blessed indeed is that; but then externally as well as internally he shall be at rest.

II. A STERN NECESSITY. The destruction of the wicked; for that is what the words just quoted mean. For until then God's people cannot be perfected, but then they shall. Many object to this stern doctrine. They say God is too merciful ever to let such doom fall upon any soul. But what about his own people? If they cannot enter into God's rest until what is here said is fulfilled, does not this make it altogether likely that it will be fulfilled; yea, that it must be? If mercy to the wicked be cruelty to the righteous, as it is, what is it likely that God will do? There can be but one answer.

III. A TERRIBLE ONLOOK. "The pit digged," etc. 1. *These words assert the fact* that such retribution will surely come. Scripture evermore affirms it. Conscience confirms the Scripture, and observed facts in the constant acting of God's providence—the awful retributions that we see do actually come on the wicked—attest the same awful truth. 2. *They tell the nature of this retribution.* "The pit." It brings up before the mind the dark horror which awaits sin. 3. *Its gradual approach.* The pit is not yet dug, but is being made ready. It becomes wider and deeper every day. 4. *Those who are preparing it.* God and the sinner himself. In an awful sense he is a "co-worker with God." 5. *Its loud appeal.* "Stop the digging!" If man stops, God will; he will not go on if you will not. Turn to him, and he will deliver you out of the horrible pit (Ps. xl. 1).—S. C.

Ver. 19.—*The throng of our thoughts.* It is not difficult to see how the experiences which are more or less plainly referred to in this psalm should produce a "multitude of thoughts." The text reminds us that—

I. THOUGHTS COME IN THROGS. To one standing on the golden gallery that surmounts the dome of St. Paul's in London, and looking down on the streets below, the sight of the thronging multitudes of people, hastening hither and thither, each intent on his or her own business, the traffic never ceasing, is very striking. How the people come and go, some one way, some another, crossing and recrossing each other, never still for a moment,—it is all a picture of the minds of most men. Who could count or remember the multitude of thoughts that pass and repass, that come and go across the pathways of the mind? It is an incessant traffic, a concourse that is never still. And they are of all kinds, good, bad, and indifferent, grave and gay, coming one scarce knows whence, and going one as little knows whither.

II. MANY OF THEM OFTEN LEAVE THE SOUL SAD. There are those of an opposite character, and by God's mercy they are the most numerous and ordinary. And there

are people who seem never to think seriously at all—the mere butterflies of life. But the Christian cannot be one of them. We know what our Lord said of the “wayside” hearers. The good seed never takes root there. But the soul awakened to things that are eternal must often think seriously, and, not seldom, sadly likewise. It was so with the writer of this psalm. To him also the enigmas of this unintelligible world came clamouring for solution, as they do still. “Lord, how long shall the wicked triumph?” (ver. 3). That was to him one of the many inexplicable and heart-saddening facts of life. And how many minds are to-day agitated, perplexed, well-nigh shipwrecked, and their lives darkened by the mysteries they must meet, but cannot comprehend? But—

III. GOD HAS PROVIDED RELIEF FOR SUCH SOULS. Indeed, much more than simply relief. He has provided “delight” for them. Unquestionably—blessed be his holy Name for it!—God has done this. The testimony of saints in all ages has shown that God giveth “songs in the night.” See the life and letters of men like Paul; above all, listen to “the Man of sorrows” himself telling of his “joy,” and praying that it may “be fulfilled” in his disciples. And there are children of God now plunged in poverty or pain, or both, and yet who *know* and confess that God is their “exceeding Joy.”

IV. THIS IS ACCOMPLISHED BY MEANS OF HIS “COMFORTS.” “Thy comforts delight,” etc. 1. *They are of God.* Those that this world supplies could never accomplish this. 2. *They come through various channels.* Sometimes through Nature—her calm and beauty and grandeur uplift the soul. Or through revelation. Think of all the “exceeding great and precious promises.” Or through providence. Or by his Spirit in the soul. This best of all.

V. THE CONDITION IS—TRUST IN GOD.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*A God of vengeance.* Aglen, in Ellicott’s ‘Commentary,’ proposes to render, “God of retributions, Jehovah, God of retributions, shine forth.” The idea in the term “vengeances” would be better expressed by the term “avengements.” God is thought of as the great Goël-Avenger of his oppressed and afflicted people, and therefore the One to whom appeal should be made in any particular time of distress. The word “vengeance” includes the idea of heated personal feeling. The word “avengement” sets prominently family relations and duties. The Apostle St. Paul expresses this thought of God, when he commands that “no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter, because that the Lord is the Avenger of all such” (1 Thess. iv. 6). The “avenger of blood” is a familiar figure in the Mosaic constitution. But Moses only adopted and modified an original tribal institution. The main functions of the Hebrew Goël, Avenger, or Redeemer, were three. 1. If any Hebrew had fallen into penury, and been compelled to part with his ancestral estate, the family avenger was bound to redeem it and restore it. 2. If any Hebrew had been taken captive, or had sold himself as a slave, the goël had to buy him back, and set him free. 3. If any Hebrew had suffered wrong, or had been killed, the goël had to exact compensation for the wrong, or to avenge the murder. It is evident that the psalmist lived in a time when wickedness triumphed in high places. We may think of the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, when the condition of Jehovah’s prophets and people seemed to be hopeless; they could only cry mightily to God, seeking his preservations and his deliverances. The psalmist had no confidence in the existing rulers, who should have been the avengers of all the poor, the wronged, and the distressed. He had confidence in God, of whom it can be said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.”

I. MAN CANNOT AVENGE HIMSELF. 1. Because those who wrong him are often quite beyond his reach or control. 2. Because he has not at command the requisite forces. 3. Because he is not self-master enough to temper justice with mercy. 4. Because he cannot be strictly judicial, but is sure to spoil his avengings by introducing personal feeling. 5. Because he is in grave peril of injuring *himself* in his avengings.

II. MAN MAY RESTFULLY LET GOD AVENGE HIM. 1. Because his power is sufficient. 2. His self-restraints are perfect. 3. His time is best. 4. His avengings prove to be blessings both for the wronged and for the wrong-doer.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The Judge of all the earth.* The older Scriptures constantly set God forth as the actual, living Judge, concerned now in his Divine magistracy, deciding causes,

vindicating the oppressed, punishing the wrong-doer. The idea of some one single judgment-day, in the far future, when all earth-complications are to be put straight, and all earth-evils are to be rectified, does not appear to have been in the minds of Old Testament saints. It may be that the New Testament figure of the "judgment-seat of Christ" has unduly limited the Christian idea of the present and ever-continuous judging of God. It may be that this *present judging* needs to be set more clearly before the Christian mind. Our notion of the Judge is of one who, at a fixed time, holds a grand assize; and this notion helps to shape our figure of a single final judgment. But the Israelite thought of judging, magistracy, as the most important continuous function of his king, which every faithful king would exercise daily, sitting in the gate to hear and decide all causes that might be presented, and so coming into constant judicial relation to the life of the people. Shifting God's judgment on to a future great assize should not be allowed to loosen our Christian sense of God's present rule as involving a present magistracy, and present punishments and rewards. Read life aright, and the signs of a present Divine magistracy will abundantly appear.

I. GOD THE JUDGE IS DISTINGUISHING IN DIFFICULT CASES. Illustrate from the *nisi prius* courts. Constantly in life we find ourselves bewildered. We do not know what to think, or what to do, or where to go. We are in danger of being carried away by the merely attractive. If we will but wait, God will surely decide for us, and make the *right for us* quite unquestionable.

II. GOD THE JUDGE IS RECOGNIZING AND REWARDING THE RIGHTEOUS. We never have any doubt of this until we become impatient, and want the recognition at once. Because the Judge is also the Sanctifier, he may delay the reward which he decides to be due. But he is keen to notice everything that is good.

III. GOD THE JUDGE IS THE PUNISHER OF ALL THE WICKED. We need never be deceived by the apparent prosperity of the unjust. It is part of their judgment. It is making them top-heavy in preparation for some irremediable fall.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The tether of the ungodly.* "How long shall the wicked triumph?" Men ask this question only when they cannot see the rope, or the chain, which keeps the movements of the ungodly within strict limitations. In Jersey and Guernsey the cattle are not left free in the fields, but are tethered so that they can only feed within a defined circle; and the visitor is interested in the different lengths of tether allowed to each animal. Bunyan represents his pilgrim as alarmed at the lions at the entrance to the palace Beautiful, and reassured when told that they were chained, and the chains did not permit of their reaching the middle of the pathway: he would be quite safe if he kept to the middle. The waves lift up themselves, and sometimes seem as if they would overwhelm; but God holds the waters in the hollow of his hand, puts his limitations even on their storm-time swellings. The martyr-souls are represented in Rev. vi. 10 as crying from under the altar of God, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

I. THE TETHER OF THE UNGODLY IS FIXED FOR THE HONOUR OF GOD. He will not permit his Name to be dishonoured or his work to be hindered. Nebuchadnezzar finds he has reached the limit of his tether when he begins to boast himself against God. Herod reaches his limit when, unproved, he allows the people to shout concerning him, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." Because God is and must be supreme, every man is under limitations. Against that men fret, but they can only hopelessly fret.

II. THE TETHER OF THE UNGODLY IS FIXED FOR THE SAFETY OF GOD'S PEOPLE. "What can harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?" The figure is presented of Satan, the deceiver and persecutor of the saints, as bound for a thousand years. He is always bound. See the figure of Satan, in the Book of Job, obliged to get Divine permission ere he can touch Job, or a thing that Job has. Even the malice of persecuting ages, and the shameless wickedness of the Inquisition, were in Divine limitations.

III. THE TETHER OF THE UNGODLY IS FIXED IN THE INTERESTS OF THE UNGODLY THEMSELVES. Illustrate from the antediluvians. Their life-tether was about a thousand years, so they became gigantic in wickedness. What would proud, vicious

men become now, if they could get free from Divine restraints? Mercy puts limits on the wicked.—R. T.

Vers. 9, 10.—*From man to God.* The argument here is, that whatever powers are found in man are surely found in him who made man. The workman must have in him everything that gains expression in his work. A machine is an embodiment of thought, and the thought is altogether higher than the machine. Here the point is—men hear the cry of the oppressed; men see the sufferings of the godly; then they may be quite sure that God both sees and hears; and they must seek some better explanation of his delayed help than can be found by assuming his ignorance or indifference. “Whatever is in man must be in the Power that made man—whether by evolution out of lower natures or otherwise it matters not—and whatever exists in that Power must show itself in active energy in the direction of man’s history” (Barry).

I. MAN IS ALWAYS READY TO HELP HIS SUFFERING NEIGHBOUR. Man as man is. Some men, self-centred and self-seeking, are not. All true men are sympathetic toward sufferers, easily roused to champion the oppressed, and vigorous against the violent wrong-doer. History is full of illustrations of the sacrifices men will make in behalf of the innocent and oppressed. No doubt the advancing civilization, which crowds cities, tends to put the disabled and oppressed out of sight and hearing; but let their condition come into view, and then men are ready with generous hand and gift, prepared to help. The psalmist is dealing with those who pleaded that, in the humiliations and distresses of his time, there were no more than signs of *human* sympathy and help; and who groaned that these were proving quite ineffective.

II. GOD IS ALWAYS READY TO HELP HIS SUFFERING PEOPLE. First, this is absolutely certain—he *can* see and hear. And this is quite as certain—he *does* see and hear. Then why does he not immediately intervene? To get the reason we must always take a large and comprehensive view of God’s rule. And especially we must remember that he is the God of the *wrong-doer* as well as of the *saint*; of the *oppressor* as well as of the *oppressed*. And it may be that the need of the hour is *chastening* for the good, and this may require that the evil be maintained as the chastening agency.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*The vanity of men’s idea of the Divine indifference.* “The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.” Clearly the reference is not a general one, to the common and usual thoughts of men, but a special one to the particular thoughts about the delay of God’s vindication of the oppressed, which was at the time distressing the psalmist (see ver. 7). The idea that God does not regard the suffering of his people, and will not intervene in their behalf, is characterized as “vanity,” a foolish, baseless, and altogether unsound notion. This idea concerning God is sometimes the doubt of the pious soul, as in Isa. xl. 27; here it is the reproach of the ungodly. The doubt of the pious soul is properly met by Divine comfortings and assurances; the reproach of the ungodly is properly met by scornful and withering reproof. “So far from ‘not seeing,’ ‘not regarding,’ as these brutish persons fondly imagine, Jehovah reads their inmost thoughts and devices, as he reads the hearts of all men, even though for a time they are unpunished” (see 1 Cor. iii. 20).

I. SUCH THOUGHTS ARE VANITY BECAUSE THEY ARE UNTRUE. They do not answer to the facts. If God be God, he must know what is going on; he must be controlling everything; he must be working toward the blessing of the good. Such thoughts are untrue if tested (1) by right knowledge of God; (2) by the assurances and promises of God; (3) by the history of his dealings with men; (4) by the personal experiences of believers.

II. SUCH THOUGHTS ARE VANITY BECAUSE THEY ARE UNWORTHY. The men who encourage them are not in a right state of mind. Men ought to trust God, not doubt him. Men ought to be quick to observe everything that can nourish confidence. If God’s ways ever seem perplexing, our assumption should always be in favour of their wisdom and loving-kindness. It is unworthy of men to doubt God in one thing, seeing he gives them such abundant reason for trusting him in a thousand things. He is “too good to be unkind.”

III. SUCH THOUGHTS ARE VANITY BECAUSE THEY ARE UNSTABLE. They are but

the feelings of the hour; they are based on no careful considerations. Men take them up when they are vexed at not getting what they wish, or not having things according to their minds. The moods of the hour may well be called "vanity."—R. T.

Ver. 12.—*The triumph of the wicked may be the chastening of the righteous.* It alters everything when we can see our trouble to be Divine chastening. Look on it as human oppression, the masterfulness of unprincipled magistrates, the persecution of an idolatrous Jezebel, the scheme of those who cherish enmity against the righteous, and our trouble is hard to bear; everything noble in us rises up to resist. But have a supreme faith in God; feel sure of his comprehensive ruling; apprehend that he works for the highest moral ends, and uses even the self-will and the wrong-doing of men as agents in the accomplishing of his loving purposes;—and then the soul goes down into the quietness of a holy submission, and out of its enduring sings its songs of hope, even as apostles sang their joy in God when in the dungeon at Philippi. We can never read life aright until we can fully receive the idea of the Divine *chastening*. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Illustration may be found in God's dealings with his ancient people. In Egypt, in the days of the judges, and in the age of the later kings, we find what, at first sight, seem to be pure calamities. But we are helped to read them aright, and then we see that they are chastenings, designed to secure the moulding and the correcting of God's people. See also the story of the patriarch Job. There, too, we have calamities, but we are taught to see in them *chastenings*, and chastenings of the highest order, not meant to secure mere correction, but designed to effect the noblest spiritual culture.

I. WE MAY MISTAKE IF WE READ THE TRIUMPH OF THE WICKED FROM BELOW. That is, as those actually crushed down under it. Suffering prevents both right feeling and right thinking.

II. WE MAY MISTAKE IF WE READ THE TRIUMPH OF THE WICKED FROM THE LEVEL. That is, as those who are not suffering themselves, but are watching the depressions and woes of God's people. So far as earthly issues are concerned, we can see no good in the trouble. Indeed, evil seems better off than good.

III. WE CAN ONLY READ THE TRIUMPH OF THE WICKED FROM ABOVE. From God's point of view. Then we can see how things fit, and what things work towards. The wicked are only his staff with which he chastises his children for their good.—R. T.

Ver. 19.—*The comfortable thoughts God gives.* They are the thoughts God starts in our minds concerning himself. The "multitude of thoughts" here suggest "anxious thoughts," "distractions;" "divided or branching thoughts." Keep before the mind that this psalm was written in some time of personal or national anxiety, which was causing very grave perplexity. Multitude of thoughts, complexity, conflict of thoughts.

I. OUR MULTITUDE OF THOUGHTS. A suitable and suggestive term. A true description. Have you ever tried to watch the process of the mind in ordinary times or in special times? Explain how the law of association brings up not one string of orderly thoughts, but various series, which branch and cross and conflict one with the other. Past, present, future, bring in their various thoughts. The importance of good ordering of thoughts, to the pious man, may be seen from these considerations. 1. Sin lingers in them. 2. Character is exhibited to God as much by them as by our actions; for "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." 3. The power of religion is first felt in them. 4. They are the real springs of action, and they give character to our action.

II. God's COMFORTING THOUGHTS. He gives comforting assurances for us to think about. God makes himself a Key-thought to the thoughts that we should cherish. Illustrate how the godly soul may fill his mind with the "exceeding great and precious promises," and how these will be always ready to come up, to dispel distracting thoughts, and soothe troubled thoughts. God's comforts are thoughts that realize God as the holy Father, Christ as the elder Brother, the Spirit as the present Guide, and "all things working together for good."

III. THE DUTY OF CHERISHING God's COMFORTING THOUGHTS. They will ease our distress; they will recall us to trust; they will put a "song into our mouth." We may cherish them by full acquaintance with God's Word, which is the great storehouse of

Divine thought-suggestions, and by daily communion with God, which is sure to start fresh comfortings in our souls.—R. T.

Ver. 20.—*Man's rival law.* "Frameth mischief by a law." "Making legislation a means of wrong." The idea is that, in the psalmist's time, the courts of justice were corrupt; and man's law, instead of being in harmony with God's Law, and its expression, had become a rival. It had come to do what God's Law never does. It worked towards injustice and unrighteousness. God's Law is "holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." The thing that seemed so unbearable to the psalmist was, that the tyrants of his day claimed to be acting according to law, seeking to hide their unrighteousness by a holy name.

I. SUBMISSION TO LAWFUL AUTHORITY IS A PRIMARY RELIGIOUS DUTY. Inculcated by Old Testament and New. Felt to be the right thing. Necessary to the individual and national well-being.

II. RESISTANCE TO UNLAWFUL AUTHORITY IS A PRIMARY RELIGIOUS DUTY. Unlawful authority is that which conflicts with the authority of God. All law that has claims on men is the translation, for particular relations, of the Law of God. Unless we can be sure that a thing can stand the Divine Law-test, we are not bound to render obedience.

III. The case of the text is, however, more subtle than this. It brings before us lawful authority abused, and Divine Law dishonoured in its applications. And it may be difficult for men to see what is their duty in such a case. The psalmist seems to see his way clearly. He suggests that we should submit to the injustice, and cry mightily to God, that he would turn the hearts of the rulers. And he is right. To right law wrongly administered we should present submission, for history abundantly proves that through suffering the wrong-doing of rulers is best revealed. But submission would be wrong if men had not the profound conviction that God *rules the rulers*, and is the Avenger of all the persecuted and oppressed.—R. T.

Vers. 1—23.—*Divine retribution certain.* The psalm may be distributed under the following heads.

I. A PRAYER FOR THE PUNISHMENT OF WICKED OPPRESSORS. (Vers. 1, 2.) Probably in anticipation of the Assyrian invasion.

II. THE GROUND OF THE PRAYER—THE INSOLENT AND ATHEISTIC SPIRIT OF THEIR CRUEL WORK. (Vers. 3—7.) They murder the fatherless, and say, "Jehovah seeth not."

III. THE BLINDNESS AND CONTEMPT OF GOD THEY SHOW. (Vers. 8—11.) All sin implies this.

IV. THE BLESSED REST AND CONFIDENCE OF THOSE WHO ARE CHASTENED AND TAUGHT OF GOD. (Vers. 12—15.) "Judgment cannot always be perverted—cannot always fail."

V. THE DEEP CONVICTION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS DERIVED FROM PAST EXPERIENCE. (Vers. 16—19.)

VI. AN ANTICIPATION OF RETRIBUTION ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED UPON THE WICKED. (Vers. 20—23.)—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM XCV.

THIS is a liturgical psalm, probably composed for the temple service, and still used in the synagogue as one of the Friday evening psalms which introduce the sabbath. The Western Church has adopted it into its daily "Order for Prayer"—a position which it continues to occupy in our own

Matins. It consists of two parts (vers. 1—7 and vers. 7—11), so strongly contrasted, that separatist critics suggest an accidental combination of two quite unconnected fragments (Professor Cheyne). But a deeper and more penetrating exegesis sees in the composition two trains of thought, purposely set over against each other—one joyous, the other plaintive; one setting

forth the "goodness" of God, the other his "severity" (Rom. xi. 22); one inviting to joy and thankfulness, the other to self-examination and repentance; one calling to mind God's greatness and loving-kindness, the other bringing into prominence man's weakness and danger.

In the Septuagint the psalm is ascribed to David, and this view seems to have been taken by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. iv. 7). But modern critics are generally of opinion that the style is not that of the Davidical psalms.

Vers. 1—7a.—The song of praise. This seems to terminate with the words, "We are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand."

Ver. 1.—O come, let us sing unto the Lord. From this opening phrase, which finds an echo in vers. 2 and 6, this psalm has been called "The Invitatory Psalm." As it invited the Jews, so it now invites Christian congregations, to join in the worship of the sanctuary. Let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation (comp. Ps. xxxiii. 3; xcvi. 4). Loudness of voice was regarded as indicating earnestness of heart (see 2 Chron. xx. 19; Ezra iii. 13; Neh. xii. 42, etc.). The expression, "Rock of our salvation" is taken from Deut. xxxii. 15 (comp. 2 Sam. xxii. 47; Ps. lxxxix. 26). It is well paraphrased in our Prayer-book Version, "the strength of our salvation."

Ver. 2.—Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving. Our first duty, when we come before God's presence, is to thank him (see the Exhortation in the Order for Daily Prayer). And make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. A "psalm" is properly a "song of praise"—the natural concomitant of thanksgiving.

Ver. 3.—For the Lord is a great God. Thanks and praise are due to God, in the first place, because of his greatness (see Ps. cl. 2). "Who is so great a god as our God?" (Ps. lxxvii. 13); "His greatness is unsearchable" (Ps. cxlv. 3). And a great King above all gods; i.e. "a great King above all other so-called gods"—above the great of the earth (Ps. lxxxii. 1, 6), above angels (Deut. x. 17), above the imaginary gods of the heathen (Exod. xii. 12, etc.).

Ver. 4.—In his hand are the deep places of the earth; the strength of the hills is his also; rather, the summits of the mountains are his also. The meaning is that all the earth is his, from the highest heights to the lowest depths.

Ver. 5.—The sea is his, and he made it (see Gen. i. 9; Ps. civ. 24, 25). And his

hands formed the dry land (see Gen. i. 9, 10).

Ver. 6.—O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel. The outward and visible worship of the body is required of man, no less than the inward and spiritual worship of the soul. Before the Lord our Maker; i.e. "who has made us what we are—created us, redeemed us, taken us to be his people" (comp. Deut. xxxii. 6; Ps. c. 3; cii. 18; cxlix. 2; Isa. xxix. 23; xliii. 21; xliv. 2, etc.).

Ver. 7a.—For he is our God. A second, and a more urgent, reason for worshipping God. Not only is he a "great God" (ver. 3), but he is also "our God"—our own God—brought into the closest personal relationship with us. And we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand (comp. Ps. lxxiv. 1; lxxxix. 13; lxxx. 1, etc.). We are led by him, tended by him, fed by him, folded by him. We owe everything to his shepherding.

Vers. 7b—11.—The warning against waywardness. This is delivered in four, or rather four and a half, verses, and commences with the words, "To-day if ye will hear his voice."

Ver. 7b.—To-day. This word, standing prominently forward as it does, is a startling call, intimating that the time is come for a momentous decision. If ye will hear his voice. God is crying to his people—will they hear, or will they forbear? If the former, all will go well; if the latter, than assuredly they shall not enter into his rest. The "voice" intended proceeds to give the warning of vers. 8—11.

Ver. 8.—Harden not your heart, as in the provocation; rather, as at Meribah (see Exod. xvii. 2—7). And as in the day of temptation in the wilderness; rather, and as in the day of Massah. The children of Israel "tempted" God, and "chided" with Moses at Massah (or Meribah) in the wilderness, where water was first given them out of the rock. Their descendants are warned not to follow the example of their forefathers.

Ver. 9.—When your fathers tempted me (see Exod. xvii. 2, 7). Proved me; or, "tested me"—put my power and goodness to the proof. And (rather, even) saw my work; i.e. "saw the water gush forth from the rock, when at my command Moses struck it" (Exod. xvii. 6).

Ver. 10.—Forty years long was I grieved with this generation; rather, with that generation—the generation that tempted God in the wilderness (see the Revised Version). And said, It is a people that do err in their heart; literally, a people of wanderers in heart.

are these; i.e. "not only are they a people whose feet wander (Ps. cvii. 4), but their hearts also have wandered and gone astray from my paths." And they have not known my ways. "My ways—the ways of my commandments—are unknown to them, untrodden by them."

Ver. 11.—*Unto whom I swear in my wrath; rather, so that that I swear in my wrath, or "wherefore I swear in my wrath"* (for the oath itself, see Numb. xiv. 21—23; and comp. Deut. i. 34, 35). *That they should not enter into my rest. The "rest"*

originally intended was that of Canaan, when "the Lord gave rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about" (Josh. xxiii. 1). But Canaan was a type of the heavenly rest; and the warning given to the Israel of his day by the present psalmist is to be regarded as a warning that, if they followed in the steps of their forefathers, they might miss of that final and crowning "rest," which, after the wilderness of this world is traversed, still "remaineth for the people of God" (see Heb. iii. 7—19; iv. 1—9).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 6.—*Public worship.* "O come, let us worship." This sublime psalm belongs to the Christian Church no less than to ancient Israel; in a sense, more. For the series of psalms to which it belongs have a prophetic character—they look forward to the kingdom and gospel of Christ. Times without number chanted by white-robed priests and Levites in the temple court, to the clang of trumpets, harps, and cymbals, they nevertheless outstretch the narrow bounds of the old covenant. In Ps. c. (the crown of this series) the widest invitation is given to all nations to join in worshipping Jehovah as their God.

I. AN INVITATION TO WORSHIP. What is *worship*? Our English word means honour and reverence paid to worth—*worth-ship*. It stands here for a Hebrew word, literally meaning "to fall" or "prostrate one's self;" i.e. (according to Eastern usage) by kneeling, and touching the ground with the forehead. So Abraham before the angels; Joshua (Josh. v. 14); the heavenly worshippers in St. John's vision (Rev. iv. 10). So when our Lord was on earth (Luke v. 12); and elsewhere. So it follows: "bow down . . . kneel before the Lord." Bodily movements are the natural expression of inward emotions. So then spiritual worship is the corresponding feeling; prostration of soul—the knees of the heart. It is the acknowledgment of our dependence; we must add, our sinful unworthiness; and of the infinite worth, majesty, glory, holiness, of our Maker. It is reverence, homage, admiration, carried to the highest pitch—adoration. Other feelings, affections, motives, may enter into worship—wonder, gratitude, joy, love, obedience, trust. But worship takes all these, and lays them on the altar, as a whole burnt offering, consumed in the flame of holy awe. All the sentiments which go to make up worship may be claimed by fellow-creatures; but only in measure and limit. Not only self-respect, but jealous regard for God's supreme claim, place such limits. Therefore Cornelius was rebuked by St. Peter, and St. John by the angel (Acts x. 26; Rev. xxii. 8, 9). But when we behold all good and glorious attributes united in the One Infinite, Self-existent, Eternal Being, the Source of all other being, life, joy, goodness, perfection, reason itself tells us that our worship should be unlimited, absolute. Only blindness, coldness, hardness of heart, and unbelief can prevent the full response of our souls to this invitation. "O come," etc.

II. AN INVITATION TO PUBLIC UNITED WORSHIP. "Let us worship." Worship is worthless if not spiritual (John iv. 22—24). Outward forms without spiritual reality may even be hurtful, dangerous, deadly. And perhaps silent worship may be the highest worship: "groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. viii. 26). But public, united, vocal worship has great advantages. It prevents our worship from sinking into mere contemplation and meditation. These are most important aids. But worship is not truly worship unless it is actual converse with God—calling on him, drawing near to him, bowing our souls in his glorious presence. Vocal united prayer or praise greatly helps this—helps us to feel the reality of his presence, and that not only are we thinking of him and addressing him, but that he hears and answers.

III. THIS INVITATION HAS A MEANING AND POWER FOR CHRISTIANS, immeasurably transcending all that it could have for saints of old under the old covenant. Worship has regard not only to what God is *in himself*, but what he is *to us*. The pious

Israelite worshipped him as "our Maker," the Judge of all the earth, the God of Israel—of Abraham and his children. Christian worship takes in all these considerations. But think what it adds! After this manner pray we, "Our Father, who art in heaven!" We worship the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We have fellowship with the Father and the Son. We have received, not the spirit of fear, but the spirit of sonship, teaching us to say, "Abba, Father!" We have access with boldness through the blood of Jesus. The darkness is past, and the true light shineth (Eph. i. 2, 3; iii. 14; 2 Cor. iv. 6; 1 John i. 3; Rom. viii. 15; Eph. iii. 12; Heb. x. 19; 1 John ii. 8). Wonderful is the longing desire, holy boldness, nearness to God, of many of the ancient saints (Ps. xlii. 1, 2, and many other passages)! What ought *our* worship to be, standing on so far higher a level, where in privilege and knowledge "the least in the kingdom of heaven" is greater than the greatest of them!

CONCLUSION. 1. The possession of spiritual life is an indispensable condition to the offering of spiritual worship (John iv. 24). 2. Public worship is not only a means of blessing, a privilege, an enjoyment; it is a high and solemn duty. Christians should take earnest pains to fit themselves for taking part in it. 3. Those who lead the praises of the Church (choristers) have a sacred ministry, calling for consecration of heart as well as ear and voice or (organist's) fingers.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—11.—*The invitatory psalm.* It has been thus called in Christian Liturgies throughout Christendom, and chiefly because of its fervent invitation to praise. But it is also an equally earnest invitation to hearken and to believe. Let us take that which stands at the beginning, and consider—

I. THE INVITATION TO PRAISE. In this is shown: 1. *To whom the praise is to be rendered.* It is to Jehovah, the Rock of our salvation. 2. *Think of the many ministries which the word "rock" reminds us of.* Shade: for God was to his people as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land;" and he is so still. Defence: "Thou art my Rock and my Fortress." Strength: "Thou hast set my feet upon a rock." Supply: "He smote the rock," etc. (Pss. lxxviii. 20; lxxxi. 16). Dwelling-place: we read both in Isaiah and Jeremiah of "the inhabitants of the rock." Such were the ideas that gathered round this name of the Lord which the psalm summons men to praise. 3. *The manner of the praise.* It was to be by joyful song and resonant shout, with thanksgiving and with psalms. So hearty, so jubilant, so universal, so emphatic, was to be the praise of the Lord. But in ver. 6 there is the call to yet more profound adoration and worship, since yet higher manifestations of God's grace are to be commemorated. Therefore note: 4. *The reasons for all this worship.* And (1) because of what God is—supreme over all the gods of the heathen; (2) because of his rule over the whole earth—its depths, its heights, the sea, and the land; (3) because—and here comes the summons to the higher praise spoken of—of what God is to his people—their Maker, their God, the Giver of their peace and rest (cf. Ps. xxiii., "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures"); so his people are "the people of his pasture." He is also their Guide, Defender, Ruler—"the sheep of his hand." Such are the grounds—and surely they are adequate—for this reverent and yet exultant worship. And they all remain still.

II. THE CALL TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE. (Ver. 8.) For as the former verses had told of the rich and lofty privileges of the people of God, so these tell of their great peril—the peril of unbelief. This had been their ruin in days gone by, in all that weary forty years. Nothing else could harm them; but this wrought all their woe (cf. Heb. iv. 6—9). And what was true of old and of Israel, is true to-day and of ourselves. The righteous live by faith; no unbeliever can enter into God's rest.

III. THE CALL TO FAITH. For this is the condition of our obtaining the prize of our high calling. The rest of God is God's reward to his faithful people—a rest not alone in heaven hereafter, but here and now, whilst in this world, which Christ promises to give, and does give. Saints of old knew it; saints to-day enter into it. Christ dwelt in it, and so may we—if we believe.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Everybody called to praise God.* The call to offer God joyful thanksgiving is made to everybody, without qualification or limitation. It may be that certain forms of Divine worship are properly reserved for those who are in certain states of mind, or have voluntarily entered into certain relations; but the common duties of thanksgiving rest on all humanity—the claims of the God of providence and mercy should be felt, and should be responded to, by every man made in the Divine image. A strange notion has been allowed to gain some acceptance, that praise and thanksgiving from the unconverted can never be acceptable to God. The Scriptures give no countenance whatever to such a notion. Every man is invited to praise God as well as he can. What God resists is insincerity. It does not matter how imperfect the praise may be, if it is but sincere. The terms of the text imply the union of music and song in God's worship. The psalmist invites to a full burst of instrumental and vocal music, which will use up all kinds of human talents. Being a general call, it is a call to worship God with thanksgiving, which every man may be expected to feel; not with penitence, which only a few may feel.

I. ALL MEN MAY JOIN IN RECOGNIZING WHAT GOD IS TO ALL MEN. 1. *God the Creator.* Open out the idea that what God could say of his daily handiwork, "Behold, it is very good," man, observing the further workings, the operations, of what God has made, can repeat after him. Explain that, in a large way, man could always, by observation, see the goodness of God in creation; in minute detail man's science sees it still. 2. *God the Provider.* "Giving to all their meat in due season." Here show that the extraordinary, such as provision of *manna*, only illustrates the ordinary, God giving all their daily bread. 3. *God the Saviour.* In the lower sense of Preserver, Defender, Deliverer, from the common ills and perils of life. Apart, then, from all theological distinctions, all men should praise God.

II. SOME MEN MAY JOIN IN RECOGNIZING WHAT GOD IS TO SOME MEN. 1. Some men have special personal experiences of God's dealings. 2. Some men know God as their Saviour from sin.—R. T.

Vers. 4, 5.—*The beautiful and sublime calling to devotion.* There is a remarkable diversity in the psalms. Some express the struggling of earnest souls with the moral difficulties and mysteries of life (see Asaph's psalms). Some express the varieties of experience characterizing individual religious experience (see Ps. xlii.). The psalm now before us is one that expresses the influences of the varied aspects of nature upon the culture of religious life and feeling (see also Pss. xix., civ., cxlvii.). These poetical nature-psalms are as true to humanity, as necessary and as helpful, as those whose influence seems more direct. Man's Bible is poetical. It should be, because the poetical is one of man's faculties. It is the side of his nature on which he is set in harmony with the suggestive in material creation. By the poetical faculty we need not mean the power of making poetry. It is the power to receive and respond to the impressions made on us by God's handiwork. Nothing quickens and nourishes the faculty as religion does. Faith and hope are nearly allied to imagination; and they cannot fail to culture it. In this psalm it is evident that the beautiful and sublime in nature is impressing the psalmist, filling him with reverence, leading him to personal devotion, and inciting him to call upon others to share with him in worship.

I. THE GREAT THINGS OF NATURE IMPRESS ALL MEN. Many of us may seem to be under grave disadvantage, because we live in a crowded city, a man-made city, an unæsthetic city. But even cities cannot wholly shut out the changing moods of nature. Smoke cannot hide the firmament, the sunshine, or the stars. Business cannot make us unmindful of the seasons, the winds, and the rains. Men's buildings cannot alter the conformation of the ground that makes the landscapes. And the very disabilities of city people only make them more open to nature-influences when they can get away into the country. The beautiful and sublime will not always produce their due impression on us. Poets are not always equally sensitive. So much depends on our circumstances and on our moods. And therefore how important is the *spirit* in which we go into the country; the kind of society we seek there; and especially the quietness, the loneliness, we gain in which we may listen to nature's voice! Crowded trains, crowded piers, crowded seashores, crowded lodgings, too easily crowd men out of their spiritu-

ality. Can we recall times when nature has borne upon us with all its holiest force? At such times we were our real selves, our noblest selves; God touched us with his nature-hand, and we felt the touch. Illustrate by the impressions of moor, mountain, seashore, sunset, or tempest. Upon David the voice of nature fell often, and found an exquisite sensitiveness that was partly his disposition, and partly his piety. Believe, then, in kinness between yourself and the grand in creation; and learn to expect that nature-messages will come to you.

II. THE GREAT THINGS OF NATURE CALL TRUE-HEARTED MEN TO DEVOTION AND WORSHIP. To many men, warped and biassed by education and association, the great things of hills and seas and skies speak only of a higher *power*. If man is simple, true-hearted, they speak of the personal being of God. "The sea is *his*." The psalmist does not merely assert a *fact*; he asserts a man's *feeling* concerning the fact. We can have no reverence, no devotion, for the vague thing—a power. Reverence and devotion can only be felt in relation to a living being. So we must guard our faith in God, the living God. If open-hearted, nature makes us feel the kinness of man with creation in its daily dependence on God. "He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." Our minds, receiving impressions of glory from earth and sky, transfer them to God. If this his handiwork be so glorious and so gracious, what must he himself be? And if all things depend on him, how should we bow before him, and worship? "Oh how I fear thee, living God!" But a further impression comes. That which fills us with reverence and worship is God's voice to humanity, and it reaches the whole brotherhood of men. So we become dissatisfied with lonely worship, and want to say, with the psalmist, "Come, let us worship and bow down." Search, then, and see what is the influence of the holiday-times of life upon us. Have they made us more reverent, more devout, more earnest in our religious life and service? Do they give us a worthier sense of the value of common worship; and fill us with a holier determination "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is"?—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Associated and public prayer.* 1. In meeting together for public prayer, we follow the impulses of our own hearts, as well as obey the commands of our God. Prayer and worship are connected with our *whole* relation to God. God is in direct relation to the spirits that we *are*. We feel this, and therefore we must pray for spiritual blessings. God is in direct relation to the bodies that we *have*. They are his making, the care of his providence. They are subject to weariness and disease; they are the mediums of our virtue and of our vice. Out of the sense of the relation of our bodies to God, we are impelled to pray for temporal blessings. And God is also in close relation to our associations with one another—to our associations as families, as Churches, as fellow-worshippers, and as citizens. Our best welfare, in all these relations, depends on him who is Lord of all natural laws, Lord of storms, Lord of harvests, Lord of sunshine, Lord of the wrath of men, and Lord too of their wealth. Let any man feel this, as every true man, every thinking man, must feel it, and that man will be impelled by his own spirit to meet with others, and say to others, "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." God deals with us *collectively* here on earth. We may not think of separate Churches in heaven; of organized families in heaven. There are no towns, with distinct town interests, in heaven; no nations, with national qualities and national interests, in heaven. It is peculiar to our present human scenes that God deals with us *collectively*. This need not relieve our sense of individual responsibility. We do but show what a basis is laid for *collective* prayer, for public worship, in this fact, that God deals *collectively* with us. He can punish individuals in another world for their individual wrong-doings. He can only punish nations, as nations, for their national wrong-doings, in this sphere. Collectively, God regards us; then collectively we should pray, collectively we should worship, collectively we should live for God. The man that refuses to join in public worship is breaking away from his humanity; and denying the gracious conditions and responsibilities under which God has placed him. It is a more familiar truth, that sharing in public worship is the direct command of our God. 2. What are the reasons which keep men from the performance *at all*, or from the *due* performance of this duty of public worship? To put our reasons out into the full blaze of the light

is often sufficient to wither them up, and to make us altogether ashamed of them. Perhaps some persuade themselves to say, "Your worship is not really intended for us: it is for Christians, and we do not want to intrude." It is a mistake. God's worship is for men, all men, all God-made men, whether they fit in with our idea of what God would have them be or not. Some stay from public worship because they cannot arrange their domestic affairs so as conveniently to attend it. Be sure that you have really tried and failed, before you rest in this excuse. Most stay away from sheer indifference, from the carelessness which settles down over souls that willingly live to self and sin. Some men are indisposed to worship; and it is this indisposition with which we have to deal. 3. Under the terms, "associated, and public worship," three forms may be indicated. (1) Family prayer. When the devoted Richard Baxter lived in Kidderminster, it is said there was not a house in which the evensong of praise might not be heard, and the uplifted prayer of earnest hearts. The rush of modern business life has swept away much family prayer. (2) Social prayer. Times when two or three meet together, to plead the promise made to two of the disciples who agree to ask. The smaller meetings are specially fruitful in spiritual blessings. (3) Public prayer. The services of the sanctuaries. The spiritual antitypes of the old temple worship at Jerusalem, "whither the tribes go up." Public worship sustains, as nothing else can do, our dependence on God, the Creator, the Provider, the Redeemer. "He made us, and not we ourselves;" "He redeemeth our life from destruction." He "sent his Son into the world, that we might live through him." Then surely we ought "to worship and bow down."—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Our moral relations with God.* "People of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." Some writers try to amend this sentence, because the poetical figure seems complicated. It is much better to leave it in its poetical suggestiveness. It indicates familiarity with Eastern shepherding. The shepherd lives with his flock day and night; feels for them a personal affection; tends them in all their times of need with his own hands. So the Eastern sheep and shepherd figures, for God and his people, are stronger and more suggestive than we can realize if we keep ourselves to Western shepherd associations. In so carefully putting *people* into one sentence, and *sheep* into the other, the psalmist reminds us that God's sheep are moral beings, and the mere physical relations of shepherds to their sheep do but represent and illustrate the moral relations in which God stands to his people as moral beings. So we rise into a sphere in which we need the help of another figure—that of the father and his family. The "Lord our Maker" here brings God before us as the Universal Creator; and as the Founder of the Israelite nation.

I. OUR MORAL RELATIONS WITH GOD INCLUDE OUR CHARACTERS. Illustrate from the shepherd's estimate of each sheep. But the end at which the shepherd aims is health, fairness. The end at which God aims is cultured, developed, perfected character. And this is the Divine aim for every man, and the Divine work in every man. If we can see the issue more plainly reached in some men than in others, this need not dim our confidence that the work is going on in all.

II. OUR MORAL RELATIONS WITH GOD INCLUDE OUR MOODS. For no man can study human nature without observing that men are constantly acting, on occasion, out of harmony with their characters. The difficulty of dealing wisely with children lies in their occasional strange lapses and oddities. God bears shepherd-like relation to the odd moods of his moral beings.

III. OUR MORAL RELATIONS WITH GOD INCLUDE OUR SINS. This brings us into a very familiar field, and opens to view the redeeming and sanctifying work of God. These moral relations of God to us are the real reason why we should "worship and bow down."—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*Divided feeling in man.* The psalmist assumes that they wish to hear God's voice, and yet there is danger of their hardening their heart. That double feeling is constantly to be found in men. They are for ever putting stumbling-blocks in their own way. The head will often hinder the heart, and the heart will often hinder the head. Man is a single being, and he is his own true self only when all the forces of his nature act in harmony together. But man can make himself into a dual being,

and start a strife within himself that will prove morally destructive. Illustrate by the devil-possessed in the time of Christ. There was strife in the men. Their will pulled one way, the mastering will that was upon them pulled the other. Or take the modern case of *delirium tremens*. Here in our text we have the power which lies in man to hinder himself. He may "harden his heart," and so silence every high and noble desire he may feel. This hardening of the heart is always a man's own act to begin with, and God's act to finish with. A man sets himself upon resisting right impressions and persuasions; he finds it easier a second time and a third; he is hardening so that the persuasions have little effect, and God at last puts his seal on the hardening, and the persuasions roll off altogether.

I. WHEN A MAN WANTS TO WORSHIP GOD, HE CAN HARDEN HIS HEART BY ENCOURAGING DOUBTS. Some one is ever ready to whisper, "Is there a God at all? If there is, is he really a good God? If he is good, might he not have done a great deal more for you?" Give room to such doubts, and all interest in worship will soon take to itself wings and flee away.

II. WHEN A MAN WANTS TO WORSHIP GOD, HE CAN HARDEN HIS HEART BY MURMURINGS. Illustrate from the historical allusion to Meribah (Exod. xvii. 1—7). If anybody wants to murmur, he can easily find something to murmur about. There is a sunny side and a dark side to almost everything; and, if a man chooses, he can see only the dark side; and, if he does, he will surely spoil all desire for worship, all grounds for thanksgiving.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The sin of tempting God*. Tempting God is putting him to the test, as if you did not feel quite sure of him, and could not fully trust him. The idea of the word is "assay," "test," as the refiner does metals, or as the chemist or analyst may do to substances submitted to him. It is always implied that the man who proves the thing either does not know what it is or is uncertain about it. It is just that ignorance and uncertainty which God's people never should have concerning him. It is that doubting God which makes all attempts to test and prove him altogether wrong. Take the case of Israel at Meribah, and show that, in view of the Divine deliverances, guidings, providings, and defendings, any attempt to prove whether God really cared for them, and could help them, was absolutely unworthy; it amounted, indeed, to an insult offered to their covenant-King.

I. PUTTING GOD TO THE PROOF MAY BE PERMISSIBLE. But the conditions are very clear. If a man wants to believe, and wants encouragement to faith, God will permit him to put him to the proof. This is illustrated, in a very different way, by the sign of the fleece asked by Gideon. The rightness or wrongness of asking the sign depended entirely on the state of Gideon's mind and feeling. He wanted help to belief, so he may put God to the test. Circumstances may arise now which may allow of our proving God; but that work should never be attempted save at the utmost strain.

II. PUTTING GOD TO THE PROOF IS GENERALLY UNPERMISSIBLE. Because generally it implies doubt of God's power, or faithfulness, or mercy. See the mood of the Israelites; and see the spirit in which the scribes and Pharisees came, putting Jesus to the test. They did not want to believe in him. They wanted to get something which would encourage their unbelief. So Jesus refused, saying, "There shall no sign be given unto them." Keep right attitudes and moods of mind, and right relations with God, and then it will never come into our minds to attempt to put him to the test.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*Divine judgments on the unbelieving*. "They should not enter into my rest." As the reference is clearly to the murmurings of the Israelites at Meribah, the "rest" referred to can only be the anticipated rest of settlement in the promised land of Canaan. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews finds a further meaning, or rather suggestion, in the word; but we may seek for the first and direct teaching of the passage. 1. Notice that God is said to have been grieved with the effort made to test or tempt him; but his grief is not to be thought of as *distress*, it is rather that he was "moved with indignation," and therefore found an immediate and severe judgment necessary. 2. Notice that the basis of all the wrong in Israel is recognized as *unbelief*;

but that is not here an intellectual sin, it is a heart-sin; it is not "inability to believe," it is "untrustfulness," and untrustfulness when God had laid down such abundant grounds for their trust. 3. Notice that the judgment fell upon the *generation*, and not upon the *race*. In all God's judgments that recognize personal failings, we may find personal suffering and loss, but no frustration of the Divine purposes. The untrustful generation died in the wilderness; but the race, in good time, entered and possessed the "rest" of Canaan. 4. Notice that our own human feelings enable us to understand the Divine indignation. All good men love to be trusted. You can never so sorely try a good man as by failing to trust him. This applies even more strongly to those who are in close, loving, family relations with us. The supreme indignity, to our humble view, is a son failing to trust a good mother. Work out the various relations in which God, the infinitely Good One, stood to Israel, and stands to us; and so bring to view the shame of our untrustfulness, and the reasonableness of our coming under disciplining Divine judgments.—R. T.

Vers. 1—11.—*Public worship—its necessity and advantage.* I. ITS NATURE.

1. *Thanksgiving and praise.* (Vers. 1, 2.) We need special seasons for thinking over our privileges and cultivating gratitude, and the utterance of the spirit of praise. 2. *Adoration and prayer.* (Ver. 6.) God's love thus a cause for our cleansing. Christ's promises and grace inexhaustible. Who can drink the river of his love dry? Confession and supplication. 3. *Listening to the voice of God.* (Ver. 7.) In his spoken Word and in our own hearts. Hearing what God speaks to us is as much worship as our speaking to God.

II. REASONS OF WORSHIP. 1. *God's supremacy.* (Vers. 3—5.) Here is the theme of the loftiest praise; a reason for the largest prayers; and an argument for submission to his perfect will. 2. *God's tender guardianship.* "He is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." Intimate *relationship* to him: "our God." Living upon his *bounty*: "people of his pasture." We are being *guided* by him: "sheep of his hand." 3. *God's oath against those who are hardened.* "Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest." 4. *He is the Rock of our salvation.* (Ver. 1.) The eternal Foundation and Shelter of the soul.—S.

Vers. 4—6.—*The material universe and its lessons.* "In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it; and his hands formed the dry land." The material universe suggests—

I. THE PROFOUND MYSTERY OF SELF-EXISTENCE. Is it eternal, self-existent; or has it come from God in the way of direct creation or evolution? Self-existence an impossible conception, whether of the universe or of God; but it is also impossible to avoid it and find a substitute; only impossible to conceive of two self-existences.

II. IF THE UNIVERSE IS EVOLVED FROM GOD, THEN IT MUST BE A REVELATION OF PART OF HIS NATURE. Shows that God takes delight in material strength and beauty as well as in spiritual. The infinite variety of conceptions embodied. The infinite skill in the construction of the infinitely little and the infinitely great. But this only of a part of his nature, and that not the highest.

III. MANIFESTATION OF POWER. "Who by his strength setteth fast the mountains, being girded with power." Seas and mountains only functional examples of his power. The vastness of the universe. The child that Augustine saw lading the sea into a hole in the sand. "Not more impossible than for you to empty the universe into your intellect."

IV. THE MATERIAL UNIVERSE GENERATES IN US THE SENSE OF WEAKNESS AND INSIGNIFICANCE. But mind, conscience, heart, are the only things that are eternally great. Mountains will melt, and seas dry up. "He is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves." *We are his children.*—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM XCVI.

THIS psalm occurs, with very little change, in 1 Chron. xvi. 23—33, and is there (ver. 7) ascribed to David. It is also entitled, "A Psalm of David," in the Septuagint. But the phraseology and the style, especially the frequent iteration (vers. 1, 2, 7, 8, 13), belong to the later Hebrew. If David, therefore, was the original author, we must suppose a reconstruction of the composition at a later period. The psalm is one entirely devoted to praise. It sets forth Jehovah, first, as the Creator and Wonder-worker of old (vers. 1—6); secondly, as the present Ruler of the earth and its inhabitants (vers. 7—10); and, thirdly, as the coming Judge of all men (vers. 10—13).

Metrically, the psalm consists of four stanzas, the first three of three verses each, and the last of four.

Ver. 1.—O sing unto the Lord a new song (comp. Ps. xxxiii. 3; xcviii. 1; cxliv. 9; cxlix. 1; Isa. xlii. 10). This clause does not occur in 1 Chron. xvi. It seems to belong to the second recension of the psalm, when it was recast to suit some "new" occasion. Sing unto the Lord, all the earth. So in Isa. xlii. 10, "Sing unto the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth." The psalmist at once makes known his "universalism" by calling on the whole earth to join in his song of praise (comp. Ps. lxxvi. 1, 4). This psalm has been well called "a missionary hymn for all ages."

Ver. 2.—Sing unto the Lord, bless his Name (cf. Ps. c. 4; cxlv. 1, 10, 21, etc.). Show forth his salvation from day to day; or, publish his salvation (*εὐαγγελίζετε*, LXX.); i.e. "make it known"—"spread the good tidings."

Ver. 3.—Declare his glory among the heathen. Publish God's praise, not only in Israel, but to the ends of the earth. Let all mankind hear the joyful news (comp. Ps. ii. 8; xlvii. 1, 8; cxxxviii. 4). His wonders among all people; rather, among all the peoples; i.e. "all the nations of the earth" (see ver. 7).

Ver. 4.—For the Lord is great (comp. Ps. xcv. 3a), and greatly to be praised. Whatever is "great" excites our admiration, and naturally calls forth our praise. God's greatness is such that he needs to be "greatly praised." He is to be feared above all gods (comp. Ps. xcv. 3b, and the comment *ad loc.*).

Ver. 5.—For all the gods of the nations are idols; rather, *vanities*, or *nothings*. In the original there is a play upon the words—the *elohim* of the nations are mere *elilim*. *Elilim* is a favourite designation of the heathen gods in Isaiah. Compare the statement of St. Paul, "We know that an idol is *nothing in the world*" (1 Cor. viii. 4). But the Lord made the heavens. That which is nothing can do nothing, can make nothing. How far superior is Jehovah, who "made the heavens" (comp. Gen. i. 1; Isa. xlii. 5; xlv. 24)!

Ver. 6.—Honour and majesty are before him. Another paronomasia—*hód vè-hádár*. Dr. Kay translates, "grandeur and majesty;" Professor Cheyne, "glory and grandeur." Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. The original phrase used seems to have been, "Strength and gladness are in his place" (1 Chron. xvi. 27)—terms suiting the simplicity of David's time. When the psalms came to be used in the temple service, loftier language was more fitting. The whole passage has probable reference to the glory of God as seated between the cherubim in the first temple.

Ver. 7.—Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people; rather, O ye families of the peoples. A renewed appeal to the heathen to join in the song of praise (comp. ver. 1). Give unto the Lord glory and strength. "Give" must be understood in the sense of "ascribe" (see Professor Cheyne's translation, and compare the Prayer-book Version). Both this and the next verse are echoes of Ps. xxix. 1, 2.

Ver. 8.—Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his Name; literally, the glory of his Name. Bring an offering, and come into his courts. The parallel expression in 1 Chron. xvi. 29 is, "Come before him." "Courts" would be inappropriate until the temple was built. (For the bringing of "an offering" (*minchah*) by the Gentiles, see Mal. i. 11.)

Ver. 9.—O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness (comp. 1 Chron. xvi. 29; Ps. xxix. 2). This is generally explained as "holiday attire," or "in vestments suited to holy service," but may include, besides vestments, the other material accessories of Divine worship. Fear before him, all the earth; or, tremble before him (comp. Ps. xcvii. 4). The fear of God is constantly inculcated by the psalmists, not only as "the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. cxl. 10), but as required of every man during his whole life (Ps. xix. 9; xxxiv. 9; xl. 3; lxi. 9; lxxxvi. 11; cxix. 63, etc.).

Ver. 10.—Say among the heathen that

the Lord reigneth (comp. Ps. xciii. 1; xcvi. 1; xcix. 1). The world also shall be established that it shall not be moved. When God takes his throne, and manifestly reigns, the earth is at once "established," settled, placed on a firm footing (see the comment on Ps. xciii. 1, where exactly the same words occur). He shall judge the people righteously (comp. ver. 13). God, the Deliverer of old time (vers. 3, 4), God, the King of the whole earth (ver. 10a), is also God the Judge, who gives sentence on the "peoples" with equity.

Ver. 11.—Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad. "An appeal for the sympathy of nature" (Cheyne): comp. Isa. xlv. 23; Jer. li. 48. If the final coming of Messiah's kingdom be the event alluded to in ver. 10, as is quite possible, the calling on heaven and earth to rejoice may indicate a real renovation of the material universe, such as to bring it into harmony with the newly established spiritual conditions of the period (comp. Isa. lxxv. 17—25; Rev. xxi. 1—4). Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof (comp. Ps. xcvi. 7). The sea is to show its joy by raising its voice, and "roaring," or "thundering."

Ver. 12.—Let the field be joyful; *i.e.* "the cultivated ground." And all that is therein. Its vines, its olives, its other fruits, and its harvests. Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord. Lebanon and Bashan shall rejoice equally with Carmel and Sharon. The whole earth shall "break forth into singing" (see Isa. xlv. 23).

Ver. 13.—For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth (see above, ver. 10). This is given as the reason for the burst of joy. God's coming to judgment is the establishment of moral order in the place of moral disorder upon the earth, and the inauguration of a reign of love, peace, and happiness (comp. Isa. lxxv. 18—25). He shall judge the world with righteousness (see above, ver. 10, and comp. Ps. ix. 8). The judgment which the psalmist has specially in view is, "not a retributive, but a gracious judging, by which controversies are adjusted and prevented, and the law of love introduced into the life of the people" (Hengstenberg). And the people with his truth; rather, *the peoples*; *i.e.* all the nations on the face of the earth.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 5.—*Idolatry*. Thus it was three thousand years ago. Thus, to an extent as astounding as melancholy, it is to-day. Population of globe estimated at fourteen hundred millions; if so, one thousand millions heathen. Considering the prevalence, permanence, antiquity, of idolatry, that these words and many like these should have been written when and where they were, is no unsubstantial proof of the superhuman authorship, Divine inspiration, of Old Testament Scriptures. History presents no more impressive and significant sight than that of the little nation of Israel, holding a tiny corner of earth not twice the size of Yorkshire, hemmed in by mighty empires and ancient civilizations, often crushed by their irresistible weight; with absolutely no advantage over other peoples in the struggle for life, save their religion; yet maintaining for fifteen centuries their single-banded witness to the foundation-truth of religion, and protest against the perverted faiths of the world. (1) *The causes of idolatry*; (2) *its evil*; (3) *our duty*.

I. THE CAUSES OF IDOLATRY. How to account for this terrible and amazing fact—the widespread, long-continued prevalence of idolatry? No single origin can be historically verified. Worship of forces and forms of nature, of ancestors, of deified heroes, of symbols or personified attributes, of partial and degraded conceptions of the one living God, or fading traditions of his worship,—all these have their place in the labyrinth of the history of national faiths. The theory propounded with immense assurance and *éclat* a generation ago, that fetichism was the parent of polytheism, and the worship of many gods crystalized into the worship of One, has shared the fate of theories which facts are forced or invented to fit, in place of theory being fitted to fact. Degraded superstitions of barbarous nations have the clear marks of being dust and dregs of ruined faiths (most striking illustration in the history of Madagascar, where proverbs still bore witness to God, while idols were bundles of sticks and rags). American Indians (types, according to Sir W. Dawson, of pre-historic men), among remnants of decayed civilization, have preserved the ancient faith in "the Great Spirit." Greece and India bear witness to the fact that the worship of nature preceded that of deities in human shape. In China, where the emperor once a year publicly

worships "the God of heaven," and where worship of ancestors is the strongest form of religion, Buddhism, dating only some five centuries B.C.—at first a system of atheistic morality—has been transformed into idolatry. The two most amazing proofs of the all-but irresistible tendency of human nature are found in the history of Israel and the history of Christianity. From the time of Joshua's successors to the Babylonian Captivity, the incurable propensity of rulers and people to idolatry is scarcely a less striking feature of Israel's history than the steadfast witness of the prophets and of the faithful remnant against it and on behalf of the truth. Christianity itself, whose glorious message to the heathen was—to turn from dumb idols to the living God, became in five centuries so encrusted with the worship of saints, the Virgin, the Host, relics, images, that when Mohammed drew the sword against idolatry, he reckoned Christians among idolaters. What is, then, the explanation? We find in it (1) man's need of worship—his "feeling after God." (2) In all which makes men shrink from worshipping the Holy One, who says to his worshippers, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." St. Paul gives the true philosophy of religion (Rom. i. 18—25).

II. THE EVIL OF IDOLATRY. People ask—Is not this greatly overrated? Does there not lie in the heart of idolatry a craving after God? Is it not better to worship an idol (as a symbol, it may be, of an unseen power) than not to worship at all—blind reverence better than none? Answer: Granting this, it does not change the fact that idolatry has death at its root, and death as its fruit (Jer. ii. 13). Blind reverence brings no fruit of blessing into life, pardon, love of goodness, strength for duty, comfort in trouble, moral renewal, or spiritual life. To be Godless is to be Christless, hopeless (Eph. ii. 12). False substitutes for God do not prepare the heart to know and love him, but harden and close it against his voice. And for the most part idolatry brings the grossest immorality in its train.

III. THE DUTY, therefore, of delivering from the curse of blind, false, degrading worship a thousand millions of mankind, and spreading in its place the true knowledge of the ever-living Creator, the Father of spirits, and the glad tidings of reconciliation to him, and life eternal, as his children by faith in Christ Jesus, is one of the noblest, happiest, most imperative, to which Christians are called.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Songs and sermons.* We have both in these verses. There is a threefold summons to sing unto the Lord, and a similar threefold summons to speak for the Lord. Such psalms as this never contemplate a religion which can be hid away and held in secret. The passionate love which breathes in this psalm must have vent or die. There is here no coming to the Lord by night, or being secretly a disciple for fear of the Jews, but the psalm is an open, full, joyous confession of the soul's delight in the Lord. And such confession takes this double form.

I. SONG. This is called for: 1. *Because our love to the Lord should be amongst those deep and intense feelings which demand the fullest utterance of which the soul is capable.* Plain prose will serve for ordinary communications, but when the soul is deeply stirred, as it should be, by the love of God, then song becomes a necessity. See in the Scriptures how the rapt utterances of psalmist and prophet inevitably clothe themselves in poetical form. 2. *Because it is so attractive.* It tells of a glad, bright, winsome religion, of sunshine in the soul and joy in the heart, all which in this sad, weary, sin-stricken world cannot but be infinitely attractive. Therefore God would have his people sing. 3. *And because it is the noblest form of utterance.* Music and poetry combine to invest the soul's deepest and holiest thought in the most perfect garment of praise. 4. *And the song is to be a new song.* Every day is a new day, and brings with it material for a new song.

"New mercies, each returning day,
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven."

5. *And universal.* This is our desire, and, if so, its expression commits us to do our
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best to unite "all the earth" in this song. 6. *It is to be grateful.* "Bless his Name." What abundant reason there is for such gratitude! Happy they who thus sing unto the Lord!

II. SERMONS. These also are called for—fervent, holy speech for God. Not necessarily set discourses such as we understand by sermons. These, but not these alone, nor these at all, if God has not given us the needed capacity; but God-prompted, loving words spoken for him—these all can speak, and should do so as opportunity is given. Such speech is described, as was the song, in a threefold way. 1. *Showing forth God's salvation.* And this from day to day. This can be done, and perhaps best done, by what we are and do—by our life as well as by our lips; yet let not the latter be silent, as they too often are, to our own and others' great loss. 2. *Declaring his glory among the heathen.* There is no need to go far away to find these heathen. They are all around us. Tell them of the glory of his character, his Word, his service, his Spirit dwelling within, his eternal rest by-and-by. 3. *His wonders among all people.* Not the good people only—it is easy to talk before them; but among the unsaved, tell them what a wonderful Saviour Jesus is.—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*The spirit of missionary work.* Amongst the brighter signs of the times in which we live must be reckoned the universal anxiety, now in so many ways manifested, on the part of Christian people for the spread of the message of Christ's salvation both at home and abroad. The whole psalm overflows with thankfulness and delight, and in it is found this summons to missionary work. Now, in a human composition we should say that it was unskilled and lacking in true art if there were introduced an idea which marred the unity of the whole, which was out of harmony with its spirit and incongruous with its main intent. But in an inspired composition like this psalm we can be quite sure that there would be no such incongruity. But then it follows that this summons to missionary service must be in keeping with the spirit of this psalm, or it would not be found where it is. Therefore we note—

I. THE SPIRIT OF SONG IS IN HARMONY WITH MISSIONARY SERVICE. For think of what this service is. It is: 1. *To preach.* Not to amuse by gaudy ceremonial. Men are not so won to Christ. And not to conjure as by mystic sacramental grace. But to preach. This is what Christ commanded, what the text bids, what such as Paul gloried in, what God ever blesses. And it is a joyful service. True preachers own this as they feel that those to whom they speak are moved and touched, and are conscious in their own souls of the inspiration of their theme—a theme with which none other can compare. For: 2. *It is to preach God's salvation.* That which the text calls "his glory," "his wonders." Now, we know how pleasant it is to be the bearer of happy tidings—say, to a distressed household, a heart trembling with fear. And such is the work of the preacher of the salvation of God. He goes to the consciously guilty, and tells them of free forgiveness in Christ; to the sin-enslaved, and tells them of complete deliverance from the accursed tyranny under which they groan; to the sorrow-stricken, and tells them of him who shall wipe away all tears; to the dying, and tells them of him who, when he had overcome the sharpness of death, opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Such is the missionary's joyous task. - 3. *And to preach this to all.* None are to be left out. One who had been the means of rescuing many from a watery grave through the breaking of a sheet of ice on which they had been joyously skating, tells how all his joy was marred by the fact that he had been compelled to leave many unsaved. So if we were limited, and not suffered to go to all with the glad tidings of God's salvation, we should feel our joy marred indeed. But because it is for all, therefore is our joy great. 4. *Thus he is a co-worker with Christ.* In fellowship with him. This is an enhancement of the gladness of the work. A regiment is honoured by distinction won by one of its soldiers; a whole family, if one member wins high place. How much more the missionary when Christ is co-worker with him! And: 5. *It is a work which has not been in vain.* What glorious results have been achieved! what trophies won! Therefore we say this service is in harmony with glad song.

II. AND THIS SPIRIT OF GLAD SONG IS NEEDED FOR SUCH SERVICE. For: 1. *Men will not care for that which, so far as they can see, does you little or no good.* But when they see that the faith of Christ is the sunshine of our lives, then they will be

more ready to believe. Do we let men see this? And: 2. *It alone is strong enough for the work.* Let me tell you a parable. There was a tyrant who sought to oppress the inhabitants of a certain land. The better to do this he built a strong castle, built it deep and high, and placed it at the entrance of a valley which led to the land he sought to oppress. A little stream ran along that valley near the foundation of his fortress; but he heeded not that, sure it could do no harm. Many who loved that land felt very sad as they saw the oppressor's power; but yet they hoped that somehow his power would be overthrown. And so it came to pass. The summer went on and the autumn rains came, and the little rivulet became a rapid stream, and began to gnaw away at the foundations of that grim castle; but it could not do much harm. But the winter storms came, and the stream swelled into a strong river, and began to be dangerous to the tyrant's fortress, so that he, at length, did feel fear. But matters grew worse; the winter was over, and the snow high up on the mountains which shut in the valley began to melt, and the river went on increasing in its might till, one wild night, the great reservoirs of waters that had been gathering all the winter through suddenly burst, and with a rush and a roar raged all down the valley, the waters bearing with them a vast mass of timber, stones, trees, earth, and all kinds of material; and they came down upon the tyrant's castle and overwhelmed it, sapping its foundations and tearing down its walls till it had perished out of sight. Such the parable. The interpretation is not far to seek. Heathendom is that fortress, and the prince of darkness he who built it. The rill, the stream, the river, the torrent, represent respectively the force of the motives which assail the strength of heathendom. The sense of fear, of duty, of pity, of glad joy in God. It is this last which alone avails; the others do but little, though some much more than the rest. "The joy of the Lord is our strength."

III. THE SPIRIT OF SONG SHALL BE GIVEN TO THOSE WHO ENGAGE IN THIS SERVICE. For joy comes in the service of the Lord—true joy. Be not content until you know this joy, for not till then will you effectually serve.—S. C.

Ver. 6.—*Strength and beauty.* It is supposed that this psalm was composed for the dedication of the temple at Jerusalem; but it existed in the time of David, though it was doubtless used in the service of the second temple. The previous reference of the strength and beauty told of here is to the massive foundations and the solid structure of the temple,—such was its strength; and the "beauty" told of the lavish adornments and the varied splendour and richness which characterized all the appointments of the house of the Lord. In very real and literal sense "strength and beauty were in his sanctuary."

I. THEY ARE THE DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF ALL GOD'S WORKS. "Jehovah made the heavens"—so we read in ver. 5; and assuredly they are seen there. And look where we will, it is the same. See the account of the Creation.

II. THEY SHOULD BE IN OUR SANCTUARIES TO-DAY. It is a public dishonouring of God if men are content that the sanctuaries in which they worship should be mean and ill-appointed, as so many of them are, whilst in their own houses no costly expense is spared and no adornment withheld (see Hag. i. 4). On the other hand, the magnificent churches, minsters, abbeys, which still remain in this and other lands, have throughout all the long centuries since they were built borne silent but eloquent testimony to the reverence, love, and devotion towards God which dwelt in the hearts of their builders, and which it was their profound conviction ought to dwell in the hearts of all. Meanness and miserable selfishness often skulk behind the plea of spirituality of worship, and that the heart is all that God desires.

III. THEY ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE WELFARE OF ANY CHURCH. 1. *Strength must be there.* Not necessarily the strength of wealth, or intellect, or social rank, but spiritual strength—that strength which springs from a firm and living faith universally and tenaciously held, manifesting itself in conscientious adherence to the truth and unsullied righteousness of life, and nourished by fervent prayer and diligent use of all the means of grace. If such strength be wanting, then the glory of that Church has departed, and her decay and dissolution and degradation are at hand. Ecclesiastical organization and money and property may keep up the scaffolding and outworks of such Church for a while, but ere long they too will fail, and the Church must die.

But with such spiritual strength, the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. 2. *And there must be beauty also.* "The beauty of holiness," in which we are bidden "worship the Lord" (ver. 9). By this we understand that moral and spiritual beauty, such as were pre-eminent in our Lord; that winsomeness and grace, that attractiveness of love and pity and compassionate helpfulness, that beautiful grace of which St. Paul in 1 Cor. xiii. has so much to say, that sweet reasonableness and evident sincerity, and that holy peace and joy which union with Christ imparts,—such is the beauty, the only real beauty, which should be in the Church of the living God.

IV. AND THEY SHOULD CHARACTERIZE THE TEMPLE OF THE SOUL. 1. *Strength* born of faith and love, which holds the soul true to Christ and causes it to be rooted like the oak, and grounded like the deep foundations of a temple, so that it can never be moved. 2. *Then beauty.* The superstructure, fair in form and symmetrical, that arrests the attention and awakens the delight of the beholder—that holy beauty of Christ-like character, which, with strength also, he is waiting and willing to impart to every faithful soul.—S. C.

Ver. 8.—"*Bring an offering, and come into his courts.*" This psalm is one continuous appeal for all to render praise unto the Lord. Not men alone, though they, of course, chief of all, are to join in the song unto the Lord; but the heavens, the earth, the sea, the fields, the trees,—all are to testify to their Creator's praise. And the psalm tells of a threefold expression of this joy in God. 1. *The song.* All are to join in; no stopping to inquire into the motives, but all are to sing (ver. 1). It will be good even for evil men, as well as the people of God, to unite in his praise. It may help them to pass over to the side of God's people. 2. *Preaching.* The very idea of missions as here set forth is the overflowing, the exuberance, of the Church's joy. So only can missions really succeed (see homily on ver. 3). 3. *Offerings.* Of these we would specially speak. For our text lays down—

I. THE DUTY OF OFFERING TO GOD. 1. *The witnesses to this will of God are numerous.* (1) The patriarchs. See their sacrifices. Noah's offerings. Abraham's tithes (Gen. xiv. 20). Jacob's vow (Gen. xxviii. 22). (2) The Jews. The tithes they had to pay amounted to nearly a third of their income. The treasury was a constituent part of the temple, and large sums were continually cast in there (Mark xii. 41—43). (3) The early Church. They had a common fund (Acts ii. 44, 45). Paul and Barnabas (Acts xi. 29, 30) gathered for the poor of Jerusalem. Paul from the Corinthians (1 Cor. xvi. 1). Christ said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (see parable of unjust steward, Matt. xxiv. 6, etc.). 2. *The need of it is so great.* Think of the multiplied objects which call for such offerings. The Church of God needs such aid for the maintenance of her ministers, her fabric, her missions, and her varied religious agencies. The poor rightly claim our help. If we have not compassion for them, how dwelleth the love of God in us? Our own spiritual life demands that we make such offerings. The only way to overcome that idolatry of money which seduces so many is to give it away in wise and Christian manner. If we hoard and keep it, the love of it will drive out the love of God.

II. THE MANNER OF FULFILLING THIS DUTY. 1. *Presenting it in the house of God when we come to worship.* This was the custom of the Jews (see 1 Chron. xvi. 1). Also of the early Christian Church (see 1 Cor. xvi. 1; 2 Cor. viii. and ix.). St. Paul's argument on this matter is very interesting and noteworthy. He was very anxious to relieve his own countrymen; to fulfil his own promise (Gal. ii. 10); to prove the reality of the faith of the Gentile Churches and their love to their Jewish brethren, and thus to heal the breach that so sadly severed the Jewish and Gentile Churches. Hence he was very anxious about this collection, and hence, also, he would be sure to seek out the best means for securing it. Hence he directed that there should be the weekly Lord's day storing for this end (1 Cor. xvi. 2). Now, as this plan is so good, and no other is so commended to us, we may regard it as having special claim on our attention. 2. *For it has great advantages.* It takes away the temptation to neglect of this duty which arises from: (1) The largeness of the offering asked. What is given week by week is not felt as when a great sum is asked for all at once. (2) Delay of offering. (3) Infrequency. (4) Dependence upon the excitement of the moment. Moreover: (5) It makes worship more real. (6) It is far more productive

(7) It is a witness-bearing for Christ. (8) It nourishes our own spiritual life. But, of course, this especial manner of offering is not obligatory, though it has especial sanction.

III. THE MOTIVE. Love to Christ (2 Cor. viii. 9). That is the only worthy and reliable motive. Others are sure to break down sooner or later, and to miserably fail in securing the end sought after. Let Christ possess a man's heart, all else will go along with that.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The call for a new song.* "The series of psalms to which this belongs is by nearly all commentators assigned to the period immediately succeeding the seventy years' captivity. The joyous feelings, the glorious expectations, the marked repetition (both in matter and style) of the later prophecies of Isaiah, their rhythmical character suggesting that they were intended for liturgical purposes, combine to identify them with this period." Take this idea of historical connection, and the *newness* of the song called for is at once explained. God is spoken of as *beginning* to reign, and as *coming* to judge, or rule; and this precisely represents the feeling of the returned exiles, who were setting up a *new theocracy*. They were restoring, beginning again, their theocratic, social, and religious system. The altar of burnt offering was new. The temple was new. The order of worship was new. And if the Divine relations were not new, they were at least freshly realized. On the call to song, H. W. Beecher suggestively says, "The wings God has given us to fly up to him are the wings of song. The lyrical element is the best expression of feeling. All forms of experience have been touched in the poetry of chant and song. Singing is the process by which intellectual propositions can be converted into emotion and heart-expression." The point for us is this—a new age finds a new song to God. Illustrate from the Book of Revelation, which presents the white-robed host singing a *new song*, because no song can ever have risen before for a *completed* redemption. The Christian's is a new song, because it is that fresh thing, a soul's joy in God revealed and apprehended in Christ Jesus. Illustrate the following topics from the circumstances of the returned exiles.

I. NEW SUBJECTS FOR SONG. Divine faithfulness. Divine mercy. Renewed national life. Freedom to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience. Signs of Divine favour. Realization of the Divine presence. We can always find subjects for new songs in our new and ever-varying *circumstances*.

II. NEW FORMS OF SONG. Every generation makes its own hymns. Davidic psalms may be partly used by the exiles; but the thoughts and emotions of the hour called for an immediate and natural expression. The thoughts of God in these psalms are new. Note especially the idea of God as "coming to reign."

III. NEW FEELINGS TO EXPRESS IN SONG. Contrast the *depressed* moods of the time of captivity, and the *joyous* moods of the time of restoration. In Babylon they hung their harps on the willows, and could not sing. When back at Jerusalem they called for harp and song with which to praise the Lord.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The law of Christian missions.* The "heathen" of the Old Testament match the "Gentiles" of the New Testament. "Gentiles," as our Lord used the term, means "those who do not know of God as the Father in heaven." And "heathen" means "those who do not know God as the One, the Spiritual, and the Holy." But in referring such an expression as this to missions, we are using for our purpose the language, not precisely discerning the psalmist's meaning. In desiring that God's glory should be declared among the heathen, the returned exile did not think of, or wish for, the *conversion* of the heathen to the faith and service of Jehovah. He only wanted everybody to know of his new liberty and dignity, and of the great things his God was doing for him. It was as if Englishmen went everywhere to tell what great things God had done, and was doing, for England. Active effort to convert the world to Judaism has never been made, and is not being made now. The truly missionary idea is introduced by Christianity. There is a sense in which the exclusiveness of the Jews was broken down by the Captivity. Jews were then scattered over the earth; but they were only silent missionaries wherever they went. They witnessed for Jehovah by what they *were*, rather than by what they *said*. Wherever they went they found a sort of belief in one God, clouded over by an active belief in many gods.

This is the characteristic of all heathenism; and we too readily miss seeing the idea of one supreme God, which is really the root-religious idea of man everywhere; the idea to which the higher revelation makes its appeal. The law of Christian missions, and missions in all ages, is this—If any man has a higher and better view of God than his neighbour, he is bound to tell it to his neighbour.

I. THE JEW HAD A BETTER VIEW OF GOD THAN HIS NEIGHBOURS. Take especially the Jew of the Restoration, to whom the primary truths concerning God seemed as if freshly revealed. He knew of three truths that are fundamental to right conceptions of God. 1. The unity of God. 2. The spirituality of God. 3. The holiness of God. Show that these were higher views of God than were entertained in either Babylon or among the neighbouring Samaritans, Ammonites, etc. What responsibility, then, rested on the Jew, specially to show that good doctrine bears good fruit?

II. THE CHRISTIAN HAS A BETTER VIEW OF GOD THAN HIS NEIGHBOURS. He knows God in the face of Jesus, through the Sonship of Jesus as the *Father*, as the Forgive of sin, and as the Forgive on the basis of one ever-acceptable sacrifice for sin.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*The God of heaven.* This seems to have been the Babylonian name for the God of the Jews. "Lord of heaven;" "King of heaven." It expresses the apprehension gained by the Babylonians (see Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgment, Dan. v. 37). It intimates that Jehovah, though an all-powerful God, was in no sense a *local* God, with a limited kingdom and ordinary earthly claims. To call God the "God of heaven" is at least making a beginning towards the realization of him as spiritual.

I. GODS OF EARTH. Explain the strictly local and limited area of the kingdoms possessed by idol-gods. Bel belonged to Babylon; Ra to Egypt. There were "gods of the hills and gods of the valleys." There were distinct conceptions of, and representations of, Baal for each country and almost for each city. Jealous over their own particular divinity, no missionary idea found place in the ancient world. Nobody wanted to share his god with any one else. (A striking exception to this is found in the proselyting spirit of Jezebel.) Curiously, the god of the limited district was conceived as almighty within his limits. Even when the world-conquering idea took possession of nations, such as Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Grecia, Rome, in no case did propagating the religion become a primary inspiration. The conquerors freely left the conquered their local religion. So we can see the force with which the local limitations of the gods took possession of the ancient mind.

II. GOD OF HEAVEN. Observe the strong contrast. Jehovah is *unlocalized*, *above earth*, and *doming all the earth*. It is impossible to express, not only the superiority, but also the essential *difference*, of Jehovah in more brief and succinct terms. Down on earth, a multitude of small spaces, each with a petty deity. Up above, ruling from rim to rim, the one eternal God. The all-hallowing dome is heaven. This was more strikingly apprehended when the prevailing idea was that earth was a flat surface, with the blue heaven fitting to it like the cover of a dish. Work out these points concerning the "God of heaven." 1. His forces are not exclusively *material*. He does control the material, but he commands the spiritual. 2. His forces are working *universally*. We can think of no sphere in which we may not find their operation. 3. His forces claim for him universal recognition. See how the Christian revelation has taken this figure for God, and glorified it.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*Offerings associated with worship.* Oriental custom demands that every person seeking an audience with a king shall offer him a present. An Eastern traveller writes, "It is counted uncivil to visit in this country without an offering in hand. All great men expect it as a kind of tribute due to their character and authority, and look upon themselves as affronted, and indeed defrauded, when this compliment is omitted." For illustration, reference may be made to Saul, anxious about a present for the man of God; to the gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, offered by the Magi to the infant Saviour; and to the Malagasy custom known as making "hasina." Offerings to the gods involve the heathen, oftentimes, in ruin, so exorbitant are the demands made by the priests. The psalmist is full of the idea of God as the actual, present, though unseen, King of the nation, and he is thinking of the offering as the acknowledgment of allegiance, the outward sign of loyalty. There is no idea of God's

needing offerings; the psalmist thinks only of what is fitting on the part of the people. Distinguish between taking an honourable share in the support of Christian worship, and making offerings as a sign of loyalty. See under what conditions offerings are still acceptable, showing first how far the King-figure for God may be used by us.

I. OFFERINGS FOR GOD MUST BE REASONABLE. That term includes two distinct things: (1) proportionate; (2) thoughtful. There may be times when an impulsive gift is acceptable; but as a rule no proper gift can be made to God save upon due consideration of all our claims. God asks but a proportion of our time, our land, or our labour. Our care should be to get and keep an honourable proportion. There is some danger in our over-valuing mere *impulsive* acts. They "loom large" to our view. Whereas the man who, thoughtfully estimating his means, sets aside his offering for God, lays a far nobler gift on God's altar. It is a gift of *mind*, and not of merely excited feeling.

II. OFFERINGS FOR GOD MUST BE MADE TO MATCH INDIVIDUALS. Two young pigeons for a mother if she be poor. Two mites for a widow; but gold for the rich. The gift should match *means* and *good will*.

III. OFFERINGS FOR GOD MUST BE EXPRESSIVE OF OFFERED SELF. To God there can be no value in *things*. What he asks for, and can alone accept, is the spiritual offering of the man himself—his will, his love. This can find expression in a material offering. God will only receive the offering when it is the voice of the man.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*The essential feature of God's worship.* "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." This is also read, "in the glorious sanctuary," and "in holy vestments." The Authorized Version is the more poetic sentiment, and may therefore be preferred. The expression is given in 2 Chron. xx. 21, where Jehoshaphat, in sending forth his army, "appointed singers who should praise the beauty of holiness." Holiness is the key-note of the worship of Jehovah; but it is the key-note of the worship of no other god. "Had a medal been struck in praise of Jupiter, who is the best of the pagan gods, on one side might have been engraved 'Almightiness, omnipresence, justice;' and on the reverse, 'Caprice, vengeance, lust.'" But the association of *beauty* with *holiness* now requires our attention. The best idea may be gained by thinking of ripe fruit; if it is really healthy and ripe, it cannot help having a *bloom* on. That bloom is the beauty of ripeness. "Beauty is a combination of elements according to the laws of harmony; the more beautiful the parts or elements, and the more perfect the harmonious combination, the higher the beauty." Then we must find the elements that go to make a worship so holy that, both in God's sight and in man's, it should be beautiful. Worship that can be thought of as showing the "beauty of holiness" must be—

I. LAWFUL. It may not be sufficiently recognized that public worship was arranged for, authorized. There is no room for self-will. There may be different views as to the ultimate authority for forms of worship. If it is to be "holy," the elements of mere self-willedness and pleasure must be excluded.

II. PURE. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." This was at once typified and testified by the clean white linen garments of the priests, and by their washing before engaging in their offices. Bodily purity did but represent the *moral* purity God requires.

III. SINCERE. This brings before us the condition of the will. God's great reproach is levelled at the divided mind. That worship cannot be acceptable in which the man's hand is one way and his heart is another. Worship is only ceremony and routine unless a man's heart is in it. Absolute simple-mindedness is the *beauty* of worship, the *bloom* on the fruit.

IV. CHEERFUL. The psalmists constantly remind us of the joyousness of worship. It excited high emotions. Lifted out of all drudgery to become a holy delight, we feel still the "beauty of holiness" in God's glorious sanctuary and exalted worship.—R. T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Nature-sympathies.* There is a strange and wonderful response of material nature to the spiritual moods of men. Faces may not change, but expressions on faces change continually, and even seem different to different individuals. And so nature keeps the same, but seems ever-varying to us, according as our moods are to it.

Lowth says on this verse, "Nothing can excel that noble exultation of universal nature, which has been so often commended. Poetry here seems to assume the highest tone of triumph and exultation, and to revel, if I may so express myself, in all the extravagance of joy." Keep in mind that nature is represented as suffering in consequence of the sin of man. It may well exult with man in the redemption which uplifts out of suffering both *him* and *it* (Rom. viii. 20—23). In a very well-known discourse, Dr. H. Bushnell illustrates these two propositions: (1) God has hidden powers of music in things without life; (2) when they are used, in right distinctions or properties of sound, they discourse what we know—what meets, interprets, and works our feeling, as living and spiritual creatures.

I. NATURE-SYMPATHIES WITH MAN IN HIS INNOCENCE. Show the kin-ness between the Garden of Eden and the man put into it.

II. NATURE-SYMPATHIES WITH MAN IN HIS FALL. Bringing forth thorns, etc. Ground cursed for man's sake. A well-known artist has a picture of Adam and Eve after their fall. They are seated, in utmost distress, at a distance from each other, and what seems to divide them is a hideously shaped tree, the trunk of which seems to take almost demon form. The artist made nature kin to our fallen parents.

III. NATURE-SYMPATHIES WITH MAN IN HIS MOODS. Illustrate this by the darkness which fell behind the cross of Jesus when he died. See also the effect of the shading olives on Jesus in Gethsemane. Compare the harvest psalms—the corn, etc., shouting for joy in response to the glad and thankful moods of men.

IV. NATURE-SYMPATHIES WITH MAN IN HIS REDEMPTION. For illustration, see Isa. xi. 6—9, where the very beasts are poetically represented as affected by the peace of eternal purity which one day shall come to men.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*The coming Judge.* Compare the idea of God's *coming* to judge with the basis-idea of all this series of psalms, that God was *beginning* to reign, setting up again his kingdom among his restored people. Here the Judge is put poetically for the King, because deciding cases, magistracy, is the main feature of Eastern kingship. Absalom enticed the people from their allegiance to David by a half-veiled promise of considerateness, if not favouritism, in the king's work of judging. The first thing recorded of Solomon is an act of skillful judgment. The association of this passage with a "day of judgment" is purely a Christian association. God the Judge is simply God the active, present Ruler and King. But we may see the element of judging as punishing, in the verse, if we take the standpoint of the returned exiles; for any intervention of God for the salvation of his people necessarily involves some judgment on those from whom they are delivered; and so the redeeming King is found to be also a Judge. Just as the idea of God's "coming to judge" endangered the sense of his actual presence and actual working as Ruler and Judge, so the idea of Christ's second coming may be so entertained as to spoil the living sense of his actual presence and abiding relations with his people. The idea of a continual appraisalment of human action, of a Divine judgment, with adequate rewards and punishments, as always going on, is coming more and more into Christian thought, and is replacing the older idea of the delegation of everything to a final assize-day. Two things are indicated in this verse of the text, as characteristic of God's rule or judgment.

I. IT IS ETERNALLY RIGHT. "With righteousness shall he judge." Find the absolute standard of right, and all God's kingly ways will be found in precise accordance with it.

II. IT IS ADAPTED TO CIRCUMSTANCES. "With equity shall he judge." Equity is righteousness applied to the individual as placed in particular circumstances.—R. T.

Vers. 1—13.—*How and why Jehovah is to be worshipped.* I. WITH A NEW SONG. (Ver. 1.) Praise that shall celebrate the new revelation of himself, which he is about to make in a new era of the world. Constantly new revelation.

II. BY CELEBRATING THE SAVING WORK WHICH GOD IS DOING IN THE WORLD. (Ver. 2.) His coming to judge the people righteously, and thus to save them. Saving men every day.

III. BY PUBLISHING HIS CHARACTER AND WORK THROUGH THE WHOLE EARTH. (Vers. 1, 3.) This is a strongly missionary psalm: "Among the heathen;" "Among all people."

IV. BECAUSE OF HIS EXCLUSIVE DEITY. (Vers. 4, 5.) The idol-gods of the nations have no existence; an idol is nothing. But Jehovah is faithful and righteous and omnipotent.

V. BECAUSE OF THE GLORY OF HIS CREATIVE WORK. (Ver. 5.) "But the Lord made the heavens."

VI. BECAUSE OF HIS MANIFESTATIONS OF HIMSELF TO TRUE WORSHIPPERS. (Vers. 6—9.) He reveals his honour and majesty, shows them his beauty and strength.

VII. HIS RIGHTeous GOVERNMENT SECURES THE ORDER AND STEADFASTNESS OF THE WORLD. (Ver. 10.) Despotie kings and turbulent peoples seem to shake the world and make it insecure—the moral world.

VIII. THE TRUE WORSHIPPER FEELS THAT ALL NATURE IS IN SYMPATHY WITH HIS DEVOTION. (Vers. 11, 12.) To him in his highest moods the heavens rejoice, and the earth is glad; the sea thunders forth the praises of God, and the trees of the forest clap their hands; for all see that God is coming forth to assume the supreme and universal reign.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM XCVII.

ANOTHER liturgical psalm on the advent of Christ. The psalmist sees him take possession of his throne, but, this time, rather in judgment than in mercy. His accession is described with the usual features of a theophany (vers. 1—6; comp. Pss. xviii. 7—15; 1. 3—6; lxxvii. 14—19). The impression made on the inhabitants of the earth, whether idolatrous heathen (ver. 7), or faithful Israelites (vers. 8, 9), is then given. Finally, a practical lesson is drawn from the event prophesied, viz. "Let the Israel of God hate evil, and rejoice in the Lord and in his holy Name" (vers. 10—12).

Metrially, the psalm consists of four stanzas, each of three verses. There is nothing in its contents to fix its date.

Ver. 1.—The Lord reigneth; or, *the Lord has become King*—has ascended his throne (comp. Pss. xciii. 1; xcvi. 10). Let the earth rejoice. When God condescends to appear on earth, the earth is bound to rejoice. His coming cannot but improve the condition of affairs. Let the multitude of isles (literally, *the many isles*) be glad thereof. Even "the isles"—the abode of the Gentiles—are to feel joy, for they, too, at whatever cost (ver. 3), will be benefited.

Ver. 2.—Clouds and darkness are round about him (comp. Exod. xix. 16, 18; Deut. iv. 11; v. 22; 1 Kings viii. 12). The "darkness" does not belong to the nature of God, who "is Light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John i. 5), but to the inter-relationship between God and man, in which are involved problems that man cannot solve. Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne; rather,

the foundation of his throne—the firm basis on which it is immovably fixed.

Ver. 3.—A fire goeth before him. So long as there is evil in the world, the "fire" of God's wrath must necessarily "go before him" at each theophany, to sweep the evil from his path (see Isa. xlii. 25). It is in this sense that "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 29). And burneth up his enemies round about (comp. Ps. i. 8; Matt. xiii. 30).

Ver. 4.—His lightnings enlightened the world. Here the tenses change from present to past—not, however, that any past event is alluded to, but merely to mark prophetic certainty. The psalmist, rapt in vision, sees the future as past. Lightnings play a part in almost all theophanies (Exod. xix. 16; Job xxxvii. 1—5; Pss. xviii. 13; lxxvii. 18, etc.). The earth saw, and trembled (comp. Judg. v. 4; Pss. lxxviii. 8; cxiv. 7).

Ver. 5.—The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord (comp. Judg. v. 5; Isa. lxiv. 1; Micah i. 4). The earth itself is regarded as not only shaken (ver. 4), but as melting and crumbling away at the descent of God from heaven to earth (comp. 2 Pet. iii. 10). At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth (comp. Josh. iii. 11, 13; Micah iv. 13; Zech. iv. 14; vi. 5).

Ver. 6.—The heavens declare his righteousness (comp. Ps. l. 6; Matt. xxiv. 29, 30). By signs in the heavens it is proclaimed that the Lord has come to judgment. And all the people see (rather, *have seen*) his glory; literally, *all the peoples*; i.e. all the nations of the earth (comp. ver. 1).

Ver. 7.—Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols. Professor Cheyne transposes this verse and the next, but without any necessity. It is quite natural that the effect of the theophany on God's enemies should be noted *first*. The effect is that

they are "confounded," or rather, *covered with shame*. The display of real Divine power makes manifest the impotency of the idols, and puts their worshippers to the blush. **Worship him, all ye gods.** The theophany is a call on the false gods to worship the true God.

Ver. 8.—**Zion heard, and was glad** (comp. Ps. xlviii. 11). To Zion, the Church of God, the company of his saints, the theophany brings, not shame, but rejoicing. The Lord comes for their relief, for their deliverance, for their exaltation. **And the daughters of Judah rejoiced.** The "daughters of Judah" are the other cities of Judæa besides Jerusalem. In a Christian sense, they may be taken to represent the irregularly organized Churches, which will participate in the general joy of the faithful at Christ's final coming. **Because of thy judgments, O Lord.** It does not show any vindictive feeling, if the saints, persecuted so long, "rejoice" when an end is put to their sufferings by the final judgment of the wicked.

Ver. 9.—**For thou, Lord, art high above all the earth; rather, art the Most High (elium) above all the earth** (see the Revised Version). **Thou art exalted far above all gods** (comp. ver. 7, and see also Ps. lxxxiii. 18). No comparison can be made between Jehovah and the heathen gods. He is "exalted" far, far above them.

Ver. 10.—**Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.** The psalmist ends his strain with an exhortation to the faithful—an exhortation,

first of all, to "hate evil." God hates evil (Ps. xlv. 7); evil will separate them from God, evil will be their destruction. Therefore let them hate and abhor it. It is indifference to evil, that, more than anything else, lays men open to the assaults of Satan. **He preserveth the souls of his saints.** He (i.e. Jehovah) watches tenderly over the souls of his saints—his holy loving ones, and preserves them in being, keeps them from destruction, and delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.

Ver. 11.—**Light is sown for the righteous** (comp. Ps. cxii. 4, "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness"). God sheds the rays of his grace on the path of the righteous man, enlightens his understanding, and illumines his spirit perpetually. **And gladness for the upright in heart.** Together with "light," he sheds abroad "gladness," the irrepressible joy which comes from a sense of his favour and protection.

Ver. 12.—**Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous.** Such being the blessedness of the righteous, they are finally exhorted to "rejoice in the Lord," i.e. to show forth their gratitude to God in psalms and hymns of joy (comp. Ps. xxxii. 11; xxxiii. 1—3), and to give thanks to him at the remembrance of his holiness; or rather, to *give thanks to his holy memorial*, which is the same as giving thanks to his Name (comp. Ps. xxx. 4, and the comment *ad loc.*).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*God's sovereignty.* "The Lord reigneth." To a thoughtful, loving, earnest Christian heart, the spectacle of prevailing disorder, wrong, misery, in this world (to-day as in past ages) is a source of sometimes almost unbearable wonder and grief. Then it is unspeakable consolation to remember "the Lord reigneth" (Ps. xi. 3, 4). As from his own sin and trouble he takes refuge in God's love; so from the apparent triumph of evil, in God's righteous rule. God's Kingship or sovereignty involves these three: (1) supreme power; (2) rightful authority; (3) exercise of this power and authority in actual government.

I. SUPREME POWER. "If we speak of strength, lo! he is strong." "With God all things are possible." No design, no emergency, to which his power is not equal. He is the Source—the Creator—of all other power. The forces of nature, the wills and faculties of men—of all creatures, lower or higher than men—have their root and being in him; hang on his sovereign will (Ps. xxxiii. 8, 9). We must not think of God's power apart from his wisdom (Ps. cxlvii. 5). Nor of these apart from his love (Ps. cxlv. 9, 10). Blind unconscious force—the universe of atheism—is the most frightful of all conceptions. Force guided by loveless wisdom is an impossible idea, for it would have no motive for exercise. But it is "the Lord" who reigns; and "God is love."

II. RIGHTFUL AUTHORITY. The righteous self-evident claim to absolute and universal obedience. Power without right would be tyranny. Right without power would be an empty shadow—crown without sceptre. The right to obedience, and power to enforce it (or punish disobedience), together make up authority. Therefore to those attributes of power, wisdom, and love, we must add righteousness. "The sceptre of his kingdom is a right sceptre." While nature and Scripture proclaim that he *does* reign,

reason and conscience declare that he *ought* to reign. 1. The right of *absolute ownership* is his (Ps. c. 3). He has created us. 2. Of *infinite benefaction*. All we have or hope for, or ever can enjoy, is his free gift. 3. Of perfect and sole *fitness*, infinite *ability*, to rule the universe he has created and owns. Knowledge which nothing, great or small, escapes. Power which upholds all in being, and which, if he please to exert it, none can resist. Goodness which no demand can overtax.

III. ACTUAL EXERCISE OF GOVERNMENT. (Ps. ciii. 19.) "He doeth according to his will," etc. (Dan. iv. 35). He has bound all nature with a chain of love which natural forces and existences cannot even *seek* to break. He has given to man and other spiritual creatures, with reason to apprehend duty, and conscience to approve our fulfilment or condemn our neglect, a will endued with the mysterious power of *disobeying* his law, resisting his will. Without this we should be incapable of willing, reasonable, loving, conscientious obedience. Men therefore *do* disobey God; and the direct result of disobedience is the misery and death which fill our world (Jas. i. 13—15). But man's disobedience cannot relax God's authority, or alter the fact that over all he reigns and rules. And this supreme authority is in the hands once nailed to the cross (John v. 22, 23; Matt. xxviii. 18; Eph. i. 21—23; Rev. v. 12, 13).

Ver. 10.—*The hatred of sin*. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." On the darkest, most puzzling of all questions—the origin of evil—the Bible leaves us quite in the dark. Old and New Testaments are alike silent. This would be very astonishing if the purpose of Scripture were to make deep philosophers or subtle theologians. We cease to wonder when we understand, what people have come to see more clearly in these days than formerly, that the object of God's Word is to "make wise unto salvation;" to teach us to know God and to know ourselves, and to bring us home to God. In a word, it is the very same as the angel declared to be the purpose of the Incarnation, "He shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. i. 21). Therefore, while the Bible is dumb as to all questions of curiosity, it has a plain answer to such practical questions as, "What is sin? How ought we to regard it?" Sin in conduct is disobedience to God; in character, unlikeness to God. The first sin was an act of deliberate disobedience. Sin in every form is "that abominable thing" which our Father hates. Therefore we ought to hate it with perfect hatred. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil!" We may take these words (1) as a description; (2) as a command.

I. HATRED OF SIN A CHARACTERISTIC FEATURE OF THOSE WHO LOVE GOD. It is to be expected of them; is peculiar to them; is a mark by which they may be known. It may be objected that this hatred of evil is felt by multitudes who make no pretence to love God. Every just man hates injustice—to others as much as to himself. Every benevolent man hates cruelty; every honest man, knavery; every sober man, intemperance; every one of pure life, impurity. All this without reference to God. This is so; and just here lies the difference. The Bible deals with evil not merely as wrong done to man, but first and foremost as *sin against God*. So the sinner is taught to see it (Ps. li. 1—4). So the saint laments it in others (Ps. cxix. 136, 158). So God regards it, both in judging and in pardoning (Ps. i. 21; Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7; Hos. vii. 2; Ps. xxxii. 1, 2). To set forth the complete teaching of Scripture on this would be practically to quote the whole Bible. If we wanted a title for the Scriptures, we might write on the back, "The story of sin, and how God deals with it." Real hatred of sin, then, springs from the Holy Spirit's teaching. An ungodly man may hate and despise many kinds of sin; but not *as sin*—breaking God's Law, dishonouring God, hateful in his sight, inconsistent with love to him. So also an ungodly heart may admire and delight in many kinds of goodness; but not because goodness and holiness are God's likeness, the fulfilment of his Law, and pleasing to him. Love of what God loves; hatred of what God hates;—this is the supreme test of character; in one word, *sympathy* with God (John xiv. 21, 24). Our Saviour is in this, as in all else, our perfect Model. His habitual calm and gentleness, the stress he lays on doing good to those who hate or injure us, and his meek submission to immeasurable wrong, are apt to conceal from us his unsparing condemnation of sin. No denunciations of Old Testament prophets are more severe than our Lord's warnings concerning the impenitent cities, the hypocritical Pharisees, the guilty city of Jerusalem, the unfaithful servants. Nothing in the Bible is more terrible than his words to those who have tried to combine religious

profession with a sinful life: "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

II. Therefore THIS COMMAND COMES TO US, WE MAY SAY, WITH THE WHOLE BIBLE AT ITS BACK—all the motives of the gospel added to all the motives of the Law. The words of the old Hebrew psalmist should have tenfold force in the ears and hearts of Christian believers, "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." *Reasons* for hating sin are to be found in every page of human history; in every home and heart throughout the world. It is hateful as the source, directly or indirectly, of all the misery which pervades the world. Hateful as degrading, deforming, debasing, human nature; for which reason sin is so constantly represented in Scripture by the loathsome image of defilement (Job ix. 30, 31). Hateful because "the end of those things is death" (Rom. vi. 21). What the Bible precisely means, what God means, by the death of a soul has been of late years fiercely controverted. I feel no warrant or wish to dogmatize. I only point out here that the *tendency* of sin, unforgiven, unrepented, unremoved, is to the extinction of all that is worth calling "life." Even one *single sin*, lying, *e.g.*, or pride, or gluttony, if it were to gain absolute unchecked mastery, would render the man hopelessly selfish, blind to duty, incapable of nobleness, unfit for society, unfit, in a word, to live. But it is not by any or all of these reasons that we are here urged to "hate evil." It is by *love*. "Ye that love the Lord." Love to God and love of evil are the two most irreconcilable opposites in the universe. One must be fatal to the other. We could not love God, at least not aright, did we not know that "his work is perfect," etc. (Deut. xxxii. 4). The supreme truth that "God is love" involves his eternal abhorrence of sin, for sin is the deadly foe of love. The opposite of love is selfishness; and sin and selfishness are so closely connected that some of the deepest thinkers have reckoned them identical. Perhaps it is true to say that the essence of sin is want of love to God; and where love is absent, selfishness rushes in to fill the void. Accordingly, the great crowning proof of God's love is declared to be that which is at the same time God's crowning condemnation of sin, "the death of his Son" (Rom. v. 10). Our Lord himself declares this to be a new and glorious reason for his Father's love (Isa. x. 17). The crucial test of his own love (John xv. 13). Of God's love to the world (John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 9, 10). In sight of the cross let us learn how to "hate evil."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—12.—*Jehovah is King.* The subject of this psalm, as of the whole group to which it belongs, is the reign of Christ. Some glorious revival in the Jewish Church so uplifted the thought of the writer of these psalms that he sees, as if already present, that blessed advent and reign of the Lord which, whilst it must be the confusion of his adversaries, must also be the everlasting joy of his faithful people. We observe—

I. THE AFFIRMATION OF THESE PSALMS—that Jehovah is King. "The Lord reigneth." The writer has no doubt of it at all. Therefore: 1. *He bids the whole earth rejoice, even to its uttermost parts, the scattered islands of the sea.* 2. *He admits that much mystery remains.* "Clouds and darkness are," etc. 3. *Nevertheless, he affirms that righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.* The Lord is enthroned, and righteousness and judgment shall be habitually upheld. 4. *Nature bears witness to him.* Lightnings, earthquakes, volcanoes, the earth melting like wax, symbolize his majesty and power. 5. *The heathen are confounded, whilst his people, for abundant reasons* (ver. 9), *rejoice.*

II. THE GENERAL DENIAL OF THIS AFFIRMATION, which is met with in our day. There are not a few who say that the Lord *will* reign; but that, as yet, the state of the world is getting worse and worse, and will do so until the coming of the Lord, when he will bring all evil to an end. They look forward to that second coming of the Lord as the great hope of the Church. Hence it is only as having the right and the power to reign, and as now and then manifesting that power, that, at present, the Lord can be said to reign. They believe that the Lord shall reign, not that he does. But note—

III. THE NEW TESTAMENT CONFIRMATION OF THIS PSALM. 1. *It everywhere declares*

that the Lord is King, is reigning now. Because such is the just conclusion from its constant statements that the coming of Christ was "at hand;" that generation in which our Lord lived was not to pass away until the coming of his kingdom. Some standing around him—so he declared—should not taste of death till they had seen him coming in glory. And with this all the teachings of the apostles agree. They tell of the Lord's coming as "at hand." They believed that some of them should remain and be alive at his coming. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," was the burden of their preaching; they went everywhere proclaiming that, and the coming of the Lord as its inauguration. But if our Lord has not come, then how are his words, and the words of his apostles, whom the Holy Spirit was to lead into all truth, to be understood? We shrink from saying that they were mistaken, and, unwittingly, taught error. Therefore we believe that he has come, and that he is indeed and in truth reigning now. 2. *And the objection—Why, then, is evil so rampant?*—is met by St. Paul's statement in 1 Cor. xv. 23—26. There the reign of Christ is plainly declared, and that "he must reign till he hath put," etc. (ver. 25), evidently implying that, though he doth reign, yet there will be enemies still to be subdued, and this will be only a gradual process. His coming was not to put an end all at once, in a moment, to all evil; but it should ultimately be done. 3. And this is still being done. Let the laws and customs of Christian nations tell. They are evil enough in many parts still, but will any one dare to say that the lot of humanity is as dark now as it was in our Lord's day? Has he done nothing for us? Who will say that? And let the growth and increased purity of the Church—far short, doubtless, of what they should and will be—also tell. And the Lord's work by his Spirit in the individual believing soul. Are we not conscious that he is more and more putting all our spiritual foes under his feet? Therefore we believe that the Lord has come, and that he reigneth.

IV. THE BLESSED RESULTS OF THIS BELIEF. 1. *The need for twisting the Scriptures is taken away.* We can read them in their plain and obvious meaning. 2. *The infidel's taunt is silenced.* Gibbon sneers at the Christian's belief, taking it for granted that the Lord has not come. And many to-day base their unbelief on the glaring contradiction between the Scriptures and the doctrine of so many Christians that Christ has not yet come. 3. *We are not fighting a losing battle.* The state of the world is not darkening drear—as so many say—but brightening. The Church has not to wait for, but to rejoice in, his presence. 4. *Death, in the old dread meaning of the word, is abolished.* 5. *Satan is judged, fallen, condemned.* We, whilst trusting in Christ, need have no fear. The Lord is King.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—"The Lord reigneth." On this truth we observe—

I. IT WAS THE FAITH OF ALL HOLY SCRIPTURE. The Law, the Prophets, the Psalms—these especially—the Gospels, the Epistles, and the Revelation, all alike declare this faith, and in varied form utter their "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

II. THIS FAITH IS COMMENDED TO US BY ITS NEVER-FAILING FRUITFULNESS IN ALL MANNER OF GOOD. Some beliefs which men have long and largely held have died away, and men have willingly let them die; but this faith is too blessed that we should lightly let it perish. It imparts peace to the mind amid all the vicissitudes of life; vigour to the will, strengthening it for strenuous action; and power for the help and comfort of our fellow-men.

III. IT IS, NEVERTHELESS, GREATLY DOUBTED AND DENIED. 1. *In some because of the sad and insoluble problems of this present life.* Life seems to them an inextricable tangle, not worth living, all vanity and vexation of spirit. 2. *In others, the teachings of science seem not only to remove God so far away, but throw doubt on his existence altogether.* 3. *In others, the increased sensitiveness to human suffering* has caused the mind to recoil from doctrines and beliefs which were unquestioningly held by our forefathers, and the sight of the mass of unrelieved misery which crushes beneath its awful weight the multitudes of mankind in all ages and lands has begotten the dark doubt in minds not a few, whether there be an omnipotent and beneficent God at all. Perhaps men's doubts of this faith were never more widespread than they are now.

IV. BUT ITS EVIDENCES, NOTWITHSTANDING, ARE EVERYWHERE. 1. *In the natural world, the power, wisdom, and beneficence of the Creator are, in spite of many mysteries, clearly to be seen* (see Drummond's 'Ascent of Man'). 2. *In the order of God's*

providence, when men will obey its laws. 3. *In the history of the Church.* 4. *In the experience of the individual believing soul.*

V. AND THIS FAITH MAY BE ATTAINED TO BY WHOSOEVER WILL. The path is—obedience. “He that doeth my will shall know of the doctrine,” etc. Refuse to cherish doubt. “I will trust, and not be afraid.”—S. O.

Ver. 10.—*Good haters.* These are sadly wanted. Evil is not hated as it ought to be, as in this verse it is commanded to be. The world and the Church alike are suffering from need of those who hate well. The world is left without guidance, and the Church without strength, or honour, or joy.

I. THERE ARE MANY WHO HATE NEITHER GOOD NOR EVIL. 1. *They do not hate goodness.* They would be shocked to be told they did. They often say fine things about it, and, like Herod with John the Baptist, do “many things” because of it. They do not practise it much—never, unless it is conventional and in good form. Still, they do not hate it. It would be almost better if they did. For then they could not deceive themselves as now they do. They imagine all is well with them, simply because they do not openly oppose goodness. Though not with it, they are, so they flatter themselves, not against it. It was specially to such that our Lord spoke his stern, solemn word, “He that is not with me is against me.” They are the would-be neutrals. Our Lord likens them to the “house swept and garnished,” from which one devil is gone out, but who soon comes back with seven others worse. The publicans and harlots, who know and feel their sin, go into the kingdom of heaven before such. 2. *And assuredly they do not hate evil.* If it be very gross and flagrant, they will condemn it, but if it comes to them in plausible and specious garb, as it generally does, they make excuses for it, and allow it both in themselves and others. The devil has it pretty much his own way so far as these people are concerned. He fears none but those who *hate evil*.

II. BUT THOSE WHO LOVE THE LORD MUST HATE EVIL. 1. *It stands to reason.* Such hatred of evil is but the necessary consequence and concomitant of the love of the Lord; where the one is, the other is also. 2. *They will do so always and everywhere.* Most and first of all in themselves. Not only in its outward manifestations, but in its secret spring—the heart from whence it proceeds. It is of no use fulminating against evil in others whilst we cherish it in ourselves. This they deeply feel, and hence their perpetual prayer is for the “clean heart.” And they will hate evil in others also. They will not connive at it, nor in any way countenance it; their lives will be a witness and protest against it, they will be “the salt of the earth.”

III. THE MOTIVES THAT URGE THEM ARE FULL OF FORCE. 1. *Sin is the curse of humanity.* Its steps are blood-marked all through the world’s history. It “brought death into the world, and all our woe;” and as it was, so it is still. 2. *It slew our Lord.* How would we feel towards the murderer of our dearest friend? 3. *Whenever we in any degree allow it in ourselves, it weakens and humiliates us,* and brings darkness into our souls. 4. *It is life or death with us.* If we do not destroy it, it will destroy us. 5. *It robs us of power over others, save to do them harm.*

IV. BUT THIS HATRED OF EVIL NEEDS TO BE DILIGENTLY CHERISHED. For we are in peril of getting used to it, and so of acquiescing in it as a thing that cannot be helped. Therefore: 1. *Pray the Holy Spirit to fill you with the love of Christ.* 2. *To reveal you to yourself.* 3. *Walk in the light.* 4. *Confess at once if you have sinned.* 5. *Openly commit yourself on the Lord’s side.* 6. *Attack evil wherever possible.* 7. *Pray without ceasing.*—S. C.

Ver. 11.—*The seed of light.* The sacred writers often use strange metaphors; as here, light is said to be “sown for the righteous.” Milton uses the same figure of the dew—

“Now Morn, her rosy steps in th’ eastern clime
Advancing, sowed the earth with Orient pearl.”

But let us get beneath the strange figure, and ask—

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? 1. *What is meant by light?* It is a constant symbol for joy, gladness (Esth. viii. 16; Ps. xxvii. 1, etc.). And, on the other hand, sorrow is likened to darkness. 2. *What does the word “sown” mean?* It is a very suggestive

word. It teaches that the seed of joy is: (1) Scattered abroad. And so it is for God's people; they find it everywhere, and often in most unlikely places. As Paul and Silas in their dungeon at Philippi. (2) For a time out of sight. The seed, when sown, is so. See this in our coal-beds. Light is sown there. Let there be the application of a due amount of heat, and the light will flash forth that was sown by the sun long ages ago. And in like manner, the grace of God has stored up joy and gladness in places where you would never have looked for them. Light is sown in them, and, though now out of sight, will in due time break forth (Ps. cxxvi. 5). Then (3) certainly not lost. Sometimes it seems as if our light had gone from us for ever. But it is not so; the losses, bereavements, trials of all kinds which darkened our life, they are but the furrows of the field into which the seed has been cast, and by which it is for the time buried. But as the farmer does not count his seed sown as seed lost, but quite otherwise, so should our thought be. (4) But is in the care and keeping of God. (5) Will come back multiplied. (6) And glorified (cf. 1 Cor. xv. 42—44). We are wont to speak of "God's acre," the old and beautiful name for our churchyards, and they are full of sown light. But all our life is a field thus sown. And there are many harvests, the resurrection morn chief of them all. Yet other fields are the Holy Scriptures, God's providence, the Holy Spirit's work. Light is sown for the righteous in all these. But the question will arise—

II. IS IT ALL TRUE? And we reply: 1. *The order of nature seems to affirm it.* How often has the righteous career been trampled upon and apparently destroyed, but it has sprung up again! 2. *The Scriptures assert it* unhesitatingly, and furnish perpetual proof, that the light of the righteous is never lost, but only sown preparatory to a blessed harvest. 3. *And our heart's deepest convictions confirm it.* We could not live without this faith.

III. WHAT THEN? 1. *The instincts of our nature are not mocked.* We were made for the light, for blessedness, and the righteous shall realize it. 2. *What a terrible thing that any should be self-excluded*—as the ungodly are—from the number of those for whom this word is spoken! 3. *Be patient when some of your light is taken from you.* It is wanted for seed. 4. *Yield your hearts to Christ,* that by his blessed Spirit he may make them righteous. 5. *Look on to the harvest.*—S. C.

Ver. 11.—*The seed of light.* (Another outline.) The text leads us to consider—

I. WHENCE WHAT LIGHT OF GLADNESS AND JOY WE HAVE HAS COME. The seed was sown: 1. *At the Creation.* 2. *In God's plan of providence.* 3. *In the gift of Christ.* 4. *In the ministry of the Holy Spirit* in the Church, the Scriptures, and in our own soul.

II. WHERE WHAT OF LIGHT WE HAVE LOST IS GONE. 1. *Into God's keeping.* 2. *As seed.* 3. *For increase and glory.*

III. WHITHER WE MUST LOOK FOR WHAT WE WOULD HAVE COME BACK. 1. *In the way of submission to God's will.* (1 Pet. v. 6.) 2. *To the Holy Spirit's work in our souls.* 3. *To the unfolding of God's providence.* 4. *In the endeavour to help and comfort others.* 5. *To the resurrection morn, and the heavenly home.*—S. C.

Ver. 12.—*Giving thanks for God's holiness.* The psalm tells of the Lord coming in majesty and righteousness to judge the world. And here at the end of the psalm the writer remembers this judgment and the holiness which characterized it, and bids all righteous men rejoice.

I. WE ARE COMMANDED TO DO THIS—to "give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness." 1. *"His holiness."* It means not alone his righteous deeds, but yet more his righteous character; not alone for what he does, but for what he is in himself. He cannot be tempted of evil, cannot be moved away from perfect righteousness. God is holy in all his ways. 2. *We are to give thanks for this.* We are ready to give thanks for God's providential love and for his redeeming grace; but for his holiness we commonly cherish reverence and awe rather than joyful praise. This is wrong, and we are bidden here rejoice and give thanks. 3. *And this whenever we remember his holiness.* We do so in retrospect, looking back upon the righteous acts of the Lord. And we do so in prospect, anticipating the time when his will shall be done on earth as in heaven. We are to stay ourselves on the faith that he cometh to judge the earth, and that he shall judge the people righteously.

II. IT IS ASSUMED THAT WE ARE RIGHTEOUS. Such, in the first part of the verse, are distinctly appealed to. *For only such can obey this command.* To the ungodly the holiness of God is hateful; it is to him a constant and awful threatening, a dark cloud lowering over his life; he shrinks from coming into contact with it. How fearful are, often, the death-beds of such men! And until we are regenerate, and know that we are accepted in Christ, the holiness of God must excite in us fear rather than thanksgiving.

III. AND THAT THERE ARE GOOD REASONS FOR SUCH THANKSGIVING. And there are; for: 1. *The holiness of God is the sure pledge and guarantee of our redemption.* The atoning work of Christ, on which our redemption rests, is no plan whereby God's love may be satisfied at the expense of his holiness. For nowhere is that holiness more conspicuous than in that atonement. It magnifies the Law, and makes it honourable as nothing else could (cf. Rom. viii. 1, 2). The tables of the Law in the ark of the covenant, on which the mercy-seat rested, symbolized the eternal fact that God's mercy rests on righteousness; his love is sustained by and based upon his holiness. 2. *And it is the assurance of our own holiness,* that we shall be made like him. For whatever be the character of any man, one sure effect of it will be that he seeks to make his surroundings like himself. And so the holy God must seek to make his people holy; he cannot be satisfied until they are holy as he is holy. 3. *And of our eternal blessedness.* Could sin enter heaven, it would cease to be heaven—it would be the world over again. But nothing can enter heaven that defileth. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." 4. *And of the kingdom of God upon earth.* The curse wrought by the Fall shall be banished by the redemption of God. Not in us alone, but in humanity at large, shall God's blessed holy will for our sanctification be done on earth as it is in heaven.

IV. AND THAT THERE NEED BE NO REASONS WHY ANY OF US SHOULD NOT "GIVE THANKS AT," ETC. For the two essentials for our thus giving thanks are ours in Christ. 1. *We can be reconciled to God in him.* Until we are we cannot be thankful for his holiness. But if we will come away from our sins, and confess them, and believe in him, then we shall be reconciled to God, and to us shall be given the new nature, the regeneration, without which we cannot even see the kingdom of God. 2. *And we may be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.* Not forgiven only, but saved from sin itself (see Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 27). And when this is done, then the very thoughts of our heart will be changed, and whereas we could not heretofore do aught but tremble at the remembrance of God's holiness, now we shall rejoice and give thanks.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*What God seems, and what God is.* The figures of this verse are evidently taken from the scenes connected with the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. Then "clouds and darkness" were the surroundings, and from these men might get a cursory and an unworthy impression of God; but then "justice and judgment" were declared to be the "pillars of his throne," and if men would but go beyond the appearances, they would apprehend God aright, and even discern the mission and the mystery of the symbols in which he appeared to them.

I. WHAT GOD SEEMS TO OUR IMPERFECT VISION. What could Israel see when the people dared to look up to the holy mount? Compare with what Moses saw who was on the holy mount. "And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke . . . and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly" (Exod. xix. 18). For proper apprehension of God we are under two disadvantages: 1. Distance. 2. Sin. Distance makes it difficult for us to see things clearly; and difficult for us to get them in the right perspective. Sin brings a dimness of the moral and spiritual vision—somewhat as drunkenness gives a double vision; and so the clouds round about God prove to be sin-clouds in our own eyes. And sin brings a strange fear, because man can never separate sin from consequences, and he cannot help feeling that God will see that the consequences come. So our sin makes a "darkness" about God.

II. WHAT GOD IS TO OUR CULTURED VISION. That vision has to be cleansed before it can be cultured. Illustrate cultured vision by the trained eyesight of the sailor or of the scientific man. We at first may see nothing; gradually as we fix our gaze, and think as we gaze, we can see much. Cultured spiritual vision gradually gains right

apprehension of what God is, and sees two things as absolutely necessary to the fitting idea of him. 1. He is eternally right in the principles that sway him. 2. He is practically right in the application of those principles. These two things are indicated in the abstract word "righteousness" and the concrete word "judgment." It may be shown how necessarily related these two are. If God is right, we may be confident that his ways are right. If we can see his ways are right, we know that he is right.—R. T.

Vers. 3—5.—*The sign of the storm-god* (comp. Exod. xix.; xx.; Hab. iii.; Heb. xii. 18—21; see also Ps. lxxvii. 17, 18). There is here an evident reference to an Eastern thunderstorm. Lightning and thunder, among all superstitious peoples, are regarded as special manifestations of the Deity. To us storms are but nature-forces, having their intensity, and their comings and goings, according to ordinary nature-laws. But poetry can now do, better than superstition, what superstition has done in all ages and in all lands. We inquire what the "storm-sign" tells concerning God. The one common feeling in tempest is the sense of the presence of an august and awful force that is uncontrollable by man, but controllable by God. In addition to this it may be said that the storm-witness for God is universal; it is rendered in every land and in every age. Point out that in Jewish history storms are directly associated with the destruction of God's foes, and the deliverance of God's people, as in the case of Sisera. See also the revelation of God to Elijah, at Horeb, in the wild storm and the still small voice. The storm-voice says concerning God—

I. HE HAS AUGUST FORCES AT COMMAND. Nature-forces are sublime in themselves, but they represent moral and spiritual forces far more sublime.

II. HIS FORCES ARE ALTOGETHER OUT OF MAN'S LIMITATION. Tempest makes us feel this. All the combined powers of all humanity could not stop a flash of lightning or silence a peal of thunder. What makes the storm so trying to us is the sense it brings of our utter helplessness. But that lesson man needs to learn in a thousand ways, and over and over again.

III. HIS FORCES MAY BE USED IN MISSIONS OF JUDGMENT. The lightning strikes some. The storm may damage much. And though we may not say in a particular case the lightning-stroke is a particular judgment on the individual, we do properly get the impression of God's power to carry out the Divine threatening.

IV. HIS FORCES, HOWEVER USED, HELP US FULLY TO REALIZE HIMSELF. There is constant danger of men's being satisfied with *one-sided* views of God. Christianity exalts his *love*; therefore it is needful to qualify our view of God by the nature-teachings and the older revelations.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Men's own gods*. The figures which men worshipped in the olden time were either shaped of wood or molten metal; but in either case they were hand-carved or hand-graven, finished off by man's skill; and to set prominently the fact of man's share in their making, they are called "graven" images. It does not matter what form a man's god may take—whether it be a creation of his hand or of his imagination; the thing that makes it an idol, a vanity, an altogether unworthy thing, is that *it is his*. Man is a dependent creature. He did not make himself; he has a Maker. He does not want a God; he has a God. Whatever a man makes is less than the man. The god a man makes must be an *inferior being to himself*; and so cannot be really his God.

I. THE INFLUENCES ON MEN OF WORSHIPPING THEIR OWN GODS. As they have no standard beyond themselves, there is no hope of their rising higher in intellectual or moral attainments. And men make their gods to represent what they *like*—their pleasures. So their gods are always actually lower than their best selves, and the worship of them must debase and degrade them. This is abundantly illustrated by the immorality of all heathenism, both formal and intellectual.

II. THE CONSEQUENCES OF MEN'S WORSHIPPING THEIR OWN GODS. They must come into a "confounding." Life brings round the strain-times when the helplessness of idols is revealed. Illustrate by the helplessness of the Baal-priests in the great testing-day of Carmel. Intellectual idols, in which men boast themselves now, can provide no cheer for sorrow, no light for death.

III. THE INFLUENCES ON MEN OF WORSHIPPING THE ONE GOD. They have the inspiration of an absolute standard. They can always see in God what they *ought* to be, what they *might* be, and what they should strive to be. They can always find in God something beyond them, something that they are not. High thoughts of God draw us on to noble attainments.

IV. THE CONSEQUENCES OF MEN'S WORSHIPPING THE ONE GOD. They are never "confounded." They do receive Divine help. They are lifted above all fear of nature-forces or of human forces that may be arrayed against them.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*Our attitude toward evil.* "Hate evil." In Scripture the term "evil" is employed in two senses—calamity and wrong-doing. We can only "hate evil" when it stands for wrong-doing. But it is necessary to carefully distinguish between hate of the wrong-doer and hate of the wrong-doing. The first is never right, the second is always right. We are to hate our own wrong-doing, and to hate other people's. The term "hate" is also used in Scripture in two senses. Sometimes it means "feel intense dislike towards;" sometimes it means "put in the second place of your regard." The use of the term as applied to evil, and as representing the attitude towards evil of those who love God, may be seen in the other synonymous terms used in the Bible. 1. To hate is to *eschew*. A strong term, applying to something found unpleasant in the mouth, and therefore cast out. Of Job as an upright man it is said, "He feared God, and eschewed evil." 2. To hate is to *depart from*. So the psalmist (xxxiv. 14) bids us "depart from evil, and do good." 3. To hate is to *abhor*. The Apostle Paul (Rom. xii. 9) bids us "abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good." Gibbes says, "A man may know his hatred of evil to be true, first, if it be universal: he that hates sin truly hates all sin. Secondly, true hatred is fixed; there is no appeasing it but by abolishing the thing hated. Thirdly, hatred is a more rooted affection than anger; anger may be appeased, but hatred remains and sets itself against the whole kind. Fourthly, if our hatred be true, we hate all evil, in ourselves first, and then in others. Fifthly, he that hates sin truly hates the greatest sin in the greatest measure. Sixthly, our hatred is right if we can endure admonition and reproof for sin, and not be enraged." The points that may be opened and illustrated are these—

I. THE HATE WE CHERISH FOR EVIL IS AN INWARD FEELING. Show the natural repulsion of the pure-minded from foul conversation. Those who love God become like-minded with God; and so inwardly feel sin to be "the abominable thing."

II. THE HATE WE CHERISH FOR EVIL WILL FIND OUTWARD EXPRESSION. 1. In separation from it. 2. In resistance of it. 3. In fighting with it. But never in any persecution of, or unauthorized attempts to punish, the wrong-doers.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*Our Soul-preserver.* It has always been a source of questioning and doubting to anxious-minded men, such as the Psalmist Asaph, that God does not always preserve the *bodies*, or the *circumstances*, of his servants. But this ought to be no surprise to those who apprehend that God promises to preserve the *soul*; and he may, sometimes, be actually preserving the soul by not preserving the body. But perhaps this involves the higher Christian idea of the *soul*. In the older Scripture, and sometimes in the newer, the word "soul" is equivalent to "life;" and preservation of natural life is the thing assured. Take the promise in its twofold sense.

I. GOD PRESERVES OUR NATURAL LIFE. We press that truth into the familiar saying, "Man is immortal till his work is done." Nothing can ever touch a man's life save on God's permission. Evil of circumstance can never of itself rise to that height. Illustrate by the permissions and restrictions given to the "Satan" of the Book of Job. But our Lord raises an argument on God's care of our life. He who keeps alive will surely provide. The Preserver of our soul is surely the Provider of our need. What we may ever need of *deliverance* is guaranteed in the grace of our Preserver. Keeper always, Redeemer at call of our need.

II. GOD PRESERVES OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE. That is our supreme treasure; or rather, that is our true, our permanent self. Natural, animal life we do but share with the animals, and we can have it but for a time; circumstances are only the surroundings of our time of probation. They may all go, and we remain. What we *are*, when we

have done with circumstances, and have ended our animal life, is the matter of supreme concern to us. It is, then, the soul-character that God preserves and delivers; as the apostle says, "He will keep that we have committed to him unto the great day." Not a thing we have, and say we *own*, is safe. All may take wing and flee away. But with absolute confidence we may say, "He shall preserve our soul."—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*The harvest for the righteous.* "Light is sown." Light is the type of everything pleasant. Perhaps it is conceived of here as hidden, like seed, in the ground. God's people no more see light about their paths than men can see seeds in the ground. They walk in darkness. But the seeds are there, and the light is there. And one day there will surely be revealings both for the seeds and the light—a harvest of the seeds, a harvest of the light. Perowne and others think that the verb "sown" is to be taken in the sense of "scattered," "diffused;" but the figure of light as hidden at present and waiting for a revealing day, is certainly more poetical and suggestive. Professor Grove gives the material for an effective illustration. "Marvelous as it may appear, light can actually be bottled up for use. Take an engraving which has been kept for some days in the dark; expose it to full sunshine—that is, insulate it—for fifteen minutes; lay it on sensitive paper in a dark place, and at the end of twenty-four hours it will have left an impression of itself on the sensitive paper, the whites coming out as blacks." Take "light" for vindication and blessing, see—

I. LIGHT FOR THE RIGHTEOUS IS ACTUALLY IN EXISTENCE. They may not see it, but that does not matter. The farmer does not see his seed. God's response to all goodness is immediate; but he often keeps his response a secret until the right time for revealing comes. There is comfort and strength in knowing that the light exists.

II. LIGHT FOR THE RIGHTEOUS IS IN GOOD KEEPING. As the earth keeps the seed, so God keeps vindication, full deliverance, and blessedness for the righteous. See the figure of martyr-souls safely kept under the altar, only crying, "How long, O Lord, how long?" There is comfort and strength in knowing that the light is safe.

III. LIGHT FOR THE RIGHTEOUS MUST BREAK FORTH SOME DAY. As surely as grass-blades will show from the seeds, and loaded wains carry home the harvest. The time for breaking forth will be God's time, and that is, in every way, the best time.—R. T.

Ver. 12.—*The inspiration of cherished memories.* "Give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness." Why does not the psalmist say, "at the *thought* of his holiness"? See that his point is this—you may be full of perplexity as you try to understand God's dealings with you *just now*; but you can always get comfort from thinking of God's ways with you *in the past*. And then you can very easily argue from what God has always been to what God surely is.

I. THE PLEASURE OF OUR CHERISHED MEMORIES. We love to live in the past. Like the old soldiers, we are always "fighting our battles o'er." As we grow older, we find more and more pleasure in thinking of our early days—school-day scenes; youthful friendships; opening struggles; first love. But the Christian finds his great interest in tracing God's guiding hand. He has no doubt at all about God's goodness and mercy as he reads over his past. Life seems to him dotted over with pillars, on which over and over again he has written his "Ebenezer." And the "rightness," the "holiness," of God is the thing that so much impresses him. He can see how God led, and where he led, and can say, "It was a good way." Verily the "Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works."

II. THE ARGUMENT FROM OUR CHERISHED MEMORIES. Whatever may be the appearances of things, God is the Unchangeable One; the Rock; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. If we know what he *was*, we know what he *is*. The better we know what he has been, the more fully and clearly we know what he is doing. No friend can bear that we should doubt that he will always be what we know him to be. We ourselves are distressed when those about us seem to fear lest we should be other than they know us to be. Never distrust God. All the ages tell what he has done, and what he *was*, and what he *is*.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The Divine character and government.* “Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and truth are the foundation of his throne.”

1. WE ARE OFTEN IN DOUBT AND DIFFICULTY ABOUT THE DIVINE CHARACTER AND GOVERNMENT. “Clouds and darkness are round about him.” We cannot reconcile all we see with: 1. *Divine omnipotence.* Abortions. The means do not attain the end. 2. *Divine wisdom.* Or the wisdom was not perfect. 3. *Divine justice.* 4. *Divine goodness.*

II. AN OVERPOWERING CONVICTION THAT THE DIVINE CHARACTER AND GOVERNMENT ARE PERFECT. 1. *We feel that we are incapable judges of an infinite plan.* We only see a part, therefore we cannot understand the whole. 2. *What we can see and understand gives us unbounded faith in God in reference to what we cannot understand.* 3. *We feel assured that God is able to overrule what seems evil for final good.* “All things work together for good.”—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM XCVIII

ANOTHER psalm of joy on the coming of God to judge the earth (ver. 9). It is entitled simply “a psalm,” and has no very peculiar features. Metrically, it is best viewed as composed of three strophes of three verses each. The first strophe gives the grounds of praise (vers. 1—3); the next describes the method of praise (vers. 4—6); the third contains a call on all nature to join in the praise (vers. 7—9).

Ver. 1.—*O sing unto the Lord a new song* (comp. Ps. xcvi., which opens similarly). The faithful and wise steward is ever bringing out of his treasures things which are at once old and “new.” For he hath done marvellous things. The “marvellous things” which God has done for man constitute the first ground for praising him. These marvels may be either those of his ordinary providence, or special interpositions and deliverances. *His right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory; rather, hath wrought salvation for him* (see the Revised Version; and comp. Isa. lix. 16; lxiii. 5).

Ver. 2.—*The Lord hath made known his salvation; i.e.* “has manifested his power to save.” The psalmist looks back upon the deliverance of ver. 9, as though it were accomplished. *His righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen.* God has vindicated in the eyes of all the nations upon earth the righteousness of his rule over mankind.

Ver. 3.—*He hath remembered his mercy and his truth towards the house of Israel.* The judgment of the nations involves mercy and deliverance to Israel, which is oppressed by them; and thus manifests God’s faithfulness towards them. *All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God* (comp. ver. 2 and Isa. lii. 10).

Ver. 4.—*Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth.* God is to be praised heartily—with a loud and ringing voice. The body is to unite with the soul in giving him thanks, and to perform its part vigorously and with zeal (comp. Ps. v. 3; lvi. 1; lxxxi. 1; xcv. 1, 2; c. 1, etc.). And in the praise of God *the whole earth* is to join. *Make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise; rather, break forth, and sing for joy, and sing praise* (see the Revised Version).

Ver. 5.—*Sing unto the Lord with the harp; i.e.* “with a harp accompaniment.” It is fitting that in the praises of God instrumental music should be joined with vocal melody (comp. Exod. xv. 20; 2 Sam. vi. 15; 1 Chron. xv. 16, 28; xvi. 6; 2 Chron. v. 12, 13; Ezra iii. 10; Neh. xii. 27, etc.). With the harp, and the voice of a psalm; or, *the voice of melody* (Revised Version).

Ver. 6.—*With trumpet and sound of cornet; rather, with clarions and voice of trumpet.* The *chatsotsérôth* are “the straight trumpets, such as are seen on the Arch of Titus, used by the priests for giving signals” (Kay). The *shophâr* is the ordinary curved or rounded trumpet or horn. *Make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King; literally, before the King, Jehovah.* (On the use of wind instruments in the temple service, see 1 Chron. xv. 24, 28; 2 Chron. v. 12; Ezra iii. 10.)

Ver. 7.—*Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof* (see above, Ps. xcvi. 11, where the same phrase occurs). The call on the inanimate things of nature to rejoice is grounded on man’s sympathy with nature, which makes him desire, and half believe, that nature may sympathize with him. *The world, and they that dwell therein* (comp. Ps. xxiv. 1).

Ver. 8.—*Let the floods clap their hands.* This bold metaphor occurs only here and in Isa. lv. 12, where the “trees” are asked to “clap their hands.” *Let the hills be joyful together before the Lord; or, sing for joy*

together; i.e. join with the rest of nature in expressing gladness.

Ver. 9.—For he cometh to judge the earth. Nature, inanimate and animate, may well be asked to rejoice when God comes to judge the earth—since he is sure

to judge it aright. With righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity. “God by his righteous judgment will bring the whole earth from a state of sorrow into a state of salvation and joy” (Hengstenberg).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS

Ver. 1.—*Jehovah's victories.* This psalm is almost an echo of Ps. xcvi., and, like that, tells of the triumphant issue of the Lord's great battle. No doubt the psalmist had some special event in the history of God's people in his mind—some glorious victory given to them; but his words here bring to our thoughts God's spiritual victories, far larger and wider triumphs than any that Israel ever knew. Consider, therefore—

I. THE VICTORIES OF THE LORD WHICH THIS PSALM REMINDS US OF. 1. *There is that of the past*—for humanity generally, for the whole world. Mankind was in sore distress; and he had no help in himself, he had become the devil's prey. But how was this to be remedied? The Incarnation, the Atonement, the gift of the Holy Ghost, were the answer. And so now for every child of man who will avail himself of it, there is full salvation provided. The guilt of our sin, our corrupt nature, and the holy Law of God, were all against us; but in this great victory of the Lord, guilt was put away, man's evil nature subdued, and the Law honoured as it had never been or could be before. Well may we say with St. Paul, “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. xv. 57). 2. *There is that of the present*—that which the individual believer rejoices in for himself. The sense of condemnation is gone, the power of sin is broken, the tyranny of the devil trampled on, the might of sorrow and care gone, the fear of death vanished, and eternal life won—that is the victory which is given now to many a believing soul, to every soul who will have it. 3. *That of the future*—that of the Church triumphant, when every foe is vanquished, when all that have tried and troubled us is no more, and when we are presented “faultless before the presence of the Lord's glory with exceeding joy.”

II. WHAT IS HERE SAID OF THEM. 1. *They are marvellous.* Are they not so? Think of what stood in the way of each. 2. *They are all of God.* “His right hand, and his holy arm, hath,” etc. How evident this is! Did ever any hear of a really saved soul saying aught else than this? And: 3. *They are victories of believers.* Not of mere compassion, still less of mere power, but it was “his holy arm” that triumphed. The law of righteousness and truth was maintained. 4. *They demand a new song.* And they have it, and will for evermore. Let us be in that choir.—S. C.

Vers. 7—9.—*Man's relation to the natural world.* In a beautiful sermon on these verses by the late Rev. T. C. Finlayson, M.A., to which this homily is greatly indebted, he remarks, that when piety and poetry are married to each other, such a song as this is the offspring of their marriage; he notes also the unhappy rarity of this union. Where piety is, there, all too often, imagination is conspicuous by its absence, and such absence is regarded with much complacency, and as a thing desirable rather than otherwise. On the other hand, where the gift of a rich imagination has been bestowed, how sadly often it is divorced from all piety! But in this psalm, as in so many others, the two have been united, and the outcome is such an inspired burst of poetry as we have in these verses. In this exalted spiritual condition the soul sees its true relation to the natural world. The soul regards the world of nature—

I. AS ITS SERVANT. There is a tone of lordship and mastery in these verses. The sea, the earth, the floods, and the hills are bidden to take their parts in the great anthem of praise. The psalmist seems to be issuing his orders to them, and they are as servants ready to obey. It is here as in Ps. viii. All things are put beneath him, he is lord of all. Man has been placed on the earth, not merely to occupy, but to subdue and to rule over it. As generation after generation passes away, this rulership becomes ever more complete. By patient study of the laws of the great Over-lord of

all, man, the under-lord, has learnt to bind the forces of nature, and to make them execute his will. They are his servants under him, and he says to this one, "Come," and it cometh, and to another, "Go," and it goeth. And so here he utters his command, "Let the sea roar," etc.

II. AS FELLOW-WORSHIPPER. The scenes, the sounds, the movements of nature are to the soul of the psalmist not merely scenes and sounds and movements, but show that, like himself, nature is a worshipper "before the Lord." Not that nature, the dead material world, can of itself render worship; only the soul can do that. And only a soul itself filled with the spirit of worship, can see and hear in the natural world what appears to be worship, joy, and praise. We speak of sacred music, but no sound of choir, or organ, or instrument of any kind can utter sacred music unless it express sacred thought in some soul. But let the soul be filled with such high, holy thought and emotion, and, lo! all nature becomes one vast choir, and its varied sounds one glorious anthem of praise.

III. AS SHARER TOGETHER WITH HIMSELF IN THE VICTORIES OF GOD'S GRACE. The soul sees along with its own redemption, the redemption of nature (Rom. viii. 19—21; Ps. lxxvii. 6). The soul of the psalmist is looking on to the full victory of the Lord over all his foes, and the consequent redemption of man, and the earth likewise, under the Lord's righteous rule; and so he calls on all the powers of nature to join with him in praise.

IV. AS, LIKE HIMSELF, GLAD IN GOD. The undevout soul fails to see this, but the eye purged with the love of God in Christ beholds continually in all that is fair, beautiful, and good in the natural world—and how much there is of this!—the heart of nature praising God (see Keble's hymn, "There is a book, who runs may read").—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The Lord's victory.* "His right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory." This is to be treated as a joy-song of the returned Exiles, who regarded themselves as delivered and restored, because their God had fought for them, overcome all their foes, and mastered all their hindrances and difficulties. It was not *their* right hand that had gotten them the victory. It was God's right hand that had gotten *him* the victory, of which they were permitted to reap the full benefit. This victory quickened thought, and brought to mind the assurances of the Prophet Isaiah, e.g. "The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isa. lii. 10). And the victory brought to view the older Israelite history, from the great Red Sea victory and onward. It was plain enough that God had been always getting the victory, always redeeming, always recovering, rescuing, and restoring, always the Saviour. The type of the Divine relations with the people is given in the redemption from Egypt, and then Israel lifted a joy-song, acknowledging concerning Jehovah, "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces thine enemy." For a chorus to their song the women sang, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

I. THE VICTORIES WHICH THE LORD HAS WON. Illustrate: 1. Those won in the older ages, and kept on record in the Old Testament. 2. Those won in the times of Christ, and kept on record in the New Testament. 3. Those won in the ages of the Christian Church, especially in the missionary ages. 4. Those of which we have personal experience, as bearing relation to our past distresses.

II. THE FIGHT IN WHICH THE LORD IS NOW ENGAGED. It is not enough to say that it is with evil in all its forms; it is also with the consequences of evil in all their varieties: as these affect the race, the nation, the society, the family, or the individual. We recognize the fight, we do not always see that it is the Lord fighting—the Lord with us in the fight.

III. THE VICTORIES WHICH THE LORD WILL WIN. "His bow ever abides in strength;" "He goeth forth conquering and to conquer." He will conquer in the *one*. He will conquer in the *many*. One day the final Victor over all evil will "deliver up the kingdom to the Father, and God shall be all in all."—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The Lord's memory.* This is regarding God as if he were a man, and acted as men act. Men find the memory of kindnesses they have done become a plea for

showing further kindness. To have ever helped any one gives them a sort of natural claim on us to help them again. So the psalmist, full of joy in the blessings God was giving his people in his day, felt quite sure that God must have been recalling, remembering, what great things he had done, in olden days, for his people. We think our great pleas to urge before God are our *needs* and our *deserts*. But these are altogether surpassed by the pleas we may use. God's honour, God's promise, and what God has already done for us. But herein lies an important distinction between God's feelings and man's. Only the very noblest among men fail to be annoyed when past favours are made into a plea for new gifts. We are annoyed at the beggar who comes again and again so hopefully, because he has so often come successfully. God loves to bless those whom he has blessed. We may never think of him as tiring of blessing.

I. WHAT MAY WE THINK THE LORD REMEMBERS? See two things. (1) That he had to be very gentle and merciful toward us. (2) That he had to keep his promise to help us. Remembers his mercy and truth; his loving-kindness and faithfulness. See what persuasion to new "mercy and truth" is in such quickened memory. 1. The exercise of the passive graces purifies and ennobles character, and makes us more able to exercise them, and more anxious to find objects on which to exercise them. Do some act merely for a person, and you may find it tiresome to have to do it again. But show a kindness, be merciful, pitiful, tender, gracious, and you will want to be all these over and over again. 2. Every claim upon a man of truth is an establishing and confirming of his truth, and makes him more determined that men shall have absolute trust in his word. If it be thus with men, how much more so with God!

II. HOW MAY WE VENTURE TO QUICKEN THE LORD'S MEMORY? By telling him freely what is in our memories concerning his dealings. This is the way of love. The lover tells his loved one his memories, and that is the best quickening of hers.—R. T.

Vers. 5—7.—*Showing our joy in God.* It must strike every reader of the Psalms that the call to give expression to the joy felt in God is very frequent. We are constantly made to feel that the people did not readily come up to the psalmist's standpoint. Emotionally he could not raise them to his level, and their flagging and dragging seems sometimes to worry him. But the intensely earnest man, the man of cultured spiritual feeling, the pious poet-soul, always has this trouble, and is always in danger of misapprehending his fellows because they seem unable adequately to respond to him. He does not realize that he may be no better standard, since he is *above average*, than they are who are *below average*. The man in advance does us all good by lifting us all higher, if he fails to lift us to his own level. If we cannot sing and praise as the psalmist does, we can all sing and praise better because the psalmist chants so nobly. Illustrate this point by referring to David, the royal psalmist, actually beginning in the tabernacle a service of song. No doubt some were heartily with him from the first, but many must have given him trouble. Some were tiresomely indifferent. They would not come, but they would give no reasons for not coming. Some opposed, and we can well imagine some of the grounds of their opposition. So it always is and always will be. We may qualify the trouble this may cause us by remembering that the signs and expressions of religious feeling greatly differ, and we cannot reasonably expect all persons to express themselves as we do. What we may look for, and work for, is some expression of what is in men's hearts toward the Lord. Let them break out into songs and music, if that will best utter their hearts. Let them abound in good works, if they like that voice for their souls better. The main thing is this—if a man has any joy in God in his soul, let him find out how to give it voice, so that God and men may know of it.—R. T.

Vers. 1—9.—*Universal salvation.* "The last great revelation, the final victory of God, when his salvation and his righteousness, the revelation of which he has promised to the house of Israel, shall be manifested both to his own people and to all the nations of the earth."

I. GOD HAS REVEALED A GREAT SALVATION FOR THE WORLD. (Vers. 1—3.) Distinguished by three great things. 1. *Righteousness.* (Ver. 2.) Reveals his righteousness in and by means of Christ in order to secure our righteousness. *Righteousness* the most comprehensive description of the Divine character and work. 2. *Mercy*, or

loving-kindness. (Ver. 3.) Loving-kindness towards the sinful and unworthy. Mercy and righteousness *compatible*—mercy a part of righteousness. 3. *Truth, or faithfulness.* (Ver. 3.) "Loving-kindness and faithfulness, the two attributes expressive of God's covenant relationship to his people." He fulfils all the promises, and more than all the promises, which his mercy has made.

II. THE JOY WHICH THIS SALVATION SHOULD CREATE. (Vers. 4—9.) 1. *The intensity of this joy.* (Vers. 4—6.) To be uttered by all possible means and instruments. "A joyful noise." The human voice is to be aided and supplemented by instrumental music to give more intense expression to it. 2. *The extent of the joy.* (Vers. 7—9.) The sea is to take up the song; and the floods all to clap their hands; and the mountains are to rejoice together. The whole earth is to rejoice, because God comes to bring it from sin and sorrow into a state of salvation and joy. The poet projects himself into the grandest material objects, and they become sympathetic with his joys and sorrows.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM XCIX.

HERE we have the last of the series of Second Advent psalms, which began with Ps. xciii. The first of them, the fifth, and the last, commence in the same way—with the watchword, "The Lord reigneth." The first and last lay special stress on holiness, as God's leading characteristic, and as required by him (Psa. xciii. 5; xcix. 3, 5, 9). Delitzsch has called this psalm "the earthly echo of the seraphic Trisagion." It resolves the concentrated declaration, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts" (Isa. vi. 3), into three distinct and separate cries, "Holy is he" (ver. 3); "Holy is he" (ver. 5); and "Holy is the Lord our God" (ver. 9). This refrain divides the psalm into three unequal portions, viz. vers. 1—3; vers. 4, 5; and vers. 6—9.

Ver. 1.—The Lord reigneth (see the comment on Ps. xciii. 1). Let the people tremble; literally, *the peoples*; i.e. all the nations upon earth. He sitteth between the cherubim; rather, *he hath his seat upon the cherubim* (comp. Ps. lxxx. 2). The imagery is taken from the internal economy of the Jewish temple, where the Shechinah was enthroned above the cherubic forms that overshadowed and guarded the ark. Let the earth be moved; or, *quake* (comp. Ps. cxiv. 7).

Ver. 2.—The Lord is great in Zion. Primarily great among his faithful ones, among whom his greatness is especially shown. And he is high above all the people (or rather, *peoples*). Secondly great, or "high," among the nations which do not acknowledge him, but are forced to tremble before him (see ver. 1).

Ver. 3.—Let them praise thy great and terrible Name. Even the Gentiles, after

conversion, will praise the Lord, sing of him, and bless his Name. (On the "greatness" and "terribleness" of God, see Exod. xv. 11; Deut. vii. 21; x. 17; Neh. i. 5; iv. 14; Ps. lxxviii. 35, etc.) For it is holy; rather, *holy is he*. This may be a suggestion to those about to praise God—a putting of words into their mouth; or it may be an almost involuntary outburst of praise on the part of the psalmist.

Ver. 4.—The King's strength also loveth judgment. "The king" is here the Lord, Jehovah (see Ps. cxviii. 4). His "strength," or might, "loves," and is always combined with, right (comp. Isa. lxi. 8, "I the Lord love judgment"). Thou dost establish equity. The pronoun is emphatic: "Thou," even thou—nearly equivalent to "thou only"—"dost establish equity." Thou—again emphatic—"thou, even thou"—executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob; i.e. governest thy people Israel with strict and absolute justice.

Ver. 5.—Exalt ye the Lord our God (comp. ver. 9; and see also Ps. cxviii. 20 and Isa. xxv. 1). And worship at his footstool. The "footstool of God" is everywhere (except in Isa. lxvi. 1) the ark of the covenant, which he sat upon the cherubim touched, as it were, with his feet (see 1 Chron. xxviii. 2; Ps. cxxxii. 7; Lam. ii. 1; Isa. lx. 13). Israel is called upon to worship God as he sits in his holy temple, enthroned above the cherubim, with his feet upon the mercy-seat. For he is holy; rather, as in ver. 3, *holy is he*.

Ver. 6.—Moses and Aaron among his priests. Moses, though not called a priest in the Pentateuch, performed many priestly acts, such as sprinkling the blood of the covenant at Mount Sinai (Exod. xxiv. 6—8), setting in order the tabernacle (Exod. xl. 18—33), consecrating Aaron and his sons (Lev. viii. 6—30), interceding for the people (Exod. xxxii. 30—32; Numb. xiv. 13—19),

etc. He is therefore, not improperly, here included among God's priests. And Samuel among them that call upon his Name. Samuel was not a priest, but a simple Levite (1 Chron. vi. 16—28). He was, however, a powerful intercessor with God, a righteous man whose effectual fervent prayer availed much. He is united with Moses by Jeremiah, as having weight with God through his prayers (Jer. xv. 1; see also 1 Sam. xii. 19—22). They called upon the Lord, and he answered them (see Deut. xi. 19; x. 10; 1 Sam. xii. 17, etc.).

Ver. 7.—He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar (see Exod. xxxiii. 9, "And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door . . . and the Lord talked with Moses"). They kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them. Moses was known as "the servant of the Lord" (Deut. xxxiv. 5; Josh. i. 1, 2, etc.). He was "faithful in all his house, as a servant" (Heb. iii. 5). Aaron was "the saint of the Lord" (Ps. cvi. 16). This general obedience was, however, departed from in some few instances (see the comment on ver. 8).

Ver. 8.—Thou answeredst them, O Lord

our God (comp. ver. 6, *ad fin.*). Thou wast a God that forgavest them; literally, *a forgiving God wast thou to them*. Both Moses and Aaron "angered God at the waters of strife" (Ps. cvi. 32; Numb. xx. 12, 13). Aaron angered him still more by sanctioning the idolatry of the golden calf (Exod. xxxii. 1—24). God pardoned both of them these and other sins, but not without inflicting punishment for the sins. Though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions. God's "severity" extended even to these blessed saints, Moses, Aaron, and Samuel. The former two were expressly excluded from the land of promise for their conduct at Meribah (Numb. xx. 12); and Samuel's judgeship seems to have been brought to an end through his undue leniency towards his sons Joel and Abiah (1 Sam. viii. 1—5).

Ver. 9.—Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill. Repeated from ver. 5, with the slight variation that "his holy hill" is substituted for "his footstool"—Zion, on which the temple stood, for the sanctuary of the temple itself. For the Lord our God is holy; rather, *for holy is the Lord our God* (comp. vers. 3 and 5).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 6.—*Samuel*. The venerable figure of Samuel forms the living link between two great and very diverse stages in the history of ancient Israel. He was the last of the judges (Acts xiii. 29), he was the first of the prophets (Acts iii. 24). Not that there were no prophets between Moses and Samuel (Judg. iv. 4; 1 Sam. ii. 27), but from his time the prophetic gift and office took that leading place which belonged to it down to the days of Malachi. As judge, Samuel's administration brought to a close the period of anarchy recorded in the Book of Judges; as prophet, he was commissioned to choose and anoint the first King of Israel; and, on Saul's proving himself utterly unable to understand his position as the Lord's servant, and thus unfit to reign, to declare his deposition, to anoint David, and probably to train him for his high office, and to promise to the seed of David an eternal throne and kingdom. The life and character of Samuel present at least *three* grand lessons and lines of thought (to be treated in different discourses).

I. SAMUEL AN EXAMPLE OF A CONSECRATED LIFE. A consecrated childhood the preparation for one of the noblest, purest, grandest, and most useful lives history records. When we think of Samuel, the image that most naturally rises to our view (as Dean Stanley observes) is not of the aged ruler and seer, with his unshorn grey locks on his shoulders (1 Sam. i. 11; xii. 2), but of "the child Samuel" (1 Sam. i. 27, 28; ii. 11, 18, 21; iii. 1—10, 19). Excepting the holy Child Jesus, there is none other in Scripture whose childhood and early piety, consecration, and inspiration are thus prominently recorded. The whole life is of a piece. "Wild excesses in youth are often followed by energy, by zeal, by devotion. We read it in the examples of Augustine, of Loyola, of John Newton . . . But it is no less certain that they are rarely, very rarely, followed by moderation, by calmness, by impartial wisdom . . . whatever else is gained by sudden and violent conversions, this is lost. Whatever else, on the other hand, is lost by the experience of evil, by the calm and even life that needs no repentance, this is gained. . . . Samuel is the chief type, in ecclesiastical history, of quiet growth, of a new creation without conversion" (Stanley's 'History of the Jewish Church,' i. 364, 365). To such a childhood, the key-note of which was

"Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth," the grey-headed saint could look back in his public appeal to the nation (1 Sam. xii. 2—5). Seldom has so great a life been so blameless. This view of Samuel's life and character appeals: 1. *To the young*. You may neglect or throw off the fear and love of God, faith and prayer and duty, and yet be converted and saved, like the poor prodigal; but you will have flung away life's morning, robbed God of the *firstfruits* of life, forfeited the honour and happiness that crown a consecrated life, and the right to say with St. Paul, Acts xxiii. 1; xxiv. 16; xxvi. 4, 5; 2 Tim. i. 3. 2. *To parents*. Samuel was consecrated to God by his mother's faith and prayers before he had any knowledge or choice. 3. *To teachers of the young*. The teacher who has trained one Samuel has richer reward and higher honour than one who has crammed a hundred prize-winners.

II. SAMUEL AN EXAMPLE OF THE POWER OF PRAYER. His name, "Heard of God" (*q.d.* granted in answer to prayer), was the memorial of his mother's broken-hearted supplications (1 Sam. i. 11, 26, 27). The first thing recorded of his childhood is that he "worshipped the Lord" (1 Sam. i. 28), "ministered to the Lord" (1 Sam. ii. 11, 18; iii. 1). His brief prayer (most of the mightiest recorded prayers are brief), "Speak; for thy servant heareth" (iii. 10), contains the very concentrated spirit of prayer, the open ear of faith, the loving heart of obedience. Therefore it is not wonderful that Samuel's prayers had great power (1 Sam. vii. 8, 9; xii. 17, 18, 19, 23). Prayer was his refuge in trouble (1 Sam. viii. 6; xv. 11). The text specially commemorates him "among them that call upon his Name." The truth of the necessity, duty, and value of prayer, and of the fact that God does indeed answer prayer, is one in which the teaching of the Old and New Testament Scriptures is most completely and emphatically one. The Christian could not afford to dispense with this witness—loses much if he does not constantly feed his faith on it. *Promises* of prayer, and *commands* to pray, are even fuller and more emphatic (if possible) in the New Testament; but the Old Testament backs these up with the experience of two thousand years; and nearly two thousand years more have supplemented this experience, and tested and verified these promises. If there is a truth verified by human experience, it is this—that God hears prayer (John xvi. 23, 24; Jas. v. 16).

III. THE RELATION OF RELIGION TO NATIONAL LIFE. Christians make a tremendous mistake when they suppose they may neglect the Old Testament Scriptures. The New Testament Scriptures unfold a fuller gospel, richer promises, a clearer manifestation of Divine love, a world-embracing message. But in the history of ancient Israel lessons were taught, experiments made, problems solved for the Church and for mankind in all ages. God will not either repeat or *unteach* them. Woe to us if we despise them, especially in an age in which the Christian Church is so loudly called to face the social, national, and international problems of to-day! 1. *National life and well-being need religion* as their only secure foundation. Samuel, as prophet-judge, not a military leader, like Othniel or Gideon, but a judge *because* he was a prophet, represented God in relation to Israel, and Israel in relation to God (see 1 Sam. vii. 2—15). All the miseries which befell Israel during the centuries from Joshua to Samuel were from one cause—their provoking the Lord. When deliverance followed repentance, the monument set up was not a military trophy of their prowess, but a religious memorial (1 Sam. vii. 12). The special relation of Israel to God, constituted at Sinai, was doubtless unique, but the underlying principles are good for all time, all nations (Prov. xiv. 34). Life, private or public, is alone securely founded on truth. Righteousness—*q.d.* justice, good faith, temperance, purity, doing as you would be done by,—this is the sure basis of national well-being. And the only safeguard is true religion. 2. *Yet Law is impotent to maintain true religion or spiritual life*. The experiment (we may with reverence say) was bound to be tried. A universal religious society, like the Christian Church, was in earlier ages alike inconceivable and impossible. The national form of the Church was the only practicable. The history of Israel is the history of the failure of this experiment. (1) First, the people themselves were tried. Endowed with laws they could neither repeal nor improve, sanctioned by God himself; with tribal and municipal magistrates, partly elective, partly hereditary; with an elaborate system of public religion, and careful provision for home education and public teaching; and with a perfect land system,—Israel was placed in uniquely favourable circumstances. The Book of Judges is the record of their trial, during some four centuries, and utter

failure. (2) Next, at the nation's own wish, kings were tried for some five hundred years. A few splendid examples showed what good a wise, strong, pious ruler might effect if he understood his position as the servant of Jehovah and the father and yet brother of his subjects. But on the whole, national failure was yet more shameful, ending in the Babylonian captivity. Samuel's life forms the link between these two stages. Remarkable that *priestly* government was guarded against by special fundamental laws—the denial to Levi of any inheritance, and dispersion of the sacerdotal tribe throughout Israel. Samuel was a Levite, but the only priest-judge, Eli, was a sad failure. (3) Lastly, after the Captivity, came the rule of the teachers—scribes and rabbis—or, as we should say, clergy and universities, with an episode of priestly sovereignty under the Maccabees. The Gospels describe the utter and woeful failure of this last stage (see Matt. xxiii. and parallel passages; Gal. iii. 21). 3. *Where the Law failed, what can the gospel do for national life?* Christianity brought to an end the national pre-eminence of Israel, putting all nations on a level; but much more—substituting, as the supreme rule of life, for public law personal obedience to Christ (Isa. xlv. 3—5; Heb. viii. 7—13). There are four possible relations of the Church to the State. (1) Identical, as in Israel. (2) The Church ruling the State, which is the theory of Rome. (3) The State ruling the Church, which has been tried in various forms from Constantine's days. (4) The pervading influence of the Church as a spiritual community in the persons and lives of its members, moulding and inspiring legislation, policy, manners, business, and every form of public and social life (Isa. lx. 21; Rev. xi. 15).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 5.—“*The Lord our God is holy.*” “This is the last of the series of royal psalms, of psalms which celebrate the coming of Jehovah as King. The first of the series is Ps. xciii. This opens with the announcement that ‘Jehovah is King;’ passes on to tell that his throne has been from everlasting, that he made the world, and that he rules it—rules the raging of the elements and the convulsions of political strife, of which that is the figure—and then concludes with one brief glance at his revelation of himself to his people, and the distinguishing glory of the house in which he deigns to dwell, ‘Holiness becometh thine house for ever’” (Perowne). Three times over in this psalm is this declaration made of the Lord's holiness: After the setting forth of his great and terrible Name (ver. 3); then after telling of his equity, judgment, and righteousness (ver. 5); and after the naming of the great saints of God who called on his Name, and to whom a gracious answer was vouchsafed (ver. 9). Consider—

I. THE MEANING OF THIS REPEATED WORD, “The Lord our God is holy.” 1. *It tells of his own personal nature and character.* That he is of too pure eyes to behold iniquity; that not, as is the case oftentimes with men, holy deeds may hide an unholy heart, but that in all his thoughts, purposes, and in his inmost being, he is holy. 2. *Of the constant character of his actions.* For the trial of his people's faith he may at times seem to favour the ungodly and to cause the unrighteous to prosper, yet this is never because he is really on their side, but for quite other reasons; the main stream of his providential dealing is and has ever been clear on the side of righteousness and holiness, and hence men have learned that the Lord is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. 3. *Of his sympathies.* Men have believed and been confident that, however dark their circumstances, the love and favour of God, the shining of his countenance, have been towards his people, and that they knew it (cf. Ps. iv. 6, 7).

II. ITS TRUTH. This is shown: 1. By his *acts and ways*. The review of God's dealings with men—his tender mercies to them that fear him, and his fierce wrath against evil-doers, all have proved this sure truth. 2. *By those whom he has chosen to be his chief and most honoured servants.* (See ver. 6.) Not the evil, the worldly, the impure, but such as these saints of God here told of. 3. *The ritual of the Law.* This also taught the same truth. The gods of the heathen made no pretensions to holiness or demand for it, but the Lord demanded it always and everywhere, and above all things else. Hence, that this may be impressed and indelibly engraved upon the minds

of Israel, the whole ritual and manner of worship of the Law was arranged. 4. *By his revealed Word and will.* Holy Scripture makes clear the mind of God in this matter. 5. *By the operations of his Spirit in their hearts.* That inward witness for God ever sought to lead men to holiness. They could be in no doubt as to the Divine will, and, therefore, as to the Divine character.

III. ITS UNSPEAKABLE IMPORTANCE. Such great stress and emphasis was laid upon it for many reasons. 1. *It kept up a perpetual protest against sin.* Before this truth wickedness could not stand. 2. *It furnished a standard by which to judge of all other religions.* Did they or did they not lead to holiness? 3. *It implied a constant inspiration towards the pursuit of holiness.* It encouraged such pursuit, for it revealed the fact that God loved holiness, since he himself was holy. 4. *It was the essential preparation for the kingdom of God.*

IV. ITS OBLIGATION. 1. *To exalt the Lord God.* In their hearts' worship and adoration; in their open confession of his Name; in their faithful obedience to his will. 2. *Worship at his footstool.* Such worship was his due. It aided the realization of God's presence, deepened the conviction of his holy and perfect nature, roused the affections of the heart, strengthened the resolves of the will, and helped mightily towards the attainment of like holy character in themselves.—S. C.

Ver. 8.—*Forgiveness consistent with vengeance.* This is a strange statement, but it is what this verse and numerous others and many facts beside clearly declare. Therefore, that we may the better understand this apparent contradiction, consider—

I. THE MEANING OF THE TERMS EMPLOYED. There are three: 1. "*Thou answeredst them.*" That is, answered their prayers for forgiveness of the people. Moses, Aaron, Samuel, had each this in common—that once and again they were intercessors with God on behalf of Israel who had sinned (Numb. xiv. 13, etc.; xvi. 47; 1 Sam. xii. 19, etc.). And their intercession was effectual. Nevertheless, vengeance followed. 2. "*Thou forgavest them.*" What is God's forgiveness? It is not the mere letting off of punishment. That may be done, often is done, but there is no forgiveness. And it is distinctly said here that God did forgive, though he did not forego punishment. It is true that the word "though" in this verse should rather be rendered "and;" but this alteration does not really alter the sense, the two seemingly incompatible ideas of forgiveness and vengeance are linked together all the same. But they are not incompatible ideas if we consider what God's forgiveness really is. What is a father's forgiveness of his child? "Let us remember our own childhood, our children, if we have any, and how we do with them. What makes the little face fall, and the tears come to the eyes? Is it your taking down the rod from behind the door, or the grave disapprobation in your face, and the trouble and rebuke in your eyes? It is not only the buffet from the father's hand that makes the punishment, but still more the disturbance and the displeasure of the father's heart that makes the child's punishment. And forgiveness is not complete when the father says, 'Well, go away; I will not hurt you,' but when he says, 'Well, come, I am not angry with you; I love you still.' The taking the child to the father's heart is the forgiveness" (MacLaren). And such is God's forgiveness—the taking back of his sinful child to his heart again. If that were not done, no mere remission of penalty could ever make the soul blessed. The soul of man is so constituted that it would say over and over again, "Never mind the penalty; I can bear that if only I have the love." Forgiveness, therefore, is the putting away of anger from the heart of God towards the sinner. 3. "*Vengeance.*" This does not mean revenge. The punishment of a criminal by the state is not an act of revenge, but the due maintenance of righteous law—a maintenance necessary for the preservation of society, and oftentimes for the reformation of the criminal himself. And so when God allows and, indeed, causes the consequences of the sinner's crime to dog his footsteps, and darken his life, and cause him sore sorrow, he may, he does, do that for reasons altogether consistent with the love which has already led him to forgive the sin and to receive the sinner back into his heart's love again.

II. THE TRUTH THE TEXT DECLARES. That prayers may be answered and forgiveness bestowed, and yet vengeance taken. 1. *This is so.* See case of Moses and Aaron; they were forgiven men, beloved of the Lord, yet their penalty—exclusion from Canaan—was never removed. David (2 Sam. xii. 10) was forgiven, but the

penalty was exacted. All his after-life testified to the truth here declared. Israel: they were forgiven, but for their unbelief none of them entered into their rest. And it is so still. How many a forgiven child of God is yet bearing in weakened health, in tarnished reputation, in stern poverty, in enfeebled will, in recurring fierce temptation, in shortened and saddened life, the consequences of former sin! But there is no doubt that they are forgiven and true children of God; and yet— And it probably will be so. Until the ends and purposes for which these penalties are exacted are fulfilled, how can they come to an end? They are inflicted in love, not wrath, and love must hold us down to the endurance of them until that which is desired is attained. Hence: 2. *Such retribution is consistent with forgiveness.* For though the outward penalty be continued, its character is changed. It is now not a token of anger, but a means of blessing. For such sufferings deepen our hatred of sin, drive us to God in prayer, keep us lowly before God and man in humility, make us ever watchful and compassionate to other tempted ones, enable us to glorify God amid all, maintain the truth of God's holy law of retribution. If along with forgiveness there came at once remission of all penalty, we should think that God did not care much for sin, and certainly we should not. But they will cease when their purpose is accomplished.

III. THE LESSONS IT TEACHES. 1. *Hate sin.* 2. *Rob it of its sting* by turning to Christ in repentance, by submission to his will, by careful obedience in the future, and by daily, hourly trust in his grace. 3. *Fight against it in others.* 4. *Exalt the Lord Jesus Christ*, who makes us more than conquerors over it.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The permanency of God's reign.* "He sitteth between the cherubim." Jennings and Lowe render, "Jehovah has become King, the peoples tremble; (even) he that sits upon the cherubim, the earth shakes." There is a designed contrast. The peoples tremble, the king is established firm; the earth shakes, the throne of the king is steady and unmoved. The figure of God as sitting on the cherubim is difficult, because we cannot be quite sure of the ideas Israelites had of the position and relations of the fire-symbol of God in the holy of holies. In Ps. lxxx. 1 God is presented as "sitting throned above the cherubim;" and the idea here is probably "*above* the cherubim" rather than "*on* the cherubim." Then we get a clear meaning. The cherubim represent all created beings superior to man, all supersensual beings; and God is to be thought of as beyond and above even them, as superior to them as to the people of this earth, and as unaffected by conceivable changes in them as he is unaffected by the commotions of earth. The more usual way of explaining the figure is given by Spurgeon, thus: "In grandeur of sublime glory, yet in nearness of mediatorial condescension, Jehovah revealed himself above the mercy-seat, whereon stood the likeness of those flaming ones who gaze upon his glory, and for ever cry, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts.'"

I. GOD'S REIGN ESTABLISHED. Keep the associations of the restored exiles. They set up again the theocratic kingdom, and conceived of Jehovah as coming again to reign. So they naturally recalled the old sign of his presence and rule, the Shechinah-light which shone above the mercy-seat, which the cherubic figures guarded. The sign of the lapse of the nation from Jehovah was the fading or removing of that light. Now the restored exiles rejoiced in the resumption of Jehovah's reign, and in figure presented it as God taking his seat again above the cherubim. God takes the throne only when hearts are *willing* to receive him.

II. GOD'S REIGN CONFIRMED. The satisfaction of the psalmist evidently is in the fact that God means to *stay* enthroned. He is conceived of as unaffected by the trembling of the people or the shaking of the earth. There is even a more striking poetical figure. If even the cherubim were to tremble, or shake, or fail, God's reign is too confirmed to be affected by it. We may think of him as "*above* the cherubim." Absolute reliance on him may find expression in loyal and loving service of him.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The holiness of God.* Revised Version, "Holy is he." The refrain of the psalm is found in these words. Possibly it was given as a response by the congregation. What is prominent here, however, is not the *purity* that is in holiness, as the majesty that is in it, the severity that is in it. The psalmist is full of the "greatness" and

the "terribleness" of the Divine Name, and this makes him say it is reverend, it is awe-inspiring. It is one of the serious evils of our day, that the more august and solemnizing views of God seem to be lost. There is so little now of the "submission of holy awe." Even in acts of homage and worship we have to fear the encroachments of an undue familiarity. Hebrews may let reverence pass into superstition when they refuse to pronounce the Divine name, but it is to run to the opposite and even more dangerous extreme when we, at the lightest provocation, take the holy Name upon our lips. To-day we need to put deeper and more searching and more awe-inspiring meanings than ever into the "great and terrible Name" of the All-holy One. It is not "holiness" as a Divine attribute, but "holiness" as making a Divine claim, which we have here to consider.

I. THE DIVINE HOLINESS AS A CLAIM FOR WORSHIP. 1. Take "holiness" as ideal, absolute perfection, the sublimest idea of being that man can possibly reach. Wherever man finds that, in whomsoever he finds that, he is bound to worship. Show that man can *think* a holiness which neither he nor any other has ever, or can ever, reach. God is presented as the perfect realization of that thought, so for God man has the highest reverence. 2. Take "holiness" as finding expression in righteousness and faithfulness. Then every review of the Divine dealings wakens in us the spirit of worship. There is so much to thank God for, to trust God for, to honour God for.

II. THE DIVINE HOLINESS AS DECIDING THE CHARACTER OF WORSHIP. There is a tone of familiarity and lightness in much that is called "worship," which, though not wrong, is unbecoming and unworthy. We need say no evil of those who put noise and excitement in place of reverence, but we may urge that an atmosphere of quietness, solemnity, awe, are becoming to God's house. Reverence, humility, self-restraints, submissive awe, are befitting his worship of whom it is said, "Holy is he."—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*Our place at God's footstool.* "And worship at his footstool;" "Worship at his holy hill;" "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?" (Isa. lxvi. 1). To understand this figure two things must be considered: (1) the peculiarity of Eastern thrones; (2) the peculiarity of Eastern salutations. Eastern thrones were high erections, so that the king, seated in his place, might be *exalted* (see expression in psalm) high above the people. The seat was reached by a series of steps; the bottom step was known as the "king's footstool," and the suppliant for the king's mercy, or the man who brought presents as signs of loyalty, showed his humility and reverence by venturing no further than the footstool. Solomon had made a throne of ivory, overlaid with gold, which had six steps, with six lions on each side. Salutations in the East were very elaborate, and approaches to a superior, especially when a request had to be made, involved bending right to the ground.

I. KEEPING AT A DISTANCE AS A SIGN OF HUMILITY AND AWE. Illustrated by Moses turning aside to see the bush that was burning, but was not being consumed. He heard a Divine voice saying, "Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." When the people were facing the Mount Sinai, whereon God was manifesting his glory, extreme care was taken to keep the people at a becoming distance. "Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it; whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death." The symbol of the Divine presence was placed in the dark chamber known as the holy of holies, and no one dared go near, save the high priest once a year, and then not without incense and blood. These are picture-teachings of the humility in worship we must cherish, which will be our "spiritual distance-keeping."

II. KEEPING ON THE BOTTOM STEP AS A SIGN OF OUR GODLY FEAR. It is the suppliant's proper place; but it is more especially the place for that suppliant who knows his sin, asks for forgiveness, yet justly fears the king's indignation. Until the king reaches out his golden sceptre to be touched, a sinful suppliant dare venture no further than the bottom step. And that is our fitting place, because we never can go into the Divine presence without the sense of our sin filling us with godly fear.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Model worshippers.* The reason for recalling these three worshippers

belonging to the olden times, and these three only, does not immediately appear. And it is singular to find both Moses and Aaron classed as priests. Probably, before the appointment of the Levitical priesthood, Moses had been the priest as well as leader of the people. The thought appears to be that men may now call upon and worship God with the assured confidence that he receives worship and answers prayers even as he has always done. As specimens of God's ways with his people who seek him, Moses and Aaron are brought as types of those who offer worship; and Samuel is brought as a type of those who present supplications. So the two sides of worship are presented, *praise and prayer*.

I. **MOSES AND AARON THE MODELS OF WORSHIP AS PRAISE.** This is the Godward side of worship. It is knowing God, offering God his due, recognizing the Divine mercies and judgments, making offerings due unto his Name. And Moses and Aaron represent worship as presented in God's own appointed way, in the line of his own arrangements. This brings in the element of obedience, and every true act of worship is an act of obedience, and an expression of the spirit of obedience. Worship may be wholly praise, and God says, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." From the worship-system of Moses and Aaron, show what are the essential elements of all acceptable worship, such as adoration, thanksgiving, confessions, and expressions of dependence. Symbolic rites only belong to particular times and people, but the spirit which the rites symbolize is required in every age and of every people. The underlying spirit of Mosaism is the spirit of all true and acceptable worship to-day.

II. **SAMUEL THE MODEL OF WORSHIP AS PRAYER.** Probably Samuel is chosen because prayer was recognized as the most marked peculiarity of his life. He would spend nights in prayer. He seems to have had a peculiar cry, or scream, in prayer. Now, prayer is not essential to all worship; but prayer is *true worship*, because the act and expression of dependence on God is one of our best ways of doing honour to his Name. So the model worship is a holy blending of praise and prayer.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The Answerer of the worshipful.* "Thou answeredst them, O Lord our God." It is prayer as worship which is here more especially dealt with. God responds to man's homage. The context brings the following points before us.

I. **GOD MADE KNOWN HIS CLAIM TO HOMAGE AND WORSHIP.** See ver. 7, "He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar." The cloudy pillar being regarded as the emblem of God's miraculous interpositions and various revelations, God declared himself to be their God, and demanded their entire reverence and obedience. He gave them his testimonies, and set his ordinances plainly before them. So we must feel that, the full revelations of God having come to us, we know distinctly what our service should be.

II. **THEY RESPONDED TO GOD'S CLAIM BY WORSHIPFUL OBEDIENCE.** Observe the blending of two things: "They kept the testimonies, or laws, and the ordinances, or religious regulations, that he gave them." Note that of this obedience and worship Moses and Aaron are made types in one age, and Samuel in another; but the response of the people Israel is assumed as represented by the types. It is not enough that we know God's testimonies and ordinances; our proper response is the fixed habit of worshipful obedience.

III. **GOD RECOGNIZES AND REWARDS SUCH OBEDIENT RESPONSE.** That is the "answering" which is here referred to. 1. We may always be sure of the Divine recognition of sincere worship, let its form be prayer or praise. 2. We may have good hope of its acceptance. 3. We are sure of a first answer in the blessing that worship brings to our own hearts. 4. We may even think our loyalty brings the blessing to others of an inspiring example. 5. And beyond all our imagination, God is wont to give direct answers to prayer, and gracious, comforting acknowledgments and rewards to worshipping souls.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The limitations of Divine forgiveness.* The "inventions" here are simply "doings;" but the word seems to imply "self-willed doings." So we read, "God made man upright; but he has sought out many inventions." There is no allusion to "scientific discoveries." When we read the passages in which Divine forgiveness seems so absolutely assured, it is necessary that we bear in mind how the Divine forgiveness may be absolute in the Divine purpose, yet must be limited in Divine

application. We can at once think of two limitations. 1. The exigencies of God's universal rule. 2. The moral condition of those whom God would forgive.

I. **FORGIVENESS LIMITED BY THE EXIGENCIES OF GOD'S UNIVERSAL RULE.** That demands the recognition, and the adequate punishment, of all acts of wilful sin. God has ordered the relation of things in nature so that suffering certainly attends sin, and calls attention to the character of sin. In the interests of the race, that relation must be maintained; it must never for one moment even seem to be doubtful. Even in God's chosen people wilful wrong-doing must be duly punished; and so even when God forgives the wilfulness, he does not interfere with the punishments. Of this Moses and Aaron present striking instances. They sadly failed in the matter of the smitten rock. They were forgiven, but the penalty of their sin came on them. They died on this side Jordan, with their life-hope unrealized.

II. **FORGIVENESS LIMITED BY THE MORAL CONDITION OF THOSE WHOM GOD WOULD FORGIVE.** We do not sufficiently realize that God would have his forgiveness prove the best possible moral blessing to those whom he forgives. Forgiveness only blesses those who are in a mood to receive forgiveness. And so we see that punishment, along with forgiveness, may be necessary in order to get the forgiven into proper soul-moods. Christ taught that his disciples could not be *forgiven* unless they were *forgiving*. They must be in right mood to receive. So there are holy limitations even to the Divine free forgiveness.—R. T.

Vers. 1—9.—*The holy God infinitely worthy of our worship.* I. **BECAUSE OF HIS UNIVERSAL SUPREMACY.** (Vers. 1—3.) His power exercised for the ends of *goodness*. "He is great in Zion," the most beneficent institution.

II. **BECAUSE HE RULES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RIGHT AND TRUTH.** (Vers. 4, 5.) He is setting up throughout the world righteous order, establishing the dominion of right and justice.

III. **BECAUSE HE HEARS AND ANSWERS THOSE WHO PRAY TO HIM.** (Vers. 6, 7.) Grants them their need; speaks to their minds; reveals his Law and his will to them; still guides as he guided his ancient people.

IV. **BECAUSE HE IS MERCIFUL TO THE PENITENT.** (Ver. 8.) "Thou wast a God that forgavest them."

V. **BECAUSE HE PUNISHES THE IMPENITENT.** (Ver. 8.) This is as great a necessity of his nature and rule as that he should pardon the penitent. He is holy.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM C.

THE hundredth psalm has for its title, "A Psalm of praise," or "of thanksgiving," and to this description it well answers. There is not a single mournful note in the composition. God is praised from the beginning to the end, and all the earth is called upon to join in blessing and thanking him. It has been suggested that it was probably written to be chanted by a festive procession as it approached and entered the temple (see ver. 4). The whole runs on without any break or division.

Ver. 1.—**Make a joyful noise unto the Lord** (comp. Ps. xcv. 1, 2, and the comment *ad loc.*). **All ye lands;** literally, *all the earth*.

Ver. 2.—**Serve the Lord with gladness.** "Gladness" is the emphatic word. Almost

every clause of the psalm contains some such call. **Come before his presence with singing;** or, *with a cry of joy*.

Ver. 3.—**Know ye that the Lord he is God; or, be sure—**"recognize the fact as a certainty" (see the Prayer-book Version). It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; or, according to another reading, *and his are we*. This latter reading is preferred by De Wette, Kay, Cheyne, and the Revised Version. But the other, which was the reading of the LXX., and is supported by the Vulgate and the old commentators generally, should, however, be retained, as yielding a better sense (see the arguments of Hengstenberg, 'Commentary on the Psalms,' vol. iii. p. 201, Engl. trans.). We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture (comp. Ps. lxxiv. 1; lxxix. 13; xcv. 7).

Ver. 4.—**Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise.** The mention of "gates" and "courts" points

primarily to the temple-worship, but the reference may be, as Professor Alexander suggests, "typical or metaphorical" rather than literal, and may extend to all the faithful and to all places of worship. Be thankful unto him; or, *give thanks unto him* (Revised Version). And bless his Name (comp. Ps. xvi. 2; cxlv. 21).

Ver. 5.—For the Lord is good (comp. 1 Chron. xvi. 34; 2 Chron. v. 13; vii. 3; Ezra iii. 11; Ps. cvi. 1; cvii. 1; cxviii. 1, 29; cxxxv. 3; cxxxvi. 1; cxlv. 9, etc.). His

mercy is everlasting; literally, *his mercy is for ever*. Compare the frequent refrain, "His mercy endureth for ever" (Ps. cxviii. 1-4, 29; cxxxvi. 1-26, etc.). And his truth (or, *his faithfulness*) endureth to all generations; literally, *to generation and generation*. All men's hope is in God's "faithfulness," that he will keep his promises to them—pardon them, deliver them, cleanse them, and give them rest in his kingdom for ever.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*The joy of service.* (Sermon for missions.) In this short psalm a note is sounded which echoes, and will never cease to echo, through the world. The trumpet of jubilee is blown, not for Israel, but for all mankind. Brief as this psalm is, it is one of the most wonderful portions of Scripture, glowing with self-evident light of inspiration, not poetic, but prophetic, Divine. This first verse exhibits the three characteristic features of the whole psalm—its *catholicity*; its *joyfulness*; its *hope and promise*.

I. Here, in the very heart of Old Testament Scriptures, is an anticipation of Christ's world-wide command (Mark xvi. 15; Matt. xxviii. 19). No trace of either national exclusiveness or ecclesiastical bigotry. God's temple is thrown open to all mankind (ver. 4). "Courts," not the "court of the Gentiles" merely. All men alike are invited to say, "His we are [see margin]; we are his people." It is impossible to explain such words from Jewish lips, such feelings in Jewish hearts, but by Divine inspiration (cf. Gal. iii. 8).

II. JOY IN GOD IS ONE OF THE MOST MARKED FEATURES OF THE PSALMS. In this psalm it rises to its highest pitch. Worship is a native instinct and need of the human heart; and heathen worship was often attended with tumultuous rejoicing. But not joy in *God's* holiness (Ps. xcvi. 10-12); in our belonging absolutely to him (Ps. cxix. 94); in his righteous rule (Ps. xcvi. 6, 9); in his mercy and truth (ver. 5). These streams of joy are from a higher source (Gal. v. 22).

III. THIS PSALM CAN BE FULLY UNDERSTOOD ONLY TAKEN WITH PSS. xciii. 95-99. The whole series not only celebrates, but foretells, the coming of Jehovah to "judge," i.e. to rule and reign over the whole world (comp. Ps. lxxii.). Such bold world-wide hopes would be utterly inexplicable as mere poetic dreams of Jewish imagination, and can be explained only as inspired prophecies and promises; so they would be wholly unmeaning and fictitious apart from their fulfilment in Christ (John v. 22, 23; xii. 32; Matt. xxviii. 18).

CONCLUSION. The enterprise of Christian missions is the most joyful work in the world; the proclamation of the most joyful news to every human being, on the authority of God's command, in the light of God's glorious promises.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1-5.—*Jubilate.* This psalm, which comes at the close of the magnificent series of royal psalms, which tell of the reign of Christ Jehovah, has been called their doxology. It seems to have been sung during the thank offering in the temple service (Lev. vii. 12). "Luther would have immortalized his name had he done no more than written the majestic air and harmony to which we are accustomed to sing this psalm, and which, when the mind is in a truly worshipping frame, seems to bring heaven down to earth, and to raise earth to heaven, giving us anticipations of the pure and sublime delights of that noble and general assembly in which saints and angels shall for ever celebrate the praises of God." The psalm "is all ablaze with grateful adoration, and has, for this reason, been a great favourite with the people of God ever since it was written." It bids us "make a joyful noise unto the Lord." It means "a

glad shout, such as loyal subjects give when their king appears among them." Now, let us consider this subject of thankful praise which it brings so prominently before us. Let us glance at—

I. THE HOLY DUTY TO WHICH WE ARE SUMMONED. 1. *Our hearts are to be full of thanksgiving.* It is no mere outside worship which is told of here, but such as wells up from the deepest fountains of a grateful and glad heart. 2. *We are to openly avow that thankfulness.* It is not, though beginning in the heart, to stay there. Openly, loudly, joyfully, we are to let all men know our delight in God. 3. *We are to join with others in this service of praise.* There is to be no standing aloof or pleading that we can worship God as well at home. We are to go with the multitude to keep holy day. 4. *And it is to be all unto the Lord.* Choirs and congregations alike are to remember this.

II. THE GROUNDS ON WHICH THIS SUMMONS IS BASED. 1. *"The Lord, he is God."* Our Jehovah, so good and gracious, is God Almighty also. Not only a Saviour who would fain bless and save us; but who has all power—is mighty to save. 2. *He is our Creator, and so responsible for our being.* "It is he that hath made us," etc. (ver. 3). This is a most blessed fact. When we see what men and women are, so corrupt and evil, we often wonder wherefore God perpetuates the race. But he does so; he takes all the responsibility of it. What treasure store of hope for humanity lies in this act! 3. *He is our King and Shepherd.* "We are his people, and," etc. (ver. 3.) We are under his wise, holy, strong government; we are provided for by his loving care, led along as his sheep in his pasture. 4. *He is good, eternally merciful, and true.* (Ver. 5.)

III. THE CULTIVATION OF THIS THANKFUL SPIRIT. Many sadly fail here. They have no song, only a perpetual dirge, and against many the condemnation is written, "Neither were they thankful." Now, how may we cultivate this thankful spirit? 1. *We must remove the hindrances.* They are such as these: The miserable habit of looking enviously at what other people have, but which we have not, forgetting all the while what of good we nevertheless have. What folly this! and yet how common! and what a fruitful source of unhappiness, and of unthankfulness it is! And many are wont to look habitually on the dark side of their experience, and scarcely at all on the other and bright side. This is why St. Paul bids us, amid our prayers and supplications, to mingle thanksgivings, since this compels us to look at the bright side, in order to find out what we have to be thankful for. And then, too, our sad habit of regarding our ordinary mercies as mere matters of course is another sad hindrance of the thankful spirit. When health is restored after sore illness, how thankful we are! but the months and years of health which may follow give ample time to forget our thankfulness, and to let our gratitude die because we do not see anything extraordinary about our experience of God's goodness. Now, we must set ourselves to get rid of these evil ways if we would be habitually thankful. 2. *Then there are positive aids to this blessed spirit.* Such as taking right views of life, remembering its brevity and its educational purpose. We are not at home here, and we cannot expect on a journey the comforts of home. And a school—and such is this life—is certainly not as a home, as his father's house, to a child. Then think much of our mercies. Accustom yourself to go over them in your thoughts, and to render thanksgiving for them. And when misfortunes come, make the best, not the worst, of them. Remember how much worse it might have been. It is told that "when the New England colonies were first planted, the settlers endured many privations and difficulties. Being piously disposed, they laid their distresses before God in frequent days of fasting and prayer. Constant meditation on such topics kept their minds gloomy and discontented, and made them disposed even to return to their Fatherland with all its persecutions. At length, when it was proposed to appoint a day of fasting and prayer, a plain, common-sense old colonist was in the meeting, and remarked that he thought they had brooded long enough over their misfortunes, and that it seemed high time they should consider some of their mercies—that the colony was growing strong, the fields increasing in harvests, the rivers full of fish, and the woods of game, the air sweet, the climate salubrious, and their homes happy; above all that, they possessed what they came for, full civil and religious liberty. And therefore, on the whole, he would amend their resolution for a fast, and propose in its stead a day of thanksgiving. His advice

was taken, and from that day to this the festival has been an annual one." Ah! would that we had men of this spirit, and would make the best, not the worst, of our misfortunes! "The bee when in a flower from which it cannot get nectar, gets the golden farina, out of which it builds its cells, and so it rolls up its little legs against the stamens, till they look large and loaded as golden store, and, thanking the flower as sweetly as if it had been full of honey, gladly humming, it flies home with its wax. Yes, and herein lies God's moral. If our flowers have no honey, let us be glad of the wax." The same writer who gives the above illustrations tells how the good, though self-willed, George III., when he had lost all our American colonies, and thousands of our troops had been slain, and millions upon millions of debt incurred, nevertheless, not to be outdone in piety by the Americans, ordered a day of thanksgiving. He was asked by a pious clergyman what the thanksgiving was to be for—was it to be for any of the above-named facts? He pressed the king for an answer, who replied energetically, "Thank God it is not any worse." Yes; there is something to be thankful for in all circumstances, if we will only be open-eyed to note it. Remember, too, that our evils are but blessings in disguise. "Light afflictions"—so St. Paul called them—"which are but for a moment, and which work for us," etc. Above all, let us give our hearts to Christ. Yield them to him, as he bids us do; and as he will by his blessed Spirit fill them with all other good things, so he will shed abroad in them this grace also, the spirit of thankfulness.

IV. REASONS FOR SUCH CULTIVATION. 1. *Our circumstances demand it:* we have cause for thankfulness. 2. *It will greatly bless others.* For a glad, thankful spirit is winsome and attractive Christwards, whilst the opposite spirit cannot but repel. 3. *For our own sake.* It will brighten all our life, whilst if, owl-like, we dwell in darkness, we shall come to love it, and be as dim-sighted and night-haunting as they. 4. *And does not the Lord our God and Saviour deserve all our praise?* Therefore, jubilate.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*Glad service.* "Serve the Lord with gladness." So sings the psalmist, and his teaching has been echoed by the wisest of human teachers. "Give me the man who sings at his work;" so writes Carlyle.

"A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a."

So teaches Shakespeare. Now glad service is what God asks for here. But—

I. IT IS ALL TOO RARE. That it is so is evident; for: 1. *Look at the countenances of those who profess to serve God.* How grave, gloomy, austere, they seem! how seldom they ripple out into sunny smiles! This characteristic of the Puritans has had not a little to do with the disfavour in which they have long been and are still held by our countrymen generally. A common epithet for earnestly religious persons was that they were "serious people." Certainly they were not thought to "serve the Lord with gladness." 2. *Read their writings.* Their hymns, even, are either sad or stern, and as to their books and sermons, they are full of grave, earnest, and often terrible teaching; but "gladness" is conspicuous chiefly by its absence. And their prayers are the same. As if God were a tyrannical Taskmaster, and not our loving Father. 3. *Listen to their teachings.* How much too dull and sombre these are! 4. *Observe their worship.* How bare and uninspiring! how destitute of beauty and brightness! how much too often it depresses rather than uplifts! 5. *Ask our own consciences.* Must they not own the general absence of gladness in our service of the Lord? 6. If it be asked—*Why is this gladness so rare?* the answer is that with some the sense of sin, the remembrance of their much transgression, is ever before them; with others, the mystery of life, the presence of earthly sorrow; with others, the tyranny of inward sin; with others, misunderstanding and misreading of the Gospel; and with yet others, and most, the want of real trust in God. We are so slow to take God at his word, and when he says he has forgiven us, to believe that he has really done so.

II. BUT GLADNESS IN THE LORD, THOUGH SO RARE, IS YET MOST REASONABLE. Whether we think: 1. *Of the Lord whom we serve.* How good and gracious he is! 2. *Of the service itself.* How healthful, right, blessed both for ourselves and for others! 3. *Of the wages.* "The recompense of the reward." We are all little better than eleventh-hour workers, and yet for us there is the whole day's wage.

III. AND ALONE EFFECTUAL. 1. *It is so in our secular work.* Slave-work, task-work, is never like that of free men. All the heart is taken out of it if it be not glad service such as only free men can render. 2. *Yet more in the service of the Lord.* See the elder son in the parable of the prodigal. He had no joy in his service, and hence how harsh and unloving he became! This is why St. Paul is for ever rejoicing that we are not under law, but under grace. So only will real service be rendered.

IV. AND IT OUGHT TO BE. See in that same parable the father's reply, "Son, thou art ever," etc. He was surprised at such a spirit in his son; it ought to have been so different. But if it was wrong for that elder brother, who never transgressed, how much more wrong for us who have transgressed, and yet have been freely forgiven! Pray, therefore, not only that you may serve the Lord, but that you may serve him "with gladness."—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*The gospel of our creation.* "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves." This declaration was held to be a gospel. It occurs in a psalm that may well be regarded as a universal psalm. It is not for Jesus only, but for "all people that on earth do dwell." And amongst the reasons wherefore it calls on all to be joyful in the Lord, there is this one—that "it is he that hath made us," etc.

I. NOW, WE CANNOT CONCEIVE OF GOD AS ACTING WITHOUT MOTIVE. And—

II. THEREFORE THERE MUST HAVE BEEN MOTIVE FOR THE CREATION OF MAN. We can trace reasons and evidence of purpose in all God's works, and hence we are sure there must have been such when he created man.

III. AND THIS MOTIVE MUST HAVE BEEN GRACIOUS OR THE REVERSE. 1. *It could not have been the reverse;* for, whether we look at the structure of man's body, where all seems so adapted to secure health and happiness; or whether we look at man's mind, the source to him of such unspeakable good; or whether we think of man's dwelling-place, this earth on which he lives, and which is so stored with all that ministers to his comfort, delight, and well-being;—whichever way we turn there is proof abundant that no malignant motive, or any the reverse of gracious, could have prompted the creation of man. 2. *Therefore we are shut up to the conclusion that love, grace, goodness, can alone explain what we see all around us and in ourselves.*

IV. BUT IF THE MOTIVE WAS A GRACIOUS ONE, WHAT WAS IT? For answer: 1. *We look to our own constitution,* for that is the nearest idea we can have of God who made us in his own image. And we find: 2. *That the purest pleasure springs from love—* loving others and being loved by them. Why is home so blessed, but because there they are whom we tenderly love, and who love us in like manner? 3. *But love that has stood trial and testing is the most precious of all.* If, in spite of every inducement to be untrue to us, love has been faithful, how precious that! 4. *But all this reveals the reasons wherefore God hath made us,* and placed us where we are. He desired objects on whom he might lavish his love, and who would love him, in whose love is our eternal life. And that love would be more precious and more fruitful unto our eternal life in proportion as it endured test and trial (cf. 1 Pet. i. 7). Hence we are born into a world of temptation, for so only can our love be perfected. 5. *But such temptation will in no case be greater than we can bear.* A father may let his son enter for a contest which he knows his son can and will, if he rightly strive, come out with honour; but he would not let him enter where defeat was certain and inevitable. And so our heavenly Father will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, though what we are able for we have to endure, because it is good for us that we should. He will submit no child of his to what must issue in ultimate defeat. We cannot conceive of his having created us, knowing that that would be the final issue.

V. THEREFORE WE SAY THAT THE FACT OF OUR CREATION BY GOD IS A VERY GOSPEL with which the gospel that "God so loved the world," etc. (John iii. 16), fitly and beautifully harmonizes. Yes, we may well be joyful in the Lord, because it is "he that hath made us," etc.—S. C.

Ver. 5.—*"His truth endureth."* Test this declaration.

I. AS TO WHAT GOD HIMSELF IS. He is ever true. None of the miserable motives which lead men to be untrue can have any power with him. Examine all his works,

whether in nature, providence, or grace, and in all it will be found that he acts consistently with himself.

II. AS TO HIS WORD OF TRUTH. That is contained in the Holy Scriptures, and whether we appeal to the testimony of conscience, or to that of history, their witness agrees to and affirms the declaration of our text.

III. AS TO HIS FAITHFULNESS. The *onus probandi* lies on those who deny this. Where can it be shown that one of his promises, when rightly understood, has ever failed? What thing hath he spoken that hath not come to pass? Trace the records of the Bible, and they form a great cloud of witnesses to this truth. Trace the course of providence, and its varied events all show that his truth endureth. Trace the experience of God's people, and it is the same. Let the following quotation illustrate: "Now instead of taking you back to ancient or modern history, I would like to take you to the history of your mother or of your grandmother. I think of my dear grandfather, and of what he used to say to me. If he were here to-night—I am glad he is not, because he is in heaven, and that is a much better place for him; but if he could come from heaven, and could talk as he used to do when he was here on earth, he would say, 'Ah, my boy, I did find him a faithful God.' He had a large family and a small income, but he loved his Lord, and he would not have given up his preaching of the gospel for anything, not even for an imperial crown. He has told me often how the Lord provided for him. He had a little farm to get his living upon it, and he had a cow which used to give milk for his many children, and one day when he came up to the cow it fell back with the staggers, and died. Grandmother said, 'James, how will God provide for the dear children now? What shall we do for milk?' 'Mother,' said he, 'God said he would provide, and I believe he could send us fifty cows if he pleased.' It so happened that on that day a number of gentlemen were meeting in London—persons whom he did not know—were sitting as a committee for the distribution of money to poor ministers, and they had given it to all who had asked for it. My grandfather had never asked for any; he liked to earn his own money. He did not send any petition or appeal. Well, after the gentlemen had distributed to all who had asked there were five pounds over, and they were considering what they should do with this balance. 'Well,' said one, 'there is a Mr. Spurgeon, down at Stambourne, in Essex, a poor minister; he stands in need of five pounds.' 'Oh,' said another, 'don't send him five pounds: I will put five to it; I know him; he is a worthy man.' 'No,' said another, 'don't send him ten pounds; I will give another five pounds, if some one else will put a fourth five to it.' The next morning came a letter with ninepence to pay. Grandmother did not like to pay ninepence for it; but there was twenty pounds in it, and as my grandfather opened it, he said, 'Now can't you trust God about an old cow?' These things I tell you, and you smile, and well you may; but, oh, my soul laughs, and my face laughs on both sides when I think how faithful God has been to me. He has never lied unto me, or failed me, or forsaken me; but has kept his word to this moment in every respect" (Spurgeon). But such experience as this the whole army of the saints of God can furnish instances of. It is no solitary example.

IV. THEREFORE BELIEVE FOR ALL THE FUTURE. Go forward with a cheerful courage, thou child of God, fully persuaded of what all the past of all the people of God abundantly proves, that his truth shall endure, and that he "will never leave thee nor forsake thee."—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*Service with gladness.* "Make a joyful noise;" "Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing." It does not appear that anything in the nature of a *song-service* was connected with the Mosaic tabernacle. David systematized, if he did not actually introduce, that element. And it made a vital change. Previously the Divine worship had been a *ceremony*; from that time it became a *service*. Previously it had been an affair exclusively of priests; from that time it became an affair of priests and people. Singing is the portion of service in which the people can share. Instrumental music, in the olden time, was not the refined expression of various moods of feelings that we know. Noise was thought more of than harmony; though the stringed instruments must have been capable of delicate expression. Just as children now express their joy by noisy "hurrahs!" so the

Hebrews expressed joy by great shouts, loud blasts, and noisy clangings. What we may properly learn is that the elements of joy and *gladness*, which find their easiest and best expression in music and song, are the proper accompaniment of all worship offered to God. It has been pointed out that "thanksgiving and praise are the higher elements of worship, and so the essence of the worship of heaven; confession and prayer belong to the imperfection of earth."

I. GLADNESS IN THE SERVICE OF GOD'S HOUSE IS BECOMING. In view of God's gracious ways with us. They who receive gifts from friends are cheered and gladdened by the gifts; and we are receiving fresh gifts from our heavenly Friend continually. Dulness and sadness would say that God's favours are little valued. As the thing that is fitting, becoming, God's people should nourish a bright, cheery, hopeful, happy spirit.

II. GLADNESS IN THE SERVICE OF GOD'S HOUSE IS HONOURING. Note that it has ever been this feature that has made Divine service attractive. And the supreme anxiety of each generation has been to get brightness into its service that will make it attractive. So joy in God's house honours God by winning men to him.

III. GLADNESS IN THE SERVICE OF GOD'S HOUSE IS INSPIRING. We are consciously helped by sunny cheerful services. Nothing carries away our cares, doubts, fears, like joining together in holy song. "The joy of the Lord is our strength."—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The sovereign rights of God our Maker.* "It is he that hath made us." This might truly enough be the exclamation of an individual; but it is a public psalm, sung at public worship, and it is the expression of a nation. Special interest attaches to it as the language of a restored nation, one that has begun again its national career. It must be associated with the circumstances of the returned exiles, and it is their rejoicing in their new national relations with God. We may cover the entire subject suggested if we take—

I. GOD AS THE MAKER OF THE INDIVIDUAL. 1. It is true that God made *man*. The design, the capacities, the possibilities, and the relations of man, are all and wholly the Divine idea and the Divine handiwork. It is well to see clearly that man's own creative power stops short at *life*. Man can make forms; he can quicken no forms into life. But we want to see more impressively the truth that God made *each man*. However the individuality of men may surprise us, we may be sure that we never can get an individuality which was not the *Divine thought*. Man makes neither himself nor his peculiarity. Then God, as our Maker, has *first claims* on those he has made.

II. GOD AS THE MAKER, OR FOUNDER, OF THE NATION. Take "nation" as type of all kinds of ways in which men combine together. What is true of the nation is true of the family and of the Church; we are to recognize God as the Arranger of, and Presider over, all forms of human combination. Illustrate from the way in which God created the nation of Israel. Note that the creation of a nation is no simple and sudden act; it is a long process, a shaping and using of various agencies. God selected the nation's beginning, disciplined a set of tribes through long generations, provided a location for it, etc. The fact of the making of a nation being a prolonged work should not prevent our seeing that it is *God's work*. Illustrate by the 'Making of England.' So God, as the Nation-maker, has the first claim on the nations he has made.

III. GOD IS THE MAKER, IN THE SENSE OF REMAKER, OF THE NATION. For nations seem at times to break up, and require remaking. Illustrate by Israel's experiences in the days of the Captivity, and our England's in the days of the Stuarts. In this remaking we too easily overvalue the human agents. God alone can remake; and the agents are his agents to do his work.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Blessing the Divine Name.* "Bless his Name." The name stands for the Being named. It does but gather up and focus his most glorious and gracious attributes. The distinction on which we may dwell is this—It is fitting that we render thanks to God, in our loving recognition of what he *has done* for us. It is fitting that we should bless his Name as we recognize what he *must be*, who has done for us such good and gracious things. Possibly a distinction may be made between *thanking God*, as a duty which every one who receives his bounties ought to perform; and *blessing God*, which is the expression of that personal feeling towards God which only his own

redeemed people can cherish. We thank those who do us a kindness; we bless those who evidently show their personal love to us in the kindness they do us.

I. RECOGNITION OF THE DIVINE DEALINGS WHICH CALLS FOR THANKSGIVING. See in life the: 1. Divine providings. We have wanted no good thing. 2. Divine guidings. So that we can say, "It has been a good way wherein the Lord our God has led us." 3. Divine overrulings. We can in some measure already see that "all things do work together for good." Since God "giveth us all things richly to enjoy," what should we do but be thankful? Illustrate by Moses calling upon the people to review their wilderness-life for forty years, in order that, in renewed thankfulness and trust, they might bind themselves for ever to God's service (see Deut. viii.).

II. RECOGNITION OF THE DIVINE LOVE IN THE DIVINE DEALINGS WHICH CALLS FOR BLESSING. This requires the opened, quickened, spiritual vision. Character is shown in all action, but only the thoughtful minds watch for it, and find pleasure in dwelling on it. And so many are quite satisfied with the *things* God does, and do not concern themselves with the revelations in them of the character of the Doer. So they cannot rise up to the height of "blessing his holy Name." But to the spiritually quickened, the reading concerning God himself in his doings is the unceasing delight; and in the revelations of his love made to them they learn to "bless his Name."—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*The goodness of God.* The word "good" is used as the one supremely suitable for God. But we are not left to our own guidance to find out what is included in the term. We are told that God's *goodness* is made up of two things: (1) his mercy; (2) his truth. "Goodness is a very comprehensive quality. It is love, kindness, benevolence, that which leads you to wish well and to do good to those around you; and the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord, because it is so full of his works and ways, which are the fruits and manifestations of his goodness."

I. THE GOODNESS OF GOD AS MERCY. He is gracious, kind, pitiful. Mercy is the grace of our dealing with those who are weaker than we are; and with those who have wronged us. It has in it the idea of "dealing otherwise with us than according to our stern deserts." Take this as chief point, and illustrate from God's gracious ways with his people Israel. Make this provide for a careful reading of our own life-histories, so as to discern the Divine mercies in them.

II. THE GOODNESS OF GOD AS TRUTH. Here his faithful promise-keeping. And it is noticed that there is this steadfast sameness of God to all generations. He always has been, and he always will be, "the faithful Promiser." "Hath he said, and shall he not do it?" Deal with this point in the same way. Find proofs of the Divine faithfulness in the story of ancient Israel; and make what is found illustrate the faithfulness and truth of the Divine dealings with us. For practical applications, show: 1. "The goodness of God ought to be one of the strongest barriers that can be raised up against sin. 2. The goodness of God should 'lead us to repentance.' 3. The goodness of God should lead us to do good to others. 4. The goodness of God to us in this world should inspire us with confidence in his goodness to us in the world to come." The goodness of God may be thought of as the infinite fountain; the mercy of God is the ever freshly flowing stream; and the eternal truth and righteousness is the ocean out to which God's mercy flows.—R. T.

Vers. 1—5.—*Worship.* I. THE CALL TO THE WORSHIP OF GOD. 1. *It is to be the worship of joyful song.* (Vers. 1, 2.) Not the worship of silent thought, but of glad utterance. True fear and joy not incompatible. 2. *It is to be universal worship.* (Ver. 1.) "All ye lands," or "All the earth"—Gentiles as well as Jews. 3. *It is to be the worship of thankful gratitude.* (Ver. 4.) In remembrance of all the Divine benefits and mercies received. No mention of confession of sin, or petition for blessing.

II. THE GROUNDS OR REASONS OF THE CALL TO WORSHIP. 1. *He is the only true God as distinguished from the gods of the heathen.* (Ver. 3.) "Be ye sure that Jehovah he is God." 2. *He hath made us, and therefore we are his property.* (Ver. 3.) "It is he that hath made us, and we are his." And we cannot yet fully understand what use he is going to make of us. 3. *He is our Guide and Sustainer, our Shepherd.* (Ver. 3.) "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." We are dear to him as the sheep are to the shepherd. He is the good Shepherd pre-eminently. This is also

the pre-eminent character of Christ. 4. *His goodness and mercy are everlasting.* (Ver. 5.) Not only enduring and constant, but *unbounded* by any limits. 5. *He fulfils his promises from generation to generation.* (Ver. 5.) "His truth" here means his faithfulness—the fulfilment of the word or promise that he has spoken.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM OL

THIS psalm describes the rightful conduct and proper principles of action of an Israelite king. It is regarded by some as a portrait of an ideal ruler, dramatically put into his mouth; by others, as an actual address to God by a real ruler, making profession of his intentions, and asking God to aid him (ver. 2). The "title" of the psalm, both in the Hebrew and the Septuagint, which ascribes it to David, favours the latter view. Ewald and De Wette, who maintain the Davidical authorship, note the simplicity, depth, and concentration of the thought as wholly worthy of the reputed writer.

Metrically, the psalm divides itself into two stanzas, each of four verses. In the first stanza (vers. 1—4) the writer declares the principles on which he intends to act in his private life. In the second (vers. 5—8) he enunciates those by which he means to be guided in his government of the people.

Ver. 1.—*I will sing of mercy and judgment.* The writer does not mean that he is about, *in this present psalm*, to sing of God's mercy and justice, but that he will make it one of the rules of his life to do so. *Unto thee, O Lord, will I sing;* or, "will I make melody" (Cheyne, Kay).

Ver. 2.—*I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way* (comp. Ps. xviii. 22; Isa. xxvi. 7). The psalmist aspires after "perfectness." Then feeling his inability to walk in the perfect way by his own strength, he cries to God for aid—*O when wilt thou come unto me!* "Unless," *i.e.*, "thou come unto me, I cannot keep one of these resolutions. O Lord, come quickly." *I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.* It is not only the "way," or conduct, that requires to be "perfect," but the "heart" also, or the motives from which the conduct springs.

Ver. 3.—*I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes;* or, *no base thing* (Revised Version); "no *villainous* thing" (Cheyne, Kay); comp. Deut. xv. 9. *I will set before me nothing of this kind,* "as an object either of imitation or of attainment." *I hate the*

work of them that turn aside; literally, *the doing of acts that swerve*; *i.e.* "that depart from the right way." It shall not cleave to me. If such a thing "seized on him unawares," he would shake it off as a thing accursed" (Kay); comp. Deut. xiii. 17.

Ver. 4.—*A froward heart shall depart from me;* *i.e.* I will put away from me all perversity of heart; I will root it out and rid myself of it. *I will not know a wicked person.* This is a possible meaning, but it is better to translate, with our Revisers, "I will know no evil thing." The "principles of private conduct" may be summed up under the four heads of (1) devotion; (2) endeavour after perfectness; (3) avoidance of evil; (4) hatred of it.

Ver. 5.—*Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off.* (On the heinousness of slander, see Ps. xv. 3; xxxi. 13; 1. 20, etc.) It is probably not meant that the slanderer will be put to death, but only that he will be banished, at any rate from the court, and, so far as possible, put down. *Him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer.* "Lofty looks" and a "proud heart" are again conjoined in Prov. xxi. 4, Solomon showing that he paid attention to his father's lessons. David himself disclaims both in Ps. cxxxi. 1.

Ver. 6.—*Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land;* *i.e.* "my favour shall be shown to them; I will give them help and encouragement." That they may dwell with me; *i.e.* "frequent my court," either as officials or as simple courtiers. *He that walketh in a perfect way* (see the comment on ver. 2). *He shall serve me;* *i.e.* "shall be promoted to office under my government."

Ver. 7.—*He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house.* It is the duty of a king to see, not only that his own ways are blameless, but that his entire household is well ordered, and consists of righteous persons (comp. Job i. 5). "Deceit" here means "wickedness" generally. *He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight;* literally, *shall not be established*; *i.e.* shall not keep his position in my court, but be banished from it. "Lying" is one of the sins which the psalmists denounce most frequently (see Ps. xxxi. 18; xl. 4; lii. 8; lviii. 3; lix. 12; lxii. 4; lxiii. 11; cxix. 163, etc.).

Ver. 8.—*I will early destroy all the wicked of the land;* literally, *each morn will I root*

out all the wicked of the land; i.e. "day after day I will make it my endeavour, not only to keep my palace free from evil-doers, but to cleanse the whole land of them." David is determined to exercise that just severity which is a part of the duty of kings (Rom. xiii. 4), and not to be that curse to a country—a weak and over-indulgent ruler (see Calvin, *ad loc.*). That I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord. So

long as there were "wicked doers" in the land, they would be sure to flock to Jerusalem, since the capital always attracts the criminal classes. David is especially anxious that Jerusalem, which he has made "the city of the Lord" (2 Sam. vi. 12—19), shall be kept free from the pollutions of evil-doers, but, to effect this object, he must purge the whole land. The spirit breathed is that of Ps. xv. 1—5.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Four features of true piety.* The psalmist has before him the fashioning of his future life; he records his purpose of heart as he cherishes it before God. Applying his words, not to his own royal estate with its peculiar obligations, but to the ordinary conditions of human life, we have four features of all genuine piety.

I. A FULL, INTELLIGENT GRATITUDE. "I will sing of mercy and of judgment [righteousness]" (ver. 1). We are to cultivate and express ("I will sing") thankfulness for all that God does for us—for his mercy and for his judgment. 1. For every kind of mercy; for all forms of *kindness* and benefaction—creation, preservation, provision; for *forgiveness* and reception into his kingdom; for long-continued *patience* with us through the years of an immature and imperfect Christian life; for the promised *inheritance* he offers us, which is immeasurably beyond our desert. 2. For all his ways of righteousness; for the justice he has done to us in bringing our integrity into the light, and establishing us in the confidence and favour of our brethren; in honouring our industry and fidelity; also for the righteousness he has shown in overturning the designs, or in humbling the pretences, or in overthrowing the institutions, of the guilty; and even for his righteousness as shown in his chastening of ourselves, purging us of our folly and error and impurity. Perhaps at first we can go no further than silently submit to this last form of Divine judgment; but "afterwards," when "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" has been gathered (Heb. xii. 11), we can open our lips and "sing."

II. A DEVOUT SENSE OF DEPENDENCE ON GOD. "Oh when wilt thou come unto me?" (ver. 2). It is significant that the psalmist interjects this petition between two utterances of his purpose. It is as if he said, "I will do the thing that is right and wise; but I know I cannot accomplish anything without thy helpful, thine effectuating power." He felt as Moses did when he said, "If thy presence go not with us," etc. (Exod. xxxiii. 15). It is a deep sense of our dependence which is the essence of our devotion. If we have not this, prayer is an act of mere formal obedience; if we have it in our heart, prayer is the certain, spiritual, and acceptable outcome. In the prospect of the future, in the conduct of our life, in the prosecution of all Christian work, it is essential that we hold fast, and that we appropriately express, this consciousness of our need of the presence and the power of God.

III. A FIXED PURPOSE OF INTEGRITY. It is vain indeed to sing and pray, if we do not intend to depart from all iniquity (see Ps. lxxvi. 18). But if the purpose of our heart is toward God and righteousness, we may be sure that the faintest cry is heard. The psalmist here resolves to act uprightly; he will walk within his house with a perfect heart—he will "show piety at home;" he will discharge his kingly duties with all conscientiousness; he will uphold and honour the faithful (see ver. 6); he will remove the wicked from place and power (see vers. 4, 5, 7, 8); he will spare no one, he will spare nothing, that he may build up "the city of the Lord" (ver. 8). True piety will manifest itself in these three directions: 1. It will be seen *at home*, in all purity, guardianship on the one hand or obedience on the other, kindness, patience, unselfishness, forgiveness. 2. It will be exercised in the *daily occupation*, and show itself in fidelity, honesty, truthfulness, thoroughness, equity, considerateness. 3. It will shine, with clear and steady light, in the *sanctuary*, revealing itself in constancy of worship, activity in service, heartiness in co-operation.

IV. SACRED SELF-RESPECT. The psalmist was resolved that nothing wicked should

"cleave to him;" he would not have it "before his eyes" (ver. 3); he would "destroy all the wicked" (ver. 8), so that neither his own presence nor his country should be dishonoured or contaminated. Piety will have a supreme concern for its own purity; it will guard its heart most carefully against every one and everything that would hurt or would defile; it will extirpate the thoughts which stain the soul; it will burn the books which pollute the mind; it will not allow anything which is unholy and unworthy of a Christian disciple to enter the sanctuary of the soul; it will know how to be merciless to the flesh, that it may be true to the spirit (Matt. v. 29, 30); it will "keep the heart beyond all keeping," knowing that "out of it are the issues of life."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The secret of a happy life.* The psalm is evidently one composed on the occasion of the setting up of a new order of things in the home or in the State, or in both, and it tells of the psalmist's holy resolves in regard to himself, and his conduct in his household and amongst men generally. And they are wise resolves.

I. THEY CONCERN HIMSELF. (Ver. 2.) "I will behave myself," etc. Here we must begin if our life is to be worthy and happy. Therefore: 1. *The psalmist considers his ways.* He will behave himself wisely. It was not enough that he had full and clear knowledge, and frequent good purposes and desires, and just opinions and true beliefs; what he was concerned about was as to his conduct, his behaviour. And that is the all-important thing; the others have their value as they influence that. 2. *And his desire and purpose were that he should behave himself "wisely."* In what vast and such variety of ways men—especially those in high station—behave themselves! "Man, vain man, dressed in a little brief authority," etc. But here was one who would sink mere self-pleasing, and the suggestions of pride and power which his high station would bring to his mind, and, like Solomon, his one desire was to behave himself wisely. 3. *And his conviction was that the way of righteousness, the perfect way, was alone the way of wisdom.* 4. *And that for all this he needed the abiding presence and blessing of God.* "Oh when wilt thou come," etc.? (ver. 1). Surely this man began well!

II. HIS HOME-LIFE. "I will walk within my house," etc. He would "show piety at home." If it be not there, it does not matter where else it is. There, where it is more difficult, because we are more off our guard, and contact with wife, children, servants, is so close that there is more peril of friction and irritation than in the more distant and guarded intercourse with the world outside. A man has need of "a perfect heart," upright, faithful, and true, if his home-life is to be what it should be.

III. HIS DEALINGS WITH HIS FELLOW-MEN. He divides these into three classes: 1. *Those whom he will avoid.* They are the froward, the slanderer, the proud, the deceitful. Woe to the man whose companions are of such a sort! sorrow and shame will be his lot. 2. *Those whom he will choose.* "The faithful of the land;" they who walk with God. Such companions and servants do minister much to our peace and happiness. 3. *Those for whom he will have no tolerance.* The wicked-doers. Kindness to them, whilst they persist in wickedness, is cruelty and wrong to the innocent, the godly, and to the city of the Lord. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil"—so we are told (Ps. xcvi. 10). And, indeed, if there be not such intolerance, it is because the love of God is weak within us (cf. Rev. ii. 6, 15). The psalmist may have meant by "cutting off" the putting of them to death. A monarch such as David would have deemed that quite right. But it is a power too great for human hands to wield. Our part will be to cut off the prompters to sin in our own hearts, to slay evil passions and unholy desires there; then, by earnestly seeking the conversion of the ungodly, to cut them off from their sin.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—"Mercy and judgment." The psalmist says he will sing of these; and if it were David who wrote this psalm, he had good reason for such song. And who of us is there that, in looking back over our life, has not reason for the like song? But—

I. THERE WAS A TIME IN MAN'S LIFE WHEN THERE WAS NEITHER MERCY NOR JUDGMENT. 1. *In Paradise*, before sin had entered, there was no occasion for mercy; for mercy implies unworthiness and guilt. But these there were not. Man received love, bounty, goodness, but not mercy. Only a sinner can receive that. This is why the redeemed sinner will sing more loudly than the angels, who have never known what sin is. 2. *And so, too, there was not judgment.* No anger darkened the face of God; no need for the chastisements and disciplines of life. But this time will never come again.

II. THERE WILL BE A TIME WHEN MEN WILL KNOW BUT ONE OF THESE. 1. *Mercy only will be known in heaven.* The time for chastisement and punishment will be gone. God will have wiped away every tear. It will be mercy without judgment. 2. *But judgment only will be known in hell.* Mercy comes not there; for hell is a state of mind rather than a place, and the mind that has its fit place there must be forsaken ere mercy can come and do its work. The father's welcome was not given to the prodigal until he had come away from the "far country." 3. *But here judgment and mercy are blended.* They are the warp and woof of life; but yonder they will stand apart; where the one comes, the other cannot.

III. AT PRESENT MEN ARE THE SUBJECTS OF BOTH. This is a certain fact. It was true of David, of Israel, of our Lord Jesus Christ, for because of both mercy and judgment he came into the world. And it is true of God's dealings with humanity generally.

IV. AND BOTH ARE TO BE THE SUBJECT OF OUR SONG. 1. For think *what would have been the consequences had man received nothing but mercy.* See what prosperity often does now, and always will, unless diligently guarded against by faith and prayer. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (and cf. Ps. xvii.). But: 2. *Had God dealt with man only in the way of judgment*, the results would have been no less disastrous; men would have hated God, broken out into wild rebellion, or laid down in despair. 3. *And think of the service both render.* The mercy of God brightens all our life, and makes up in us the love of God. "We love him because he first loved us." This is especially true when we behold the mercy of God in Christ. But his judgments also are blessed for us. "Before I was afflicted I went astray" (Ps. cxix.). They bridle and curb the lawless will; they make manifest to our souls the bitter evil of sin. "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest"—so said the saints of old; and it is true still. 4. *And of the characteristics of both.* Of mercy—so free, so great, so abiding, so seasonable, so undeserved. Of judgment—its purpose, its profitableness, its alleviations, its limit to the present life and never beyond our power to endure. 5. *But some sing of neither.* Not of mercy, for they regard not God as its giver; not of judgment, for they deem it only ill fortune. 6. *Some sing only of one.* Of mercy, for that is easy to sing about. Some only of judgment,—they believe only in a God of judgment, not in "our Father." 7. *Let us sing of both.*—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*Showing piety at home.* Ps. c. is all about praising the Lord. This psalm is all about a holy life. The sequence of the two seems to teach that the best way of praising the Lord is by such a life as this psalm tells of. The time of the psalm's composition seems to have been when David was crowned king of all Israel, and his new government was about to begin. It has been well said that in this psalm David was both merry and wise. We have here—

I. A WISE AND HOLY RESOLVE. "I will behave myself," etc. See: 1. *It begins with himself.* If only everybody would begin there! But so many are for trying to put others right before they are right themselves. 2. *It refers to his conduct.* "I will behave." How we behave—not how we talk, think, profess, desire, but how we behave—is the all-important thing. That is what men will judge us by, and by which we shall influence others. 3. *It declares his deliberate resolve.* That he would behave himself *wisely*. Some would have said, "grandly," or "merrily," or "just as I please;" but this man says, "wisely." Oh that we all would make such choice as this, especially those who are in the morning of their lives! David made this choice because he felt it so necessary. He was a king, and a foolish king is a nation's trouble. And he was a king surrounded by many perils. And the same resolve suits all sorts and conditions

of men. Moreover, David felt that he would be wise only as he walked in a perfect way. The right way is the wise way, and *vice versa*. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Turn to the right, and keep straight on. 4. *And that he made up his mind about it.* "I will behave," etc. See what a number of "I wills" and "shalls" there are in this psalm. You may say, "He did not keep his resolve." That is true; but probably he would have fallen yet more deeply had he never made such resolve as this. Such resolves are good to make. They commit you on the side of God; especially the resolve to be openly and always on the Lord's side.

II. A FERVENT CRY FOR GRACE TO KEEP IT. "Oh when wilt thou come unto me?"

1. *This is an interruption, but no hindrance.* Holy thought and prayer may interrupt, but they do not hinder, our work. The haymaker, stopping to whet his scythe, does not hinder his work, but helps it. So does such a prayer as this. 2. *It is a confession of utter weakness in himself* apart from God, and a cry for God to come and abide with him. The holiest resolves, without much cry to God for grace to keep them, come to nothing.

III. THE TEST LAID DOWN whereby it should be known whether he was keeping it. There should be such test. 1. *David lays down this—his conduct at home.* "I will walk within my house," etc. 2. *We are truly what we are at home.* In the world we have to be reserved and cautious; in the Church we show our best side; but at home our true character is revealed. And, alas! some people can be saints at church and devils at home, and hence are no saints at all. 3. *But we cannot be right at home unless our heart be right with God.* It is a matter of the heart, and the heart given to God. Let parents remember this. If you would have a happy, heaven-like home, let your hearts be perfect with God.—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*Wicked things.* I. WE CANNOT HELP SEEING WICKED THINGS, BUT WE ARE NOT TO SET THEM BEFORE OUR EYES. That is: 1. *He will not think of them.* They may be where he cannot but see them; but he will turn away his eyes from them, and his thoughts likewise. 2. *He will not sympathize with or desire them.* They have a fatal attraction, and appeal to our nature where it is most susceptible of temptation. 3. *He will not strive after them.* However gainful they may be, their wickedness shall bar all endeavours after them.

II. WE ARE TO HATE THEM. There is to be, not the mere negative grace of not choosing them—that is much—but there is to be the further positive grace of hatred towards them. Now, to help us herein, think of: 1. *The harm wickedness has done to men generally.* What havoc it has wrought, and is working still! Could the world be but rid of its sin, its sorrows would not trouble us much. 2. *The harm wrought in your own soul.* 3. *The dishonour done to Christ.* 4. *And let your hatred of wickedness take practical form.* Attack the fortress of sin, fight against it wherever you find it, make aggressive effort against it and for the cause of Christ. So will this hatred blessedly grow.

III. WHEN WICKEDNESS SEEKS, AS IT WILL, TO CLEAVE UNTO US, WE ARE TO CAST IT OFF. 1. See how our Lord did this. "Get thee behind me, Satan!" Sin will try to adhere to you; but spurn it at once. 2. *Consider how to do this.* Prayer will greatly help; for sin is its direct antagonist. One must destroy the other. They cannot coexist. Plead and trust the promises of God to help you. Avoid the occasions of sin. Carry the war into the enemy's country; not merely resist, but attack. Military writers all insist on the advantage against a foe of attacking, not waiting to be attacked. And, without doubt, aggressive work for Christ, a fighting faith, is an immense advantage and safeguard.—S. C.

Ver. 5.—*Slanderers.* I. THERE ARE SUCH PEOPLE. David had to do with many of them—Doeg, Cush, Ziba, etc. And such ever haunt the precincts of courts. And they exist still. Note their characteristics. 1. *They are not men who merely speak evil of their fellow-men.* No good man likes to do this. But sometimes it has to be done—in giving evidence in courts of law; for the sake of vindicating or warning others. Our Lord spoke evil of the scribes and Pharisees. But he did so because, not only was his witness true, but it was necessary to be given, for the people at large were deceived by them. And he spoke freely before their face, and never because of mere

personal dislike and antipathy, though he could not but have felt that, but for the sake of the many whom they were leading astray. And he affirmed only what he knew to be true. When, then, we have to speak evil of another, let us speak only as Christ did—faithfully, openly, and for the sake of others rather than our own sake. Such evil-speaking is not slander. 2. *What, then, is slander?* It is the speaking evil on hearsay rather than proof, or on half-knowledge; it is generally cowardly, “backbiting” Ps. xv. calls it. The man would be ashamed to say it openly. The motive is malignant—seeking to do evil, or, if not that, there is a culpable carelessness as to the truth, which is almost as bad. This is what the psalmist seems to mean when he says, “Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing.”

II. GREAT IS THE EVIL THAT THEY DO. 1. *Often to the victim of their slander.* (See Edna Lyall’s ‘Autobiography of a Slander.’) Cf. Shakespeare, ‘Othello’—

“Who steals my purse steals trash . . .
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.”

There are men in every rank of life whose whole career has been blighted by some cruel slander, which, often carelessly rather than maliciously, has been set going. 2. *To the hearer of them.* A shadow has come over your intercourse with the slandered one; confidence is destroyed or much shaken; you are drawn nearer to that mad state of mind which led David to say, “All men are liars.” You don’t know whom to trust. 3. *To the slanderer himself most of all.* If it has been spoken carelessly, as it so often is, and he comes to know of the evil he has wrought, it will be a lifelong regret to him. If it has been done out of malice, then he has done not a little to harden his conscience, to sear it as with a red-hot iron. Furthermore, he has incurred the anger of God, to whom slander is abhorrent (Ps. v. 6), and one of whose chief commands is, “Thou shalt not bear false witness,” etc. And he loses his own self-respect; he carries about with him the consciousness of his crime and shame, and, when found out, as he is all but sure to be, he is the object of the merited scorn of his fellow-men.

III. HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM. “Him will I cut off,” says our text. 1. No doubt *David would deal with such men in the ruthless, despotic way of an Eastern king.* There would be but short shrift for such with him. 2. *And so God will deal with them, unless they repent.* 3. *And so, in principle, should we deal with them.* Be stern with the man who brings the slander; shun the company of such; warn others against him; compel the man to say openly what he has said in secret. 4. *Such stern treatment necessary,* for we are all prone to this sin. A burning coal thrown out in the road soon becomes dead; but cast it into a heap of straw, and then what conflagration ensues! The first pictures the fate of a good report of your neighbour—nothing comes of it. The second pictures the fate of an evil report—how that spreads fast and far! And slander is destructive of all brotherhood and confidence between man and man. It flagrantly violates our Lord’s golden rule, “Do unto others as you would,” etc.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Are you the victim of slander?* Pray for your enemy, and forgive him; then go and tell him of his fault. 2. *All are in danger of this sin.* Therefore seek to have your heart filled with love; let the mind be in you which was also in Christ, then slander will become impossible to you.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The Divine mercy and judgment.* This “king’s song” may reasonably be associated with the beginning of David’s reign. Then we must regard “mercy and judgment” as attributes of the Divine King. David desired to frame his own rule, and his own kingdom, after the Divine pattern. He meditates on the mercy and righteousness of God till his heart glows with the thought of their surpassing excellence, as seen in the Divine government; and he longs to have these kingly virtues transferred into his own life and reign. That seems to be the first connection of the text, and such thoughts and desires are in every way suitable for a king. But we are not kings; and so we are set upon finding associations with the king’s words which may fit them to our circumstances, and make them expressive of our feeling. Reviewing God’s dealings with us—

I. WE CAN SING OF MERCY. That is a very comprehensive word. It includes the

Divine compassions, forbearances, long-sufferings, and considerations. But there is a special tone in the word. It fits exactly into God's ways with us frail, sinful men. It would hardly be fitting to speak of God's mercy to the angels who have "kept their first estate." It is not the term we should choose by which to express his relations with them. We know the word in our human spheres. It expresses the clemency of the king towards rebel subjects. The guilty man sues for mercy. When the royal rights are vindicated, we hope that justice will be tempered with mercy. We know the word in our own home-spheres and relations. Fathers and mothers are merciful towards their wayward, wilful children, considerate, patient, gentle, pitiful, hopeful. And "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Many of us have now no father or mother in these earthly spheres; but could we put our idea of the old child-relations in the old home into a single word, that word would have to be "mercy." No other word would worthily gather up their patient, pitiful gentleness. And that word best expresses our sense of our heavenly Father's dealings with us. It is so suitable because it always carries with it the assumption of the frailty and wilfulness of those to whom it is shown. Only when people try us do we show them *mercy*. Then let us see if we are not really needing God's mercy. 1. It is now a good many years since you discovered your easily besetting sin. Then it ought to have been done with long ago, driven out altogether. But it is there still, spoiling your best things, making trouble for yourself, and for all around you. Then you know what is meant by God's mercy. 2. When this year began you made high resolves; but after the first flush of feeling passed, you never made any really earnest effort to carry them out. Verily God has a call to be merciful. 3. God's mercy to us ought to have made us merciful to one another. And just in this we are constantly failing. Who could bear to think of the life he has yet to live, if he might no longer hope in God's mercy? Mercy bears with us. Mercy is pitiful and kind. Mercy in God is not mere good feeling; it is active, ever doing for us something kind.

II. WE CAN SING OF JUDGMENT. This may stand for "righteousness," or justice finding practical expression. We can always have this satisfaction—God's mercy is righteous. It is never weak indulgence. God never steps aside of the right in order to do a kindness. But that is hardly the precise association of the word that we want. It is rather "the corrective recognition of our faults." It is our holy joy, that our Father-God will never leave our faults and failings, our waywardnesses and self-willednesses, alone. He is ever correctively dealing with them. Punishment, as a vindication of violated law, and as the firm reassertion of defied authority, is almost entirely a human conception; it can only be applied to the dealings of our heavenly Father with extreme caution. It is far safer for us to think of God's punishments as always paternal; and paternal punishments are, primarily, *corrective*. And what child could do well without corrections? 1. Divine corrections may come as the natural results of our wilfulness. 2. They come as testing losses; or as wearying strain; or as painful sickness; or as that long, long-enduring which is the supreme soul-test.

III. WE MUST TAKE CARE THAT WE SING OF THESE TWO TOGETHER—"MERCY" AND "JUDGMENT." It is the blending of them that so brings out the charm of the Divine ways with us. Illustrate by the bright light made by combining the flames of oxygen and hydrogen gas. Never can God's full glory shine out until we learn to blend his mercy and judgment. Mercy that cannot judge cannot be the mercy of our heavenly Father. Judgment that is not tempered with mercy cannot characterize our heavenly Father's dealings.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Home-religion*. "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." The royal author may be using the term "house" as a figure for the kingdom he rules; but it is better to keep the term to his private and domestic sphere. Only he who can rule his own house is fit to rule the Church of God. Whatever a man's professions may be, and whatever the exactness and abundance of a man's ritual observances may be, a man's religion is never really a better thing than it shows itself to be in his own home. The home is the first and nearest sphere in which the religious life finds expression. In the home-sphere it should have its fullest force. Religion begins at home. It always should expand outward from the home. "It is in vain to talk of holiness if we can bring no letters testimonial from our holy walking with our relations."

"It is easier for most men to walk with a perfect heart in the Church, or even in the world, than in their own families."

I. HOME-RELIGION OUGHT TO BE EASY. Because usually the atmosphere is healthy and inspiring. If we are the heads of the house we can give the tone to the house. If we are but members, still our well-being is the care of all, and if religion is our concern, we are, usually, at least unhindered. For our religious habits and duties we can easily make or find fitting time and place. But this ease of home-religion may come to be a temptation and peril. Men, in every sphere, reach their noblest things by mastering opposition. They tend to lose nobility and enterprise when a thing is easy. Easy religion very readily becomes weak religion. Religion cannot bear indulgence; it needs the bracing of hardship.

II. HOME-RELIGION OUGHT TO BE STEADFAST. Because there are no suddennesses, and no great variations, in the experiences and temptations of home to sway the religious barometer. The psalmist means by a "perfect heart" one quietly, steadily, persistently set on the right, the kind, and the good. The finest thing we can say of the pious man at home is that he is "always the same." It is in homes we can most fully exhibit that great grace, "patient continuance in well-doing."

III. HOME-RELIGION OUGHT TO BE BEAUTIFUL. Because home is the sphere in which natural amiability and personal affection find their freest expression. And these, when sanctified by sincere and earnest piety, cannot fail to make attractive characters. Appeal to all experiences thus. Are not the Christians you most admire and love those who were beautiful for Christ in home-spheres?—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The feeling of pious souls concerning self-will.* "A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person." The idea in the word "froward" is "twisted," or "perverse." The idea in the word "wicked" is "wilful," "self-willed," "lawlessness." "What David, therefore, disclaims is the reckless self-will, acknowledging no law of right, which is the temptation of despotic royalty, and was hereafter the secret of his own great sin."

I. PIOUS SOULS SEE SELF-WILL AS THE ROOT OF SIN. Take man as the *creature* of God. Manifestly he is dependent on God. He has no independent rights, and no independent will. He has a free-will within the necessary limits of the creature, but as that free-will finds exercise, it can get no better standard than the sovereign and perfect will of the Creator. The supreme triumph of man's free-will is his full, loving, hearty acceptance of the Divine will. Adam sinned when he put his self-will in opposition to God's will. Describe how you may the various forms that human iniquity can take (Gal. v. 19—21), the informing spirit of them all is self-pleasing, self-will. Therefore pious souls see clearly that their witness and work is not the mere cleansing of conduct, but the rooting out of the very fibres of self-will, which thread their souls as couch-grass threads the fields, or cancers thread the body. Parents must deal with self-will in their children; kings must deal with self-will in their officials; Christians must deal with self-will in themselves and in the world.

II. PIOUS SOULS SEE SELF-WILL AS THE ONE THING TO RESIST. Many may be occupied with special forms of temptation, and with what they discover to be their "easily besetting sins." So they are occupied with the expressions of things rather than with the causes. Illustrate from the various treatment of skin-diseases. That treatment alone is hopeful which deals with the fountain of mischief. But the psalmist is dealing with self-will in others, rather than in himself. There is a self-reliance which is good, if kept within due bounds. It is the spring of enterprise; it is the spirit of the man who conquers circumstance. But it may easily become masterfulness, tyranny, pursuit of ends irrespective of means, and then pious souls feel repugnance, and may rightly show repugnance. The self-willed man is not a God-fearing man.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*The sin of the slanderer.* "Privily slandereth his neighbour." Modern law cannot reach the slanderer unless his slander has produced pecuniary loss to him whom he has slandered. Eastern kings judged on principles of equity, and not according to written rules or established precedents, so they could punish all slanderers. To a king the term includes the jealous informer who tries to breed suspicion, and the sycophant who flatters the king, and speaks evil of others in order to obtain place and favour.

I. THE SLANDERER IS A MISCHIEF-MAKER. His interest is taken not by anything good, but by something evil. Every true and good man covers over, hides, smothers down, the evil, because it is like fire—let it spread, and it will do a world of mischief. The slanderer fixes on the tiny spark of evil, fans it until it flares, and consumes reputations and ruins lives. Gossip is the slanderer's weapon. Malice is his inspiration. Self-conceit is his guide. Often pure devilry makes a man start the evil suspicion which makes the mischief of broken hearts and untold misery. It is no excuse for the slanderer, when made to face the consequences of his slander, to say, "I did not mean it." As mischief-makers, gossiping women are worse than men.

II. THE SLANDERER IS A THIEF. He does not steal men's goods; he steals what is of far more value to man than what he has—he steals his reputation. Estimate the difficulty every man finds in building up a character. It may fall, like a house of cards, before the suspicion started by the slanderer; that suspicion may stick to a man for life, and he may find it impossible to recover his place. The robbery of the slanderer is oftentimes irremediable.

III. THE SLANDERER IS A DETERIORATOR OF HIMSELF. The most serious injury a man can do to his own moral nature is to give expression to the suspicious, or malicious, temper. If a good man or woman ever find themselves betrayed into becoming the originators of a slander, they feel the bitterest regrets and most searching humiliations. The bad man who finds he has slandered, and will be humbled by no regrets, belongs to the devil, and will have to find his home with him.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*The sin of the arrogant.* "Him that hath an high look and a proud heart." Prayer-book Version, "a proud look, and high stomach;" literally, "puffed-up heart;" "wide of heart;" "puffed up and blown out." Perhaps the idea includes the "ambitious men," who think so much of themselves that they are jealous and mischievous if any one seems to be preferred before them. Trapp says, "Pride will sit and show itself in the eyes as soon as anywhere." Horne has this good note: "Detraction, ambition, and avarice are three weeds which spring and flourish in the rich soil of a court. The psalmist declareth his resolution to undertake the difficult task of eradicating them for the benefit of his people, that Israelites might not be harassed by informers, or repressed by insolent and rapacious ministers. Shall we imagine these vices less odious in the eyes of that king whose character was composed of humility and charity; or will Christ admit those tempers into the court of heaven, which David determined to exclude from his court upon earth?"

I. THE ARROGANT MEASURE THEMSELVES BY A WRONG STANDARD. A man may seem to have fair reason for being proud who compares himself with his fellow-men. It may be honest truth that he is better bred, more refined, better educated, and more intelligent than they. But then the standard is so poor. Let him appraise himself by comparison with those who are better bred and better educated than himself. Nay, let him measure himself by the proper, the Divine, standard; then will the loftiest-minded man be compelled to say after the psalmist, "My goodness extendeth not to thee, only to the saints that are in the earth."

II. THE ARROGANT BOAST THEMSELVES AGAINST GOD. Pride is the open claim to independence; the declaration of conscious self-sufficiency. The proud man needs no God, and knows no God. He never can come into right relations with God until he can get rid of that pride. All who do boast themselves against God may be reminded of that day when the "lofty looks of man shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted."

III. THE ARROGANT ARE OUT OF RIGHT RELATIONS WITH MEN. The right relations are thus expressed: "By love serve one another." The arrogant man serves nobody, only expects everybody to serve him. So he never gains love, and never receives love-service.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The encouragement of the upright.* "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land." Such only would the king seek for; such only would he gather to his court.

I. THE UPRIGHT ARE ALWAYS WANTED. Men of probity and integrity are ever being sought for. For all service character is the supreme fitness. If it seems otherwise,

and we find isolated instances in which the unprincipled seem to prosper, let us think of the thousand cases in which character even triumphs over ability, and much more over unscrupulousness. If a man has character, he has a commodity that is always marketable.

II. THE UPRIGHT ARE ALWAYS TRUSTED. Illustrate by Joseph in Egypt, Nehemiah at Susa, and Daniel at Babylon. In that trust is the fullest recognition of the value of character.

III. THE UPRIGHT ARE ALWAYS REWARDED. Depend upon it, kings always know when they have good counsellors, and masters know when they have faithful servants. And it is always the aim of masters to encourage those who serve them well. Say what men will, it is most largely true that the best things of this world come to the good. And it can always be said, with absolute confidence, that God is on the side of the upright, "the Rewarder of all those who diligently seek him."—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*The sin of the untruthful.* "He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight." There is no sin that is more difficult to deal with, when once it has become established. Many children are untruthful because they have vivid imaginations, and though their words match what they see, what they see does not strictly accord with the actual facts. These cases require the most careful and judicious treatment at the hands of parents and teachers, if the child-habit is not to develop into a confirmed untruthfulness. But there are some children who seem to be born liars—their word can never be trusted. Only the sternest discipline can correct an evil which, if left unchecked, must inevitably ruin the life. And some children are made untruthful by fear; and by their statements always being treated suspiciously; and by their being constantly set upon inventing excuses.

I. THE UNTRUTHFUL MAN SINS AGAINST HIMSELF. He confuses his own sense of right and wrong; destroys his moral sense, until he discovers that he cannot trust himself.

"To thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

II. THE UNTRUTHFUL MAN SINS AGAINST HIS FELLOW-MAN. For only truth can guide us aright. If those whom we trust and obey are not true, our way cannot be safe. Illustrate by the man who goes an unknown road, and receives untruthful directions. See in business affairs what mischiefs untruthfulness can make. Every man has an absolute right to demand from his fellow-man a precise accordance between statement and fact. Show that secrecy, withholding, may be as effectually untruthful as any statement. We are bound to be true in every form in which we express ourselves to our fellows. Point out what self-restraints are required, if we are to be absolutely true in tones, and looks, and silences, and speech.

III. THE UNTRUTHFUL MAN SINS AGAINST GOD. Who "requireth truth in the inward parts." This introduces familiar considerations, on which no special suggestions are needed.—R. T.

Vers. 1—8.—*The ideal of a royal life; or, David's mirror of a monarch.* I. HIS PERSONAL LIFE. 1. *He sought the union of loving-kindness and right in his own character.* (Ver. 1.) As a Divine union found in the King of kings, and therefore the subject of his song. 2. *He would seek to follow the perfect way with or by means of a perfect heart.* (Ver. 2.) He would give earnest heed to whatever was right, and pursue it with an undivided heart. 3. *He would live in the closest fellowship with God.* (Ver. 2.) "When wilt thou come unto me?"

II. HIS DOMESTIC LIFE. (Vers. 3, 4.) How he would walk in "his house." 1. *Will not allow himself to think of any wicked design or action.* (Ver. 3.) Nothing in his home-life that is unworthy of a king. 2. *He will be guilty of no unfaithfulness.* (Ver. 3.) They who "turn aside" are the unfaithful. Delitzsch says he "hates excesses;" all temptations to this he will shake off from himself. 3. *He will not know fellowship with a false or "froward" heart.* (Ver. 4.) No commerce with those whose policy is one of craft and deceit.

III. HE WILL MAINTAIN A PURE COURT-LIFE. (Vers. 5—7.) 1. *He will discourage all forms of untruthfulness and pride.* Slander and deceit and lies he will not tolerate (vers. 5—7). 2. *Those who serve him in high offices must be faithful men.* (Ver. 6.)

IV. HE WILL RULE THE CITY AND THE STATE SO AS TO BRING IN THE REIGN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Ver. 8.) "Early," equivalent to "in the morning." Courts of law were held in the early morning. A dream which has its fulfilment in the vision of the New Jerusalem (Rev. xxi. 27).—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CII.

THE "title" of this psalm is altogether peculiar, being "a Prayer for the afflicted, when he faints, and pours out his complaint before Jehovah." This is clearly a general direction for the use of the psalm by afflicted persons, either universally, or, at any rate, when in circumstances resembling those of the writer. The writer appears to have belonged to the period of the Captivity, and probably to the later portion of it (ver. 13). It has been conjectured that he is Daniel; but there are no sufficient grounds for assigning the composition to any special individual. It is the voice of a representative sufferer in Babylon, mourning over his own afflictions and those of his nation.

The psalm consists of three main portions: first, a complaint, prefaced by an appeal to God for aid (vers. 1—11); secondly, a confident expression of an assured hope and trust in a speedy deliverance (vers. 12—22); and thirdly, a contrast between human weakness and God's strength and unchangeableness, resulting in a conviction that, whatever becomes of the writer, the seed of Israel will be preserved and established before God for ever (vers. 23—28).

Ver. 1.—*Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee* (comp. Ps. xxvii. 7; xxxix. 12; liv. 2; lv. 1, etc.). "Stereotyped expressions," but the fittest to express a sufferer's urgent need.

Ver. 2.—*Hide not thy face from me* (so in Ps. xxvii. 9; lxxix. 17; cxliii. 7). As the "light of God's countenance" is the greatest of all goods (Ps. iv. 6), so its withdrawal is the worst of evils. *In the day when I am in trouble; literally, in the day of my trouble, or of my straits.* *Incline thine ear unto me* (comp. Ps. xvii. 6; lxxi. 2; lxxxviii. 2, etc.). *In the day when I call, answer me speedily.* Compare the versicles of our Prayer-book, "O God, make speed to save us; O Lord, make haste to help us."

Ver. 3.—*For my days are consumed like smoke; or, according to another reading* (כָּעָן, instead of כָּעָר), "are consumed into smoke," i.e. "disappear, pass away into nothingness." And my bones are burned as an hearth. Dr. Kay translates, "My bones smoulder like a firebrand," which is better (compare the Prayer-book Version, and see Lev. vi. 2 and Isa. xxxiii. 14). (For the sentiment, see Ps. xxxi. 10; xxxii. 3; xlii. 10.)

Ver. 4.—*My heart is smitten.* As with a stroke from the sun (see Ps. cxxi. 6; Hos. ix. 16). And withered like grass. As grass upon the house-tops (Ps. cxxxix. 6), or, indeed, in any exposed place under an Eastern sun. *So that I forget to eat my bread; literally, for I forget, etc.* The fact is adduced as a proof of the heart's condition (comp. Job xxxiii. 20; 1 Sam. i. 7; xx. 34, etc.).

Ver. 5.—*By reason of the voice of my groaning; i.e. "by reason of the affliction which causes my groaning."* My bones cleave to my skin; literally, to my flesh, but the Authorized Version rightly expresses the meaning (comp. Job xix. 20; Lam. iv. 8).

Ver. 6.—*I am like a pelican in the wilderness.* The Hebrew word here rendered "pelican" is elsewhere in our version translated by "cormorant" (Lev. xi. 7; Deut. xiv. 17; Isa. xxxiv. 11; Zeph. ii. 14); but it is now generally believed that the pelican is intended (compare the Septuagint πελεκάνος, and see Mr. Houghton's letter in the *Academy*, April 5, 1884, and the versions of Hengstenberg, Kay, Cheyne, and our Revisers). The pelican is a bird which haunts marshy and desolate places. It abounds in the Lake Huleh in Northern Galilee (Thomson, 'The Land and the Book,' p. 260). I am like an owl of the desert; or, "of the ruins." The owl haunts ruins in the East no less than in our own country (Layard, 'Nineveh and Babylon,' p. 484, note).

Ver. 7.—*I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house-top.* Sparrows are very common in Palestine. Dr. Thomson says that he has often heard a sparrow which had lost its mate, uttering "by the hour" its sad lament, seated upon a house-top ('The Land and the Book,' p. 48).

Ver. 8.—*Mine enemies reproach me all the day.* The reproach of their enemies was always felt by the Israelites as a bitter aggravation of their afflictions (see Pss. xlii. 10; xlv. 13—16; lxxix. 4; lxxx. 6, etc.). They that are mad against me are sworn against me; rather, *use me as their curse* (comp. Jer. xxix. 22). It was a common form of cursing among the Israelites to wish a man the same fate as had befallen some one whose unhappiness was notorious.

Ver. 9.—*For I have eaten ashes like bread; i.e. "the 'ashes' of humiliation have been my food. I have, as it were, fed on them."* A literal mingling of ashes with his food is not to be thought of. And mingled my drink with weeping (comp. Pss. xlii. 3; lxxx. 5).

Ver. 10.—*Because of thine indignation and thy wrath.* "The bitterest ingredient of our cup of sorrow," says Dean Johnson, "is to know that it is owing to Jehovah's wrath and fierce anger for sin." For thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down. "Elevated me," i.e. "only to cast me down, and so make my affliction the greater." The allusion is probably to the former prosperity of the speaker, and of Israel generally, in their own land, and their present misery in Babylon (compare, however, Job xxvii. 21; xxx. 22).

Ver. 11.—*My days are like a shadow that declineth; literally, that lengthens, as shadows do when the day declines* (comp. ver. 24). The psalmist, like his nation, is old before his time; the shades of evening have come upon him, when he should have been in his midday brightness. And I am withered like grass (comp. ver. 4). The "I" here is emphatic (אני)—not only is the psalmist's heart withered, but he himself is altogether scorched and dried up.

Ver. 12.—The second part of the psalm here begins. Against the complaint is to be set the confident hope and consolation. But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever. God does not "wither" or decay—God and God's purposes "endure for ever." It matters not that Israel is brought so low, and seems at the last gasp; God can raise up his people, and will do so in his own good time (vers. 13—17). And thy remembrance unto all generations; or, *thy memorial* (Revised Version); see Exod. iii. 15. God's "remembrance," or "memorial," consists in the recollection, that his faithful ones have, of his historically manifested attributes. If this recollection is never to pass away, his faithful ones must remain also, to keep it up.

Ver. 13.—*Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion* (comp. Pss. iii. 7; xii. 5; lxviii. 1). God is said to "arise," when he bestirs himself to take vengeance on his enemies,

and deliver his saints out of their hands. The "Zion," on which he would "have mercy," was not the city only, but the people belonging to it. For the time to favour her (or, *pity her*), yea, the set time, is come. By "the set time" is probably meant the time fixed by Jeremiah for the termination of the Captivity and the restoration of Jerusalem (Jer. xxv. 11, 12; xxix. 10), and alluded to by Daniel in Dan. ix. 2. This time, the psalmist says, approaches.

Ver. 14.—*For thy servants take pleasure in her stones* (comp. Isa. lxiv. 10, 11; Lam. iv. 1; Neh. ii. 13; iv. 2). To this day the same affection is shown by Israelite pilgrims at the "Jews' Wailing-Place." And favour (rather, *pity*) the dust thereof. The rubbish in which the stones lay (Neh. iv. 2) seems to be intended.

Ver. 15.—*So the heathen shall fear the Name of the Lord* (comp. Isa. lix. 19). The restoration of Jerusalem could not but impress great numbers of the heathen, and tend to the enlargement of Jehovah's kingdom. And all the kings of the earth thy glory. Oriental hyperbole, if confined to the immediate effects of the rebuilding of the earthly Jerusalem; but simple truth, if extended to the establishment on earth of the new and heavenly Jerusalem (Isa. lrv. 17—25; Rev. xxi. 1—24).

Ver. 16.—*When the Lord shall build up Zion; rather, because the Lord hath built up Zion.* The psalmist, in prophetic ecstasy, sees the future as past. The verbs in this and the next verse are all preterite. He shall appear in his glory; rather, *hath appeared in his glory* (see Isa. xl. 5).

Ver. 17.—*He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer; rather, he hath regarded . . . and hath not despised* (see the Revised Version). The word translated "destitute" is elsewhere (Jer. xvii. 6) only used as the name of a shrub—probably the dwarf juniper, still so called by the Arabs. The dwarf juniper has "a gloomy stunted appearance" (Tristram), and well symbolizes the Israel of the Captivity period, dry and withered, like a wretched desert shrub.

Ver. 18.—*This shall be written for the generation to come; or, let it be written; γραφήτω αὐτῇ, LXX.* The mercy of God in restoring his people to their own land and city must be recorded in writing, as his past mercies have been (Exod. xvii. 14; Deut. xxxi. 19), for the edification of future generations. The record was made by Ezra and Nehemiah. And the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord. Restored Israel is spoken of as a new creation (comp. Ps. xxii. 31; Isa. xliii. 7, 21). It was, indeed, a sort of resurrection from the dead (see Ezek. xxxvii. 1—10). (For the "praise"

immediately rendered, see Ezra iii. 10, 11; vi. 16—22; Neh. xii. 27—43.)

Ver. 19.—**For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary.** God's true sanctuary is the heaven of heavens wherein he dwells. Earthly sanctuaries are but shadows of this. **From heaven did the Lord behold the earth** (comp. Exod. ii. 23—25). As God in the days of old had looked down on the affliction of his people in Egypt, so did he now "look down" and "behold" their sufferings in Babylon.

Ver. 20.—**To hear the groaning of the prisoner** (see Exod. ii. 24, "God heard their groaning;" and comp. Exod. iii. 7; vi. 5). **To loose those that are appointed to death; literally, the sons of death** (comp. Ps. lxxix. 11). Captive Israel regarded its life in Babylon as little better than death (see Ezek. xxxvii. 11).

Ver. 21.—**To declare the Name of the Lord in Zion; rather, as in the Revised Version, that men may declare.** The great object of Israel's restoration was the glory of God—that Jew and heathen, joined together in one, might unitedly bless God, and praise his glorious Name. The complete fulfilment was, of course, only after the coming of Christ. **And his praise in Jerusalem.** Especially in the "new Jerusalem" (see the comment on ver. 15).

Ver. 22.—**When the people (rather, the peoples) are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord** (comp. Ps. xxii. 27; lxviii. 29—32; Isa. xlix. 6, 7, 18, etc.).

Vers. 23—28.—The third strophe begins with an acknowledgment of weakness—a sort of "renewed complaint" (Hengstenberg). But from this there is an ascent to a higher confidence than any displayed previously—a confidence that God, who is everlasting (vers. 24—27), will perpetually protect his people, and, whatever becomes of the existing generation, will establish their seed before him for ever (ver. 28).

Ver. 23.—**He weakened my strength in the way.** The reading "my strength" (צַדִּיק) is greatly to be preferred to that of "his strength" (צִדְקָה), which cannot be made to yield a tolerable meaning. It is judiciously adopted by Professor Cheyne,

who translates, "He has brought down my strength in the way," and explains "the way" as "the journey of life." So also Rosenmüller and Hengstenberg. **He shortened my days; i.e. "made me grow old prematurely"** (comp. ver. 11).

Ver. 24.—**I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days.** Compare the complaint of Hezekiah (Isa. xxxviii. 10). A pious Israelite regarded himself as entitled to a fairly long life, which was promised him directly (Exod. xx. 12) and by implication, since it was only the wicked that were "not to live out half their days" (Ps. lv. 23). **Thy years are throughout all generations.** Dathe and Professor Cheyne translate, "O thou, whose years are eternal." But the Hebrew will scarcely admit of this rendering.

Ver. 25.—**Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth** (comp. Isa. xlviii. 13). **And the heavens are the work of thy hands** (see Gen. i. 1, 7; ii. 4; Ps. lxxxix. 11; Heb. i. 10).

Ver. 26.—**They shall perish.** The coming destruction of the world that now is, is very frequently declared in Holy Scripture (see Isa. li. 6; lxxv. 17; Matt. xxiv. 35; Mark xiii. 31; Luke xxi. 33; 2 Pet. iii. 7, 10, 12). **But thou shalt endure.** With the perishable nature of the whole material creation, the psalmist contrasts the absolute eternity of God (comp. ver. 12; also Ps. ix. 7; Heb. i. 11). **Yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment** (comp. Isa. li. 6). **As a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed.** Compare the prophecies of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Isa. lv. 17; lxvi. 22; 2 Pet. iii. 13; Rev. xxi. 1).

Ver. 27.—**But thou art the same; literally, but thou art He** (comp. Isa. xlv. 4; xlv. 4); i.e. "thou art the one eternal and unchangeable existence—the one reality." **And thy years shall have no end.** It is by an accommodation to human modes of thought that God's "years" are spoken of. An eternal existence is a unity—not made up of years and days.

Ver. 28.—**The children of thy servants shall continue.** "The nation descended from those who served thee of old shall continue," or, "abide"—i.e. not only continue to exist, but have a permanent abiding-place (comp. Ps. xxxvii. 39; lxxix. 36). **And their seed shall be established before thee** (comp. Jer. xxx. 20).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—11.—**Affliction.** "Many are the afflictions of the righteous"—even of the righteous, and sometimes these are almost, if not altogether, overwhelming. We expect to find suffering and sorrow among the guilty, but experience teaches us that it is—

I. THE OCCASIONAL PORTION OF THE GODLY. Seldom, indeed, is the good man

reduced to such distress as that described in the text; yet it does occur; troubles do sometimes accumulate where they seem least deserved or least necessary. But if not found in this degree, yet they are found in company with: 1. *Bodily pain* (ver. 3), or weakness, or lingering disease, or some form of physical privation. There may be associated: 2. *Depression of spirit*; so that food is distasteful (ver. 4), and the simple comforts of life bring no enjoyment; fair scenes give no pleasure to the eye, sweet sounds have no charm for the ear. There may be added: 3. *Loneliness*; either because (1) friends have lost faith, and have deserted; or (2) because the dejected spirit declines all human fellowship, and retires to a disconsolate obscurity (vers. 6, 7). 4. Added to these may be *positive enmity and opposition* (ver. 8). Perhaps the evil which is hardest to be borne is the accusation or the insinuation of misconduct made by former friends, who are now the most cruel of enemies, and who use the language of reproach or innuendo. Beside all this is: 5. *A painful sense of departure* (vers. 3, 11). The mind is oppressed by the thought that, like the lessening shadow, life is going; the opportunity for clearing reputation, for doing good work, for taking a good position, for reaping any of the fruits of toil, is rapidly being consumed; it will soon be gone, and then the best of life will have been lost. It is the servant of God who is sometimes called upon to "eat ashes like bread," and to "mingle his drink with his tears" (ver. 9). But even in the midst of his distress and of his perplexity there will be—

II. A DEVOUT REFERENCE TO THE WILL OF GOD. The sufferer is a man who has *mens conscia recti*; he is the victim of injustice; he wonders why he is thus assailed, thus brought low; but he does not question the presence or the ordering of Divine providence. God has allowed it all: "Thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down." The Christian man in similar distress has learnt of Christ that calamity is not always a sign of Divine displeasure (Luke xiii. 1—5); he does not therefore speak about "thy wrath and anger." Moreover, he has learnt of his Master that persecution is often the highest honour (Matt. v. 10—12); and from his apostle that affliction is often not punitive at all, but curative; the evidence, not of Divine anger, but of Fatherly love and wisdom (Heb. xii. 3—11). He therefore accepts what he suffers as the will of God concerning him, assured that it has a gracious purpose, and will work a spiritual and eternal good that will more than outweigh the physical and temporal distress.

III. THE APPEAL TO GOD. (Vers. 1, 2.) 1. It is a real relief to utter his thought in the conscious presence of God; the very recital of his griefs in God's ear brings some comfort. To tell all our troubles to a sympathetic friend, even when we do not expect him to be able to help us, is a relief to us; how much more to breathe them into the ear of him who has the most perfect sympathy with every one of his people (Matt. viii. 17; Heb. iv. 15)! 2. We may confidently count on our heavenly Father's help. It is the natural, and therefore the right, thing for us, in our moment of spiritual agitation, to use the language of earnest, if not agonizing entreaty, and to let earnestness pass into importunity ("hear me speedily"); it is altogether wise and right to continue in prayer for Divine succour when that seems to be delayed; but it is needful, for true sonship and perfect service, to rest calmly assured that God does always hear our prayer, and that he will help us, either by delivering us from our evil condition, sooner or later, here or hereafter, or by so multiplying his sustaining grace that we shall positively triumph in our endurance (2 Cor. ii. 14; ix. 10, 11).

Vers. 13—22.—*God's care for his people (Christ's care for his Church)*. The psalm passes from the individual to the nation or the society, and we have an earnest, effectual appeal for Divine pity and restoration. Primarily applicable to the ancient people of God, it applies as well to the recurring necessities of the Christian Church. We have—

I. THE COMMUNITY (THE CHURCH) IN SORE DISTRESS. It is in a position to receive the *mercy*—the pity and the redemption of the Lord (ver. 13). Its state is one of destitution (ver. 17); it is brought very low, is naked, is helpless.

II. ITS APPEAL TO THE DIVINE SAVIOUR. We are weak and powerless, "but thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever" (ver. 12); thou art the Eternal and the Almighty One; "thou canst save, and thou canst heal." When the captain and the crew have done their utmost, and shipwreck seems inevitable, they can and they do "cry unto the Lord" (Ps. cvii.). Man's extremity is God's opportunity. When from every human

point of view the case is hopeless, then all hearts turn their thought to heaven, then every voice is raised in earnest supplication. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

III. THE GROUNDS OF ITS APPEAL. 1. The duration of its distress. Has not the time fully come for God's favour (ver. 13)? Zion must have endured her appointed time of tribulation (see Ps. xc. 13—17). 2. The disinterested attachment of its friends (the disciples of the Lord) (ver. 14). Its very ruins are dear to them; they cleave to it in its extremity. 3. The spiritual well-being of those outside its borders (ver. 15). Let Zion be exalted, and then those who are now either indifferent or hostile will be gained; in their hearts will be planted the fear of the Lord, the love of Jesus Christ. 4. The glory of God, the hallowing of his Name, the exaltation of the Redeemer (vers. 16, 21, 22). 5. The character of the pitiful Father. To regard the destitute, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to save from death,—is that not just what his people may rightly ask of the benignant and compassionate Saviour? Our heavenly Father is never nearer to us, or likelier to hear and help us, than when our hour is darkest and our hearts are saddest.

IV. ITS LASTING ISSUE. (Ver. 18.) The interposition of God, and his redeeming grace, will not only command the wondering attention of the living; it will go down to the generations yet unborn, and those who "will be created" in distant days will believe and praise.

Vers. 23—28.—*The mortality of man and the eternity of God.* The psalmist returns to his own personal condition; he considers himself as one who has but a narrow span of life, and even that small span is likely to be shortened; his heart is troubled at the thought of—

I. THE BREVITY AND UNCERTAINTY OF OUR MORTAL LIFE. 1. The *length* of our life is regarded by us very differently, according to the portion of it which we have spent. In youth it seems long, and we are eager to get on further, we anticipate the coming years; but in age it seems short indeed, and we wish we were younger than we are. Many, immersed in cares or pleasures, have no time to measure the life they are fast expending; but to the thoughtful (as well as to the merely imaginative) human life seems a painfully short time in which to sustain its pure and holy relationships, in which to gather its fruits of learning and wisdom, in which to do its work and achieve some solid and enduring task. All too soon does that shadow decline, all too quickly do the flowers wither (see ver. 11). 2. And this pensiveness is deepened by the thought of the *uncertainty* of life. Sudden sickness comes, and the strong man in his prime is laid on the bed of death. The fatal accident occurs, and men and women are removed in an hour from the scenes of their activity, the homes of their affection. The land mourns its prince, its statesman, its scholar; the Church deplores its ruler, its minister, its counsellor; the home laments its head, its mistress, its ornament,—that one that should long have stayed and been its strength and joy. But in sharp and striking contrast with this is—

II. THE ETERNITY OF GOD. 1. He is *from everlasting*. Our finite mind cannot possibly comprehend the idea of the infinite. We cannot take into our imagination the absolutely boundless past. But we can think of that which was indefinitely and immeasurably remote, and consider that God was long before that. We think of the ages behind us, when the first foundations of the earth were laid, and we reflect that all that vast and unknown period counts not even one degree of the time that God has been. 2. He is *to everlasting*. Similarly, we look on to that distant hour, inconceivably far away, when our planet itself will be consumed or be congealed, or even to the time when the whole sidereal system will be dissolved, and we think that that immense tract of time will not count one unit of "the years of the right hand of the Most High." 3. He is the *Unchangeable One*. Not that the idea of boundless temporal duration *includes* that of moral and spiritual constancy; but it *suggests* it, and it may be said to imply it; for surely it is only the Unchangeable that could be and would be the Eternal. So that while we are placing our mortality in contrast with the immortality of God, we may also place our fickleness and unreliableness in contrast with his immutability, and give the fullest meaning to the words, "thou art the same" (see Jas. i. 17; Heb. xiii. 8).

III. THE REDEEMING THOUGHT. The psalmist seems to feel that God, out of the

exceeding riches of his eternity, might well bestow upon him a few more years of life (ver. 24). But he closes with the relieving thought that the children of God's servants will dwell in the land, that they will find a home there from which they will not be driven, and that their children will still be found in happy occupation, through coming generations (ver. 28). We have, in this Christian dispensation, a far more precious consolation. That is twofold. It consists of: 1. The fact that the briefest human life, spent in the service of God and of man, holds a worth which no arithmetic can compute, no wealth can weigh. 2. The truth that a holy life on earth conduces to a blessed and glorious immortality beyond. "They shall perish, but thou shalt endure." So also shall we, and *our* years shall have no end; for "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—28.—*Light arising in darkness.* The authorship and therefore the date of this psalm cannot be certainly fixed, or whether it be a national or an individual utterance; probably it is the latter. The alternations of thought and feeling are very noteworthy. We have—

I. **EARNEST PRAYER.** (Vers. 1, 2.) There is an ascending scale, reaching to a climax. 1. *That the Lord would hear.* "Hear, O Lord." 2. *For close access.* "Let my cry come unto thee." Do not hear me from afar, but come near to me. 3. *For gracious hearing.* "Hide not thy face," etc.; when I see thee, let not thy face be averted, but graciously turned to me. 4. *For attentive hearing.* "Incline thine ear;" as one anxious to hear bends down his ear, that he may more easily hear what is said. 5. *For prompt reply.* "Answer me speedily;" let there be no long delay. It is a blessed thing when our troubles and distresses lead us to God in prayer, and in prayer thus earnest and believing.

II. **SAD COMPLAINT.** There are nine verses of this (vers. 3—11). They tell of: 1. *The swift approach of death.* (Ver. 3.) As fuel in fierce heat and flame is swiftly consumed, so is it with his life. 2. *Of his bitter sorrow.* (Ver. 4.) All its strength and joy smitten, as is the grass with the sun-stroke, so that he cares not to live, forgets to eat bread. 3. *His wasted form.* He is worn as a skeleton, his bones cleave to his flesh. 4. *His utter loneliness.* (Ver. 6.) As the cormorant of the wilderness (Zeph. ii. 14; Isa. xxxiv. 11), and as the owl. The owl is called in Arabic, "mother of the ruins." 5. *His cruel enemies.* (Ver. 8.) These, when they curse, point to him as an example of misery; when they would imprecate vengeance on any, they ask that those whom they curse may be wretched as the psalmist. 6. *His abiding and unrelieved sorrow.* (Ver. 9.) It mingles with all his food. 7. *The cause of it.* The Divine displeasure. "God's wrath has seized and hurled him aloft, only to cast him, as worthless, away" (cf. Isa. xxii. 18). 8. *The result of it all.* Death is close at hand. Not improbably some exile dying far away in Babylon poured forth this bitter complaint. As the groans of a sick man are a relief, so is the outpouring of our trouble to God a relief to the burdened heart. It is ever well so to do. But now, out of these depths comes—

III. **DIVINE COMFORT.** There are eleven verses of this (vers. 12—22). And this comfort is drawn: 1. *From the remembrance of the eternal God.* (Ver. 12.) God does not die, though man does; God lives to carry on his work when men pass away. 2. *The conviction that Zion's redemption is at hand.* (Ver. 13.) He gathers this from the fact that the minds of the people of God were turned to the fallen Jerusalem (cf. Neh. i.—ii. 3). There were probably many conferences and much interest and prayer in regard to Zion (ver. 14); and the psalmist recognizes in all this one of the evidences that God's set time to be gracious to Zion has come. 3. *The anticipation of the blessed results that shall follow on Zion's restoration.* (Vers. 15, 16.) This is ever the harbinger of the world's conversion. 4. His grateful sense of the exceeding goodness of God which is to be made manifest (vers. 17—22). He thinks of the destitute, of the prisoner groaning in his misery, of those appointed unto death, and of the blessed help and deliverance that shall come to them all, and his heart leaps up in praise. But next we see—

IV. **SADNESS SEEKING TO COME BACK AGAIN.** (Ver. 23.) As is the way of sadness,

it haunts the soul, and, though banished awhile, it will return. It was so with the psalmist. The remembrance of his own sore trouble comes over him again, and he bursts out in this piteous lament, "He weakened my strength in the way," etc., and he cries, "O my God, take me not away," etc. But God does not leave him; such holy troubled souls never are left. We next see—

V. SADNESS AGAIN DRIVEN AWAY. (Vers. 25—28.) His trust is restored; for: 1. *He remembers the eternal God.* This had been his comfort before (vers. 1, 2); and now it comes to his help once more. "Thou art the same, and thy years," etc. (ver. 27). And then he thinks of: 2. *His children.* They shall be established before God (ver. 28). And so the light again ariseth in the darkness.—S. C.

Ver. 7.—"*As a sparrow alone.*" A sad, a not unseldom, and often a salutary, condition this. For the soul, when thus left alone of men, retreats into the sure sweet shelter of the love of God. We are apt to think we can do very well without that when the smiles and favour of our fellow-men rest upon us. But unquestionably it is a sad and painful condition, however it may be caused.

I. SO, OFTEN, THE SOUL SEEMS TO BE. The world says it: "God hath forsaken him; persecute him and take him." And the soul itself says the same: "Why art thou so far from me, O God?" It is a frequent complaint. Even our Lord knew this distress. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But he was then, and all God's children were and are wrong; for God never forsakes his people (John xvi. 31, 32). They may think he does.

II. SO, AT TIMES, IT WILL BE. But this is in regard to the world. The soul must "come out, and be separate" (2 Cor. vi. 17; cf. homily on Jer. xii. 9, "The speckled bird," p. 325, vol. i.).

III. SO EVER IT MUST BE IN REGARD TO GOD IN THE WORLD. There can be no compromise.—S. C.

Ver. 16.—"*When the Lord shall build up Zion.*" I. WHAT IS THIS WORK HERE SPOKEN OF? The building up of Zion. 1. *By the conversion of individual souls.* The true Church can be built up in no other way. 2. *By the public confession of their faith* on the part of these converted ones. If they refuse this, how can the Church be built up? 3. *By their union in the fellowship of the Church.* They must openly range themselves on the Lord's side in this his appointed way. 4. *By the full sanctification of these converts.* This is a further gift of grace, and it is the privilege of all who will fully consecrate themselves to the Lord, and then trust him to accomplish his own will in them—even their sanctification (1 Thess. iv. 3). Thus are they qualified to become co-workers with God in the further upbuilding of his Church. 5. *By their becoming builders for God*—going forth to make converts and win others. Such is this blessed work.

II. WHAT IS HERE SAID OF IT? 1. *It is the Lord's work.* Many may co-operate, but apart from God he can do nothing. 2. *It will be a gradual work.* The very idea of building implies this. 3. *That from various causes it may be at a standstill, or almost so.* Who does not know this? Oh, these miserable lulls in the work, these ebb-tides in the flow of holy zeal, faith, and love! It is so in the Church and in the individual soul. 4. *There are special times for this upbuilding.* (Cf. vers. 13, 14.) A hallowed excitement on the matter is felt, a sacred and deep sorrow because of Zion's desolation (cf. Nehemiah). A faithful ministry is raised up. Such are some of the indications of the set time to favour Zion having come. 5. *Great glory accrues to God.* The building of his Church is God's greatest glory, that for which he put forth his greatest power, that on which he lavished his greatest love, even the gift of Christ. That glory appears in the poorness of the instruments he employs (1 Cor. i. 26—30); in the setting aside of man's chief agencies, their great churches, hierarchies, and priesthoods; in the discomfiture of the innumerable and mighty adversaries which stand in the way of this work. All this is taught here.

III. THE MOMENTOUS CONCLUSIONS THAT FOLLOW. 1. *The work shall surely be done.* "I will build my Church," said Christ. It is not a mere possibility, but a fixed will. 2. *As to our duty.* To be patient. To inquire what is our relation to this work. Are we helping or hindering? Are we ourselves forming part of this glorious building, or are

we wilfully refusing, as we can do, to have part or lot therein? If we are of the Lord's Zion ourselves, are we striving to win others? Many fail here. Let us be found workers together with God.—S. C.

Ver. 17.—*"The prayer of the destitute."* I. A TRUE DESCRIPTION OF MAN'S SPIRITUAL CONDITION. He is destitute, not merely badly off; and he is without expectation, and without power of his own to better his condition.

II. A WISE COUNSEL THAT WE ALL SHOULD FOLLOW. That we should wait upon God in fervent prayer and earnest cry. There is nothing else that we can do. There is nothing better that we could do. There is nothing that has ever succeeded so well. There is no fear that, notwithstanding the Lord's greatness and majesty, he will disregard us.

III. A GLORIOUS ENCOURAGEMENT TO FOLLOW THIS COUNSEL. The text is a plain declaration of what the Lord will do, not merely of what we may desire he should do. Our Lord was surrounded by destitute people, who begged of him, and he never sent one away unblest. And when he comes in his power he will do the same. Only let us remember that we must come as destitute.—S. C.

Ver. 24.—*Lives taken away in the midst.* I. WHAT LIVES ARE THESE? 1. *They are not those of little children.* They have not yet come to the midst of their days. And the sadness that overwhelms us when they die is, after a while, lit up with the conviction that they rest in the love of God, and can never know the sins and sorrows which men and women cannot but know. 2. *But they are lives mature, but not aged—* lives in the full meridian of their strength. Of such the psalmist is here speaking. 3. *And there are others, and yet more sad.* For old age has been denied to many of God's beloved ones—to the well-beloved Son himself, for he was one of those who seemed to be taken away in the midst of their days, in the very prime of his manhood and his service. We may desire length of days; many and worthy motives prompt such desire; but it is often refused. God may have some better thing for us and for our beloved ones, and so we have to go. But the real sadness is not in such shortened lives, but in those which end, it may be, not literally in the midst of their days, but with the real purpose of life unachieved. God's forgiveness not gained because never sought after. The regenerate nature, indispensable for entrance into the kingdom of God, never desired, and therefore never striven for in faith and prayer, and therefore never given. The good works by which God should be glorified, and his fellow-men cheered and blessed, never wrought, his day's work all undone. The bright hope of eternal life with God never valued, never cherished, and now never to be realized; death coming on the man with all its sting, and the grave exulting in its victory. These are the real incomplete lives by side of which the sorrow over mere brevity of earthly life is but small indeed. God grant our lives may not be thus really cut off in the midst!

II. WHEREFORE ARE THEY SO DEPRECATED? See how piteous is the psalmist's supplication. Wherefore this? Because for him, like Moses, who—

"On the very verge did stand,
Of the blessed promised land,"

but yet was never permitted to enter; so the psalmist feared that in the restoration of his own people to Zion he should not live to share. But for all, life is such a blessing when the purpose for which it was given is attained; that for men to die without that purpose being attained is sad indeed. Think of life's capacities: what glory it may bring to God! what blessing to one's fellow-men! what peace, purity, and joy to one's own self! And all this which might be, not attained!

III. BUT THIS NEED NOT BEFALL ANY ONE. He who will commit his way unto the Lord shall find that the Lord will bring it to pass. He shall not be one who goes about asking—Is life worth living? and voting it all a failure. God did not bring us into existence for nothing, or without gracious purposes of good in regard to us. He sets before us life and death, and we are free to choose. Alas! many sin-blinded ones mistake the one for the other, but "whosoever will may take of the water of life freely."—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The prayer of the afflicted.* It is uncertain whether in this psalm we have an expression of personal feeling in a time of personal suffering, or an idealizing of the afflicted nation. If we take the former view, personal and national views must be regarded as blended. If we take the latter view, we may give heed to Bishop Wordsworth's suggestion, that the psalm was composed by Nehemiah when he went by night to examine the walls of Jerusalem, and was so deeply affected by the ruinous condition which he found. Bible writers prefer to associate the psalm with the later days of the Exile, when the sufferings of the Lord's people had become almost unendurable, and the time prophesied for the length of the Exile was nearly completed. It is the prayer of a patient sufferer for himself, and for the Jerusalem that lies in ruins. The sorrow of the psalmist has in it no touch of doubt or repining. But he does feel the difficulty and mystery of the Divine delays. That is, indeed, one of our gravest sources of anxiety. If God is acting, we are well assured and comforted. He is manifestly present; we feel his presence—that is enough. But when he delays, we easily get the impression that he is holding aloof; that he is indifferent; that he is not heeding our prayer. Then, with the psalmist, we begin prayer by praying to be heard and heeded.

I. THE PRAYER OF THE AFFLICTED SHOULD BE A CONFIDENTIAL UNFOLDING, NOT A COMPLAINT. Complaint of God must always be wrong and unworthy. No pious man can ever be placed in any circumstances of distress in which he gains the right to complain of God. No pious man keeps his piety and ever *wishes* to complain. Submission to the infinitely wise, strong love is absolutely essential to piety. "Thy will be done," and borne. But the pious soul is invited to the fullest confidences with God. He may speak out his feelings fully and freely. Great relief comes in times of trouble by giving our *confidence* to a trustworthy friend; and God permits us freely to complain to him.

II. THE PRAYER OF THE AFFLICTED SHOULD BE A SIGN OF FAITH, NOT OF FEAR. The faith should assure (1) of God's attention; (2) of God's sympathy; (3) of God's ability to help; (4) of God's wisdom in delaying his intervention. 1. Fear would be a dishonour to our past of Divine deliverances. 2. Fear would tell of our circumstances mastering our souls. 3. Fear would show suspicion of the Divine power and promise. We ask God to "hear our prayer," because we know that is just what he is doing.—R. T.

Vers. 3—5.—*The depression attending bodily pain.* The point of this pathetic complaint on which we just now dwell is given in ver. 4. "My heart is smitten, and withered like grass." There may be pain of body, and sorrow of circumstance, but these only become seriously distressing when they affect our minds, our spirits. "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."

I. SOME FORMS OF DISEASE INVOLVE DEPRESSION OF SPIRITS. Certain types of stomach and kidney disease have depression as a necessary symptom. So certain brain and nerve diseases. Then depression is not to be dealt with as a moral, but as a physical, evil. This feature of disease is specially trying to the Christian, who longs to keep ever alive his joy in God. And it makes extremely painful the duties of those who watch and tend the sick. Such may often gain patience for bearing work by treating depression as but a symptom of disease.

II. DEPRESSION OF SPIRITS IS OFTEN MISCONCEIVED. 1. By the good man. Often leads him to think he has been deceiving himself, and has never known the grace of God. As well say, when there are clouds in the sky, that they prove we were mistaken when we believed the sunshine warmed us. Varying moods of *feeling* do not affect spiritual *facts*. Depressions belong to the sphere of the feelings, the emotions; they do not belong, necessarily, to the sphere of the *will*. If the will were set against God, we should never be depressed about it. 2. By those who are in relations with the good man. They are easily carried away by his despondencies, and they are filled with fear concerning him. The low-spirited will often say and write bitter things against themselves; and we are always wise to make no decisions about them, and form no opinions concerning them, while they walk in darkness. "At even-tide it shall be light."

III. DEPRESSION OF SPIRITS CALLS FOR ALL-TRIUMPHING PATIENCE. On those who have to deal with such persons, patience has its perfect work. (1) We think how much patience the depressed require from their fellows; but (2) can we conceive aright of the infinite patience God has with them? For at such times they not only say bitter things against themselves, they say bitter things against God.—R. T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*The loneliness of the afflicted.* Removed from the interests and activities of life, the bed-ridden sufferer feels as if left alone; his very weakness and helplessness make him feel lonely; there must be long hours of the day when he is actually alone, and long, sleepless hours of the night when he seems all alone; and he must go altogether alone down into the “valley of the shadow.” Here the psalmist uses as figures three birds which were regarded, in his day, as types of loneliness. The pelican is the bird of the swamp; the owl is the night-bird of the desolate ruin; the sparrow is melancholy when it loses its mate. Tristram describes the pelican as sitting motionless for hours after it has gorged itself with food, its head sunk on its shoulders, and its bill resting on its breast. There is a bird in Western Asia, sometimes called a sparrow, which has a custom of sitting solitary upon the habitation of man. It never associates with any other, and only at one season with its own mate; and even then it is often seen quite alone upon the house-top, where it warbles its sweet and plaintive strains, and continues its song, moving from roof to roof.

I. LONELINESS AS AN ELEMENT OF TROUBLE. There is a *forced* loneliness, and there is a *sought* loneliness. That sought loneliness may be right, worthy, useful; but it may also be wrong, trying to others, and making needlessly difficult the work of the nurse. Those who would cheer us by their presence are too often frowned away. Sick people fail sometimes in due self-restraint; they become self-centred, and inconsiderate of the feelings of others. The wish to be alone may be quite wrong.

II. LONELINESS AS A CALL TO CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY. Waiting-times of pain seem very long; waiting-times of mere necessary resting without pain may even seem longer. The visit of mere good cheer is Christian service. The sight of another face, the sound of another voice, the touch of another hand, are full of truest relief and comfort. Ease the lonely hours of every sick friend within your reach.

III. LONELINESS AS AN APPEAL FOR DIVINE MANIFESTATION. That is the point we have in the psalm. God is the Supreme Friend of the lonely heart. Compare “Alone, yet not alone, because the Father is with me.” Jesus on the cross is the sublime model of loneliness; yet he could say, “My God, my God!”—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*The real bitterness of human affliction.* “And that because of thine indignation and wrath.” The conscience of sin makes men regard affliction as Divine judgment. For man, God’s *favour* is life, God’s *frown* is death—death of peace, pleasure, hope. Man can lose everything and be rich if he can keep the sense of gracious relations with God. Man can keep everything, and be poor and miserable, if he has lost the sense of God’s favour. While this is true of every man, it is in an especial manner true of the man who has once known the joy of God’s smile and favour. It is *such* a man who feels the bitterness of human affliction when it is seen as Divine judgment. The Book of Job represents the struggle of good men to get right views of human affliction. And what comes out so clearly from its discussions is, that no one explanation will suffice. It *may* be Divine judgment; but Job’s friends are wrong when they say that it *must* be. It may be Divine chastisement for correction; but it would be a mistake to say that it is always chastisement. It may be pure testing, simple culture, God’s way of nourishing the good, and not involving the removal of any bad. When a sufferer can see suffering to be Divine culture, or even Divine chastisement, his trials lose their bitterness. But it is always hard to be compelled to call suffering Divine judgment.

I. THIS MAY BE THE VIEW OF OUR TROUBLES THAT OTHERS TAKE. It is the view Job’s friends took at once, and they would hear nothing else. Job had at least secretly sinned, and his suffering was his judgment. Of Messiah it is said, “We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” It is what we first think of others, and what others first think of us. But it had better never be spoken, for it may not be true,

and it will certainly add to the sufferer's burden. What a mistake to think of the suffering Jesus as a malefactor!

II. THIS MAY BE THE VIEW OF OUR TROUBLES THAT WE OURSELVES TAKE RIGHTLY. It *may* be the explanation. And some heart-searching is proper at the beginning of all times of affliction. Perhaps we have been going astray, or becoming wilful or negligent. There are "secret faults," "presumptuous sins," "leavings of first love," which must be dealt thus with. God's people have to come into *judgments* which will mark the character of their sins, and into *chastisements* which will deliver them from their power.

III. THIS MAY BE THE VIEW OF OUR TROUBLES THAT WE OURSELVES TAKE WRONGLY. Many good Christians are too ready to think evil of themselves, and write bitter things against themselves. Absolute sincerity and truthfulness should be sought, even in dealing with our own faults and failings. We may even confess too much.—R. T.

Vers. 12, 25—27.—*Changing self; changing world; unchanging God.* A very favourite contrast with psalmists and poets.

I. A CONTRAST BASED ON A FACT. The fact is that man's life is changeable and brief. This is true of a man's bodily life, intellectual life, and life of relations. It is impressed on a man in his times of sickness, especially when sickness comes breaking into and breaking up his plans, as in the case of king Hezekiah. Here the psalmist puts the fact into two figures—the passing shadow, the quickly withered grass. Precisely the metaphor is taken from the *lengthening*, that is, the evening shadow, which Rashi thus explains: "When it is the time of evening the shadows lengthen, but when it is dark they are no longer discernible, but come to an end and go." The figure of the short-lived grass is one of the most familiar in the Bible. It is more striking in the hot Eastern countries, where blasting winds come, than with us. The contrast is the Divine continuity and persistency. The cedars outlive the storms of many winters, but die at last. They endure through *some* generations, but fall at last. God survives all kinds of winters, and lasts through all generations. The successions of the afflicted have always the Divine Healthy One to whom they can look. They may comfort themselves with the assurance that what he *was*, he *is*, and *ever will be*.

II. A CONTRAST BASED ON AN IMAGINATION. Nobody really knows anything about the earth perishing, and the heavens being folded up, though scientific men venture now to calculate the actual number of years that the earth may be expected to last. Ver. 25 is poetry, and based on Eastern knowledge and ideas of the form of earth and heaven. We can imagine all material things changing and passing. We know that nothing created retains its form long. And yet certain things of creation *seem* permanent and immovable. We speak of the "everlasting mountains," the "solid earth," the "infinite heavens." But think of the mountains shaken down, the earth shifted from its place, and the heavens folded up, and then God is the same, unaffected; nay, he is the supreme force that crumbles the mountains, refashions the earth, and rolls up the heavens that he "spread abroad."

God stands in absolute contrast with (1) all our experiences, and (2) with all our imaginations. The flux and reflux characteristic of material things never affect him "whose years are throughout all generations."—R. T.

Ver. 16.—*God glorified in fulfilling his promises.* The psalmist has evidently in mind the anticipated return of the exiles, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the re-establishment of the Jehovah-worship. By his servants the prophets God had made distinct promises to his people of a return from the Captivity. He had even fixed a precise time, though the date from which the seventy years were to be reckoned was not clearly defined. But seventy years of humiliation is a long time in which to keep up faith and hope. Many were likely to fail under the strain, and to say, "Our way is hid from the Lord, and our judgment is passed over from our God;" "God hath forgotten to be gracious." Better souls, like this psalmist, kept faith in God, sung in their hope, and were filled with confidence that God would keep his time, that he did not really tarry, and that he would surely be glorified, before all men, as the "Faithful Promiser."

I. GOD GLORIFIED IN KEEPING HIS WORD. "Hath he said, and shall he not do it?"

hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Men sometimes are neither right nor wise in keeping their word, because they had promised unadvisedly, had spoken impulsively; there had been no sufficient *thought* behind their promise. That fear can never be applied to *God*. We may always be sure that efficient knowledge and adequate thought lie behind all his promises. And these come fully to view when the blessings promised are realized. God is glorified to our view when his word is kept, because we read *him* through the blessing his fulfilled promise becomes to us.

II. GOD GLORIFIED IN THE WAYS IN WHICH HE FULFILLS HIS PROMISES. For he fulfils them through the orderings of his providence, and these are often full of surprises, which excite our admiration of the Wonder-worker. Illustrate from the providential order that brought about the return of the exiles. Who could have expected Cyrus to appear on the scene?

III. GOD GLORIFIED IN THE TIMES HE ARRANGES FOR THE FULFILMENT OF HIS PROMISES. He promised restoration from Babylon, and we can see that the time chosen was the only time when, in any sense, an independent Jewish national life could be resumed. The shiftings of authority in the great Eastern nations made that possible *just then*. So the coming of Messiah is declared to have been just at the "fulness of times"—the precise time of the world's peace, and of the universal sway of Rome, when he could be the "Saviour of the world."—R. T.

Vers. 23, 24.—*Prayer for renewal of imperilled life.* All love life, and desire to have it prolonged. But the psalmist does not ask for its renewal on merely personal grounds. He pleads that he is so sure God's restoring mercies are just at hand; and, if he could see them realized, he could die in peace. Compare Simeon's song, as he held the Babe-Saviour. Death coming when a man is in the very midst of life's work is the most trying of human experiences. We always feel intensely sorry for Moses, though he was so aged, because he must leave his life-work incomplete. See the intense distress of Hezekiah, because his "purposes were broken off." This was the special bitterness of his grief: "I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living." So with this psalmist of the Exile. He shrank from dying just at the time when he was expecting that manifestation of the Divine power for which he had been so long hoping and waiting. To die on *this side* of our promised land is always hard work. Death is dreaded in the midst of (1) manhood; (2) prosperity; (3) responsibility; (4) spiritual growth; (5) Christian work, etc.

I. THE MISSION OF DEATH IN THE MIDST OF LIFE TO HIM WHO DIES. Show how supreme a moral test it may be. It tries a man's submission. It reveals incompleteness of culture. It shows what an undue hold the world may have gained on a man. It puts him on proving the power of prayer. It humbles him by showing that he is not so essential to the well-being of humanity as he had thought. Sickness, imperiling life, coming to a man in the midst of his days, often proves to be a most humbling and sanctifying experience.

II. THE MISSION OF DEATH IN THE MIDST OF LIFE TO THOSE WHO HAVE TO LIVE ON. Nothing so effectively convinces of the uncertainty of life. Nothing better pleads for the faithful doing of the duty of every hour. Nothing more effectively convinces that no man is *necessary* to God's work in the world. It teaches us that as our life-work may be "rounded off" at any moment, it should always be ready for "rounding off." The imperilled may pray for renewed life and lengthened days, but not in any unconditional way, since length of life is no supreme and necessary good. Such prayer must wait on the holy will.—R. T.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CIII.

A PSALM of joy and thanksgiving for God's manifold mercies, especially for his loving-kindness in forgiving sin and transgression (vers. 3, 8—12, 17) passing into adoration

of him upon his heavenly throne (ver. 19), and a call on all creation to praise him (vers. 20—22). The "title" assigns the psalm to David, and this view of its authorship is taken by Hengstenberg and Professor Alexander. But other critics see in

"certain Aramaic terminations" indications of a later date. Whoever the author, we must regard the composition as less "the outbreathing of gratitude from one individual spirit" than "intended to be used as a national thanksgiving" (Kay).

The psalm divides itself into four portions: the first (vers. 1—5) an outburst of praise for blessings granted by God to each man severally; the second (vers. 6—14) an enumeration of his loving-kindnesses towards his Church as a whole; the third (vers. 15—18) a representation of man's weakness and dependence on God; and the fourth (vers. 19—22) a glance at God's unchanging glory, and a call upon all his creation to bless and worship him.

Ver. 1.—**Bless the Lord, O my soul.** Repeated in ver. 2; also at the end of the psalm; and again in Ps. civ. 1, 35. To "bless" is more than to praise; it is to praise with affection and gratitude. The psalmist calls upon his own soul, and so on each individual soul, to begin the song of praise, which is to terminate in a general chorus of blessing from all creation (vers. 20—22). **And all that is within me.** "All my whole nature—intellect, emotion, feeling, sentiment—brain, heart, lungs, tongue," etc. **Bless his holy Name;** i.e. his manifested Personality, which is almost the same thing as himself.

Ver. 2.—**Bless the Lord, O my soul.** Repetition, in Holy Scripture, is almost always for the sake of emphasis. It is not "vain repetition." Our Lord often uses it: "Verily, verily, I say unto you;" "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "Feed my sheep. . . Feed my sheep." **And forget not all his benefits** (comp. Deut. vi. 12; viii. 11, 14, etc.). Man is so apt to "forget," that he requires continual exhortation not to do so.

Ver. 3.—**Who forgiveth all thine iniquities.** This is the first and greatest of "benefits," and is therefore placed first, as that for which we ought, above all else, to bless God. God's forgiveness of sin is a frequent topic with the psalmists (see Pss. xlv. 11, 18; xxxii. 1; li. 9; lxxxv. 2; lxxxvi. 5, etc.). **Who healeth all thy diseases.** This is best understood literally—not as mere "parallelism." Among the greatest blessings which we receive of God is recovery from sickness.

Ver. 4.—**Who redeemeth thy life from destruction.** When sickness seems about to be mortal, or when danger threatens from foes, God often steps in and "redeems" men—i.e. saves them, rescues them (see Pss. lvi. 13; cxvi. 8; Isa. xxxviii. 16, 20). **Who**

crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies (comp. Pss. viii. 5; xviii. 50; xxiii. 6, etc.).

Ver. 5.—**Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things.** So Dean Johnson and our Revisers. But the rendering of "mouth" is very doubtful. The original meaning of the word seems to have been "gay ornament," whence it passed to "gaiety," "desire of enjoyment," "desire" generally (τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν σου, LXX.). Dr. Kay translates, "thy gay heart;" Professor Cheyne, "thy desire." God satisfies the reasonable desires of his servants, giving them "all things richly to enjoy" (1 Tim. vi. 17), and "satisfying the desire of every living thing" (Ps. cxlv. 16). So that **thy youth is renewed like the eagle's**; rather, *like an eagle* (comp. Isa. xl. 31). The meaning is, not "thy youth is renewed as an eagle's youth is," for an eagle's youth is not renewed; but "thy youth is renewed, and is become in its strength like an eagle."

Ver. 6.—**The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment;** literally, *righteousnesses and judgments*; i.e. "acts of righteousness and acts of judgment." For all that are oppressed. The care of God for the "oppressed" is a marked feature of Holy Scripture (see Exod. ii. 23—25; iii. 9; Judg. ii. 18; vi. 9; Job xxxv. 9—14; Pss. ix. 9; x. 18; lxxix. 21; cxlvi. 7; Isa. i. 17, etc.).

Ver. 7.—**He made known his ways unto Moses.** God's ways are "past finding out" by man (Rom. xi. 33); they must be "made known" to him. God made them known to Moses by the revelations which he gave him, especially those of Sinai. **His acts unto the children of Israel.** The rest of the Israelites were taught mainly by God's "acts"—not that his words were concealed from them, but because

"Segnius irritant animum demissa per aures,
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus."

Ver. 8.—**The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.** This was a part of the revelation made to Moses (Exod. xxxiv. 6), whose words the psalmist closely echoes, both here and in Ps. lxxxvi. 15 (comp. also Pss. cxi. 4; cxil. 4; cxlv. 8).

Ver. 9.—**He will not always chide; or, contend** (see Isa. lvii. 16; and comp. Jer. iii. 5, 12). God will relent from his anger and forgive men, after a while. He will not be "extreme to mark what is done amiss." Neither will he keep his anger for ever. He is not implacable. He will accept repentance and amendment (Ezek. xvii. 27). He will accept atonement (1 John ii. 2).

Ver. 10.—**He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us (rather, requited**

us) according to our iniquities. God never punishes men so much as they deserve to be punished; "in his wrath he" always "thinketh upon mercy."

Ver. 11.—For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him (comp. Ps. xxxvi. 5, "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds"). The metaphor is bold, yet inadequate; for God's mercy is infinite.

Ver. 12.—As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. God's mercy is the cause, the removal of sin the result. The two are commensurate, and are "described by the largest measures which the earth can afford."

Ver. 13.—Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him (comp. Deut. xxxii. 6; Job x. 8; Isa. xxix. 16; lxiii. 16; lxiv. 8, etc.). (For the nature of the "fear" spoken of, both here and in ver. 11, see the description in vers. 17, 18.) It must be a fear that produces obedience, or, in New Testament phrase, that is a "godly fear" (Heb. xii. 28).

Ver. 14.—For he knoweth our frame; or, *our formation* (Kay)—the manner in which we were formed (see Gen. ii. 7). He remembereth that we are dust (comp. Gen. ii. 7; iii. 19; xix. 27; Job xxxiv. 15, etc.).

Ver. 15.—As for man, his days are as grass. Here is a new departure. From the loving-kindness and mercy of God the psalmist passes to the weakness and helplessness of man. Man is like grass (Pss. xxxvii. 2; xc. 5, 6; cii. 11; Isa. xl. 6—8, etc.). His days fleet and fade. He never "continueth in one stay." As a flower of the field (comp. Job xiv. 2; Isa. xxviii. 1; xl. 6; Jas. i. 10; 1 Pet. i. 24, etc.). He flourisheth; i.e. he cometh up in full vigour, glorious to look upon, rejoicing in his youth and strength, but within a little time he fadeth, falleth away, or is "cut down, dried up, and withered." There is no strength or stability in him.

Ver. 16.—For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; literally, *it is not*. The burning sirocco, the wind of the desert, variously named in various places, blows upon the flower, and almost immediately scorches it up. So man, when he flourishes most, is for the most part brought low by the wind of suffering, trouble, sickness, calamity, and sinks out of sight. And the place thereof shall know it no more; rather, *knows it no more*. Seeing it not, forgets it, as if it had never been. So with the greatest men—they pass away and are forgotten (comp. Job vii. 10).

Ver. 17.—But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him (comp. vers. 11, 13). Through

this "everlasting mercy" of God, man, though so feeble and fragile, does not wholly pass away, but continues to be the recipient of God's bounty. And his righteousness unto children's children. God's "righteousness" is his everlasting justice, by which he gives to men according to their deserts.

Ver. 18.—To such as keep his covenant; i.e. "to the faithful"—to those who, notwithstanding many lapses and many shortcomings, are yet sincere in heart, and seek to do his will. Such persons remember his commandments to do them.

Ver. 19.—The Lord hath prepared (or, *established*) his throne in the heavens. In conclusion, the incomparable majesty of God is set before us, in contrast with the feebleness of man, and he is put forward as the one and only fit Object of worship, alike to the spiritual (vers. 20, 21) and the material creation (ver. 22a), as well as to the psalmist himself (ver. 22b). Seated on his everlasting throne, he challenges the adoration of the whole universe. And his kingdom ruleth over all (comp. Ps. xlvii. 2; Dan. iv. 34, 35).

Ver. 20.—Bless the Lord, ye his angels (comp. Ps. cxlviii. 2). That excel in strength. The angels that "excel in strength"—literally, *are mighty in strength*—may best be understood as those called in the New Testament "archangels" (1 Thess. iv. 16; Jude 9), the highest of the glorious beings that stand around the throne of God (Rev. viii. 2, 6; x. 1) and execute his behests. These are they that, in an especial sense, do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.

Ver. 21.—Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts. Here the inferior angels seem to be meant—that "multitude of the host of heaven" which appeared to the shepherds on Christ's natal day (Luke ii. 13), and which is elsewhere often referred to in Holy Scripture (see Pss. xlv. 10; cxlviii. 2; Isa. xl. 26; Matt. xxv. 31; Mark viii. 38; Luke ix. 26; Heb. xii. 22; Jude 14). Ye ministers of his (comp. Ps. civ. 4) that do his pleasure. The inferior, no less than the superior, ranks of angels continually carry out the will of God, being "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. i. 14).

Ver. 22.—Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion (comp. Pss. xix. 1—4; cxlv. 10; cxlviii. 7—13). The "works of God"—i.e. his material universe—cannot, of course, he said to "bless" God in the same sense that men and angels do; but, in a language of their own, they set forth his glory, and to the poetic mind seem truly to sing his praise. The "Song of the Three Children" is a natural outburst from devout hearts. Bless the Lord, O my soul (comp. ver. 1, and the comment *ad loc.*).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*God's goodness to ourselves.* The psalmist begins by addressing himself; he has before him his own personal experience during a long (or lengthening) life; and he finds ample reason for full, heartfelt gratitude. Of the "benefits" he has received, he gives—

I. A RECITAL OF THEM. They include: 1. The Divine *mercy* when he has sinned (ver. 3). These sins have been (1) very many; (2) of various kinds, including not only smaller and greater wrong-doings, but the long catalogue of omissions—of submission and service unrendered; (3) they may have been aggravated and of a deep dye; (4) they may have been committed in all the many relationships and through all the successive stages of human life. 2. Divine *restoration*. (Vers. 3, latter part, and 4.) And this is inclusive of (1) restoration from daily weariness and exhaustion; (2) recovery from the less serious ailments and evils to which every one is subject; probably (3) bringing back from the grave when dangerous illness has brought low. 3. *All the loving-kindnesses* which make life beautiful and glad (ver. 4). The excellency of human love, the comforts of home life, the sacred joy of worship. 4. The *continuance* of Divine protection and replenishment to later life (ver. 5). God had satisfied his prime (marginal reading, Revised Version) with good things—had so visited and renewed him in his manhood, that now, instead of a growing feebleness, he felt the vigour and hopefulness of youth; perhaps he was far enough on the way to be said to be "still bringing forth fruit in old age." He calls on himself to cherish—

II. A REMEMBRANCE OF THEM. "Forget not," etc. (ver. 2). Antecedently that seems impossible; certainly in the case of any one claiming to be devout. Yet it is quite possible for us to be (1) so sensible of our own agency in securing our comforts as to lose sight of the Divine action, and so to overlook them; or to be (2) so occupied with present cares and pleasures, or with future claims, that we may be regardless of them (see Deut. vi. 12; viii. 11—18). What the wise and good man will desire for himself is that he will constantly carry with him a deep sense of God's abounding goodness to him through all his course. This will lead to—

III. FULL-VOICED AND FULL-HEARTED UTTERANCE OF PRAISE. (Vers. 1, 2.) God's praise is not to be rendered by an occasional and formal "returning of thanks" either at the table or in the church. It is to be a daily offering, and one that comes from the heart as well as from the lips. "All that is within us," the whole range of our faculties, is to combine to speak and to sing his praise. Gratitude to God for his abiding and abounding goodness to us, both as citizens of this world and as his children, should be a very leading and powerful factor in our soul, making our character beautiful with spiritual worth, and our life resonant with holy song.

Vers. 6—18.—*The confidence of God's children.* These strong, sustaining words call us to consider—

I. TO WHOM THE DIVINE ASSURANCES ARE GIVEN. It is clear that they are given to the servants of God. The thought runs through the whole passage (see vers. 11, 13, 18). Where this is not explicitly stated, it is to be understood (see particularly ver. 12). Those may not claim the fulfilment of promises to whom they were not made. First enter the service of Christ, and then look up for all the blessings assured to those who believe in him.

II. THESE DIVINE ASSURANCES THEMSELVES. 1. *The overthrow of evil*, and the consequent deliverance of the good (ver. 6). God "executes righteousness and judgment" in two ways—sometimes by a Divine intervention, when he overturns the designs of the wicked, and at the same time redeems his people (e.g. the Jews from Pharaoh and from Haman and from Sanballat); more often by the constant outworking of those righteous laws which are always acting on behalf of rectitude against iniquity (see Ps. xxxiv. 15, 16). 2. Divine *patience*. (Ver. 2.) God is "slow to anger." It was said of a noble modern ruler that, under great provocation, he was "slow to smite, and swift to spare." Of how many might the opposite be said? Our God is "slow to anger." His displeasure is awakened, his condemnation uttered, only when it would be unrighteousness to remain unmoved and silent. 3. Divine *mercy*. (Vers. 10—12.)

Instead of inflicting pain, poverty, misery, death—the wages of sin—God has (1) spared to us our life and our health; (2) multiplied to us our comforts and our joys; (3) offered to us, in Jesus Christ, a full restoration to his Divine favour; (4) planted within our hearts the seeds of piety and holiness; (5) made us heirs of eternal life. The mercy of God, in Christ Jesus, has such immeasurable heights and breadths (vers. 11, 12).

4. Divine *pity*. (Ver. 13.) Nothing can exceed the pity of the parent for his or her child when in pain or trouble. Then the very tenderest and strongest as well as the purest emotions of the human heart are stirred. “As one whom his mother comforteth”—with such perfect sympathy, such exquisite tenderness—does God comfort us (Isa. lvi. 13). God’s pity for his children is felt (1) in their various distresses, and may be counted upon in all time of need (see Heb. iv. 15, 16); (2) in their spiritual endeavours and struggles, when the work is hard, and the soul is weak, and the issue is uncertain. And here we have, as we may well rejoice to have, the assurance of:

5. Divine *considerateness*. (Ver. 14.) Christian service is imperfect; our character is blemished, and our work is faulty; but it is sincere; it is rooted in faith; it is animated by love; it is purified by prayer. And he who accepted the service of his apostles in the garden, “knowing their frame” and the weakness of the flesh (Matt. xxvi. 41); he who has owned and blessed the spiritual endeavour and the earnest labours of his people in every age and in every Church since then;—will accept our service and crown our labours now, though in the one and in the other we fall far short even of our own ideal. Well, indeed, would it be if we made as generous allowance for one another as our Master makes for us all.

6. Divine *continuance*. (Vers. 15—17.) With the brevity of all human things we contrast the continuance of the Divine. We ourselves pass away and are forgotten, but God’s mercy and his righteousness remain for ever. We can always count on them. Men may be very true and very kind, but they pass to where they cannot reach and help us. Let us commit ourselves to the goodness and the faithfulness of God, for on that we may build with absolute security. This is the true confidence of the children of God. But we are reminded in one verse (7) of—

III. THE ONLY HOPE OF THE DISLOYAL. God revealed himself, “his ways, and his acts,” to Moses, but grace and truth have come by Jesus Christ (John i. 17). In the gospel God has revealed himself as the Divine Father, who waits to receive his wayward but penitent children. Those that are obdurate and impenitent may not plead his promises, may not appropriate to themselves the sustaining assurance which apply to other persons. But they may—they *must*—return in humility and in faith to the Father whom they have forsaken; and, once at home with him, they may rest in his loving favour and rejoice in his upholding Word.

Vers. 19—22.—*The range of God’s rule and claim.* We have here—

I. THE WIDE RANGE OF GOD’S RULE. (Ver. 19.) If his throne were “prepared” anywhere on earth, while within sight of a few, it would be out of sight of and, in that sense, far away from many cities and provinces; but being “prepared in the heavens,” it is (in thought and feeling) in view of all, and is thus near to all, and “his kingdom ruleth over all.” “The Lord looketh from heaven, he beholdeth all the sons of men; from the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth” (Ps. xxxiii. 13, 14). To our imagination, and therefore practically to ourselves, the heavens are much nearer to us, much more “central,” than any Jerusalem could be. Every kingdom, every city, every human home, is in the regard, under the control, subject to the rightful sway, of the Divine Sovereign.

II. THE FULLNESS OF THE DIVINE CLAIM. God’s claim: 1. Ascends to the highest intelligences; the “angels that excel in strength” owe to him their homage; they do, indeed, hearken and obey. 2. Descends to inanimate nature. All his works praise him; unconsciously they “declare his glory.”

“There’s not a plant nor flower below
But makes his glory known.”

3. Includes all that come between. Whatever or whoever are intended by the “hosts” and “ministers” of ver. 21, it is certain that the psalmist included the children of men. It may, indeed, be said that it is impossible to conceive of any of God’s creatures or children who owe him so much as we do. For our creation, our endowment, our

temporal mercies, our redemption at an infinite cost, and for all the Divine love, patience, considerateness (see above), we have been receiving from him, we owe him "perpetual songs of praise."

III. THE THOROUGHNESS OF OUR SERVICE. 1. Our praise is to be the devout expression of our deep feeling; much more than a reverent attitude or an appropriate deliverance: "all that is within us" (ver. 1) is to come forth in grateful utterance; our song is to express our soul; it is to be the natural, unbidden voice of our homage, our attention, our love, our submission, our consecration. 2. We may be concerned about the piety of our neighbour; but the first thing to do is to address ourselves: "Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*A pattern of praise.* This psalm is all praise; there is no supplication in it. It has helped myriads to praise God, and the secret of such help is that the psalmist was himself filled with the spirit of praise, and it is the blessed contagion of that spirit that helps us to-day as in the days of old. And it is a pattern of all true praise. It is so in these ways.

I. IN ITS OBJECT. 1. It is *praise of the Lord*. All is addressed to him, and is for him. 2. *And in his holiness*. "Bless his holy Name." What a happy fact this reveals as to the psalmist and all who sincerely adopt his words! We can bless God for his beneficence and mercy and goodness, but only a holy soul can bless him for his holiness. Such soul delights not merely in the kind acts of God, but in the pure and perfect character of God.

II. ITS METHODS. It shows us how we should praise the Lord. 1. *Personally*. "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" It is not a work to be handed over to any choir or any people whatsoever. It is to be our own personal work. 2. *Spiritual*. It is to be the *soul's* work. Poetic speech, eloquent phrase, beautiful music, skilled song,—all count for nothing if the soul be not in the work. 3. *Whole-hearted*. "All that is within me." Intellect, memory, imagination, affection, will, all the energies of our spiritual nature, should be engaged. 4. *With set purpose*. See how he calls on himself, stirs himself up to this holy work, repeats his exhortation and protests against that one chief cause—forgetfulness—of our failure to render praise. "Forget not any of his benefits." This is how we should praise the Lord.

III. ITS REASON. He tells wherefore we should bless the Lord. 1. *For forgiveness*. This our first necessity; all else avails not without that (cf. Mark ii. 5). 2. *For the healing of the soul*. It would be but a poor salvation if soul-healing did not follow forgiveness, for without the latter we should soon be back to our sins again (2 Pet. ii. 22). Therefore we need this healing of the soul. And it is promised (see Ezek. xxxvi. 25). 3. *For penalty in this life averted*. He "redeemeth thy life from destruction." God does not redeem our life from all the consequences of our sin (Ps. xcix. 8), but from the worst he does. The forgiven man may have to suffer much in consequence of his past sins, but it is as nothing compared with what he would have had to suffer had he not been forgiven. The comfort of God's Spirit, power to witness for Christ, victory over sin, hope bright hope of life eternal,—all these are his; his life is redeemed from destruction. 4. *For, next, God crowneth with loving-kindness*. See all this illustrated in the story of the prodigal son—forgiven, healed, redeemed, crowned, the ring, the robe, the shoes, the feast, were for him; and what answers to them yet is the crowning told of here. 5. *For satisfaction with good*. This also awaits us: would we but trust God more, we should know it for ourselves. They who walk with God, abide in Christ, know what it is. Let us not rest until we know it for ourselves. 6. *For youth of soul renewed*. (See homily on this subject.) The outward man may, will, decay, but the inward man shall be renewed day by day.

IV. ITS RESULTS. What a history it would be if we could only trace out what this psalm has done for God's saints in all ages! What spiritual victories it has won! what strength it has imparted! what holy joy! Christian, sing this psalm more heartily, so that many poor lost ones, hearing its sweet evangel, may turn and with you bless the Lord.—S. C.

Ver. 5.—*Renewed youth.* How can that be? We *must* grow old. Every day brings us nearer to old age, and there is no escaping it except by premature departure. We pass on by stages which succeed each other in regular and well-marked order from infancy to the last scene of all, the second childhood, which finds us “*sans teeth, eyes, taste—everything.*” With all of us age creeps on apace, but almost unnoticed. Now, our ideal of age shifts. Children think all grown-up people old, and some very old. But when men come to the verge of three score years and ten, they will often flatter themselves that even yet they are not old. But there are certain unmistakable signs which no observant man can fail to notice, and which remind him that the day of life is on the wane. *Physical fatigue*; less of elasticity and power; he gives in sooner than he did when strain is put on his strength. *The way the young treat us.* In Thackeray’s beautiful story, ‘The Newcomes,’ he pictures the colonel sitting in his cheerless room, and hearing his boy and his friends singing and making merry overhead. He longed to join them and share in it; but the party would be hushed if he went in, and he would come away sad at heart to think that his presence should be the signal for silence among them, and that his son could not be merry in his company. “We go into the company of young men like Chris Newcome and his friends; they cease their laughter and subdue their talk to the gravity which is supposed to be fit for the ears of the seniors. Then we know, too plainly to be mistaken, what has befallen us; we are growing older; the stamp of middle age is upon us.” But if the juniors do not bring home the fact to us, *the conduct of the seniors does.* Old men have confidence in our judgment, grow civil as they see we are approaching to their side, and have arrived at an age when it should be no longer true that “knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers.” They think they can trust no man, and they consult us as they never would have done had not the dew of our youth long ago disappeared. Yes; we must grow old. And why should we regret it? It is an honour and reward which are given of God. “Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, as a shock of corn,” etc. The Bible never speaks of “the dreary gift of years;” and if, in melancholy mood, Moses asserts that which, thank God, is so often untrue, that in the years of old age “their strength is but labour and sorrow,” the general tone of the Bible tells that days “long in the land” are God’s own reward to his people. But whether we be content or no at the inevitable advance of age, there is the fact, and hence the question comes again—How can a renewed youth be? “Can a man enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” Now—

I. THE TEXT DECLARES THE FACT OF RENEWED YOUTH. And this in no mere poetic sense, but literally and truly. It says, “like the eagle,” which year by year renews its plumage, and so seems to renew its vigour and activity along with its new garment. 1. *But the renewal of our youth is not physical.* Though the bodily life be sustained and nourished by appropriate food and rest, yet, in spite of this, the physical energies succumb to the decay of nature. The outward man not only does, but must, perish. The reservoir gets lower, the constant drain is but inadequately repaired, and by-and-by our life has all run out. No *elixir vitæ* can prevent this. It is inevitable. 2. *But the renewal told of in the text is spiritual.* As in Job xxxiii. 23—26, where not physical, but spiritual, rejuvenescence is the theme. “They go from strength to strength;” “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;” “Whoso liveth and believeth on me,” said our Lord, “shall never die.” Of Moses it is said that his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. What an illustration have we in the life of St. Paul of this ever-renewed youth! 3. *The characteristics of youth belong to such.* Capacity for progress, growth, development. It is never too late for them. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” Hopefulness. The path of their life is lit up by the sunshine of the love of God, and it grows brighter and brighter. Enjoyment. The keen relish for all that is delightful is one of the blessed appanages of youth, and that which is like to it is part of the blessedness of that rejuvenescence of which we are speaking. Fulness of joy in his presence is theirs. Innocence, also. “The wicked one toucheth them not.” Strength and vigour. They are as athletes in the contests which they have to wage: in the spiritual conflicts they fight, “not uncertainly, as one that beateth the air,” but theirs is “the good fight,” not only for the object for which it is waged, but for its manner and issue also. Such is this renewed youth.

II. EXPLAINS ITS SECRET. “He satisfieth thy mouth with good things.” Christ

is the Bread of their life, and they live by him. His are the "good things" by which they are sustained. This is the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which accounts for their renewed youth. They eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood; he is their living Bread. They follow his footsteps, they drink into his Spirit; the mind which was in Christ is formed in them, and they grow up into him in all things.

III. ENCOURAGES US TO MAKE IT OUR OWN. Is youth yet ours? Then by yielding our young hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ, let us receive from him that eternal life, that life of the Spirit, whose youth is ever renewed. But if youth has passed away for us, let us in like manner renew it, and gain again all those blessed characteristics, only in far higher degree and manner, which are God's gift to them that are young.—S. C.

Ver. 9.—"*He will not always chide.*" This psalm is full of the recital of things to be thankful for, and of expectation that we be thankful. Amongst these things, this fact declared in our text is one. And—

I. WE SHOULD BE THANKFUL THAT IT IS ONLY CHIDING, not something worse. God is speaking to his own children, not to the world of the ungodly. These latter he is angry with every day, and sternly punishes, and if they repent not he will destroy them. But though God chide his children, there is not the severity, nor the lack of alleviation, nor the endlessness and hopelessness, which characterize his dealings with hardened and ungodly men.

II. THAT THERE IS SUCH CHIDING. "For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Heb. xii. 7). If God did not make sin full of smart and pain, we should be sure to go back to it again. But when the world sees that there is no partiality with God, that his own children have to suffer even as, and often far more than, others when they do wrong, this tends to beget a holy fear. Yes; blessed be God for our chiding!

III. THAT EVEN THIS WILL HAVE AN END. When we repent of our sin, when God's purpose is fulfilled, when we enter heaven. "Therefore humble yourselves," etc.—S. C.

Vers. 13—18.—*Wherefore another gospel when we have this?* It should seem as if no gospel could be more full, precious, clear, and heart-quickening than this. It is paralleled but not surpassed by St. John's word, "God is love." Why, then, was it needful for Christ to come in order to reveal to us another gospel? Have we not everything here, in this utterance of the Old Testament, and in those others in the same Old Testament, which are like unto it? What more, then, could be needed? We reply—

I. THE MISSION OF CHRIST WAS NEEDED IN ORDER TO REVIVE AND QUICKEN THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH OF THE LOVE OF GOD. It had been, when our Lord came, so limited, petrified, and practically lost, that it was almost as if it had not been. Pharisaism and Sadduceism had so overlaid or lessened it, that only a few elect souls knew of it or believed it. God's Fatherhood was not much more in our Lord's day than a dead letter.

II. TO MAKE IT REAL TO MEN. True, our text stood there in the psalm, but the life of the Lord here on earth could alone make it stand out as a real, living truth. Then there was held up—placarded, as St. Paul says (Gal. iii. 1)—before the eyes of all men, what the pity and love of God could do and endure for the sake of sinful men. And so, as our Lord said, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all," etc.

III. TO ENSURE ITS BEING SPREAD ABROAD. The Jews, we well know, would never have allowed this. Their inveterate exclusiveness and scorn of all other nations would have kept it to themselves alone. It was necessary that Christ should come and command his disciples to "go into all the world, and preach," etc.

IV. TO REVEAL ITS ENLARGED SCOPE AND AIM. Life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel. Death, till Christ came, kept its sting, and the grave its victory, but he took both away. Such were some of the reasons wherefore God became man, and lived and suffered and died in the Person of Christ. Doubtless there are others, but amongst them all that horrible one, so sadly dear to theologians of a bygone age, is not to be found—that it was to turn the heart of God from anger to love, for God was and eternally is Love.—S. C.

Ver. 13.—*The pity of God.* I. THE FULL, CLEAR DECLARATION OF THIS IS FOUND ONLY IN THE BIBLE. 1. *It is not in ancient mythology.* The gods of the heathen were strong and much else, but not pitiful. 2. *Nor in Nature.* How heartless, how cruel, how utterly unsympathizing, she is! The dearly loved, the precious, the innocent, suffer, die in thousands, and Nature has not a solitary tear for them. 3. *Nor in society.* Law, the bond of society, cannot pity, it can only enforce its commands.

II. NEVERTHELESS, SUGGESTIONS OF IT ARE TO BE FOUND. The lower animals seem to have no affection for their offspring; but: 1. Such suggestions are traceable *amongst the higher orders of animal life.* See the affection of the mother bird or beast. See the affection of the dog for his master. And of the horse. A blackbird has been known to care for and feed a young robin that had fallen from its nest. 2. *And amongst men.* Not much amongst savages; but pity advances as we observe the higher races and the more civilized.

III. BUT FAR MORE IS HUMAN PITY SEEN IN THE HUMAN FAMILY AND HOME. 1. *There we get the idea most of all realized.* "Like as a father," etc. God has made use of our happy familiarity with parental love and pity to teach us what he himself is. 2. *And there we learn what pity is and will do.* It will inflict pain. Every father and mother do, but not, if they be wise, in anger, in revenge, or in passion, or carelessly, but ever out of love, for the sake of the child.

IV. THUS WE LEARN THE PITY OF GOD. 1. *It will inflict pain if for our good.* 2. *But such infliction does not argue that the sufferer is shut out from the love of God.* Man's punishments too often are utterly loveless. See how we treat our criminals, both in prison and when they come out. What a contrast to the Lord's way! See how the father of the prodigal forgave, but the elder brother did not. See the parable of the two debtors. 3. *It bids us trust it utterly and for ever.*—S. C.

Ver. 19.—*The kingdom of God.* The psalm does not go about to prove—Scripture never does—the existence of God, nor the fact that he exercises dominion over us; it takes both for granted, and proceeds to speak of the nature and obligations of the Divine rule. That rule is here asserted. Note—

I. ITS CHARACTERISTICS. 1. *Its basis and foundation.* These are immutably right. His is not the mere right of might, but a far higher thing, the might of right. Not *δυνάμει* alone, but *ἐξουσία*. 2. *Its extent.* This is so vast, that not alone is our eyesight aided with all conceivable telescopic power far outstripped, but even our thought fails to grasp in its comprehension, or even in its imagination, the wide range either of the material or moral universe over which God reigns. 3. *Its regulating law.* That law is holy, just, and good, and clothed with power to enforce its sacred sanctions. Its moral perfection is seen supremely in the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ. 4. *Its purpose and aim.* These are the highest possible. The glory of God is to be secured, that glory on which the well-being of the whole universe depends. Let God be banished from his throne, and straightway chaos comes again. And the highest well-being of his creatures. The two are never antagonistic, but joined in inseparable union. Where one is, there is the other. 5. *Its duration.* For ever and ever. Such are the characteristics of this blessed and glorious kingdom, whose subjects consist only of regenerated souls—souls that can say, "Oh how I love thy Law! it is my meditation all the day."

II. THE EFFECT WHICH OUR FAITH IN THIS DIVINE KINGDOM SHOULD HAVE UPON US. 1. *Obedience.* To know God's will should be to obey. "Blessed are they that keep his commandments." 2. *Praise.* What truer gospel can there be that such a rule is that under which we live? 3. *Trust.* We cannot always understand the ways of God; they are high above our thought; but we can ever trust, and that is ever good. 4. *Confident hope.* "He must reign till he hath put all enemies," etc. And he will do this.—S. C.

Ver. 22.—*The peril of the spiritual guide.* Such is the title which a great preacher has given to a sermon on this text. The subject is suggested by its closing words. The psalmist had been summoning angels and all the works of the Lord to bless the Lord, and, as if he remembered that he might be—

I. CALLING OTHERS TO PRAISE THE LORD, AND YET NEGLECTING IT HIMSELF, he adds,

“Bless the Lord, O my soul!” 1. *And this is a real possibility and a terrible peril.* Like as a guide to the loveliest scenes of nature may lead a traveller to different points of view, which will show the glorious landscape at its best, and may expatiate on the beauties that are to be seen, yet may himself be not in the slightest degree stirred or moved by what he calls on the traveller to admire. He has come to be so familiar with it all; he has said the same thing so many times, it is part of his professional talk; he has seen all these glorious things so often, that they have lost their power to affect him. At first it was otherwise; he had become a guide to these scenes because he so delighted in them. But that was a long time ago. He had thought that he could not spend his life more happily than in conducting others to these same beautiful places, and showing them their glories. But all that enthusiasm has long passed, and he is now a mere professional guide. 2. And so, the great preacher to whom I have referred points out, *it may be with the spiritual guide*—the minister of Christ, the teacher of others in holy things. He may have begun with enthusiasm for the blessed truths and the bright prospects to which he was to lead others; he had such joy in them himself, that to show to others these things seemed an employment to which he might, as in fact he did, give his whole life and soul. But alas! he has got so familiar with it all; the work has become such a routine, that all the old zest and glow and enthusiasm are gone, and he too has become a mere professional guide. God help him and all such! This is the peril.

II. THE SAFEGUARD is, by continual meditation, prayer, and obedience to the Lord, to maintain the freshness, the force, and the “first love.” And this safeguard is sure.—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*God the Healer of disease.* Though this psalm is one of the most familiar, both its authorship and its particular occasion are quite unknown. Early in the psalm this text comes. It is part of a review of God’s personal mercies to the psalmist, but it is doubtful whether the psalmist referred to times of bodily disease and bodily healing, or to the *soul-diseases* which answer to “iniquities.” In view of the way in which Eastern poets loved to repeat their thought with slightly altered phraseology, it is quite possible that the text may read, “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy soul-diseases—those soul-conditions of frailty and infirmity, out of which iniquities come.” But, however that may be, it is certainly true that God is the Healer of all men’s diseases. The work of the physician must always be traced back to the Divine Physician, who alone has proved to be the recuperative force in human vitality. God has healed us again and again through the agency of the doctor and the medicine.

I. WHAT IS SAID ABOUT MEN’S SICKNESSES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT? Abraham and Isaac died of sheer old age. So indeed did Jacob, but there is a fuller reference to his ending. For all that appears in the record, neither the patriarchs nor their families suffered any sicknesses during their lives. Evidently, these experiences of sickness were not then seen in their *relation to character*, and so there was no need to leave any narratives concerning them. Sickness is reckoned with under the Mosaic system, but in a very peculiar way. It was treated as an outward sign and consequence of sin; both the sick person and those who tended him being treated as “unclean.” To limit this rule because, in its working, it occasioned very serious family and social disturbance, one particular form of disease—that most typical form of disease, leprosy—was taken as the representative of all forms, and the law of the “unclean” was strictly enforced in relation to it. Judaism never suggests the idea that character is cultured by the experience of sickness; and so even its priests and Levites offer no example of tending the sick poor. Sickness, in the old economy, served its purpose simply as the outward sign of God’s judgment on sin. When Job’s friends came to comfort him, they could think of no other view of sickness than this, though Job felt sure that there must be a higher meaning, if only he could reach it. In the historical books the references to sickness—other than great pestilences—are very brief. One king suffered from internal disease, and one had the gout, but there is only one instance in which any details of a sickness are given, and in that case the relation of it to character first clearly appears. Hezekiah, in the middle of his reign, but before any son and heir was born to him, was smitten down with a bad kind

of boil or carbuncle, which put his life in peril. He turned to God in his distress, and gained from God recovery. Evidently he prayed the prayer of faith. As evidently the Prophet Isaiah prayed for him the prayer of faith. And yet it is significantly told us that means were used to ensure his recovery, "Now Isaiah had said, Let them take a cake of figs, and lay it for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover." The Book of Job is not a discussion of the question—What ought a godly man to do who is smitten with sickness? Its subject is rather this—What moral end can explain the Divine permission of sickness? One king was seriously reproved because, when he was ill, he "sought unto the physicians, and not unto God." But the wrong was not in his seeking the help of the physicians, but in his failing to seek God *first*, and to let him send him to the physicians. All we can say about this matter, in connection with the Old Testament, is that when moral considerations began to prevail over ceremonial ones, a truer and worthier view of sickness began to gain power. Then sickness was seen to be one of the great moral agencies by means of which God wrought his higher work in characters and in souls.

II. WHAT IS SAID ABOUT SICKNESS IN THE GOSPELS? Our Lord, as a moral and spiritual Teacher, our Lord as a Saviour, found in men's sicknesses, infirmities, and disabilities his best agencies for reaching their souls with saving influences. To him suffering was the issue and consequence of sin. And so it was to everybody in his day. Sickness illustrated sin. Suffering produced moods of mind in men which laid them open to his higher influence. So he worked very largely for and among sick people, always trying to get their sicknesses sanctified to them, even in the very act of healing or removing them. He revealed fully to the world the moral relations of sickness, the moral possibilities that lie in sickness. Our Lord's dealing with it is unique, not so much because it was supernatural, as because it was *moral*. He dealt with it only as a means of securing soul-healing. Since Christ's time, sickness, disease, and disability have taken rank among God's remedial agencies, God's character-culturing agencies, God's sanctifying agencies.

III. WHAT IS SAID ABOUT SICKNESS IN THE EPISTLES? The apostles never claimed to exert any independent powers. They always healed "in the Name of Christ." They conceived of themselves as holding that special ability in trust for particular ends in the propagation of the gospel. They did not heal everybody. They only healed when the healing could make a way for the gospel, draw attention to it, or prove its Divine origin. And the historical fact is that the power of healing passed away with the first generation of disciples. It is found, in later ages, only in separate and highly endowed individuals, to whom has been entrusted a genius for healing. The case of the Apostle Paul is a remarkable one. He had the gift of healing. He did heal the father of Publius. But he was not carried away by the gift he possessed. He held all his gifts under the most careful restraints. His friend and fellow-labourer, Epaphroditus, was "sick, nigh unto death," but St. Paul put forth no power to heal him. God had mercy on him, and restored him in the ordinary way. Trophimus was left at Miletum sick, but it did not enter the apostle's mind that he, or the elders, could have cured him if they had tried. St. Paul himself had some bodily infirmity which he calls a "thorn in the flesh," but he simply prayed about it, as we pray about such things now. The reference made to this matter by the Apostle James has been gravely misunderstood. It must be read in the light of the chief point he deals with in his Epistle, viz. that faith which cannot get expression in action is not acceptable faith, it is mere sentiment. Anointing sick people with oil was no religious ceremony in the days of the apostle. Using oil in the toilet was simply the sign of health. Those who prayed in faith for the healing of the sick should show their faith by acting as if their prayer was answered. Get the sick man up, dress him, anoint him, in the full confidence that God answers prayer. So Jesus said to the man with the withered hand, "Stretch forth thine hand!" If he believed, he would do what Christ told him, and find power come in so doing.

In every age God has healed diseases through his own appointed healing agencies; and those we must use in faith.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The Divine crown on man.* "Who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies." What various answers could be given to the question—What is the

true crown of a man's life?" No doubt the term "crown" may be used in a variety of senses. The psalmist seems here to think of the crown as that which bedecks and beautifies; and he makes us think of the crown of flowers on the May queen, rather than of the jewelled crowns on wealthy kings. So the question comes to be—What is the true adornment, or enrichment, the true decoration, of a human life? Then the answer comes—It is what God gives a man beyond his mere necessities, in the rich outpouring of Divine loving-kindness and mercy. It may be put in this way—The Divine *provisions* are crowned with Divine *bestowments*.

I. DIVINE PROVISIONS. We cannot be surprised that God, as Creator, should supply all the reasonable needs of his creatures; or that God, as Father, should supply all the wants of his children. There is a certain obligation resting on God that arises out of his relationships. There is a fairly good sense in which the creature and the child may be said to have *claims* on God, to which, if he be God, he must respond. "The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season." But the limit of the claim to necessities should be clearly shown. And real necessities are very few, and can be easily defined. Try to conceive the change, in life and relations, if God were now to draw back from us everything but our actual necessities. St. Paul could say, "I have all, and *abound*."

II. DIVINE BESTOWMENTS. Illustrate by the luxuries and delicacies that the housewife provides beyond the necessities of the table and the house. She enriches, or crowns, her provisions. So with our Father-God. He meets need, but goes beyond need to give us all things "richly to enjoy." All the extra things, all the pleasant things, all the pretty things, of life, are *bestowments* of the Divine loving-kindness and tender mercies. If we may think of God's *duty* in what he provides, we may think of his personal *love* to us in what he bestows.

Then show that personal love can never rest satisfied with its objects being merely *provided for*; it never can rest until they are happy—happy up to the very limit of their power to be happy. What must God the Father's idea of happiness for his earth-children be? With that he would crown them.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The Lord of the oppressed*. The point set forth prominently is that God is *actively engaged* in securing the interests of the oppressed. That goes into the word used, "executeth." We might think of justice and judgment as the pillars of God's throne, and yet conceive of him as only *announcing* his just decisions; leaving to others the work of carrying them out. To put it in a formal way, the *legislative* rights of God may be recognized, but the *executive* rights of God may be denied. We may fully hold both truths of fact. God does pronounce his own judgments; God does execute his own sentences. The figure for God is especially effective in Eastern countries, where justice is so often perverted, and the oppressed have no chance if they happen to be poor. Illustrate by our Lord's parable of the unjust judge and the importunate widow. All the oppressed and poor may be absolutely sure that Jehovah will considerably hear their cases, deal with perfect uprightness in relation to their trouble, and carry out his decisions, whatever they may involve.

I. THE LORD OF THE OPPRESSED *HEEDS* THE OPPRESSED. The poor often find it nearly impossible to get their cases brought before the magistrates, judges, or kings of earth. It is the righteousness of God that he is right towards every one; all may seek, and none ever seeks in vain. There is absolute freedom given to every man and woman under the sun to tell out the trouble to the Lord. And we may have absolute faith that no tale of human need was ever poured out before God, and disregarded by him. It is a beginning of hope, that the Lord surely *heeds* us.

II. THE LORD OF THE OPPRESSED *ACTS* FOR THE OPPRESSED. God's decisions never merely lie on a statute-book, like many acts of earthly courts and parliaments. If God decides a thing, it has to be carried out; nay, he himself presides over the carrying it out. We are to have confidence in the Divine energy and activity. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, and he will bring it to pass." How, when, where, he will *execute* his judgments, we may not anticipate; it is enough for an oppressed soul to know that God is *acting for him*. "He will bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our judgment as the noon-day."

III. THE LORD OF THE OPPRESSED *ACTS UPON* THE OPPRESSORS. It is not merely

that the oppressed are delivered or defended; it is that those who have injured them feel the weight of Divine indignation. Judgment is in one sense for the oppressed, and in another sense for the oppressors.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*Chiding, but not keeping on chiding.* “He will not always chide.” A prophet prays, “O Lord, correct me, but in measure.” The supreme danger of all who are in positions of authority over others—parents, teachers, masters—is that they may chastise beyond the requirements of the particular case; they may continue the chiding under the impulse of feeling, when judgment requires its strict limitation. They who chide when in a passion always over-chide; they try to satisfy their feeling—and it is unrestrained feeling—rather than the actual demands of the case. Now, the psalmist has the utmost satisfaction in God, because he is quite sure that God never over-chides. There never yet was one unnecessary stroke given by the Lord’s rod. That complaint no man ever yet fairly made.

I. GOD NEED NOT OVER-CHIDE. Either by making the chiding over-severe or by keeping it on too long. He need not: 1. Because he is never carried away by feeling. God is the infinitely self-restrained One; and so he is always *himself*, and perfectly competent to deal with every case. 2. Because he has the infinite power to estimate influences and results. This is often the explanation of *man’s* over-chiding. He cannot follow influences, and so see quickly when his object is attained. And it may be added that God has power to stop chidings. Man has not. He may be compelled to keep on awhile a training-work he has begun, because, even if he could stop it, he would do serious mischief by stopping it. The omniscience and omnipotence of God prevent him from ever needing to over-chide.

II. GOD DOES NOT OVER-CHIDE. For the assurance of this, appeal may be made to the experience of God’s people in all ages. Their marvel always has been, and always will be, that God should put such strict limitations on his chidings, and accomplish such an “exceeding and eternal weight of glory” by such “light afflictions.” This complaint no child of God, who was in his right mind, ever made; certainly no child of God ever had a *right* to make.

That God will surely *chide* us is our ground of assurance. Our self-willedness will never be left alone, to ruin us. That God will never *over-chide* is our abounding consolation.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*The measure of the Divine dealings.* The point made by the psalmist is that God’s dealings with men are not measured with the same measure as man’s dealings with his fellow-men. If we think precisely we shall admit that God does deal exactly with us “after our sins;” but it is as our sins are divinely estimated. When man proceeds to recognize and punish sins, he deals with *sins*, rather than with sinners; and metes out his punishments according to standard, with no consideration for the individual. Man, when he authoritatively punishes, is not supposed to make allowances. Judges administer law irrespective of persons. Clemency, with us, is left to the supreme authority behind the judge; and only comes in after the judge has given his judgment according to standard. Man’s law concerns acts, not motives. God’s judgments are after another standard. God judges sinners, not merely sins. God unites the clemency of the king with the justice of the magistrate. God makes all reasonable allowances. God considers the force of human frailty. God estimates circumstances and motives. Then God’s is the higher standard, but it is one which only the God of infinite wisdom and perfect righteousness can use. This may be worked out along two lines.

I. THE MEASURE OF DIVINE DEALING IS WHAT IS POSSIBLE FOR THE RACE. God never measures humanity by the standard he provides for the angels. He never measures humanity *fallen* by the standard he provides for humanity intact. He does not measure the race in its savage condition with the standard for the race civilized. He does not make one absolute standard to apply equally to every branch of the race. He is mindful of, and considerate towards, all forms of racial peculiarity and disability. Carefully show the distinction between an absolute standard of morals, and an absolute *setting*, or *application*, of that standard. If God deals with a morally fallen and frail race, he lets mercy help justice to fix the standard.

II. THE MEASURE OF DIVINE DEALINGS IS WHAT IS POSSIBLE TO THE INDIVIDUAL. This is fully treated under ver. 14. One point only need be mentioned. In every sin committed by the individual the element of *heredity* has to be taken into account. The sin is not absolutely and entirely the *man's own*. Yet man can never measure this heredity; so his measures will never suffice for deciding the Divine judgments and dealings.—R. T.

Ver. 12.—*Limitless forgiveness*. What figures will best suggest the entireness of the removal of man's sin, when God, in his infinite goodness and mercy, deals with it and removes it? That question is specially interesting because, when man is forgiven his sin, he finds it so hard to get rid of the memory of it. In a sense it may be said that a man "never forgives himself." There is always, therefore, the danger that a man will transfer his own feeling to God, and persuade himself that, though God may *forgive*, he never really *forgets*. The psalmist, speaking after the manner of men, and using terms for God which can only in strictness apply to men, declares that God can, and does, and will, *utterly forget*; "remember our sins no more." The voluntary Divine forgetfulness is a sublime conception. Jeremiah (l. 20) has this declaration, "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found." Three figures set before us the limitlessness of God's forgiveness.

I. THE DISTANCE OF EAST FROM WEST. (See text.) "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." The distance from north to south can be measured. There are north and south poles—fixed points. There are no eastern or western poles. From every point alike in the circuit of the world the east extends in one direction, the west in the other. Thus the traveller westward may be said to be ever chasing the west without coming nearer to it.

II. REMOVAL BEHIND THE BACK. (Isa. xxxviii. 17, "For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.") Two ideas are suggested: 1. "Behind the back" is a strong figure for "out of sight" and "out of mind." 2. "Casting" behind the back implies resolute purpose. It is as if God had thoroughly made up his mind that he would never look upon them again; he had done with them for ever.

III. THROWING INTO THE SEA. (Micah vii. 19, "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.") Nothing brings to us the sense of hopeless, irretrievable loss, like dropping a thing into the fathomless depths of mid-ocean. If our sins are cast into the sea, we shall never see them more.

God's gracious dealings with us rest upon our right dealings with them. Only sins that we have put away from ourselves by *repentance* can God put away from us by his full and free *forgiveness*.—R. T.

Ver. 14.—"*This body of our humiliation*." There is a truth revealed in God's Word which seems to have a painful side. God is to us as we are to him. "Thou renderest to every man according to his work;" "With the froward thou wilt show thyself froward." It is a truth which needs careful qualifications. We have one such in this text. God's ways with us are taken upon due consideration of our bodily frailty. There may be a right or a wrong excuse drawn from the weakness of human nature. We certainly are under limited conditions, and these must be duly considered.

I. GOD'S WAYS WITH US ARE TAKEN WITH FULL KNOWLEDGE OF OUR BODIES. Observe that "frame" is more than "body." This vehicle of the human spirit is wholly the plan of God. 1. Its actual parts, powers, relations, are known to him. "Fearfully and wonderfully made." Illustrate hand, eye, brain. 2. The special tone and habit of each individual are known to him. We may think of him studying each one as a parent does the disposition of each child. 3. The conditions due to hereditary taint and to civilization. Some have a great fight with bodily and mental taint or bias. And there are special influences of disease, and mischievous results often follow it. 4. The general frailty, the passing away, the gradual decaying of the vital powers. God knows and estimates.

II. GOD'S WAYS WITH US ARE TAKEN WITH FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN OUR BODIES AND OUR MINDS. Minds are spiritual things, but they work

through a material frame. The brain is the central machine, to which are attached the separate machines of the senses. The force of the machine is the blood. The spiritual operations of the mind are helped or hindered by the condition of the body. Illustrate a speck in the brain, or weakness in the heart. Sometimes we cannot think—we must just be still. Sometimes we feel depressed, and a sombre tone is put on our thinking. We fret over such things, until we remember that our God knows all. He expects no more work from us than he knows we can do; and he never counts the times of repairing and refreshing our bodily machine to be idle or wasted times.

III. GOD'S WAYS WITH US ARE TAKEN WITH FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN OUR BODIES AND OUR RELIGION. What he asks from each of us is just this—the noblest religious life we can reach under our existing body-conditions. We fret to be free from the body, as St. Paul apparently did: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But precisely the test under which each one of us is placed is this—Can you live a godly life in that body of yours, and under those precise body-conditions of yours? Only when you can will God find it fitting to entrust you with the immortal and incorruptible body. Our religious life is a thing of varying moods. Sometimes our "title is clear;" sometimes "our feet are firm;" sometimes our "head is lifted up;" sometimes we "walk in darkness, and have no light;" sometimes we say, "All these things are against me;" "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." The very variety unduly troubles us, and we fear lest God should regard us as *unstable*. But he "knows our frame." Christian joy is very closely linked with bodily health, and Christian gloom with bodily disease. Some diseases spoil the vision. And the body is the great spoiler of the soul's vision. The glorious attainment of the religious life is to get *above* body-hinderings; to become master of our bodies in Christ; to "know how to possess the vessels of our bodies in sanctification and honour." Feeling this to be the great aim in life leads to the excesses and extravagances of hermits and devotees. Remember, then, two things: 1. God sees souls. 2. God duly reckons for the body. It may be that we shall be surprised to find what soul-progress we have really made, when the body-clog drops off. This tender and considerate representation of God is full of comfort to us. But then God has not left this sentence to lie in his Word as a general statement. He has taken our frame on himself, so that he might gain experimental knowledge of it. Jesus is the Brother-Man of sorrows. We may think of God's ways with us as based on the experience of Jesus. And if God's omniscience is a reason for trust, how much more is Christ's human experience!—R. T.

Ver. 18.—*The blessedness of covenant-keepers*. Prayer-book Version, "Even upon such as keep his covenant." A distinctly Israelite point of view. If this be regarded as a psalm of the returned Exiles, the reference is a striking one. Judgment had fallen upon the nation because it had forsaken the national covenant. The restoration was a resuming of the old covenant-relations. And therefore the supreme anxiety of the Exiles would concern "*keeping this new, this restored covenant.*" It may be observed that the Lord's gracious dealings are always to be thought of as strictly *conditional*. "The blessings of the covenant are no inalienable right. Children's children can only inherit its blessings by cleaving to it."

I. COVENANT-KEEPERS REMEMBER THEIR PLEDGE. It may have been taken by themselves. It may have been taken in their names by their fathers. It may be freshly taken after a time of lapse. It is a ground of obligation. It is a source of inspiration. It should be kept ever in mind. Illustrate by the oath of loyalty taken by the servants of a king; or by the pledge taken in marriage; or by covenants entered into by those who unite in a common undertaking. See the value of special seasons—sacramental seasons—when covenant-pledges are forcibly brought to mind. There is a new covenant in Christ Jesus. It is to that covenant we are pledged; and that covenant we do well to keep in mind. (Some useful covenant-reminders may be indicated.)

II. COVENANT-KEEPERS AIM AT OBEDIENCE. Sentiment, however good, cannot suffice them. Feelings, as mere feelings, cannot honour God. True covenant-keepers try to "remember God's commandments," his requirements under the covenant, with the distinct and full intention to *do* them, and not merely *know* what they are, or

feel that they are wise and good. The Lord Jesus searchingly said, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them!"

REVIEW. 1. Set forth what the Lord's covenant *was* for Israel, and *is* for us. 2. Point out how the responsibilities of the covenant may be kept ever before our minds and hearts. 3. Impress that the only acceptable keeping of the covenant is the constant, loving, hearty obedience of all its requirements.—R. T.

Vers. 1—5.—*Gratitude for unbounded mercies.* I. THE SOUL URGENTLY SUMMONED TO PRAISE GOD FOR HIS GOODNESS. *Inward* praise, not the praise of the lips, is here called for—spiritual, not bodily worship.

II. THE WHOLE INWARD MAN IS TO RECOUNT TO ITSELF THE MERCIES OF GOD. 1. Every power he has—*memory, heart, and reason*—is to assist in recognizing the Divine benefits he has received. 2. *Our temptation and danger are to forget.* And we are to resist and conquer forgetfulness and ingratitude. Especially apt to forget the mercies: 1. *That we receive in common with others.* 2. *The mercies that are uninterrupted by constraint.* 3. *Mercies of a spiritual nature.*

III. A THANKFUL SURVEY OF THE FATHERLY MERCIES OF GOD. "The poet calls upon his soul to arise to praiseful gratitude for God's *justifying, redeeming, and renewing* grace." 1. *The forgiveness of all his sins.* 2. *Recovery from bodily sickness and infirmity.* Sin, the sickness of the soul; disease, the sickness of the body; and God is the Physician of both. 3. *Deliverance from threatened death.* The pit—a name of Hades—the abode of the departed. 4. *Loving-kindness and tender mercies make him rich and royal.* Like a king, they crown him. 5. *No real want of the soul is left unsatisfied.* "Shall not want any good thing;" "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." 6. *His strength is thus constantly renewed.* (Isa. xl. 31.) "They that wait upon the Lord," etc.—S.

Ver. 13.—*The pity of the Lord.* "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." In the Old Testament revelation of God there are bursts and flashes of light in startling contrast to the ordinary conceptions of him under that dispensation. There are grand conceptions of his power, omniscience, wisdom, and providence prevailing; but sometimes there are the tenderer conceptions of his goodness and mercy, as in the Psalms and prophets.

I. THE REASONS OF GOD'S PITY. Pity is sympathy for persons on account of weakness, suffering, or calamity. God feels pity for us: 1. *On account of our weakness.* "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." We are poor and insignificant compared with the spiritual and mighty angels. We are allied to the dust in one important part of our nature. And we are but children in the germ and infancy of our being. How weak we are in the body to contend against the mighty forces of nature, to encounter accident, to endure suffering! How weak in mind! how ignorant! how feeble in the power of our convictions! how poor in the power of our will! 2. *He pities us for our sins and mistakes.* In how many ways do we go wrong, not of set purpose, but unwittingly; or from the force of education and outward circumstances! We sin through *ignorance.* And we sin with *knowledge.* And God pities the sinner while he punishes. If he did not pity, he would not punish. Punishment is love seeking to recover the sinful child. God's anger is nothing but love chastising. 3. *He pities us in our sufferings.* He would not be a Father if he did not. Some of our sufferings are sent by him—such as we could not avoid. "But he doth not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men." Many of our sufferings are *self-incurred*—such as we might have avoided. But he, nevertheless, pities us then.

II. THE NATURE OF GOD'S PITY. That of a father. 1. *A father's pity is helpful.* A neighbour's pity or a friend's is not always helpful; they are either unwilling or unable to relieve and help us. But a father will do all in his power to help his child. And has not God helped us in our low estate by coming to us in the Person of his Son? He has not sat and looked on and done nothing. 2. *It is bountiful.* Infinite in disposition to help, and in resources for our relief. "Exceeding abundantly." God said to the Jews, "What more could I have done for my vineyard?" And surely, in view of the gospel, he might say the same to us. Only one thing to limit his help—his help is to enable us to help ourselves. What we can do for ourselves that he

leaves to us. His aim is to make us strong and great. 3. *His pity is enduring.* Human pity is soon exhausted. "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting." It has borne with each of us very long, and will continue to the end.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CIV.

"THE psalmist, in a time of severe trouble, arising from the power of the heathen, seeks consolation in reflecting on the greatness of God in nature." So Hengstenberg, correctly. The main topic of the psalm (vers. 2—32) is thus the greatness of God as seen in his works. A direct ascription of praise precedes (ver. 1) and follows (vers. 33—35) the description of God's wonders in nature.

Ver. 1.—Bless the Lord, O my soul (see the comment on Ps. ciii. 1). O Lord my God, thou art very great. The key-note is struck at once. All the rest will be nothing but a development of this vast theme—God's greatness. Thou art clothed with honour and majesty; or "thou hast robed thyself in glory and grandeur" (Cheyne).

Ver. 2.—Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment. Light was the first thing created (Gen. i. 3), before either the heaven (Gen. i. 6—8) or the earth (Gen. i. 9, 10). In light God, the invisible, as it were, enshrouds himself, making it the image of his hidden glory. Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain; or, "a canopy" (comp. Isa. xl. 22; xlii. 5; xlv. 24). The metaphor is taken from the stretching out or "spreading out" of a tent (see Isa. xl. 22).

Ver. 3.—Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters. God forms himself an upper chamber, as a dwelling-place, in "the waters that are above the firmament" (Gen. i. 7), as a man builds himself an upper chamber with beams and rafters. Who maketh the clouds his chariot (comp. Isa. xix. 1, "Behold, the Lord rideth upon a thick cloud"). Who walketh upon the wings of the wind (comp. Ps. xviii. 10). The anthropomorphism will be pardoned for the sake of the beauty of the imagery.

Ver. 4.—Who maketh his angels spirits. Professor Cheyne renders, "Who maketh his messengers of winds;" and so (in substance) Jarohi, Aben-Ezra, Rosenmüller, Professor Alexander, and even Hengstenberg. The difficulty in adopting this rendering is that furnished by the application of the passage in Heb. i. 7; but the arguments of Hengstenberg go far to meet that difficulty. It is to be noted that our Revisers, while

admitting either rendering, have preferred that of Professor Cheyne. And his ministers a flaming fire; or, "his ministers of flame and fire."

Ver. 5.—Who laid the foundations of the earth; rather, as in the margin, *who founded the earth upon her bases*; i.e. fixed the earth in its place, on bases—not necessarily material bases—which keep it steadily where it is (comp. Job xxvi. 7). That it should not be removed for ever (comp. Ps. xciii. 1).

Ver. 6.—Thou coverest it with the deep, as with a garment (see Gen. i. 9). A watery covering was spread at first over the whole earth, and enveloped it like a garment. The waters stood above the mountains. The highest inequalities of the land were concealed under the watery integument.

Ver. 7.—At thy rebuke they fled. It required only a few words from God (Gen. i. 9) for the whole surface of the earth to be changed. The waters "fled"—they shifted their place—removed from some portions of the earth's surface, and "gathered themselves together" into others, allowing the dry land to appear. Elevations and depressions of the land must have at the same time occurred. At the voice of thy thunder they hasted away (comp. Job xl. 9, "Hast thou an arm like God, or canst thou thunder with a voice like his?"). The voice of God, especially when he speaks in "rebuke," is as thunder.

Ver. 8.—They go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys; rather, *they went up mountains; they went down valleys*. In the general commotion of the waters, as they "hasted away," sometimes vast waves swept over mountain-tops, sometimes huge floods washed down the courses of valleys—a graphic description of the scene which no eye saw, but which the poet figures to himself—a turmoil and confusion beyond that even of the great Deluge itself (see Gen. vii. 17—19; viii. 1—3). Unto the place which thou hast (rather, *hadst*) founded for them. The ocean-bed, which had, in intention, been already prepared to receive them.

Ver. 9.—Thou hast set (or, *didst set*) a bound that they may not (rather, *might not*) pass over (comp. Job xxxviii. 10, 11; Jer. v. 22). The Deluge is for the time beyond the ken of the poet, who is singing God's

greatness in nature, and in the general laws under which he has placed it. Neither turn again to cover the earth. This law, once broken by the miracle of the Deluge, was thenceforth made absolute and inviolable (Gen. ix. 15).

Ver. 10.—He sendeth the springs into the valleys; rather, into the water-courses, or torrent-beds—dry for the greater part of the year, but deriving life and beauty from the springs which, after rain has fallen, flow into them. Which run among the hills; literally, between the hills (i.e. the hill-slopes on either side) they wind their way.

Ver. 11.—They give drink to every beast of the field. God's mercy is "over all his works" (Ps. cxlv. 9). He careth for the whole animal creation (see Exod. xx. 10; xxiii. 19; Deut. xxv. 4; Ps. civ. 27; cxlv. 15, 16; Jonah iv. 11, etc.). The wild asses quench their thirst. Herodotus (iv. 192) says that wild asses are ἀποροί—i.e. "do not drink"—but modern travellers declare the contrary. They drink infrequently, and are so shy, that at such times they rarely fall under human observation.

Ver. 12.—By them; i.e. "by the springs" (see ver. 10). Shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation. Birds need water as much as any other animals, and in dry tracts frequently congregate at the springs. Which sing (or, utter a voice) among the branches of the trees which in the East spring up wherever there is moisture.

Ver. 13.—He (i.e. God) watereth the hills from his chambers (comp. ver. 3). The mountains themselves, even their highest tops, are not left dry. Where springs cannot reach, rain falls from God's "chambers" in the sky, and spreads equal refreshment. The earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. The whole earth—mountains, hills, plains, valleys—is thus "satisfied," i.e. sufficiently supplied with water, by the means which God has elaborated.

Ver. 14.—He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle. The results of God's careful arrangements are now spoken of. In the first place, grass—fodder of every kind—is provided for the beasts on which man's life so greatly depends—a boon both to man and beast, of inestimable value. Next, there is brought forth herb for the service of man—i.e. for his direct service—vegetables and fruits for his food; spicy shrubs for his delectation; flax, papyrus, saffron, aloes, etc., for his use. That he may bring forth food out of the earth. That man himself may by his labour, by the cultivation of the natural products, obtain from the earth the food suitable to him.

Ver. 15.—And wine that maketh glad the heart of man. The food suitable to man consists, first, of wine, which gladdens his

heart (comp. Judg. ix. 13); secondly, of oil to make his face to shine, or give him a cheerful countenance; and thirdly, of bread, which strengtheneth man's heart, which is "the staff of life," and the main sustenance of the entire body. It was the glory of the promised land to produce in abundance these three essentials (Deut. viii. 8; xi. 14; 2 Kings xviii. 32).

Ver. 16.—The trees of the Lord are full of sap: rather, are satisfied, or have their fill; i.e. drink in sufficiently God's rain, so that they grow up and flourish amazingly. Even the cedars of Lebanon (see Ps. xxix. 5, 6; xcii. 11). These are particularized as the grandest of God's vegetable productions known to the psalmist (comp. Judg. ix. 15; 1 Kings iv. 33; 2 Kings xiv. 19; Isa. ii. 13; Ezek. xxxi. 3). Which he hath planted (comp. Numb. xxiv. 6).

Ver. 17.—Wherein the birds make their nests (comp. above, ver. 10). As for the stork, the fir trees are her house. Again, God's care for the animal creation is in the psalmist's mind. As the grass is "caused to grow for the cattle" (ver. 14), so trees—even the grandest—are partly intended for the birds.

Ver. 18.—The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats. Even the desolate ranges of the higher mountains are designed by God for the good of his creatures. They furnish a refuge for the ibex, or wild goat, when the hunter presses on him; and, if they cannot give him food, give him safety. And the rocks for the conies; rather, for the marmots. Marmots still inhabit Palestine, though they are rarely seen; "conies," i.e. rabbits do not. The marmots are "a feeble folk, that make their houses in the rocks" (Prov. xxx. 26).

Ver. 19.—He appointed the moon for seasons (comp. Gen. i. 14). The Jewish festivals depended greatly on the moon, the Passover being celebrated at the time of the full moon of the first month (Exod. xii. 6), and the other festivals depending mostly on the Passover. And the sun knoweth his going down. Observes the laws, that is to say, appointed for him.

Vers. 20, 21.—Thou makest darkness, and it is night. The mention of the moon and sun introduces a picture of night (vers. 20, 21) and a picture of the day (vers. 22, 23). The day draws in—darkness descends—night is come. At once there is a stir in the animal world. Man has gone to his rest; but the time is arrived wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The primeval jungle is alive with motion and sound. All the animals are on the alert, seeking their prey. The young lions are heard above all; they roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God. The

awful sound of their hungry roar drowns almost all other sounds, and shakes with terror the hearts of those that hear. Suddenly, however, night turns into day—

Vers. 22, 23.—The sun ariseth. Bright beams of light flame up the eastern sky; and earth basks in the sun's smile. But it is a signal to the lions and the other wild beasts to withdraw. They gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens. Hiding themselves from the eye of day, and retreating into places where they are safe. Then it is the turn of humanity to reappear. Humanity wakes up; and man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening; i.e. man proceeds to his appointed task, which is "work"—once a curse (Gen. iii. 17—19), now a blessing (Eph. iv. 28).

Ver. 24.—O Lord, how manifold are thy works! This is a parenthetic ejaculation, from which the psalmist cannot refrain, as he contemplates creation so far. It breaks the continuity of his description (vers. 2—32), but not unpleasingly. In wisdom hast thou made them all (comp. Prov. iii. 19, "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens"). (On the "wisdom" of God, as shown in creation, see the whole series of 'Bridgewater Treatises.') The earth is full of thy riches; or possessions (comp. Ps. cv. 21). "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof" (Ps. xxiv. 1). Creation gives the right of ownership.

Ver. 25.—So is this great and wide sea; rather, yonder sea too (is thy work), so great and wide-stretching. Wherein are things creeping (rather, moving things) innumerable. The abundant life of the sea, even in its depths, is the admiration of all naturalists. Tens of thousands of microscopic shells have been brought to light by the dredger's labours almost everywhere. Both small and great beasts. Microscopic shell-fish on the one hand; seals, walruses, sharks, whales, on the other.

Ver. 26.—There go the ships. These may seem out of place among the works of God. But are they not his, in a certain sense? Did he not contemplate them when he made the sea, and make it to some extent for them? And did he not give men wisdom to invent and perfect them? There is that leviathan. "Leviathan" is here probably the whale, which may in early times have frequented the Mediterranean. Which thou hast made to play therein; or, to play with him. So the LXX. (*ἐνταῖς αὐτῷ*); and, among moderns, Ewald, Hitzig, Olshausen, Kay, Cheyne, and our Revisors (in the margin). The anthropomorphism is not beyond that of other passages.

Ver. 27.—These wait all upon thee; that

thou mayest give them their meat in due season (see vers. 14, 23). As cattle have "grass," and lions "meat," from God, so every kind of animal receives from the same source its proper food.

Ver. 28.—That thou givest them they gather; literally, *thou givest to them; they gather*. Thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good; or, "are satisfied with good" (Kay, Revised Version).

Ver. 29.—Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled. If God withdraws the light of his countenance from any living thing, instantly it feels the loss. It is "troubled," cast down, confounded (comp. Ps. xxx. 7). Thou takest away their breath, they die. As the living things have life from God, so they have death from him. Not one of them perishes but he knows it, and causes it or allows it (see Matt. x. 29). And return to their dust. Return, i.e., to the dead matter out of which they were created.

Ver. 30.—Thou sendest forth thy spirit; or, thy breath. As God "breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. ii. 7), so it is an effluence from him that gives life to every living thing. They are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth. As after the Deluge (see Gen. vii. 4; viii. 17).

Ver. 31.—The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever; rather, *let the glory of the Lord*, etc. The psalmist prays that there may be no further interruption of the glorious course of nature besides the Deluge, which has come into his thoughts in connection with the destruction of animal life (ver. 29). Henceforward he trusts and prays that the Lord shall rejoice in his works, and not again repent him that he has made them (Gen. vi. 7).

Ver. 32.—He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth (comp. Ps. xviii. 7; cxiv. 7). The earth "trembles," as knowing that it can be destroyed at any moment. He toucheth the hills, and they smoke; or, *the mountains*—the strongest portions of the earth (Psa. xxxvi. 6; lxxv. 6)—"smoke" when he touches them (see Exod. xix. 18; Deut. iv. 11; Ps. cxliv. 5).

Vers. 33—35.—The peroration (like the opening) is simple praise of God himself, considered in himself. All his life the psalmist will praise God (ver. 33)—his soul shall praise him (ver. 35), he will be glad in him (ver. 34); finally, he calls upon all men to join in his praise (ver. 35, last clause).

Ver. 33.—I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live (comp. Ps. lxxiii. 4; cxlvi. 2): I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. An echo of the preceding hemistich.

Ver. 34.—My meditation of him shall be sweet; rather, *may my meditation be pleasing to him!* (Kay, Cheyne, Revised Version). I will be glad in the Lord (comp. Pss. xxxii. 11; xxxiii. 1, etc.). Rejoicing in the Lord is a form of praising him.

Ver. 35.—Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth; i.e. "Let the great blot upon creation—sin and sinners—exist no more. Let the harmony upon the earth be complete, by the elimination of this 'one jarring string.' And let the wicked be no

more. Repetition for the sake of emphasis. Bless thou the Lord, O my soul. Then, when this blot is removed, when the trials of the godly, from the persecutions and vexations of sinners, are over, it will be the part of my soul, with greater heartiness than ever, to "bless the Lord." Praise ye the Lord. Then, too, all mankind may well be called upon to join in a chorus of praise and blessing, and to sing, as saints and angels sing in the courts of heaven, "Hallelujah!" (Rev. xix. 1, 3, 4, 6).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—35.—*The greatness of God.* This psalm, charged with the truest poetry, sings of the greatness of God (ver. 1) and of the heritage of man. The subjects are inseparably mingled. Of the former we have suggested to us—

I. HIS GLORY. (Vers. 1, 2, 31.)

II. HIS POWER. (Vers. 3—9.) The winds are his messengers; the fire is his servant; the clouds are his chariot; the waters flee at his command; the ocean stays at the bound he has drawn.

III. HIS WISDOM. (Vers. 5, 10.) Nowhere is his wisdom more apparent than in: 1. Providing for the security of the earth. The diurnal and annual rotation (with which we are familiar), giving us our change of night and day, and also of our seasons, in no way interferes with the sense of our security, while it brings into view the wonderful wisdom of God (see ver. 24). 2. In the provision of water for his thirsting creatures. The beautiful circulatory system, by which the vapour is drawn up from the seas and the lakes, carried as clouds by the winds, drawn down by the hills and the trees, purified by the earth through which it passes, comes forth as the springs which flow down in the streams and rivers through the land, and end their course by replenishing the sea,—this is another striking instance of those "manifold works" "made in Divine wisdom."

IV. HIS PROVIDENTIAL GOODNESS. 1. In supplying water for man and beast (vers. 10—13). 2. In providing nourishment (vers. 14—16). 3. In giving shelter and protection to the weak—to the bird, to the goat, to the cony (vers. 17, 18). 4. In dividing time into seasons (ver. 19; see Gen. i. 14); so that we can calculate with perfect accuracy the incoming and outgoing of the tides, as well as the return of summer and winter. 5. In the amplitude of the gift of life. Not only are the air and the earth full of happy life, but so is the "great and wide sea" (ver. 25). All these innumerable hosts of living things—insects, birds, beasts, fishes—are spending a happy life in their own element, and after their own instincts. Who can form any conception of the sum of sentient life and enjoyment at any moment upon this earth? 6. In providing the materials for locomotion. Those ships of ver. 26 are suggestive of all the forces at our command, every year becoming greater, for moving rapidly over land and sea, indefinitely promoting the circulation of produce and intercourse between man and man. All these instances of Divine beneficence are suggestive of—

V. HIS GRACE to his human children. For: 1. If God cares so much for bird and beast, he will care very much more for us, his children by faith in Jesus Christ. 2. If he provides so bountifully with the necessities of mortal life, we can well believe that he has made ample provision for our spiritual and eternal good.

Vers. 1—35.—*The heritage of man.* The psalmist sings of the greatness of God (*supra*), and also of the fair heritage bestowed upon us. This includes—

I. SUFFICIENCY AND VARIETY OF FOOD. "These [all the living creatures, including man, that have been specified] wait on thee, that thou mayest give them their food," etc. (ver. 27); and the "herb" (ver. 14), for the service of man, stands for all the variety of fruits and vegetables with which our need is met and our taste is gratified. The constant supply of necessary and of palatable food is no small part of our heritage.

II. **STRENGTH AND HEALTH.** The gift of bread which "strengtheneth man's heart" is suggestive of all the bountiful provision God has made for building up our bodily frame, raising it from infantile helplessness to manly vigour, and frequently restoring from the weakness of disease to the wholeness and capacity of health. Strength is the normal condition, and if we conformed to the laws of nature, *i.e.* to the will of God, it would be the *general* and the lasting condition.

III. **HAPPINESS.** The "wine that makes glad the heart of man" may well stand for all those gifts of God which stimulate and gladden the soul, which give sparkle and joyousness to human life; *e.g.* the good wine of human fellowship, and that of honourable enterprise, and that of generous helpfulness.

IV. **LABOUR.** For while oppressive toil is an evil and a part of the penalty of sin, wholesome and regular activity, developing muscle and nerve, ministering to health, conducing to moral soundness, resulting in many kinds of wealth, is a true blessing to our race.

V. **REST.** God makes the darkness, in which the wild beasts come forth for their prey (vers. 20, 21), but in which also man lies down to rest; and the sleep which comes with the night is as welcome as the labour which comes with the day (ver. 23). The invigoration which comes between the evening and the morning, fitting the body and the mind for new life, is one of God's kindest gifts to man.

VI. **JOY IN GOD AND IN HIS SERVICE.** (Vers. 33, 34.) The act of contemplation when God (with his loving-kindness) is the Object of our thought, and the service of praise, are specified; but these are suggestive of all the blessedness which springs from piety and devotion. All reverent thought, all worship, all sacred study and sacred song, all Christian service rendered "as unto God," all really religious offerings,—all this is a large part of the human heritage. And it all demands of us the frequent utterance (vers. 1, 35) as well as the deeply cherished spirit, of gratitude and praise.

Ver. 28.—*God gives—we gather: harvest thanksgiving.* I. **GOD'S GIFT IN THE HARVEST.** God gives: 1. The soil. 2. The seed. 3. The forces which make the seed extract the virtues of the soil. 4. The sunshine, the rain, and the wind, which minister to the growth of the blade, and which ripen the grain. 5. The intelligence which enables us to cultivate the ground, to acquire the art of agriculture (Isa. xxviii. 26).

II. **OUR HUMAN SHARE IN IT.** We "gather." There are places where the gathering is all that man has to do; *e.g.* the bread-fruit in the tropics. But usually "gathering" includes more than that—it includes the preparation of the soil, sowing, weeding, watering, etc. To the production of the harvest there goes not a little human thought, skill, labour. Where, then, is—

III. **GOD'S GOODNESS IN IT?** 1. Our share is very much the smaller. 2. God's gifts are bestowed on us with such ceaseless constancy, never failing through all the ages of human existence, and in spite of the ingratitude, the atheism, or even the idolatry, of the husbandmen. 3. God's requirement of our labour is an instance of Divine goodness, to be added to, not subtracted from, his other loving-kindnesses (see *supra*).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—35.—*God's love for living creatures.* This psalm celebrates and proves it. For, see—

I. **HE HAS PLACED THEM EVERYWHERE.** The sea, the air, the land, all teem with it, as this psalm tells. And the lower life points to the higher, and proclaims that when God's will is done, that, too, shall fill earth and heaven.

II. **HE HAS ABUNDANTLY PROVIDED FOR THEM.** Food, habitation, refuge (vers. 16—18). And Christ came, that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. "He is able to save to the uttermost." Full provision for fulness of life is made.

III. **AND SUITABLY LIKEWISE.** The trees for the birds' nests, the hills and rocks for those creatures that dwell there. And so his grace is according to our need. He has a niche for each of us to fill, which will suit none else so well, and he prepares us for the place in which he would have us be.

IV. AND ALL HIS CREATURES BUT OURSELVES GLADLY ACCEPT HIS PROVISION. They never refuse his bounty, but depend on it always. Each makes its way to its own home. Christ is the soul's home: shall we turn away from that?—S. O.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The psalm of creation: the first day.* This psalm should be read in connection with the story of God's creating the heaven and the earth.

I. IT BEGINS BY THE PSALMIST SEEKING TO ATTUNE HIS SOUL FOR HIS STUDY OF THE WORKS OF GOD. 1. *He would that the Lord should be praised, and by himself especially.* "O my soul" (cf. Ps. ciii.). If the study of nature were entered on with this desire, how far more fruitful it would be! None of the good that has resulted from that study would be lost, but much of the incidental ill that too often accompanies it would be avoided. Science would be transfigured into worship, with all the moral and spiritual advantages that worship brings. 2. *Then there is the spirit of awe.* "Thou art very great." 3. *Of adoration.* "Clothed with honour and majesty." It is not the mere power, skill, and ingenuity of the Creator that strike the psalmist's soul, but the moral characteristics of God, which bring to him honour and majesty as they ought to do. A study so begun cannot but be fruitful of good.

II. THEN HE SPEAKS OF THE WORK OF THE FIRST DAY—THE CREATION OF THE LIGHT. He does not tell, as Genesis does, of what preceded that, but comes at once to the blessed and final result. 1. *There had been a previous creation.* "In the beginning God created," etc. Without doubt it had all been fair and beautiful, as in the moral creation; for there, too, man was made in the image of God, perfect, upright, without sin. 2. *But ere the light was formed, a sad change had come.* We find that "the earth was without form," etc. Chaos reigned. Moreover, the waters seem to have rushed in, and darkness brooded over all. What a true picture of the moral condition ere the spiritual light came! Disorder, subjection to sin, impenetrable ignorance, the darkness of the soul. 3. *There must have been, ere this, some terrible shock which turned God's far-off original creation into the hideous deformity of which Gen. i. 2 tells.* Certainly it is so with man's moral nature. God made him in his own image. He is, until regenerated, the victim of a moral chaos. There must have been some "fall," some terrible catastrophe, which changed man, made in God's image, into what we know unregenerate human nature to be. 4. *But, as with the earth and heavens, so with redeemed man, there has come a blessed change.* God shed abroad the light, covered himself with it "as with a garment" (ver. 2). This is how God began the creation work. "Let there be light." There had been, indeed, the Spirit brooding over the face of the deep, but the first manifestation of the creating work was in the creation of the light. And is it not ever so? Does not God always begin thus his regenerating work? The man comes to see himself as he really is—how wretched, miserable, apart from God; how hopeless, helpless, and every day getting worse; and then cometh the further light of God in Christ (2 Cor. iv. 6). And then, as the forlorn earth yielded itself to the plastic hand of the Creator, to be formed and fashioned as he willed, so, under the power of the light of the soul, it yields itself in like manner. And the Spirit of God is the Author of all this. We know not how long he may have been brooding over the darkness in the one case or the other, only that the light was through him. This impartation of light is ever his work. When he comes he convicts the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment: that is the first and preparatory work. God says, "Let there be light," and there is light. The result is that when God comes into the soul he seems to be clothed with light, so widespread, so intense, is the illumination of the soul. The peril is lest any should quench that light, or, having seen it, should cease to walk in it. What wonder, when the light is seen and welcomed, there should be a quickened conscientiousness, a scrupulosity and carefulness, which hitherto the soul had never known!

III. LET US PRAY THAT THAT FIRST DAY'S WORK MAY BE DONE IN US. So only can we truly know ourselves in God; so only can we enter on that career which all along shall have the favour of God and end in the eternal rest.—S. C.

Vers. 2—4.—*The psalm of creation: the second day.* In Genesis we have simply the declaration of how God created the firmament, or the expanse, and what was effected by it. Here we have nothing said of the creation of the firmament, but only of its glory

as the habitation of God. That firmament—the glorious new-lit cloud-caprisoned and star-bespangled heavens, whose beauty and splendour far surpass all human power to set forth, and which is here spoken of as the palace of God—was the creation of the second day. The close of the first day saw the creation of the light, but there was as yet no life possible. For that there was needed the gift of God which we call the atmosphere, the air we breathe; that without which no life of plant or animal could be. That wide expanse which surrounds our earth, and in which we live, and move, and have our being, “softer than the softest down, more impalpable than the finest gossamer, it leaves the cobweb undisturbed, and scarcely stirs the lightest flower that feeds on the dew it supplies; yet it bears the fleets of nations on its wings, and crushes the most refractory substances with its weight.” But that which is named in Genesis is its power to separate the waters that lie on the surface of the earth from those that float above it. And this it does, first drawing them up in vapour from the sea, and then suspending them in cisterns of clouds, but casting them down again in snow, rain, or dew, when they are required. But all this is full of sacred suggestion in regard to the things of the soul. And this—

I. IN ITS UPLIFTING. 1. *That which the atmosphere does for the cold dark waters* which enshrouded the earth, those waters, fit type of the sin-laden soul of man,—*that does the blessed breath of God accomplish for the human soul.* That desolate round earth was taught as it were the law of sacrifice, and yielded up itself to the encompassing breath of God. At once the vapours uprose along the unseen channels of the air, and are no longer desolate and deadly waters, but are transformed and transfigured into the glorious heavens. 2. *And this is what is taught also by the ancient law of sacrifice.* The worshipper brought his sacrifice, telling of his own will and desire to be surrendered to God—the blood, symbol of the will, was poured out; the body that had thus yielded its very life was placed on the altar, and the fire fastened upon it and transformed that cold, material, dead body into a spiritual thing, so that it seemed on the wings of the fire to mount up to God. 3. *And this is all true of the human soul.* Let that yield itself to the breath of God, and give itself up to the will of God, rising up to him in that blessed self-surrender, and it will be indeed “born again.”

II. IN ITS GLORIFICATION. 1. See the glorious heavens. 2. See God dwelling in the place of sacrifice. 3. See the present indwelling of God in the surrendered soul, and the soul dwelling with God in the eternal glory hereafter.—S. C.

Vers. 5—18.—*The psalm of creation: the third day.* On all this the preacher will compare Milton's magnificent lines (*‘Paradise Lost’*). The opening verse of this section was laid hold of by those who opposed Galileo, as with equal reasonableness or unreasonableness like verses are laid hold of in like controversies now—as utterly contradicting the conclusions to which his investigations had led him. Ever since there has been a clearer perception that the poetry of the Bible is poetry, and is to be judged by its appropriate laws. In the former homily we traced suggestions of the law of self-surrender to God; in this there are yet others on the same theme. The verses of this section tell of the separation of the land, the other part of the created earth, from the waters, and the fruitfulness that then followed. The deep mountains were still beneath the waters: “Above the mountains did the waters stand.” There has been already an uplifting of the waters by means of the creation of the atmosphere, and their glorification in consequence. Now we are to see another aspect of the law of self-surrender in the blessed service of the waters, in the ministry they fulfil. In this section, therefore, as in the corresponding one in Genesis, which tells of the creation work of the third day, we have the twofold command.

I. TO THE WATERS. 1. *They were to “be gathered together into one place.”* Here, in the psalm, this is poetically described as the result of the Divine rebuke. The terrible volcanic action by which the mountains were uplifted and the deep valleys hollowed out, and the consequent downrush of the waters, is told of as if it were the thunder-voice of God bidding them haste away.

“Immediately the mountains huge appear
Emergent, and their broad, bare backs upheave
Into the clouds, their tops ascend the sky;

So high as heav'd the tumid hills, so low
Down sunk a hollow bottom, broad and deep,
Capacious bed of waters," etc.

So Milton renders ver. 7. "The mountains rose, the valleys sank down into," etc. Thus by this emergence of the dry land the waters of the wild seas, hitherto flowing everywhere, are appointed their bounds, over which they may not pass. Straitened, shut in, subdued, and beaten back are they, as they never were before, for such is their Creator's will. The life of the ocean wave seems a poor affair compared with what it was. But is it so? 2. See, now, *the ministry of the waters*. It is told of in ver. 10 onwards. On the wings of the air the waters send up of their strength, and they thus mount on high, and in the form of snow, and dew, and rain they fall on mountain, valley, hill, and plain; and then, by means of moss and glacier and tree (see Hugh Macmillan's beautiful sermon on 'Mountain Springs'), God sendeth forth the springs along the valleys. Thus he "watereth the earth from his chambers: and the earth is satisfied with the fruit of his work" (ver. 13). Thither come the beasts of the field, and from the branches of the trees, which love to dwell where the springs are, the birds fly down, and alike quench their thirst. And grass and herb, corn, vine, and olive, and the noblest trees, are sustained, and myriad creatures of God are blessed; and even the barren rocks, the steep precipices, and the high mountains, are for the good of some—the wild goats and the conies make these their home. Is it not all a parable? The waters, at the command of God, give up their strength, and they become the glorious heavens, the visible palace of God. And this is not all. They now render unspeakable service; life, and beauty, and strength, and joy spring into existence as the result of their ministry, and this psalm is the song thereof. 3. *And so also is it with the surrendered soul*. Yield it up to God in loving self-sacrifice, and he will glorify that soul and use it for the blessings of others far and wide.

II. TO THE LAND. Take it, as so often has been done, as a type of, or rather as suggestive of, man regenerate. See God's will for him as pictured here. 1. *He is to live a separate life*. Hitherto earth and sea had been mingled together, as man in the world, but now God's will is this—separation. 2. *And this separation is to be evident*. "Let the dry land appear." There must be no hiding away, but open confession of God. 3. *And fruitful of good*. The earth was to yield "grass," the common excellences of the renewed nature, and not these only, but those more precious, and yet more precious still (see vers. 14—16). But all this: 4. *Is the work of God*. What God commands he is able to secure. Be but passive to his will, and all will be brought to pass. 5. *The old life will seek to regain its power*. (Ver. 9.) But will not be able; for: 6. *The new life will be sustained and kept satisfied in God*. (Ver. 13.)—S. C.

Ver. 19.—*The psalm of creation: the fourth day*. The order of Genesis is departed from, the moon being named first; nor does the psalm tell of the purpose for which the sun, moon, and stars were formed, as does Genesis; nor does it speak at all of the stars. Now, the relation which the "two great lights"—the sun and moon—bear to this earth sets forth the relation which Christ and his Church bear to the human soul For—

I. THE SUN IS A TRUE TYPE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. 1. *He is called "the Sun of Righteousness," "the Light of the world,"* and by other titles which are drawn from the sun and its relationship to the world. And when we think what that is, how all creature life and knowledge and joy seem to depend upon it, we cannot wonder that amongst the noblest of the heathen the sun was worshipped as a living deity. If it were not God, then it was "the brightness of his glory and the express image of his Person." The heathen mind, ignorant of the revelation of Christ, could find no nearer embodiment of its thought of God. 2. *See the avowed purpose wherefore the sun was made*. It was to rule the day. How emphatically it does this we all know. 3. And in that condition of the enlightened soul, when it has passed out of the darkness and the day is come, *the Divine idea is that Christ is to rule*—that every thought and faculty are to be subject to him. As the psalm declares that there is nothing hid from the heat thereof, so there is nothing in our whole life and being that is not to come under Christ's control. 4. *The day is also the season of activity*. We are to work while it is called to-day. Men do this in common life; and where Christ, the true Sun

of the soul, has risen, that soul will arise and toil in him and for him. He prompts, he enables the activities of the spiritual life. 5. *The day, with its light, stands also for joy and brightness.* How the natural world rejoices in the light! And the gladness of the soul is in him who is the true Light. There can be no real gladness till he comes. "Thou hast put joy and gladness into my heart, more than," etc. (Ps. iv. 7).

II. THE MOON. 1. *The world is yet in darkness.* That tells more truly of its spiritual condition than the day. We speak of this enlightened age, but the words are mockery when we remember man's present alienation from God. 2. But as the moon was to give light by night, so in this darkness of man's spiritual condition *the Church of Christ is to give light.* She is commissioned for this very end. 3. But as the moon gives light only when reflecting the light of the sun, so *the Church can be the world's light only as she reflects the light of Christ.* She has none of her own. But when she does, how fair and beautiful she is! and how great the service she renders (Cant. vi. 10)! 4. And the purpose of these great lights is to divide the light from the darkness. How almost instantaneously Christ and those who are truly his act in the world as such dividers! It was said of Christ that through him "the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed" (Luke ii. 35). Then—

III. THE STARS. These represent the individual Christians, giving their light, as does the moon, by reflection. And all these are for signs to men.—S. C.

Vers. 25, 26.—*The psalm of creation: the fifth day.* The corresponding verses to these are in Gen. i. 20—23, and they tell of the creation of the inhabitants of the sea and of the air—the fish who, by means of fins, navigate the sea; and the birds who, by means of wings, navigate the air. But as it is in this psalm, so it is in Genesis—the creation of the terrestrial forms of animal life follow on that of the other forms, all of which are to be crowned by God's highest work, the creation of man, which is the especial work of the sixth day. Let us, therefore, consider these different forms of animal life, all of which were to be made subject to man. They are in three groups.

I. THOSE OF THE SEA. 1. The sea, in the Scriptures, is continually taken as *the symbol of that which is turbulent, tumultuous, restless, violent.* (Ps. lxxv. 7.) And so the sea answers in our nature to those passions in man which are so like the sea. Oh, what shipwrecks they have caused! what widespread ruin and devastation! But when God recreates our nature, then even these strong and seemingly ungovernable passions shall be made to further his glory. Men wonder now that God has formed them with such wild, unruly tendencies. But we forget that these are for our discipline and spiritual education. They are given us to subdue and conquer, not that they should subdue us. And when we do conquer them, great is our reward. The wild, turbulent sea has been subdued by man, for see, "there go the ships;" man has made it his obedient servant, and it perpetually fulfils his will. And so shall it be with that part of our nature which is like the sea for turbulence. Passion wisely controlled, whether it be love, or anger, or ambition, shall bless, and not curse, as now, for want of such control, they too often do. 2. *Look at the fruitfulness of the sea.* The infinitely abundant and varied life it sustains, from the great sea-monsters who play therein, down to the minutest insect which makes there its home. 3. *And the sea has been termed "the life-blood of the land."* What do we not owe to it? And so, when God regenerates our nature, our passions, transformed into holy energies and Christ-like zeal, shall be for the glory of God and the good of our fellow-men.

II. THE AIR. The sky, the firmament of heaven, so lofty, glorious, beautiful, may stand as the symbol of the imagination, that high endowment of the human soul. How often that has been made the home of that which is evil, unclean, and hateful to God! But, as at the first, this also, when regenerated, shall glorify God. The thought that soars, the love that sings, the heart made pure, shall each avail itself of this fair firmament, and "on wings, as eagles," shall mount aloft to God.

III. THE EARTH. The new earth type of the renewed nature. We are told of the creatures that were formed. They tell, according to Scripture usage, of the dispositions and character of the regenerate nature: service, wisdom, strength. So we interpret the cattle, the serpent, the beast of the forest.—S. C.

Ver. 23.—*The psalm of creation: the sixth day—the creation of man.* We ask—

I. WHY DID GOD CREATE MAN? Many think that life is not worth living. Existence is so much pure misfortune. The denial of the Christian faith and hopeless pessimism seem ever to go together. But a preliminary question may be asked—Why did God create anything?

II. WE REPLY: 1. *God is love, and one necessity of such nature is that he should find objects on which to lavish that love.* It cannot remain unexercised. Creation, therefore, seemed to be a necessity of love. 2. *But another need is that such love should meet with response.* Love yearns for response, to be met by an answering love. But this involved the necessity of the creation of beings who should not be moved by mere instinct, but should possess mind, intelligence, and the capacity of love. Hence was requisite something more than any of the already created inhabitants of the seas, the air, or the land, could supply. A different, a higher being had to be brought into existence; man was needed, since he only could render the response the heart of the Creator desired. All other creatures could obey the laws of their being; man could love the Law-giver. 3. *And yet another craving of the Divine love, as of all like pure love, is for worthy response.* It cannot bear that the response it yearns for should be given to inferior objects; it desires to be chosen and preferred above all these. But such worthy response of deliberate choice can only be made when counter-objects of attraction are present. Therefore, that such choice may be possible for us, we are placed in a world where all around us are myriad lures and baits appealing to all sides of our nature, and many of them with mighty power. Hence is it that the love of his people is so precious in his esteem, for it means that they have turned their backs upon all these rivals of God, and have given to him the love he asks for and deserves. 4. *And even this love is capable of enhancement in his esteem.* It is so when, as with Job, it clings to God in spite of sorest trial and distress; when the man is in the very depths, when to all outward appearance everything is lost and thrown away by such clinging to God; when it has to hang on by naked faith, as at some time or other it has had to do in all God's saints, and with some of them, as in the martyr ages, it has had to be always so. But love like that, oh how precious is it! how grateful to the heart of God! We can understand somewhat of this when some dear child of ours, rather than grieve or disappoint us, has readily endured persecution and pain. What do we not think of that child? What proof of our love will we withhold from him? 5. *But such proof of our love, or of that of God, cannot be given unless there has been the previous trial.* And that is why we are placed in a world of trial, often cruel, prolonged, and severe. We are thus given the opportunity of winning the highest prizes of the kingdom of God. Hence man has to go "forth to his work, and to his labour until the evening." Life is no child's play for him, no place of mere sensuous enjoyment. If he chooses to make it so, he shuts himself out of the kingdom of God. No cross, no crown. Only so can we win back the image of God in which we were first created. This is "the prize of our high calling."—S. C.

Ver. 30.—*Voices of the spring.* We are following a good Bible precedent, as well as yielding to an almost irresistible suggestion, when we seek to listen awhile to some of those teachings of God which he addresses to us through the spring. The references to this season are frequent in the pages of Scripture. They tell of the sowing and the seed-time, the springing of the corn, and the varied voices, scenes, and processes of the spring. He who wrote that sixty-fifth psalm had often noticed the earth upturned by the plough, and how the rain loosened the clods, and the hard ridges were made soft with showers, and settled down to the level of the furrows after the corn-seed had been cast in, and so God blessed "the springing thereof." And he who wrote this psalm from which our text is taken, had often witnessed the wonderful bursting forth of life after the winter was over and gone, and he here celebrates God's mighty working: "Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, and they are created: thou renewest the face of the earth." And the eye of our Lord, the great Teacher, once and again fell upon some sower in the spring-time going forth to sow, and he tells, in the first of all his parables, of the varied fate of the scattered seed. And he tells, too, how the devil knows the fit season for sowing seed; for when the great husbandman had cast good seed into his field, then the enemy came and sowed tares, which, when the good seed sprang up, appeared along with it to its hurt and harm. From beginning to end, by our Lord

and by his apostles, and by the holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, the allusions to the seed-time and the spring are constant, and they constitute a positive direction to us to keep open eye and mind and heart for the lessons such seasons have to impart. Those lessons are very many. We can but note a few of them. And—

I. DOES NOT SPRING SPEAK TO US OF GOD AS THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE? FOR:
 1. *Life is starting from every pore of nature.* The whole face of the earth heaves and throbs with an inexhaustible tide of life; every spot teems with the beginnings of new life. Who does not feel impressed with the unspeakable affluence of him who is its fountain? Every wood and grove, every hedgerow and field, every garden and pasture, bear witness to his bounty. Where but a few weeks before all was sombre and silent, bare, and seemingly lifeless, now, what a change has come over the scene! The grey clouds of winter have been replaced by the bright blue skies, the brown carpet of fallen leaves has yielded to the beautiful green with which the grass has covered the woodland ways. The till now hushed grove is resonant with song and the murmur of innumerable insects. The bare skeleton-like branches of the trees are laden with glorious foliage, and the stripped hedges are all clothed again with leaves and blossoms and flowers. Fulness of life everywhere; this is the common characteristic which meets the eye throughout the whole realm of nature at this beautiful season of the year. 2. *And with what wondrous care all this is accomplished!* As silently, as irresistibly as the tender blade pushes its way up through the heavy soil which, one would think, must for ever hold it down. But slender as is that newly formed blade, yet to that which hath no might God increaseth strength, and so in due time it appears above ground, for God maketh it to grow. 3. *And how quietly all this goes on!* What a contrast to the noise and strain, the fret and toil, the loud din, and all the other accompaniments of man's strenuous labour! Here, as was said of Solomon's temple—

"No hammer fell, no ponderous axes rung;
 Like some tall palm the mystic fabric sprung."

4. But whilst all this is interesting to observe in the natural world, it is yet more delightful to look upon the Divine energy of life which each spring-tide shows as *a promise and pattern of the higher spiritual life*, which, with equal generosity, God shall one day cause to spring forth before all the nations. Why should it not be? If all this fulness of life be for the lower creation, shall the higher, the moral and spiritual, be left unblessed? "If God so clothes," etc. True, the lower life has to do with material things, and the higher with spiritual. But can that be any bar to him who called us into being, even as each spring he calls into being the full life we see around us? If, in consistency with that lower nature, he gives the new life, can he not, in consistency with man's higher nature, cause that also to be born again and to enter into the new and better life? He has done so already with one and another of us, even as he did with all the children of God in all the ages all along. In perfect harmony with man's freedom, he yet found means to convert, regenerate, and fully sanctify such as Paul, John, and myriads more. And—all glory to his Name!—he is doing this every day. Therefore we accept, not deny or doubt, the blessed prophecy of the spring. And let us each one take it for ourselves.

II. AS LOVING ALL THAT IS BEAUTIFUL. See the wealth of beauty which everywhere spring presents, in colour; song; fragrance; beauty everywhere. Then, if God so loves beauty, let him have it. In our worship, our sanctuaries, most of all in our character. In this last God himself will help us. The beauty of the Lord our God shall be upon us even as, and yet more than, it is upon all the grace of nature in this blessed spring-tide.

III. AS PREDICTING AND PROMISING THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD. (Cf. 1 Cor. xv.) If God gives new life and form to bare grain, shall he not to human souls? "And to every seed its own body." Spring is the perpetual resurrection-parable.

IV. AS ADDRESSING TO US MOST EARNEST APPEAL. "Work while it is called to-day;" "Now is the accepted time," etc. If the husbandman waste the spring season, what hope of harvest can he have? Its days run along, and will soon be gone.—S. C.

Ver. 30.—*The spiritual spring.* The natural is as the spiritual—

I. IN WHAT IT IS. An awakening from seeming death. In regard to the soul,

St. Paul speaks of its condition ere its spring as actually "dead." Certainly to all appearances it was so. But when the grace of God comes to the soul, then it awakes, as doth the earth in spring. There had been long preparation for it. Christ uses all manner of means to accomplish this. It is all his work.

II. IN WHAT IT POSSESSES. New life. So in nature, so in grace. If the manifestations of the new life in nature are beautiful, yet more are they in grace. See the fruits of the Spirit, "Love, joy, peace," etc. And we are to go on to this; not to be satisfied with conversion only; there must be the new life. And Christ, who began the work, will carry it on.

III. IN WHAT IT LEADS TO. Spring is the forerunner of summer with all its flowers, and autumn with all its harvests. And so is the spiritual spring the forerunner of all the glorious possibilities of the spiritual harvest. All its holiness and joy of service, etc.—S. C.

Ver. 31.—*The Lord's joy in his works.* Then joy is an element in God's nature. He is "the happy and only Potentate." When we see what a large element it is in our nature, how we delight in it, how we seek after it, we might argue that in being in the Divine image, God must rejoice; and in the text we are distinctly told he does. And—

I. IN HIS WORKS IN THE NATURAL WORLD. 1. *How beautiful they are!* They clearly show the Divine love of beauty. The vision of beauty delights us; and the lavish bestowment of it shows that it delights God. 2. *How innumerable!* All powers of computation utterly break down when we try to enumerate the works of God. The psalm tells of many, but how far many more are left unnamed? God cannot turn his gaze in any direction but he will behold the works of his hand. 3. *And how varied!* "Lord, how manifold are thy works!" not many only. 4. *And how successful!* "In wisdom hast thou made them all." What joy a human inventor has, when, after long study and toil, he at length has discovered how to secure the successful working of that which he has made! The old story of the ancient philosopher rushing from his bath, and crying "Eureka!" because he had hit upon the solution of some knotty problem which had long perplexed him, is an illustration of the inventor's joy. And the observation of the smooth, successful working of his Divine plans cannot but be a further element of joy, even to him. 5. *Yet more, because so beneficent.* His creatures are "filled with good" by what he has done. While they delight us they also delight him.

II. IN PROVIDENCE. 1. Here, perhaps, we pause. We think of the darker side of life—of the unspeakable suffering, of the bitter sorrows, of the dread problem of evil. And of not a little of this we are compelled to say, "It is the Lord's doing." The beautiful other side of life—happy homes, successful work, health, love, strength, and all the rest; we can see how fruitful of joy to both giver and receiver it must be; but this dark side, what of that? How can the Lord rejoice in that? 2. *Well, remember, God sees the whole of life;* we only a mere fragment of it. The shipbuilder enters his yard. Dust, din, clatter, intolerable noise, and dirt and disorder meet him on every hand. The gaunt ribs of some ship on the stocks are the occasion of all this. But the shipbuilder looks quite pleased. Why is this? Because he has in his mind the vision of the completed ship, when fair, graceful, strong, she spreads her sails, and, laden with rich cargo, she sails the ocean like a thing of life. He sees her in all her future glory, to which all that now is leads the way. The application is easy. We believe, with the poet—

"That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroy'd,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete."

"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning;" and we stay our souls on that sure truth, and we spurn the atheistic suggestions which have no proof, and only land us in deeper darkness than before.

III. IN HIS SPIRITUAL WORKS. Forgiveness, peace, purity, power, eternal life. Do we co-operate with him in these?—S. C.

Ver. 34.—*The blessed meditation of God.* The text is true—

I. BECAUSE SUCH MEDITATION SO AIDS BOTH KNOWLEDGE AND MEMORY.

II. IT WARMS THE HEART. "Whilst I was musing the fire burned," etc. (Ps. xxxix.).

III. DELIVERS US FROM SINFUL THOUGHTS.

IV. ROUSES THE ENERGIES OF OUR WILL FOR DUTY.

V. PROMOTES GREATLY OUR ADVANCE IN THE LIFE OF GOD.

VI. PROFITABLY FILLS UP THE MARGINS AND ODD MOMENTS OF OUR TIME.

VII. PURGES OUR EYESIGHT, so that we see the silver lining of the clouds that distress us.

VIII. ENABLES US TO CONVERSE WITH GOD, and to enjoy him, as otherwise we could not.—S. C.

Vers. 2—4.—*Nature-figures of the Divine glory.* These are of peculiar interest, because they appeal to man universally; the language of nature is the common, universal language. Only when men attempt to express their ideas and feelings by the languages of the tongue do they get into confusions and misunderstandings and separations. There is hope of reuniting humanity if it can be brought to heed the voice and witness of nature. Dr. Chalmers shows the connection of this psalm with the preceding one. "It begins, as does Ps. ciii., with the view of God's goodness, but on a different subject; the former psalm being addressed to God, as sitting on a throne of grace; the present psalm to God, as sitting on a throne of nature and of creation; and never have the works of God, and his sovereignty over them, been so magnificently set forth. The glory of the Divine is made palpable, in this psalm, through the medium of the senses."

I. THE LORD'S VESTURE. Observe that no attempt is made in Scripture to describe God himself. He can only be known through revelations of himself that he is pleased to make. The immaterial can only be known through the material. God must take *form*, because man can only apprehend the formal. Moses could only see the "back parts," the after-glow, when the sun had passed down beyond the edge. Elders only saw a "paved work of sapphire." Isaiah only saw an incense-veiled throne. We can see God's garments, and argue from them what he must be who is clothed with such a vesture. What a glorious thing is *light*, sun-rays, sunshine! Mysteriously pure; transcendently fine; surpassingly beautiful! It is the robe of God. Royal robes are supposed to represent, with some fitness, royalty. It is true of God that no conceivable robe can be worthy to represent him; it can do no more than suggest him. A young woman gained her sight at the age of twenty-three, by the help of a surgical operation. Looking out upon a sunlit landscape, she exclaimed, "Oh, how beautiful! I never dreamt of anything so beautiful as this." What is he "whose robe is the light"?

II. THE LORD'S TENT. By "the heavens" the psalmist means the firmament, the vast blue dome that spans the earth. No doubt the firmament was then conceived as a solid sheet spread out as are the curtains of a tent. The earth was as a tent-floor, and those long lines of light which we see between heaven and earth in times of moisture, which do indeed seem to rest in or spring out of the sea, are thought of, by the psalmist, as the poles or pillars of the tent. After unfolding this figure, show that estimates of the wealth and greatness and power of a king are formed from the splendour of his palace and its appointments. Then what must he be whose "canopy is space"?

III. THE LORD'S CHARIOT. It is not the terror of tempest-clouds that is in the poet's mind. It is the ever-fascinating sailing of the clouds across the sky, at the impulse of the upper winds. The moving of the vast masses of billowy clouds, ever taking fresh and more fantastic shapes, and now silvered with the midday sun, or tinted with wondrous colouring in the evening light, is a perpetual wonder and joy to all sensitive souls. We judge the status and wealth of our fellow-men by their equipages. What, then, must he be who "maketh the clouds his chariot," and, in place of mere horses, is borne away on "the wings of the wind"? So the nature-figures bring home to our minds the sublimity of God. These things—the heavens, the light, the clouds, the winds—are the sublimest things that come into the field of human knowledge and observation. They are not God, they are only something God has made; only

something God uses; only something that may suggest what cannot be altogether conceived. Impress that rightly reverent, adoring, wondering views of God ought to be encouraged. We all need to have his *glory* as well as his *grace* ever kept before us. Professor Agassiz even points out the importance of right impressions of God to the scientific man. "I tell you that my experience in prolonged scientific investigations, convinces me that a belief in God, a God who is behind and within the chaos of vanishing points of human knowledge, adds a wonderful stimulus to the man who attempts to penetrate into the regions of the unknown."—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Nature-forces are Divine ministries.* The precise rendering of this verse is discussed in the Exposition. Now we treat it as a poetical suggestion, which fits into the general plan of the psalm. It is a hymn of admirations of the eternal King. The first part of the psalm sees the glory of the King through the splendour of his court or palace surroundings. The second part of the psalm sees the glory of the King in the provisions, the order, the arrangements, the happiness, of his kingdom. At the court, the psalmist is moved by the sublimity of the "light" as God's robe, the blue dome of the sky as God's tent-curtain, and the wind-driven clouds as his chariot. And he further notices the grandeur of the royal attendants, the courtiers, who wait to do the royal bidding. All the forces of nature are at the Divine command, and the force that represents them all—the force that is most mysterious and sublime—is the force of lightning. Illustrate what a marvel of human power and skill it seems to be that man has, in some measure, chained the lightning, and compelled it to yield him light, and to carry his messages. What, then, must he be who has used the lightning force in his service through all the long generations? The figure is a sublime and suggestive one. All the august and awful nature-forces are conceived as ministrants in the court of the eternal King. Illustrate by the vision of Isaiah; the six attendant seraphim.

I. THE ROYAL MINISTERS DECLARE THE GLORY OF THE GREAT KING. When an impression is to be made on us of the magnificence of Solomon, we are told the number and the dignity of his attendants and courtiers. Their nobility assures us that he must be yet more noble on whom they wait. Then show how grand are the forces of nature—physical, chemical; rain, sunshine, wind, fire, electricity, etc.; or take storms, famine, plague. What must he be who is daily served by such ministrants?

II. THE ROYAL MINISTERS ILLUSTRATE THE OPERATIONS OF THE KING. They execute his behests, carry out his plans; they execute his thoughts; and so we can read his mind in their doings. 1. The multitude of his ministers suggests that he is *continuously* working, ceaselessly active. Some of these nature-forces are always at work for him. 2. The skill of his ministers suggests that he is ever *efficiently* working. These nature-forces can do what he wills. 3. And the mystery of his ministers reminds us how we are made to feel the *surprises* of the Divine wisdom.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*The King is the Creator.* "Who laid the foundations of the earth." Having filled his soul with adoring thoughts of God, by considering his palace, his surroundings, and his attendants, the psalmist goes out into the kingdom of this eternal King, to see what he can learn of him from the provisions, and order, and adaptations, and rule of his dominions. And then an introductory thought comes to him. This eternal King not only founded this kingdom, he actually *made* everything in it. "The sea is his, and he made it, and his hands formed the dry land." High honour is given to the man who *founds* a kingdom. What honour is due to him who absolutely originates the great, mysterious, complex, nature-kingdom? Bible-writers see in the psalm a sketch of creation. Browne calls it "a bright and living picture of God's creative power, pouring life and gladness throughout the universe." But the reference to creation is only a brief, passing, introductory one; and what the psalmist fully dwells on is the marvel of the Divine order and rule in the earth-sphere as created.

I. THE SHAPING OF THINGS IS THE ETERNAL KING'S IDEA. Take but the infinite varieties of *form* for material things—a crystal, a tree, a mountain, a weed; or for animated things—a bacillus, a mammoth, a dragon-fly, an albatross, a worm, a man;—and our minds are overwhelmed by the effort to imagine the ideas of all forms

fashioned in one intellect. There is no form of being that was not first of all a thought of God. He is the *Foundation* of all. If original forms modify and change, it is only according to God's ordered laws.

II. THE POWER OF THINGS IS THE ETERNAL KING'S ENDUEMENT. For there is nothing made that can really be called dead. Everything has a possibility of doing something. Even a stone can hold moisture on its under side. Metals have their chemical properties, and the very dust can at least combine. In higher ranges of being each creature has its power and its mission. And the power in things is ordered, not just developed. What must he be who is Source of power in everything?

III. THE RELATION OF THINGS IS THE ETERNAL KING'S ARRANGEMENT. Everything is connected with everything else. Nothing in the world is isolated. Everywhere there is flux and reflux. Everything is touching something, and influencing it by the touch. What must he be who devised all relations and all their consequences?—R. T.

Vers. 6—13.—*Water-witnesses to the glory of God.* The psalmist dwells most lovingly on the various wonders of God's ways with the water; and nothing more readily influences us than masses of waters, or falling waters, or gentle streams, or pouring rains. Poetically, man is very sensitive to the manifold forms in which God arranges this one simple thing—water. And nothing brings to man such a sense of irresistible power as loosened waters.

I. THE LEVELLING OF THE WATERS. (Vers. 5—8.) Evidently the poet is conceiving the original condition of the earth, when God dealt with it to make it the abode of man. Then it is conceived as a solid mass, surrounded by an envelope of watery mist, which rose higher than the tops of the mountains. The ancients did not apprehend the circular form of the earth, and so mists rising above the mountains presented to them no difficulty. The poet sees this mist dispelled by the command of God, and any one who has seen the mists roll away, in a mountain district, will fully appreciate his figures. They do seem to "go up by the mountains and down by the valleys." But in the Divine leading, the issue is that the waters gather into their various appointed places, and the dry land appears. What intangible, fickle things these mists seem to be! Then how glorious must he be at whose bidding they move!

II. THE CONTROLLING OF THE WATERS. (Ver. 9.) This impression is best associated with the sea. Sometimes, when it is driven high by wind and tide, its destructive possibilities seem overwhelming. Yet even then we calmly take our place on the tide-line, and feel sure God's bound of silver sand will be an effective defence. When he is pleased to loosen his control, the world is flooded again, as in Noah's days. What must he be who holds in restraint the great wide sea?

III. THE EMPLOYING OF THE WATERS. Even more wonderful than the restraining of the sea in bounds is the storing of the waters in the thousandfold cisterns of the hills, whence they come forth in perennial springs to supply the creatures of God. More wonderful is the continuous uplifting of the great sea into the sky, where it may form the banks of clouds, which, at fit times and seasons, burst over the earth, and, falling in chemically enriched drops, fertilize the earth, and make it bring forth food for beast and man. What must be the glory of him who is the God of the springs, and the God of the rain, to whom the waters are but an ever-obedient ministry?—R. T.

Ver. 20.—*The Divine mission of the darkness.* "Thou makest darkness, and it is night." What arrests the attention of the psalmist is the twofold mission of the darkness. It is a call to activity for some creatures; it is a call to rest for others. In a very striking article, Isaac Taylor showed that there were only one or two nights in each year that could be considered absolutely dark, and those few nights had a peculiar mission, which made them essentials in the economy of nature. Darkness is properly regarded as the resting-time of the creatures. It is, indeed, a resting for the vegetable, as well as animal, creation; though the term "resting" can only be used in a limited sense, because there are activities maintained in the darkness. Too long continuance under one set of influences has a deteriorating effect on moral natures. The impressive illustration of this is the majesty of human transgression when men's lives were prolonged by centuries. Darkness is sent to break men's lives and relationships up into small pieces. God cannot trust frail man with more than some twelve hours at a time.

I. DARKNESS PROVIDES BEST FOR THE WEARY. Show the actual physical influence of darkness on men's bodies, on the muscular and nervous systems. Rest is essential for man when his labour is merely routine labour of the body; but how much more essential is it in these modern conditions, when the toil overwears also the brain and the heart! Recumbency may restore wearied limbs; darkness alone is chemically efficient to restore wearied brains. But it is a thought full of seriousness, that nearly one-half of a man's brief life is spent in unconsciousness. The wakeful hours in which rested faculties may find their spheres, ought to be jealously watched and wisely used. Man only "goeth forth to his work and to his labour *until the evening*."

II. DARKNESS PROVIDES THE CHANCE OF BEGINNING AGAIN. It comes and stops a man, gives him the opportunity of looking at his work; it shunts him aside awhile; and then, with returning light, the man can *try again*. He need not keep on the bad way of yesterday. There has been a gap of darkness. He can do better to-day. Hope for man lies in beginning afresh day by day.—R. T.

Ver. 24.—*Poet-thoughts concerning the Creator*. This psalm has been called a poetic version of Gen. i., "a panorama of the universe viewed by the eye of devotion." It is connected with Ps. ciii., which reviews God's dealings in the realm of grace. That psalm comes first, because only through our personal knowledge of God do we gain the true understanding of the God of nature. From nature *alone* man gains ideas of power, and even of malice; so he makes many gods, and they are chiefly gods to *fear*. The good man, through his faith in God, finds good in seemingly evil things, and fears nothing. But this psalm represents the poet's observation of nature, not that of the scientific man. Sentiment, not minutely described fact, is befitting to a psalmist. Science must always be for the few among us; pious-toned observation is for all of us. In this verse we have the impression produced by religious meditation, which dwells not on the things, but on God's relation to the things.

I. THE WISDOM OF GOD SEEN IN HIS WORKS. Marvellous is the development of a few laws, and the harmonious interaction of these laws; they work into each other so that the order of the universe is never really broken. Then every individual thing is adjusted to its mission and its sphere. There is a strange and wonderful power of repair and recovery everywhere. Things do not really fail or die; they do but pass from one form of service to another.

II. THE RIGHTS OF GOD RECOGNIZED IN ALL HIS WORKS. "Thy possessions." Then our so-called "rights" are only "trusts." We have nothing. Possession belongs only to God. We are the children born of a Father who owns a large estate. We enjoy, we use, we serve our Father in the use. But we can never enter into any sort of separate and individual "possession" while our Father lives. Are we, then, sensitive as a pious poet is in the midst of mighty and beautiful nature? Are we only interested, in a scientific sort of way, in *things*? or do we know how to enter into the very heart of things, and let them do their true work—make God precious to us?—R. T.

Ver. 24.—*The manifoldness of God's works*. What profusion, what variety, there is in God's works! How inexhaustible must be the Divine ideas! "When trees blossom, there is not a single breast-pin, but a whole bosom-full of gems. The leaves have so many suits, that they can throw them away to the winds all summer long. What unnumbered cathedrals has he reared in the forest shades, vast and grand, full of curious carvings, and haunted evermore by tremulous music! and in the heavens above how do stars seem to have flown out of his hands faster than sparks out of a mighty forge!" (Beecher). "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?"

I. MANIFOLD IMPLIES VARIETY. Here distinguish between the sameness of those creative and providential laws which regulate everything, and those multitudinous and ever-varied forms and shapes in which those ever-working laws can present things.

God makes all things on principle, but no two things are precisely alike. The leaves of a tree and the faces of a flock are infinitely varied. What an impression we should have of God if a procession could pass before us of specimens only of every kind of insect form, or bird form, or beast form! What a mind to conceive these million shapes!

II. MANIFOLDNESS IMPLIES DESIGN. Once get the die stamped, and you make as many coins as you please to a pattern. But if every coin is different, there must have been a precise *design* in the making of each. Each coin would embody a thought. It must be true of the varying creatures of God. He must have planned each.

III. MANIFOLDNESS IMPLIES ADAPTATION. Everything has its place and relation. For nicety of fitting it is precisely shaped. God does not make mere things, but things to go into positions; and every variety of form and of force is the product of considerations and calculations of the Divine mind.—R. T.

Ver. 27.—*Absolute dependence upon God.* “These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.” All vegetable and animal life depends on appropriate food; and though sometimes the food is at the creature’s hand, i. e. usually has to be sought. God has arranged the economy of nature so that each creature is skilled to find its own food. The dependence of creation on the Creator may be made effective to an audience by an illustrative instance such as the following: The fox has sly and skilful movements; but it is not always noticed how God helps the fox apart from his cunning. The red colour of his coat is found to have a strangely paralyzing effect on his prey, so that they are quite unable to flee from him. The psalmist, in trying to raise high and adoring thoughts of the eternal King by examination of his kingdom, is especially impressed with the signs of the King’s presence, interest, care, and providing everywhere. It is not a creation set going, and left to go; it is sustained, provided for, continually.

I. FOR LIFE WE ARE DEPENDENT ON GOD. God wakens us from nightly sleep, and sets new time upon our store.

II. FOR RENEWED POWERS WE ARE DEPENDENT ON GOD. Yet how seldom we thank God for our sound minds!

III. FOR HEALTH WE ARE DEPENDENT ON GOD. Modern discoveries concerning the germs of disease that float around us and thrive within us, make us wonder that health is retained so well and so long.

IV. FOR FOOD WE ARE DEPENDENT ON GOD. Since he gives us the means to get it, and provides it for us, year by year, as the harvest of his earth.

Visiting the Zoological Gardens, and noticing the variety of creatures, and the variety of food required to meet the needs and daily conditions of each one, we were set wondering over the Divine response to the dependence of all living things. He giveth “them,” each one, “their meat”—that which is precisely suitable for each one—in due season, or whenever the need of each one really rises into a cry. “Our sufficiency is of God.” Dependence on him meets with response from him, which claims our thankfulness and our service.—R. T.

Ver. 30.—*Renewed life: a spring sermon.* I. SPRING AWAKENS IN US THE SENSE OF LIFE. The life of nature is a symbol of the *spiritual renewal* of the Christian. The renewal of the *heart*, the *conscience*, and the *will*.

II. AWAKENS THE SENSE OF BEAUTIFUL LIFE. What a banquet for the *eye*! what *fragrance*, as if an angel swung a censor full of the odours of celestial flowers! how the *ear* is regaled! The life of the believer in Christ ought to be the most beautiful below the skies. The serene and tender loveliness of spiritual affections and actions is nobler than all the graces of outward beauty.

III. THE SENSE OF PROGRESSIVE LIFE. It is the season of *growth*. A parable of spiritual life. 1. *When growth ceases, then decay begins.* 2. *Material growth is spontaneous; spiritual growth the result of self-effort.* The flowers of the field neither toil nor spin; but we grow by the power of *will* and *purpose*. 3. *Material and spiritual growth are often irregular.* Does not proceed at a uniform rate.

IV. IT IS PROPHETIC LIFE. The gardens and the fields prophesy a harvest of fruit and grain. 1. *The present life is only a prophecy of our immortal life.* Our knowledge,

our desires, our powers of spiritual action, are all in their infancy; the summer glory of our being is to be reached elsewhere. 2. *The present experience of the Christian is only a prophecy of future experience.* As the bud and blossom predict the fruit; or the first ear of corn predicts the whole harvest. Admonitory thought to us. Spring is full of promise; but some of its promises will never be fulfilled. How many of the young never fulfil the promise of their early days, but turn out miserable abortions!—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CV.

THIS is sometimes called a "Hallelujah psalm," since it ends with that phrase. It is a song of praise to God for his dealings with his people, resembling in its general character Ps. lxxviii. The opening passage is nearly identical with 1 Chron. xvi. 8—22, and is thought to have been the original from which that passage was taken (Hengstenberg, Cheyne). The first six verses are an exhortation to praise, and constitute the "introduction." The remainder is an account of God's mercies to Israel as a nation, traced historically from the time of the covenant with Abraham to the occupation of the land of Canaan.

The "introduction" forms a strophe by itself. It is usual to divide the historical portion into strophes; but this can only be done arbitrarily, there being no really marked divisions.

VERS. 1—6.—The psalmist exhorts the seed of Abraham (ver. 6) to give thanks to God and call upon his Name (vers. 1—3); to make him known among the Gentiles (ver. 1b); to seek him and his strength (ver. 4); and to bear in mind his marvellous works (ver. 5). The "works" intended are those of his providential government of mankind, and especially those of his rule and government over his people Israel.

VER. 1.—O give thanks unto the Lord (comp. Ps. cvi. 1; cvii. 1; cxl. 1; cxxxvi. 1; cxxxviii. 1). Call upon his Name; i.e. call upon him with prayer and praise, "according to his historically manifested glory" (Hengstenberg). Make known his deeds (or, "his doings") among the people; rather, among the peoples; i.e. the heathen nations (comp. Ps. xviii. 49; lvii. 9; Isa. xli. 4).

VER. 2.—Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him; or, "make melody unto him" (Cheyne); i.e. praise his Name (ver. 1) with song and music. Talk ye of all his wondrous works (comp. Ps. cxix. 27, 46). Those who

are full of gratitude to God for all his mercies that he has vouchsafed them cannot refrain from speaking of his goodness when they converse with others.

VER. 3.—Glory ye in his holy Name (comp. Ps. xxxiv. 2, "My soul shall glory in the Lord"). As worldly men glory in their strength and riches, so the saints of God glory in God. Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord (comp. Ps. xxxiii. 21).

VER. 4.—Seek the Lord, and his strength; seek his face evermore. Turn to the Lord, not from him; seek his favour, his support, the light of his countenance.

VER. 5.—Remember his marvellous works that he hath done (see ver. 2). These "wondrous works" are apter than anything else to stir up the heart to gratitude and thankfulness to God; and therefore they naturally lead on to the utterance of praise and thanksgiving. His wonders; or, "miracles"—*τὰ τέρατα αὐτοῦ*, LXX.—such as those touched on in vers. 27—36 and 39—41. And the judgments of his mouth. His sentences upon sinners, as upon the Egyptians (vers. 28, *et seq.*) and upon the Canaanites (vers. 11, 44).

VER. 6.—O ye seed of Abraham his servant; i.e. "his faithful and obedient follower" (see below, ver. 42; and comp. Gen. xvi. 24; Gal. iii. 9). Ye children of Jacob his chosen; rather, his chosen ones. The word is in the plural, and must be referred, not to "Jacob," but to "children."

VER. 7.—He is the Lord our God; rather, he, Jehovah, is our God. The psalmist now commences the praise of Jehovah in his own person, acting as spokesman for his people; and first of all declares his Godhead; next, his universal dominion. His judgments are in all the earth; i.e. "his sentences, decrees, laws, have a universal range, and command the obedience of all men."

VER. 8.—He hath remembered his covenant for ever. Thirdly, the psalmist praises God's faithfulness. God entered into a covenant with Israel, and that covenant still holds good. He has not forgotten it, and will never forget it. It is the word which he commanded to a thousand generations (comp. Deut. vii. 9). Professor

Cheyne concludes, from this passage, that the psalm was not written during the Captivity. But surely a captive in Babylon might have had faith enough to believe that God had not abolished, but only suspended, his covenant.

Ver. 9.—Which covenant he made with Abraham (see Gen. xv. 18). A promise was given even earlier (Gen. xii. 14, 15); but it is not spoken of as a "covenant." And his oath unto Isaac. The "oath" was originally sworn to Abraham (Gen. xxii. 16); but a further promise to "perform the oath" was given to Isaac (Gen. xxvi. 3).

Ver. 10.—And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law (see Gen. xxviii. 13). And to Israel; i.e. to Jacob, after he had given him the name of Israel (see Gen. xxxv. 12).

Ver. 11.—Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan (see Gen. xiii. 15; xvii. 8; xxvi. 3; xxviii. 13). The lot of your inheritance; literally, *the cord, or line, of your inheritance* (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 55). The words are not found among the promises made to the patriarchs, but are perhaps regarded by the writer as implied in them. When the allotment of Canaan to the several tribes was made, recourse was doubtless had to the measuring-line.

Ver. 12.—When they were but a few men in number; literally, *when they were men of number*; i.e. when they could be easily counted. A few scores at the utmost, or, with their entire households, a few hundreds (Gen. xiv. 14; xxxiii. 1). Yea, very few, and strangers in it; i.e. "in the land of Canaan" (comp. Exod. vi. 4).

Ver. 13.—When they went from one nation to another. Abraham "went from" Ur of the Chaldees to Haran of the Syrians, from Haran to Canaan, from Canaan to Philistia, and once as far as Egypt. Isaac and Jacob were also wanderers, though not to the same extent. From one kingdom to another people. Chaldea, Philistia, and Egypt were "kingdoms;" the Syrians and Canaanites, "peoples."

Ver. 14.—He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, he reproved kings for their sakes. The reference is to the punishment inflicted on the Pharaoh of Abraham's time (Gen. xii. 17), and on Abimelech of Gerar (Gen. xx. 3, 7, 18).

Ver. 15.—Saying, Touch not mine anointed; literally, *mine anointed ones*; i.e. those consecrated to my service, as were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And do my prophets no harm (comp. Gen. xx. 7; xxvii. 27—29 and 39, 40; xlix. 3—27). The actual words of this verse do not occur in Genesis, but they express the lesson which God's dealings with Pharaoh and Abimelech taught the kings and peoples.

Ver. 16.—Moreover he called for a famine upon the land. To "call for a famine" is the same thing as to create a famine. What God "calls for" immediately exists (see Gen. i. 3). "The land" intended is the land of Canaan. He brake the whole staff of bread (comp. Lev. xxvii. 26; Isa. iii. 1). Bread is called a "staff," as the great support of life. (For the severity of the famine in Canaan, see Gen. xli. 1; xlii. 5; xliii. 1.)

Ver. 17.—He sent a man before them, even Joseph. This is the real sense, though it is not fully expressed in the Hebrew. On the providential sending of Joseph into Egypt, see his own words, "God did send me before you, to preserve life" (Gen. xlv. 5). Who was sold for a servant (comp. Gen. xxxiii. 28, 36; xxxix. 1).

Ver. 18.—Whose feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in iron; rather, *his soul entered into iron*. In Genesis nothing more is said than that Joseph "was bound" in the prison (Gen. xl. 3). But the psalmist knows what imprisonment was in those early times.

Ver. 19.—Until the time that his word came; i.e. "came true," "came to pass" (comp. Deut. xviii. 22; Jer. xvii. 15). Joseph's "word came," when the chief butler was restored to favour, and the chief baker hanged (Gen. xl. 20—22). The word of the Lord tried him. It is difficult to decide what "word of the Lord" is meant. Hengstenberg suggests "the promise of the possession of Canaan." But this had not been made to him. Dean Johnson thinks that there is an "implied promise" to Joseph himself in Gen. xxxvii. 6, 9, etc.—a promise that he should be raised to an eminent rank above his brethren, and that it was this promise which, during the time of his affliction, "tried" or tested him.

Ver. 20.—The king sent and loosed him (see Gen. xli. 14). Even the ruler of the people. Pharaoh, ruler of the Egyptians. Let him go free; i.e. made him a free man, instead of a prisoner and a slave.

Ver. 21.—He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance (see Gen. xli. 40).

Ver. 22.—To bind his princes at his pleasure. The kings of Egypt were despots, and could imprison any subject. Joseph, as the Pharaoh's *alter ego* (Gen. xli. 40, 44), would, of course, be able to do the same. And teach his senators wisdom. As being wiser than any of them (Gen. xli. 38, 39).

Ver. 23.—Israel also came into Egypt; and Jacob. (For the conjunction of both names of the patriarch, see ver. 10. For the journey of the Patriarch from Canaan into Egypt, see Gen. xli. 1—7.) So journeyed in the land of Ham; or, was

a sojourner. As a "stranger" and a "sojourner," Jacob charged his sons not to bury him in Egypt, but in the land of Canaan, with his fathers (Gen. xlix. 29; i. 5). (For the use of the periphrasis, "land of Ham," instead of Egypt, see below, ver. 27; and comp. Ps. cvi. 22.)

Ver. 24.—And he increased his people greatly (comp. Exod. i. 7, 12, 20). And made them stronger than their enemies. So the Pharaoh who introduced the hard bondage, "The people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we" (Exod. i. 9).

Ver. 25.—He turned their heart to hate his people. Not by direct action on their heart, but by prospering Israel until their jealousy was stirred. To deal subtly with his servants (comp. Exod. i. 10).

Ver. 26.—He sent Moses his servant. The mission of Moses is related in Exod. iii. 10—18; iv. 1—9. And Aaron whom he had chosen. (For Aaron's mission, see Exod. iv. 14—17.)

Ver. 27.—They showed his signs among them; literally, *the matters of his signs*; i.e. his long series of signs. Aaron showed the earlier signs generally (Exod. vii. 10, 19, 20; viii. 6, 17), Moses the later ones (Exod. ix. 10, 23; x. 13, 22). And wonders in the land of Ham (comp. ver. 23 and Ps. cvi. 22).

Ver. 28.—He sent darkness, and made it dark (see Exod. x. 21—23). And they rebelled not against his word. If the "not" is to stand in this passage, it must be referred to Moses and Aaron. Professor Cheyne, however, following the Septuagint and Peshito versions, boldly cancels the "not."

Ver. 29.—He turned their waters into blood, and slew their fish (comp. Exod. vii. 20, 21).

Ver. 30.—Their land brought forth frogs in abundance (Exod. viii. 6). In the chambers of their kings (see Exod. viii. 3; and comp. ver. 8).

Ver. 31.—He spake, and there came divers sorts of flies. The 'arób is now generally thought to be either the dog-fly (*κυνόμυα*, LXX.) or some sort of beetle (see the comment on Exod. viii. 21). And lice in all their coasts; rather, *gnats* (see on Exod. viii. 17).

Ver. 32.—He gave them hail for rain (see Exod. ix. 23). And flaming fire in their land; i.e. lightning, described in Exod. ix. 23 as "fire that ran along upon the ground."

Ver. 33.—He smote their vines also and their fig trees. The hail "smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field" (Exod. ix. 25; comp. Ps. lxxviii. 47). The sceptical objection that Egypt had no vines has long been given up. And brake the trees of their coasts. Hail, though it cannot "break" trees of any size,

may do great damage to the leaves and the smaller branches.

Ver. 34.—He spake, and the locusts came (see Exod. x. 13, 14). And caterpillars. Either a kind of locust, or the locust at one period of its growth. Not mentioned in Exodus. And that without number (see Exod. x. 14, 15).

Ver. 35.—And did eat up all the herbs in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground (comp. Exod. x. 15, "They [*i.e.* the locusts] did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left").

Ver. 36.—He smote also all the firstborn in their land (see Exod. xii. 29). The chief of all their strength (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 51).

Ver. 37.—He brought them forth also with silver and gold (Exod. xii. 35, 36; comp. iii. 21, 22). And there was not one feeble person among their tribes; literally, *there was not one that stumbled among their tribes, or among his tribes*. Probably there were many feeble persons, who were carried on beasts of burden, or in carts, or by their friends. But all those who walked had strength given to them, and did not stumble by the way (comp. Isa. v. 27).

Ver. 38.—Egypt was glad when they departed (see Exod. xi. 1, 8; xii. 31, 33). For the fear of them fell upon them. The Egyptians "were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men" (Exod. xii. 33).

Ver. 39.—He spread a cloud for a covering. The "pillar of the cloud" is intended. It was a "covering" to the Israelites on the night of the passage of the Red Sea (Exod. xiv. 19, 20), and perhaps also to some extent in the wilderness, when it may have sheltered them from the sun's rays (Hengstenberg); but its main purpose was to direct them on their way (Exod. xiv. 21), to tell them when to move and when to stop, and how long to stop (Exod. xl. 36—38). And fire to give light in the night. By night the "pillar of the cloud" became a "pillar of fire," shedding a certain radiance around, and giving the people under all circumstances sufficient light (Exod. xiii. 21; xl. 38).

Ver. 40.—The people asked, and he brought quails; literally, *they asked* (comp. Exod. xvi. 3, 13; Numb. xi. 31). And satisfied them with the bread of heaven. The "bread of heaven" is the manna, which was given to the Israelites continuously from their first encampment in the wilderness of Sin (Exod. xvi. 14, 15) to their first Passover in Canaan (Josh. v. 12). The quails seem to have been given only twice.

Ver. 41.—He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out (see Exod. xvii. 5, 6, and

Numb. xx. 8-11). They ran in the dry places like a river. A poetical exaggeration of Numb. xx. 11, "The water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also."

Ver. 42.—For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham; i.e. his covenant with Abraham to bring his seed into the Holy Land. His servant (comp. ver. 6).

Ver. 43.—And brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness. The "bringing forth" intended is that of the Israelites from the wilderness into Canaan. It was naturally attended with much "joy" and "gladness."

Ver. 44.—And gave them the lands of the heathen (see Josh. viii.—xii.). And they inherited the labour of the people; rather, of the peoples (comp. Deut. vi. 10, 11).

Ver. 45.—That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. This was God's purpose. How far Israel was from carrying it out appears from the historical books generally, and perhaps still more from the writings of the prophets (see 2 Kings xvii. 7-23; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14-17; Isa. i. 2-23; Jer. ii. 5-37; Hos. iv. 1-18, etc.). Praise ye the Lord (comp. Ps. civ. 35; cvi. 1, 48; cxi. 1; cxii. 1; cxiii. 1, etc.).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1-45.—*The testimony of history.* God reveals himself in many ways; of these one is found in human history. All history may be studied, that we may understand his Divine thought and purpose; but more especially sacred history, his dealings with his ancient people. The psalmist is continually returning to this as a source of striking and convincing illustration. Among other lessons brought out by this psalm are the following:—

I. HIS FAITHFULNESS. (Vers. 8-11, 42-44.) Though, in the midst of oppression and misery in Egypt, it may have seemed that he had forgotten his covenant, it was not so. He remembered it (see Exod. ii. 24). So it often seems to us, when we wait long for deliverance. We are inclined to ask, "Why hast thou forgotten me?" (Ps. xlii. 9). But when "the end of the Lord" is seen, then we reprove our trustlessness and adore his faithfulness.

II. HIS GOODNESS IN ADVERSITY. (Vers. 12-15.) As God sheltered his people, though "few in number, yea, very few," and held back the threatening hand of the strong so that in their days of pilgrimage they were preserved, so has he guarded his people in all ages, not suffering the great world-powers to crush them; thus does he now manifest his presence and his power to individual men as they walk the checkered path of life.

III. HIS REDEEMING LOVE. (Vers. 20-22, 26, 27.) God's redeeming kindness shown to Joseph in his bondage and humiliation, and then to the whole nation in its captivity and suffering is an anticipation and a type (1) of his delivering grace shown to us, his children, as we find ourselves first entangled or enthralled, and then graciously extricated or enlarged; (2) of his redemption of our race in the gospel. A greater than Moses was "sent"—that "Servant of the Lord" (Isa. lii.), before whom "kings should shut their mouth;" who should work out a salvation compared with which the deliverance from Egyptian bondage was small indeed.

IV. THE MYSTERY OF HIS WAYS. (Vers. 16-19.) The famines which afflicted Canaan (see Gen. xii. 10; xxvi. 1), which ultimately brought Israel into Egypt, and the disgrace and hard durance of Joseph, were "trying" to the faith of those who passed through them. God does try us now, and "the trial of our faith," in dark and mysterious times, is intended to draw us nearer to himself, and to deepen the roots of our confidence in him. A faith exercised when the way was always plain and pleasant would be a poor and feeble thing; the piety that did not trust when it could not see would be of little worth.

V. THE MASTERY OF APPARENT IMPOSSIBILITIES. (Vers. 40, 41.) He who gave "bread from heaven" and "water from the rock" can interpose and save in the darkest hour, in the direst necessity. Nothing is too hard for the Lord; certainly not our own particular embarrassment.

VI. HIS LEADERSHIP. (Ver. 39.) God led Israel in a way as well as by a way which they knew not—a way his people could not possibly have imagined. So he leads his children now. We cannot predict either the means by which our God will guide us, or the path by which he will conduct us to our home.

VII. HIS PURPOSE IN OUR PROSPERITY. (Vers. 43—45.) Jehovah brought his people into the land of promise in order "that they might observe his statutes," i.e. in order that they might become a holy nation; for the end of all providential bounty and of all redeeming kindness is *character*, moral and spiritual worth. God enriches us, he redeems and reinstates us, in order that we may attain unto his own likeness, may be "partakers of his own holiness." Not comfort or enjoyment, but ennoblement, abiding orth, is the true end to which all blessings lead.

Vers. 1—5.—*The response of man to the providence of God.* What should be our attitude toward God in view of all his providential dealings with us?

I. PRAISE. "O give thanks," etc.; "Sing unto him."

II. PRAYER. "Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face."

III. CONSIDERATION. We must remind ourselves of his works (ver. 5).

IV. SACRED JOY IN HIM. (Ver. 3.)

V. PUBLICATION. "Make known his deeds among the people."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—45.—"*He watching over Israel slumbers not nor sleeps.*" I. A BLESSED RETROSPECT. 1. *He knows it is blessed*, because, ere the psalmist sets it down, he summons, in intensely earnest, varied, and emphatic way, all people to give thanks unto the Lord. 2. *And he tells them, wherefore they should hearken to his Word*—because the Lord "hath remembered his covenant for ever," etc. (ver. 8). 3. *Then comes the covenant history.* He tells what the covenant was (ver. 11), with whom it was made (ver. 9), and to whom confirmed (ver. 10). Then he tells of the apparent improbability of its fulfilment (ver. 12), yet how God guarded them (ver. 15). Then how strangely his work was carried on: sending dread famine (ver. 16), and making them exiles in Egypt; sending Joseph, whom he had wonderfully prepared to be their helper in Egypt (vers. 17—23). Then, when they were sufficiently multiplied, stirring up their nest there by means of the persecution they had to bear. Then came the mission of Moses and Aaron, and the ten plagues, so that at length Pharaoh was glad to let them go (ver. 38). Then the triumphant exodus and the perpetual help in the wilderness, ending in the promised Canaan when the people were prepared for it (vers. 44, 45). So did God lead his people by a right way, and so will he ever, though, as with Israel, the way may often seem very strange, unlikely, and the reverse of what we should have thought.

II. ITS LESSONS. 1. *God's covenants ever come true*, however unlikely and even impossible they may at times seem to be. 2. *That it is a terrible thing to stand in opposition to them* (vers. 14, 27—37). Let us beware how we hinder the work of God. 3. *God knows where to find and how to prepare his ministers in this work.* "He sent Joseph;" "He sent Moses" (vers. 17, 26). They who are to be chief in service have generally first to be chief in suffering. 4. *The aim of God's covenant is the creation of a holy people* (ver. 45). 5. *The remembrance of God's leading will ever be blessed.*—S. C.

Ver. 4.—*Successive steps heavenward.* I. THE FIRST IS SEEKING THE LORD. 1. *We are slow enough to do this.* We will try, as did the writer of Ecclesiastes, almost everything ere we turn to the Lord. 2. *But the Lord desires that we should.* Hence the plain declarations of his Word. Also the orderings of his providence. God will not let us have rest outside of himself. He is ever stirring up our nest. Thus he would compel us to own our need of him. 3. *And there is the Holy Spirit's convicting work.* And when that is done, it leads to this first blessed step heavenward—seeking the Lord.

II. SEEKING HIS STRENGTH. For though it be difficult to persuade men to take the first step, it is yet more difficult to keep them trusting in and faithful to the Lord. The real test is whether we abide in Christ. And we shall not unless we seek God's strength. All the batteries of hell will be turned against us to destroy our soul-life, and we shall indeed need to be strengthened "with all might by God's Spirit in our

inner man." That strength will come to us as we are : 1. *Diligent in prayer.* 2. *Faithful in confession of Christ.* 3. *Feeding upon the Divine Word.* 4. *Trying to save others.* 5. *Keeping on believing.*

III. SEEKING HIS FACE EVERMORE. 1. *This tells of the joy of the Lord which comes to us when his face shines upon us.* Let us be children of the light ; keep on the sunny side of the way. Let there be joy in our service, not mere duty, doing which gets to be very dull work after a while. The elder son in the parable (Luke xv.) was a mere duty-doer, and he had no joy in his service, and therefore had no welcome for his poor prodigal younger brother. 2. *If we would serve God effectually, pray for "the joy of God's salvation."* (Ps. li.) Then shall we teach transgressors, and get them converted to God. 3. *All this is possible.* We may have much of heaven before we get there.—S. C.

Ver. 12.—"*When they were but a few.*" If we look back to the beginnings of all great enterprises and movements amongst men, this is what might have been said of them all. There was a time when those who were associated with them "were but a few." So was it after the Deluge (1 Pet. iii. 20; cf. also Neh. ii. 12). And see the beginnings of the Christian Church. Small like a grain of mustard seed. Now we are prone to be much discouraged when we see only a few caring for the things of God ; and we are much elated when we see crowds of people, multitudes, uniting themselves with the professing Church. We may be wrong in both cases. Certainly we are when the fact of mere fewness casts us down. Let such dependents remember—

I. THAT IT IS QUALITY, NOT QUANTITY, THAT IS TO BE CONSIDERED. A living dog is better than a dead lion. Bigness is not strength. See the composition of the Bible. What great space is given to a little insignificant people, and the stories of their ancestors—a people who inhabited a mere shred and corner of the world, and who were just nothing at all compared with the vast empires that stretched themselves out on all sides of them ! But it was because in this little handful of people the Divine life had its home, and that in them, under God, the kingdom of God on earth depended, that, therefore, their history is all-important, and a special providence watched over them. And do not we know, in our experiences, the blessed force which a few, and even less than a few, thorough and wholly consecrated Christians exert, compared with what a crowd of the common sort ever accomplish ?

II. FEWNESS MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO GOD. (Cf. 2 Chron. xiv. 11 ; 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.) How many were the men who "turned the world upside down" (Acts xvii. 6) ?

III. THE REALIZATION OF OUR OWN WEAKNESS, WHICH COMES TO US WHEN THERE ARE BUT A FEW, IS ONE OF THE CONDITIONS OF GOD'S WORKING. Our Lord had to make Peter feel what a poor creature he was before he could be used as an apostle ; and hence came Peter's fall.

IV. A FEW BECOME A HOST IF GOD LEAD. We may be but a row of ciphers ; but if God stand at our head, then they are no longer mere ciphers. And this is not a mere figure of speech, but an actual fact demonstrated over and over again (cf. the vision, 2 Kings vi. 17).

V. HIS SPECIAL PROMISES ARE FOR THE FEW. "Where two or three are gathered," etc. (Matt. xviii. 20). And that promise has constantly been fulfilled.

VI. THE FEW ARE HIS ESPECIAL CARE. (See vers. 12—15.) And in the history of missions, the little handful who have gone to this country and that, though persecuted, and their ranks thinned by disease and death, yet have they been strengthened to hold on until they have won the battle God sent them to wage. What may not one God-filled soul do ? Read the history of Gideon to show this. And a company of them. If, then, "where there were but a few," there was no failure in the purpose and promise of God, let us rest assured that in like circumstances now there will be no failure. And let us stir ourselves up to lay hold on God.—S. C.

Ver. 19.—*Joseph's trial.* It has been remarked that in every leaf the whole tree is mirrored—root, trunk, branches, leaves (Macmillan). And so each member of Christ's mystical body resembles him in the way by which he is led. This especially true of Joseph. "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the

lower parts of the earth?" These words, supremely true of our Lord, are true also of his servants. They must descend ere they ascend. The text teaches us—

I. THAT THE LORD HAS A WORD OF RICH PROMISE FOR EACH ONE OF HIS PEOPLE. Joseph had his word; so likewise have all like him. We may not be able to discern it so clearly as Joseph did, but our lives reveal it more and more, and ultimately we shall clearly know what all along it has been.

II. THAT MUCH TIME MAY ELAPSE, AND MANY OBSTACLES HAVE TO BE OVERCOME, ERE THAT WORD BE FULFILLED. See this in history of Joseph. Years had to roll by, and everything seemed to say that his word never could come true. And so of the promise of the kingdom of God, whether in one individual soul or in the world at large. How long it is in coming, and how hopeless it often seems!

III. AND UNTIL THAT WORD COME TO PASS IT IS A SORE TRIAL. For in the case of Joseph, that word tried him. 1. *By being the cause of his trial.* If the Lord had never sent those dreams, none of his troubles would have come. And when the word of God's grace comes to a soul now, how often it stirs up a very hornet's nest, both of inward and outward trial! "I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword." How true that word has ever been! 2. *By deepening the trial.* What a bright, joyous picture that was which Joseph saw before his eyes when the word of the Lord came to him in his dreams! But when stripped of his coat of many colours, then flung into a pit, then sold to the Ishmaelites, then horribly because so falsely accused, then imprisoned,—what a contrast all this! How the light of the glad word made more dense the darkness of his dungeon! 3. *By embittering it.* What keenness of disappointment, what anguish of heart, the iron entered into his soul! 4. *By the dreadful doubts which its non-fulfilment could not but occasion.* How hard to keep believing under so hard and undeserved a lot! 5. *And yet more, not only his faith, but his love to God, would be tried.* Could it be that God loved him if he let all this shame and sorrow come upon him. (cf. Ps. xlii.)? 6. Then he was tried *by being led to almost wish that he had never received such a word.* Would it not have been better if he had been like the rest of his brothers, to whom no such word came?

IV. BUT THOUGH THE WORD BE DELAYED, IT WILL COME TO PASS. It did so for Joseph; it does for all like him. Wherefore be of good cheer. And the more, because—

V. ALL THAT WEARY TIME WAS WELL-SPENT TIME. It was a discipline indispensable if he were to fitly fill the high station for which God had designed him. And so it ever is.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*God in history.* "Tell the people what things he hath done" (Prayer-book Version). As the word rendered "people" is a *plural*, the prominent idea seems to be the duty of making the God of history, whose working is so evident in the Jewish history, known to the heathen. If we can read history aright, and see God's working in it, we must *read it aloud*, so that others may be helped to find what we have found. Reviews of history are always interesting, and were specially pleasing to the Jews, who regarded themselves as a specially favoured nation. History at first is but a collection of facts, then it becomes the estimate of relations, causes, and results, which we call the philosophy of history. But that philosophy is not complete or satisfactory which fails to recognize the overruling and modifying Divine force which moves history to pre-ordained ends. He only reaches the true philosophy of history who finds God in history. In this psalm we have such a reading of the national history as the Jewish exiles would undertake when the prospect of return to Canaan was near. We have to see the special points of view from which they would conduct their review. The thing prominent in their minds was, that God was about to redeem them from captivity, and to restore them to their own land; so they read the story of their race to find God's redemptions. And they were easy to find when men looked for them in such a mood.

I. GOD'S REDEMPTION OF ISRAEL FROM THE EGYPTIAN FAMINE. This was at the very outset of the national history. The famine affected the neighbouring countries, and God made Egypt a refuge for his redeemed people. Deliverance by quiet providences.

II. GOD'S REDEMPTION OF ISRAEL FROM THE EGYPTIAN BONDAGE. For the place of refuge presently became a place of slavery. This deliverance was accompanied with

displays of august power, which reached their climax in the death of the Egyptian firstborn. Deliverance by miraculous interventions.

III. GOD'S REDEMPTION OF ISRAEL FROM ITS OWN WILFULNESS. God's deliverance of a man is never complete while it deals exclusively with his circumstances and surroundings. A man is not redeemed until he is redeemed from his *bad self*. The nation was not redeemed until God's gracious working within it had been completed. We see this in scenes of the wilderness-journey. We see it all through, up to the great Babylonish captivity. Redemption comes by Divine discipline.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Seeking the Lord's face*. The idea of reviewing the history is prominent, but the psalmist recognizes how much depends on the spirit in which that review is done, if any real moral and religious benefit is to be derived from it. Read it as one who is seeking for signs of the Lord's presence and power. Read it in such a mood and way that upon you shall rest signs of Divine favour. Let the result of it be that you will seek to have the shinings of the face on you, which you can see made all the glory of the history.

I. SEEKING THE LORD HIMSELF. This may be taken as referring to adequate knowledge of God. This is not in itself sanctifying; for men may know without loving. But it is the proper beginning. Seek to know God. Fearlessly take all his workings into account; both those easy to understand, and those difficult. Never shirk any facts. Only he who is willing to see the revelation of himself which God has made in history all round and all through, will ever get to know God worthily. So much mistake is made by deciding beforehand who and what God is, and then selecting, from the revelations of his Word and works, only what will support our pre-arranged conceptions. Few of us yet know worthily the unity of the many-sided God.

II. SEEKING THE LORD'S STRENGTH. Signs of the Divine power in history. Now, our impression of strength is but a small one while we keep in the material regions, and see only what a man can lift, what he can pull, or what he can carry. The really strong man is he who can master difficulties, put things straight, prove himself mightier than opposing forces, and even opposing forces in combination. This is the strength of the Lord God, of which we want to find signs; and precisely signs of this—the Lord, the Overcomer, mastering all hostile forces—we find abundant in the Old Testament history.

III. SEEKING THE LORD'S FACE. The full face looking at us is the sign of favour. The downcast face is the sign of disapproval. What the child of God wants is to live with his Father's full open face smiling upon him. "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." We may read God's dealings in such a spirit as to win God's favour in the reading.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*Covenant faithfulness*. The psalmist, as a just returned, or as a speedily returning, exile—one just making preparations for his return—is anxious to be right-hearted in relation to this new national restoration, and he is anxious to help others to be right-hearted. So he thinks over aloud his personal experiences of God's dealings with himself (Ps. ciii.); the marvels of God's handiwork in nature (Ps. civ.); the overrulings of Divine providence in the national history (Ps. cv.); and the causes for national humiliation (Ps. cvi.). The leading idea before us, in this and the following psalm, is this. God and Israel entered into mutual covenant. Read the national story how you may, you will find that God has always been faithful to his pledges in that covenant, and the people have constantly been unfaithful. The marvel of mercy is that God's patient and persistent faithfulness triumphs at last over man's wilfulness and unfaithfulness.

I. GOD MADE COVENANT WITH HIS PEOPLE IN OLD TIMES. It is not only that God made promises; the marvel of Divine grace is, that God should condescend to stand on man's platform, and join with man in putting himself under solemn pledge. Covenant-making is an idea of early tribal times, when legal documents could not be written and signed. Illustrate God's covenant with Abraham, which was renewed again and again. Dwell on the fact that there were two persons, and two sets of conditions, in a covenant; and each was released if the other broke his terms. Lead on to show how the name is preserved in relation to the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. GOD WAS ALWAYS FAITHFUL TO HIS PLEDGES IN COVENANT. This the psalmist treats as an unquestionable historical fact. God was true to Abraham, Isaac, Israel in Egypt, Joseph. True to covenant in dealing with Pharaoh, Israel's oppressor. True in bringing Israel at last to the promised land. Providences are only rightly read as God's fulfilment of his covenant. That which is true of Israel is true of our personal lives. God has been to us Provider, Guide, Ruler, and Overruler.

III. GOD MAY BE FULLY TRUSTED TO PROVE FAITHFUL IN NEW SCENES. This is the appeal which the psalmist makes to the returning exiles. God has ever been faithful to your fathers; he will be faithful to you. So our trust is in what we know God to be; and we know him by what he has done, and does. He is the "faithful Promiser;" we may fully trust him.—R. T.

Ver. 15.—*Divine defence.* "Touch not mine anointed ones" (Revised Version). The reference is evidently to the patriarchs; and they are spoken of in the light of later associations, classified with those who received special Divine communications. "They were as kings and priests before God; therefore they are called 'his anointed'; they had the word, they knew the spirit of the Lord, therefore they are his 'prophets.'" (Illustrate the term "prophet" from Gen. xx. 7.) The psalmist had some special instances in his mind, which he regarded as representative of the Divine defence that is always overshadowing God's faithful people. They are cases in which the three great patriarchs moved into the territory of alien or alienated people, and were preserved from all harm.

I. DIVINE DEFENCE OF ABRAHAM IN CANAAN, EGYPT, AND GERAR. Journeying into Canaan, which was then occupied by several nations, we might have expected his coming to have excited jealousy, if not fear. His tribe was large, his flocks and herds were abundant; he must have eaten up the land as he passed through it. But the Divine defence was over him, and his course was practically unhindered. He never had to fight for any position. God made his way. In Egypt, and again in Gerar, he was placed in much anxiety, and in some peril, by the licentious customs of the age. But the Divine defence was over him and his—no evil befell him; and even the seeming evil proved to be for his own moral good, and for other people's.

II. DIVINE DEFENCE OF ISAAC IN PHILISTIA. From a similar anxiety to that which Abraham had experienced, and from the strife which arose about the wells that Isaac digged. It is well to notice that, in the matter of the wells, the Divine defence worked along with Isaac's wise self-restraint, and refusal to make quarrels.

III. DIVINE DEFENCE OF JACOB IN SYRIA, AND IN ESAU'S COUNTRY. Laban of Syria was far more of an enemy than a friend to Jacob. How much the patriarch had to endure! But God ever watched over him. The supreme peril of Jacob's life was that return to Canaan which involved his meeting the justly offended Esau. Even then we find him within the Divine defence.—R. T.

Vers. 17—22.—*The mission of Joseph.* "He had sent a man before them" (Prayer-book Version). The point is, that God had been beforehand, foreknowing how the famine would affect Jacob's tribe, and getting preparations made for affording necessary relief when the testing-time came. Joseph, relative to his family, was a forerunner; one sent on first in order to prepare the way. But herein is a remarkable thing—the providences that brought round to him the power to save his family, involved his own personal sufferings. An illustration of the truth that we can never do the highest good to men save at the cost of self-sacrifice, and burden-bearing. Our Lord saved the world through suffering for it. The mission of Joseph is usually treated in its relation to Egypt, but the psalmist considers the mission entirely in its relation to the covenant people of God. Joseph was disciplined so as to save them. Joseph saved them in their time of peril. Joseph's salvation brought them into a special Divine discipline. These three points are suggested and illustrated in this psalm.

I. JOSEPH WAS DISCIPLINED SO AS TO SAVE HIS FAMILY. A man must gain the mastery of himself before he can gain true power to serve others. See the providences which brought Joseph into circumstances which provided moral discipline. 1. The trust Potiphar placed in him. 2. The moral temptation to which he was exposed. 3. The delay in the vindication of his innocence. The effect of that delay is given by

the figure, "the iron entered into his soul." We can see that this mastery he gained over himself prepared him to master the hatred he must have felt towards the brethren, who planned his murder, and accomplished his enslaving. The greatness of the disciplinary triumph can only be fairly judged in view of the intense, uncontrolled feelings of vengeance characteristic of that age.

II. JOSEPH SAVED HIS FAMILY IN THEIR TIME OF PERIL. Had the famine been only a temporary one, due to a single failure of the Nile, Joseph might have sent supplies to Canaan; but only the position and power he had gained in Egypt enabled him to meet the case of seven years' famine.

III. JOSEPH'S SALVATION BROUGHT HIS FAMILY INTO A SPECIAL DIVINE DISCIPLINE. And so worked out the providential designs concerning the race. Joseph's personal experiences in Egypt were, in a way, repeated in his race. They came into severe Egyptian discipline, by means of which they were prepared to exchange the wandering tribal for the settled national life. Impress, that God works moral ends through disciplinary experiences.—R. T.

Vers. 23—25.—*Disciplinary experience.* It is singular that in ver. 25 God should be spoken of as the agent in turning the hearts of the Egyptians to hate his people. Some would soften the expression, and make it mean only that God suffered the hostility arising from the increase of the people. But there is no difficulty when once we see that God's dealings with us are disciplinary; that he uses the ordinary events of life for his disciplinary purposes, and that in a poem he may be said to arrange and control the events which he uses for his moral ends.

I. ALL HUMAN LIFE IS DISCIPLINARY. It is precisely this that ennobles human life, and distinguishes it from the life of the brute. The events and relations of life do nothing for the animal save complete its animal nature. The events and relations of life mould and train man. He is the better or the worse, morally, for every incident of his career, and for every person with whom he comes in contact. To say that a thing is testing, or trying, is to say that it has a *culturing force* in it; it has a moral aim. Self-mastery can only be won through discipline.

II. DISCIPLINE COMES THROUGH THINGS THAT ARE GOOD. Here, in the case of Israel, our attention is directed to that swift increase of population which is the best idea of national good (ver. 24). It is representative of the successes which God often gives men. But the disciplinary feature of world-success is not sufficiently recognized. No severer strain is put on men's characters than that which comes by letting them *succeed*. Gaining wealth or fame has overstrained many a man. Moral character failed under the strain.

III. DISCIPLINE COMES THROUGH THINGS THAT ARE MYSTERIOUS. The sphere of the mysterious enlarges as we grow in knowledge and experience. The young student can explain everything. The grey-haired professor can explain nothing. Discipline comes by finding that we cannot *know*. It tests whether we can believe, and let faith give its tone to life. Science boasts that it knows, but science can do nothing without the scientific *imagination*; and that brings in the element of uncertainty.

IV. DISCIPLINE COMES THROUGH THINGS THAT ARE EVIL. This is true in both senses of the word "evil," which may mean "wicked" or "calamitous." Israel was disciplined through the hatred of Pharaoh, and also through the sufferings of their lot. The sanctifying power of affliction for Christians is often dwelt on; the disciplinary power of hard and trying circumstances, for every one, needs fuller and wiser treatment.—R. T.

Ver. 27.—*Delivering judgments.* The "signs" here mentioned are the "plagues" which Jehovah sent on Egypt for the humbling of its weak but obstinate Pharaoh. They were "judgments" for Egypt; they were first steps of "deliverance" for Israel. So the psalmist, regarding them from the standpoint of God's dealing with his ancestors, very properly treats them as "delivering judgments." All Divine judgments are two-sided; we see what they are to those who are judged; we ought to see what they are to those who are called to learn through the judgments.

I. WHAT ARE DIVINE JUDGMENTS TO THOSE WHO ENDURE THEM? Such the plagues were to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Observe that the question really at issue was, the

relative claim and ability of the Egyptian gods and Israel's God. Then it is easy to see (and Dean Stanley, in his 'Jewish Church,' vol. i. p. 102, helps us to illustrate) that the plagues demonstrated the helplessness of the idols, and the supreme power of Jehovah. And that is the proper issue of all Divine judgments. They are intended to break us off from all forms of self-trust, and to convince us of the supreme authority and power of God, who is "known by the judgments that he executeth." "When his judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."

II. WHAT ARE DIVINE JUDGMENTS TO THOSE WHO WATCH THEM? Such were the Israelites, whose territory of Goshen was not affected by the plagues. But they were in danger of taking up with the idolatry of Egypt; they found it hard to keep true to the unseen Jehovah. So the judgments they did but observe, and did not feel, exerted a similar influence on them. They convinced them of the utter helplessness and uselessness of the Egyptian gods. They proved that the unseen Jehovah-God was practically effective in the actual scenes of nature and life. They even saw more than this. The judgments which thus fell on those who held them in bondage, were plainly beginnings of God's deliverance for them. If they seemed to tighten the Egyptian hold, they really loosened it. And when the series of judgments reached their climax, Pharaoh and his Egyptians were ready enough to thrust them out. So, while to those who come under Divine judgments they prove humblings; to those who watch and learn, they seem to be Divine deliverances.—R. T.

Vers. 40, 41.—*The sin of trying to make terms with God.* "The people asked, and he brought quails." The sin of this does not immediately strike the reader. It is not said that the people asked for quails. What we are to understand is, that God was graciously and wonderfully providing their staple food for the people: manna-food from the skies, spring waters from the rocks. But the people were discontented with what God, in his infinite wisdom and love, provided, and wanted to arrange with God what he should provide. They wanted to make terms with God; and that meant taking the arrangement of their affairs out of the hands of God, and managing them for themselves; or, rather, making God manage them at their dictation. From this point of view we see their sin plainly enough. God met their desires, but brought upon them a most humbling judgment through the very obtaining of what they wished. He showed them how utterly incapable they were of managing for themselves, and ordering their own lives, by giving them the meat they desired, in plenty, and letting them do what they would with it. See the consequence. Quails were wholesome enough when eaten in moderation. The people devoured them unrestrainedly; they showed no sort of moderation; and the consequence was a disease which became epidemic, and swept away multitudes. On the monument for those dead men this inscription might well have been put, "Never try to make terms with God."

I. SEE THIS SIN IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT GOD IS. Take the attributes, and show that God must both know, and be able to do, what is every way wisest and best. Who understands our real needs as God does? Who controls all things as God does? Take the Father-name which we are permitted to use for God, and show how wrong children are who attempt to dictate to their father as to what he shall provide.

II. SEE THIS SIN IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT GOD HAD DONE. All Jehovah's relations with his people had been gracious and considerate. They had never wanted any good thing. Defence had been close alongside danger, and provision ready for all need. Signs of distrust and murmuring were most unbecoming.

III. SEE THIS SIN IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT THE PEOPLE WERE. Had they any right to the confidence that they knew what was good for them better than God did? Their past should have taught them submissiveness and humility.—R. T.

Vers. 1—6.—*God in history.* "The mighty acts of Jehovah for his people from the first dawn of their national existence are recounted as a fitting subject for thankfulness, and as a ground for future obedience."

I. GOD HAS WONDERFULLY REVEALED HIMSELF IN HISTORY. 1. *By his marvellous work of love.* To the Jews and to the world. Christianity a grand historical embodiment and exhibition of the love of God. 2. *By his everlasting faithfulness.* As witnessed in the fulfilment of his promises and threatenings to the Jews and the

Christian Church. God departs neither from his word nor his plan. 3. *By his righteous judgments upon the wickedness of men and nations.* His righteousness is the guarantee both for his rewards and his punishments. Doing *right* is as much a part of the Divine character as doing *good*; i.e. justice and beneficence are both necessary to a perfect being. 4. *By the publication of his law to mankind.* (Ver. 5.) "The judgments of his mouth" are the utterances of his moral law which he has given by the deliverances of Moses and of Christ.

II. HOW THIS REVELATION SHOULD BE RECEIVED. 1. *With rejoicing gratitude and thanksgiving.* This one of the highest parts of the worship of God. Joyful gratitude is love, and when this is followed by obedience, then God is worshipped most acceptably. 2. *With devout meditation.* Thought, meditation, is necessary to understand the smallest fact of life; but infinitely necessary to interpret the stupendous facts of redemption. 3. *With a spirit of earnest inquiry.* We have only just begun to understand the Divine work, and if "the angels desire to look into these things," how much more eager should we be to bend over them with inquiring thought! We are only in the incipient stages of spiritual intelligence.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CVI.

THIS is the first of the strictly "Hallelujah psalms"—i.e. of the psalms beginning with the phrase "hallelu-Jah"—which are Pss. cvi., cxi., cxii., cxliii., cxxxv., cxlvi., cxlvii., cxlviii., cxlix., and cl. Eight of these ten (all but cxi., cxii.) also end with the phrase. Pss. civ., ov., and cxvii. end with it, but do not begin with it. This psalm has a general resemblance to Pss. lxxviii. and cv., but carries the historical sketch to a later period, and makes more pointed allusion to the Babylonish captivity (vers. 41—46). It consists of an introduction (vers. 1—5), comprising praise and prayer; an historical sketch, which is mainly a confession of the sins of the people (vers. 6—46); and a conclusion, in which prayer and praise are again united, as in the introduction.

Ver. 1.—Praise ye the Lord (comp. Pss. civ. 35; ov. 45). O give thanks unto the Lord (so in Ps. cv. 1). Even in their greatest afflictions, the Israelites were bound to give God thanks. His mercies always exceeded his punishments. For he is good (see the comment on Ps. c. 5). For his mercy endureth for ever. According to Chronicles, this phrase was used at the dedication of David's tabernacle (1 Chron. xvi. 34, 41), and again at the dedication of the temple (2 Chron. v. 13). It here first occurs in the Psalms.

Ver. 2.—Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? (comp. Ps. l. 2; and for the impossibility of expressing God's greatness, see Job xi. 7—9; Ps. cxii. 5; Isa. xl. 12—

17; Rom. xi. 33—36). Who can show forth all his praise? i.e. "all the praise really due to him."

Ver. 3.—Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times. No distinction of meaning is intended between "keeping judgment" and "doing righteousness." The second clause merely repeats the first.

Ver. 4.—Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people. A prayer for individual blessing, not very usual in a psalm concerned with national sins and national deliverances. Professor Cheyne compares the parenthetic utterances of Nehemiah (Neh. v. 19; xiii. 14, 22, 31), but doubts whether the entire passage (vers. 4, 5) is not an interpolation. O visit me with thy salvation (comp. Pss. xlviii. 35; lxxxv. 7).

Ver. 5.—That I may see the good of thy chosen; or, the good fortune, the prosperity, of thy chosen; i.e. their happiness when they are released from the captivity, and return to their own land (comp. ver. 47). That I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation; i.e. "the gladness" that would be theirs when re-established in their own country (see Ezra iii. 12; vi. 22). That I may glory with thine inheritance; or, triumph.

Vers. 6—46.—The psalmist now enters on his main subject—the transgressions of Israel in the past, and God's manifold mercies vouchsafed to them. These he traces from the time of the Exodus (ver. 7) to that of the Babylonish captivity (ver. 46).

Ver. 6.—We have sinned with our fathers (comp. Lev. xxvi. 40; 1 Kings viii. 47; Ezra ix. 6, 7; Neh. i. 6, 7; ix. 16—18, 26;

Dan. ix. 5—8). We have committed iniquity; or, "dealt perversely" (Kay). We have done wickedly. The confession is as broad and general as possible, including all under sin—the "fathers" from Moses downwards, the whole nation from the time of its settlement in Canaan, and even the afflicted exiles in Babylon. Their guilt is emphasized by the use of three verbs, each more forcible than the last.

Ver. 7.—Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; rather, *considered not*—did not give serious thought to them; took them as matters of course, and so were not impressed by them. They remembered not the multitude of thy mercies (comp. Ps. lxi. 16; Isa. lxiii. 7; Lam. iii. 32; and *infra*, ver. 45). But provoked him; rather, *were rebellious* (see the Revised Version). At the sea, even at the Red Sea (comp. Exod. xiv. 11, 12).

Ver. 8.—Nevertheless he saved them for his Name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known. (On this motive for the mighty works done in Egypt, see Exod. vii. 5; xiv. 4, 18; xv. 11—16.)

Ver. 9.—He rebuked the Red Sea also (comp. Ps. civ. 7, "At thy rebuke they [*i.e.* the waters] fled;" see also Isa. i. 2; Nah. i. 4). The Hebrew poets constantly represent God's dealings with inanimate nature in terms proper to his dealings with his rational creatures, thus personifying material things. And it was dried up (see Exod. xiv. 21, 22). So he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness (comp. Isa. lxiii. 13). *Midbar*, the word translated "wilderness," is properly a smooth stretch of down, very level, and suited for sheep-walks.

Ver. 10.—And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them. The Pharaoh of the Exodus, whose "hatred" had been shown by his oppression (Exod. ii. 23; iii. 9; v. 6—19), his prolonged refusal to let Israel go, and final pursuit of them, and attempt to destroy them on the western shore of the Red Sea (Exod. xiv. 5—10). And redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. The deliverance from Egypt, typifying man's deliverance from sin, is constantly spoken of as a "redemption" (Psa. lxxiv. 2; cvii. 2; Exod. vi. 6, 7; xv. 16, etc.).

Ver. 11.—And the waters covered their enemies (see Exod. xiv. 28—30; xv. 10). There was not one of them left. The words of Exod. xiv. 28 (last clause) are almost exactly followed. (On the true meaning of the expression, see the 'Pulpit Commentary' on Exod. xiv., p. 314.)

Ver. 12.—Then believed they his words. So in Exod. xiv. 31, "The people feared the Lord and believed the Lord"—believed, that is, when they could no longer dis-

believe. They sang his praise. The allusion is to the "Song of Moses" (Exod. xv. 1—18), in which the Israelites generally joined (Exod. xv. 1, 20).

Ver. 13.—They soon forgot his works; literally, *they hastened and forgot his works*. Their gratitude and devotion were short-lived. They almost immediately forgot the omnipotence and extreme goodness of God towards them. They "murmured" at Marah (Exod. xv. 24), complained in the wilderness of Sin (Exod. xvi. 3), "lusted" (Numb. xi. 4), "tempted God," etc. They waited not for his counsel; *i.e.* "they did not wait for the development of God's plans respecting them, preferring (ver. 43) their own counsel" (Kay).

Ver. 14.—But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness; literally, "lusted a lust." The expression is taken from Numb. xi. 4, where it is translated in the Authorized Version by "felt a lusting." The lust was for "flesh," and for "the fish, the cucumbers, the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic, which they did eat in Egypt freely" (Numb. xi. 5). And tempted God in the desert (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 18).

Ver. 15.—And he gave them their request. By sending the quails (Numb. xi. 31, 32). But sent leanness into their soul. By "leanness" is meant dissatisfaction or disgust. After eating freely of the quails for a full month, the food became "loathsome" to them (Numb. xi. 20). Whether it actually produced the pestilence which followed (Numb. xi. 33), or whether that was a separate and distinct affliction, it is impossible to determine (compare, on the whole subject, Ps. lxxviii. 18—31, and the comment *ad loc.*).

Ver. 16.—They envied Moses also in the camp. The writer passes now to the sin of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their followers, which was "envy" or jealousy of the high position assigned by God himself (Exod. iii. 10; iv. 1—17) to Moses and Aaron (comp. Numb. xvi. 1—3). These "gainsayers" (Jude 11) maintained that they had as much right to be priests as Moses and Aaron, since "all the congregation was holy" (Numb. xvi. 3). And Aaron the saint of the Lord; or, *the holy one*. It is rather Aaron's official sanctity (Lev. viii. 2—12) than his personal holiness that is intended. (Compare the use of the phrase "man of God" in 1 Kings xiii. 1, 4, 6, etc.)

Ver. 17.—The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan (see Numb. xvi. 31—33). And covered the company of Abiram. It is asked why there is no mention of Korah here, and suggested that he owed his escape from mention to the favouritism of the Levitical "temple-poets" (Cheyne). But the real reason seems to be that Korah was not

"swallowed up;" he and his company were destroyed by fire, and are alluded to in ver. 18 (so Hengstenberg).

Ver. 18.—And a fire was kindled in their company (see Numb. xvi. 35, 40; xxvi. 10). The flame burned up the wicked. Korah and his "company" were more "wicked" than Dathan, Abiram, and their followers, since they had received a favour from God which ought to have satisfied them (Numb. xvi. 9, 10), and since they ought to have been better instructed in the Law than ordinary Israelites. Hence Korah alone is mentioned in Jude 11.

Ver. 19.—They made a calf in Horeb (comp. Exod. xxxii. 4; Deut. ix. 8—16). And worshipped the molten image; rather, a *molten image* (comp. Exod. xxxii. 4, 24; Deut. ix. 12, 16). The sin was not only against the light of nature, but was expressly forbidden by the second commandment (Exod. xx. 4, 5).

Ver. 20.—Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass; i.e. they exchanged the spiritual revelation of Jehovah, in all his glorious attributes, for a material emblem, which would naturally suggest low and unworthy thoughts of the supreme Being. So Schultz and Cheyne. The expression, "an ox that eateth grass," emphasizes the contempt of the writer for a people who could so act. He has, probably, in his thoughts not only the golden calf, but the Apis bulls of Egypt.

Ver. 21.—They forgot God their Saviour (comp. ver. 13). "God their Saviour" is "God who had so recently saved them out of the hands of Pharaoh." Which had done great things in Egypt. The allusion is principally to the long series of "plagues."

Ver. 22.—Wondrous works in the land of Ham (comp. Pss. lxxviii. 51; cv. 23, 27, for the expression "land of Ham;" and for the "works" themselves, see Exod. vii.—xii.). And terrible things by the Red Sea (see Exod. xiv. 24, 27—30).

Ver. 23.—Therefore he said that he would destroy them; literally, *and he said*. On the apostasy at Sinai, God expressed to Moses an intention to destroy the entire people of Israel, save only himself, and to "make of him a great nation" (Exod. xxxii. 10; comp. Deut. ix. 14, 25). Had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach. Moses was "chosen" by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Exod. iii. 10), and forced to accept the office (Exod. iv. 1—17). When Israel angered God at Sinai, he "stood in the gap," like a brave soldier guarding his city when the enemy has breached the wall (Exod. xxxii. 11—13, 31—34). To turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them. God was

ready to have destroyed all Israel, and to have raised up a new Israel out of the descendants of Moses, had not Moses pleaded with extreme earnestness on the people's behalf (Exod. xxxii. 32).

Ver. 24.—Yea, they despised the pleasant land. The psalmist passes to the consideration of another sin. After the ill report of the spies (Numb. xiii. 27—33), the Israelites "despised" the land promised to them (Numb. xiv. 31), and relinquished all desire for it. They were ready to have turned back into Egypt (Numb. xiv. 3). They believed not his word; i.e. his promise to give them the land (Gen. xv. 18—21; Exod. xxiii. 31, etc.).

Ver. 25.—But murmured in their tents. The "murmuring" intended is undoubtedly that mentioned in Numb. xiv. 1—4. The phraseology employed is from Deut. i. 27. And hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord; i.e. hearkened not to the many promises which God had made to drive out the Canaanitish nations before them (Exod. iii. 17; vi. 8; xv. 15—17, etc.).

Ver. 26.—Therefore he lifted up his hand against them (comp. Numb. xiv. 30, marginal rendering). The phrase is used with reference to the uplifting of the hand which accompanied an oath. To overthrow them in the wilderness (see Numb. xiv. 29, 32, 37). The death in the wilderness of the entire generation which had set out from Egypt, save only Joshua and Caleb, is the "overthrow" intended.

Ver. 27.—To overthrow their seed also among the nations. Like Ezekiel (Ezek. xx. 23), the writer regards the Babylonish captivity as in part a punishment for the sins committed in the wilderness. And to scatter them in the lands (comp. Lev. xxvi. 33; Deut. xxviii. 64). The Israelites were punished, not merely by being carried into captivity, but by being completely broken up as a nation, and "scattered" widely over Western Asia—some in Gozan and on the Khabour (2 Kings xvii. 6), some in Haran (1 Chron. v. 26), some in "the cities of the Medes" (2 Kings xviii. 11; Tobit i. 14; iii. 7), others in Babylonia (2 Kings xxiv. 14—16; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 20; Ezek. i. 1—3, etc.). The "scattering" has in later times increased ever more and more.

Ver. 28.—They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor (see Numb. xxv. 3). The exact expression used in the Pentateuch is repeated. It signifies a mystic union, such as was supposed to exist between a heathen god and his worshippers, and to be kept up by sacrificial meals and the like. "Baal-peor"—i.e. "the Lord of Pehor"—is probably identified with Chemosh. And ate the sacrifices of the dead. The corresponding phrase in Numbers (xxv. 2) is, "the

sacrifices of their gods," who were "dead," as opposed to the true *living* God.

Ver. 29.—Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions; or, *with their doings*. And the plague; rather, a *plague*. Brake in upon them. The judicial slaughter inflicted by command of Moses (Numb. xxv. 4—8) is called here, as it is also in Numb. xxv. 8, 9, 18, "a plague."

Ver. 30.—Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment (see Numb. xxv. 7, 8). Some critics, however, translate *לָבַח* by "mediated" (Kay, Cheyne). And so the plague was stayed (comp. Numb. xxv. 8).

Ver. 31.—And that was counted unto him for righteousness (comp. Numb. xxv. 11—13, and see also Eccles. xlv. 23, 24; 1 Macc. ii. 26, 54). Unto all generations for evermore. The praise awarded to Phinehas, here and in Numb. xxv., is an everlasting testimony to him, though the "everlasting priesthood" of Numb. xxv. 13 has passed away.

Ver. 32.—They angered him also at the waters of strife; or, "at the waters of Meribah" (Revised Version, Kay, Cheyne); comp. Numb. xx. 2, 10, 13. So that it went ill with Moses for their sakes. Moses was not punished for the people's sin, but for his own sin (Numb. xx. 10—12), to which theirs led. The expression, "for their sakes," is used loosely (comp. Deut. i. 37; iii. 26).

Ver. 33.—Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips. One man's sin often leads to another's, but does not necessitate it. The people "provoked Moses' spirit" by their murmurs and reproaches (Numb. xx. 3—5). Moses, being provoked, made his rash utterance (Numb. xx. 10). He was vexed, impatient, carried away by a gust of passion, and made the unfitting speech, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of the rock?" speaking as if the power were his own.

Ver. 34.—They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the Lord commanded them. This is reckoned as another sin. Israel, once comfortably settled in Palestine, with sufficient room for its numbers, did not carry out the Divine command to "destroy," or "cast out," the Canaanitish nations, but was content to share the land with them. "The children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem" (Judg. i. 21); "neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns; nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns" (Judg. i. 27); "neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer" (Judg. i. 29); nor "Zebulun the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol"

(Judg. i. 30); "neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho" (Judg. i. 31); nor "Naphtali the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath" (Judg. i. 33); nor Dan the Amorites, who "would dwell in Mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim" (Judg. i. 35). It was not compassion that restrained them, but love of ease, idleness, one of the seven deadly sins; and the results were those described in the next verse.

Ver. 35.—But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. This was the effect of the continuous contact. "Evil communications corrupted good manners." The command to exterminate, which to moderns seems so terribly severe, and almost cruel, was undoubtedly based upon God's foreknowledge of the fact, that otherwise there would be contact, and if contact, then contamination. (For the actual fact, see Judg. ii. 11—13, 19; iii. 6, 7; vi. 25; x. 6, etc.)

Ver. 36.—And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them; or, *which became a snare unto them*. The idols worshipped were especially Baal and Ash-toreth—the nature-god and nature-goddess, sometimes identified with the sun and moon. These alone are mentioned in the time of the Judges. Afterwards, however, Chemosh, Molech, Remphan, the gods of Syria, and perhaps Ammon of Egypt, were added to the catalogue (1 Kings xi. 7; 2 Kings xxi. 19; 2 Chron. xxviii. 23; Acts vii. 43).

Ver. 37.—Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils. The Moloch sacrifices of children by their parents are evidently intended (comp. Lev. xviii. 21; Deut. xviii. 10; 2 Kings iii. 27; Jer. vii. 31; Ezek. xxiii. 37, etc.). (For the identification of the false gods of the heathen with "devils," comp. Lev. xvii. 71; Deut. xxxii. 17; 2 Chron. xi. 15; 1 Cor. x. 20, 21.) It is argued by some that the use of the word "devils," or "demons," here does not imply that the objects of the worship were evil spirits. But it is difficult to see what else can be meant.

Ver. 38.—And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters. Infants, who could have committed no actual sin, were the ordinary victims in the Moloch sacrifices (see Jarchi on Jer. vii. 31; Diod. Sic., xx. 14; Döllinger, 'Judenthum und Heidenthum,' i. 427, Engl. trans.). Whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan. Bloody offerings of this horrible kind were made, not only to Moloch, but also to Baal (Jer. xix. 5), to Chemosh (2 Kings iii. 27), and perhaps to other deities. And the land was polluted with blood. Contrary to the commandment given in Deut.

xxxv. 33. "Ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are." The "innocent blood" shed in the land is often declared to have been the especial cause of God's anger against Israel, and of his final casting away of his inheritance (2 Kings xxiv. 4; Isa. lix. 7; Jer. vii. 6; xxii. 3, 17, etc.).

Ver. 39.—**Thus were they defiled with their own works.** The heathen "works," which they adopted from them (ver. 35), had become "their own works," and made them a "defiled" and "polluted" people. And went a-whoring with their own inventions; i.e. "became spiritually adulterous," deserted God, and were unfaithful to him (comp. Ezek. xxiii. 2—21; Hos. ii. 2—5).

Ver. 40.—**Therefore was the wrath of the Lord kindled against his people** (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 58, 59). **Insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance** (see Ps. lxxviii. 62). It justly increased God's anger that the sinners were his own people, his own inheritance.

Ver. 41.—**And he gave them into the hand of the heathen.** This is the great lesson taught by Jewish history, and especially impressed upon us by Judges and Chronicles. When a nation sins, it is delivered over to its enemies, partly for punishment, partly to lead it to repentance. Israel was delivered into the hand, first, of Mesopotamia (Judg. iii. 10), then of Moab (Judg. iii. 12), next of the Philistines (Judg. iii. 31), then of the Canaanites (Judg. iv. 2), later on of Midian (Judg. vi. 1), still later of Ammon (Judg. x. 7—18), and then of the Philistines once more (Judg. xiii. 1)—on each occasion because of some flagrant sins, and suffered chastisement until it repented. So we are told in Chronicles with respect to the invasions of Shishak (2 Chron. xii. 2—5), of Pul (1 Chron. v. 25, 26), of Tiglath-pileser (2 Chron. xxviii. 19, 20), and of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chron. xxxvi. 13—17), that they were on account of the people's transgressions. God "slew" them, that they might "seek him," and the ordinary result was, that they "turned themselves, and inquired after God." And they that hated them ruled over them. Chushan-rishathaim for eight years (Judg. iii. 8), Eglon for eighteen (Judg. iii. 14), Jabin for twenty (Judg. iv. 3), the Midianites for seven (Judg. vi. 1), the Ammonites for eighteen (Judg. x. 8), the Philistines for forty (Judg. xiii. 1).

Ver. 42.—**Their enemies also oppressed them** (see Judg. iv. 3; x. 8; 1 Sam. ix. 16; etc.). **And they were brought into subjection under their hand.** (For pictures of the "subjection," see Judg. iv. 6—11; 1 Sam. xiii. 19, 20.)

Ver. 43.—**Many times did he deliver them.** By Othniel (Judg. iii. 9), by Ehud (Judg.

iii. 15—29), by Shamgar (Judg. iii. 31), by Deborah and Barak (Judg. iv. 4—24), by Gideon (Judg. vii. 19—25), by Jephthah (Judg. xi. 12—33), by Samson (Judg. xv. 8—20), and finally by David (2 Sam. v. 22—25). **But they provoked him with their counsel; rather, they were rebellious in their counsel** (see the Revised Version). **And were brought low for their iniquity; rather, in their iniquity** (comp. Lev. xxvi. 39).

Ver. 44.—**Nevertheless he regarded their affliction; or, "he saw them in their trouble," i.e. he looked on them, and had regard to them** (see 2 Kings xvii. 13; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15). **When he heard their cry.** As God "heard the cry" of his people, when they suffered oppression in Egypt (Exod. ii. 23; iii. 7, 9), so also in their other oppressions (Judg. iii. 9, 15; iv. 3; vi. 6; x. 10; 1 Sam. xii. 10, 11, etc.), if they did but humble themselves and "cry" to him, he always hearkened and gave them deliverance (1 Chron. v. 20; 2 Chron. xii. 7; xiv. 11, 12; xx. 4—24; xxxii. 20, 21; xxxiii. 11—13).

Ver. 45.—**And he remembered for them his covenant.** According to the promise in Lev. xxvi. 42. **And repented according to the multitude of his mercies** (comp. Exod. xxxii. 14; 2 Sam. xxiv. 16; 1 Chron. xxi. 15; Jer. xxvi. 19, etc.). The expression is anthropomorphic, and must be understood so as not to clash with the declaration, "God is not a man, that he should repent" (1 Sam. xv. 29).

Ver. 46.—**He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives.** Solomon had prayed that so it might be (1 Kings viii. 50). The fact that compassion was shown to many of the captives appears from 2 Kings xxv. 27—30; Dan. i. 3—5, 19; ii. 49; iii. 30; vi. 28; Ezra i. 4—6; Neh. i. 11; ii. 1—8.

Ver. 47.—The historical portion of the psalm here ends, and the writer, in a brief epilogue, returns to the topic of prayer (see vers. 4, 5), only substituting now for the personal supplications of the prologue, a general prayer for the entire nation, and especially for its deliverance from captivity. "It can scarcely be doubted," as Deau Johnson well observes, "that the words of ver. 47 refer to deliverance from the Babylonish captivity," which was the only one that involved the dispersion of the whole people, and the suspension of the liturgical offering of thanks and praise.

Ver. 47.—**Save us, O Lord our God.** Contrast with this the "remember me" of ver. 4. The review of the national history has quickened

the psalmist's sympathies and widened them. Previously he prayed only for himself. Now it will not content him unless the people generally are "saved." And gather us from among the heathen. (On the wide dispersion of the Israelites at the time of the Babylonian captivity, see the comment on ver. 27.) To give thanks unto thy holy Name, and to triumph in thy praise. This is spoken of as the consequence of the gathering together. Dispersion could not, of course, prevent the rendering of praise and thanks by individual Israelites (Dan. vi. 10); but it had stopped the united liturgical expression of them. On the restoration of the Israelites to their own land, this was resumed (Ezra iii. 2—11).

Ver. 48.—Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting. This verse is not so much a part of the particular psalm, as a mark that here another Book of the Psalms has reached its conclusion (comp. Ps. xli. 13; lxxii. 19; lxxxix. 52). The form has, however, been modified so as to make it run on smoothly with the verse immediately preceding. And let all the people say. In their praises and thanks to God (see ver. 47). Amen. Praise ye the Lord. The other terminal psalms end with "Amen and Amen;" here alone do we have "Amen. Praise ye the Lord," the intention being evidently that the last words of the psalm should be an echo of the first (see ver. 1).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The spirit of godliness.* This, under all dispensations, is—

I. THE SPIRIT OF THANKFULNESS. (Ver. 1.) The godly man is he in whose mouth the praise of the Lord is found continually, because the spirit of gratitude is deep in his heart.

II. THE SPIRIT OF TRUSTFULNESS. (Ver. 1.) "His mercy endureth for ever." To what the past has witnessed the future will testify. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow," etc. (Ps. xxiii.).

III. THE SPIRIT OF REVERENCE. (Ver. 2.) The godly man stands uncovered, awed, filled with a sense of the nearness and greatness of God, sensible of the wonderful works of his holy and mighty hand. This whole world is the temple of God, and every act of ours should be a sacrifice.

IV. THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE. (Ver. 3.) The godly man is earnestly desirous of "keeping judgment and doing righteousness," of preserving inward integrity and bringing forth its fruits; and this because (1) it is a blessed thing to be right; (2) filial obedience secures the loving favour of the Divine Father; (3) it is attended with a variety and continuity of blessings; it brings a large reward.

V. THE SPIRIT OF CONSCIOUS DEPENDENCE ON GOD. (Ver. 4.) He who is "of God" knows well that it is only as God enlarges and enriches him that he will be blessed indeed; therefore he lifts his heart in daily prayer for God's "remembrance" and his "salvation." He knows the need of perpetual supplies and of frequent interposition from above.

VI. THE SPIRIT OF SACRED, SOCIAL JOY. (Ver. 5.) It is not a truly Christian spirit to restrict our hope and our joy to our own well-being. This should continually overflow; it should spread and circulate far and wide. We should enter into the spirit of Moses and of Paul in their magnanimity (see Exod. xxxii. 31, 32; Rom. ix. 3). Our joy is never so pure, so elevating, so noble, as when we are sharing it with others, and are rejoicing in their blessedness as well as, and as much as in our own.

Vers. 6—39.—*Sin in many forms.* It is not only the psalmist who says, "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord" (Ps. xxxii. 5). It becomes us all to say, "We have sinned . . . we have committed iniquity" (ver. 6). Sin takes many forms, as this psalm makes clear. We may be guilty of—

I. SINFUL FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND. (Ver. 7.) As the children of Israel "understood not God's wonders in Egypt," so we guiltily fail to recognize the wonderful working of the Divine hand, not only in human history and in domestic experience, but also in the daily and hourly ministries of nature, and in the ordering of our individual life (see Jas. i. 16, 17).

II. SINFUL FORGETFULNESS. (Vers. 7, 21, 22.) 1. We also "remember not the multitude of his mercies," oblivious of all that God has been doing for us and in us

through all our days. 2. We are too ready to forget the special deliverances which, at the time of their occurrence, we resolved to keep continually before our eyes; we allow them to be hidden, and to disappear beneath the engagements and excitements that supervene.

III. THE SIN OF FITFULNESS. (Vers. 12, 13.) Is not the Divine Master grieved with us when he has to think of us as he did of his own apostle, who in a few hours passed from loud profession to positive denial (see Johu xiii. 36—38)? Spiritual fickleness is a very grave offence; it is also particularly injurious.

IV. THE SIN OF UNRESTRAINED APPETITE. (Ver. 14.) In this case it led to unhallowed importunity; to a request that became an impious demand, and that brought down retribution (ver. 15). More often such "lust" of the flesh conducts to other evils—to bodily deterioration, to loss of self-respect, to injury wrought on others, to ruin and to death.

V. THE SIN OF ENVY. (Vers. 16—18.) To envy those who are distinguished from ourselves by the favour of God is most unworthy and culpable. Instead of being grateful to the Divine Giver for bestowing so great a blessing as a strong and helpful man, we cherish a spirit that is mean and selfish. It is a common but a serious sin.

VI. THE SIN OF IDOLATRY. (Vers. 19, 20, 28.) The guilt of idolatry is in the substitution of the creature for the Creator, rendering that honour to the visible or the human which is due only to the Divine (see Rom. i. 19—25).

VII. THE SIN OF UNBELIEF; leading here (vers. 24, 25) to discontent, to the loss of inheritance, to cowardly inactivity; leading, in our case, to the neglect of God's Word and will, to continuance in spiritual obduracy, to a fatal forfeiture of eternal life.

VIII. IMPERFECT OBEDIENCE, WARFARE, SEPARATION. (Vers. 34, 35.) (1) To leave undone any duty of any kind to which our Lord is calling us, in discharge of what we owe to ourselves, or to our neighbours, or to our kindred, or to our race; (2) to fail to subdue and cast forth from our soul the evil dispositions and unholy principles which are there, when Christ claims us as his own; (3) to admit to close familiarity those who are alien in spirit and opposite in belief to ourselves;—this is to fall short of "the will of God in Christ Jesus," and it is to lay for ourselves a "snare," through which we may fall into grievous wrong.

Ver. 15.—*Outward prosperity, inward decline.* Let no one think that God's goodness to us is to be measured by the degree in which he satisfies our craving. It may be that the worst thing that can happen to us is to secure (1) the bodily gratification, or (2) the unhallowed ambition, or (3) the unfavourable friendship on which we have set our hearts. God's truest kindnesses are often found in his withholding or his removing the objects of our regard. He "breaks our schemes of earthly joy," that we "may find our all" in him and his service.

Ver. 20.—*Our God our glory.* The "glory" of Israel was found, as this verse indicates, in the God whom her sons worshipped; not in her cultivated fields, not in her varied scenery, not in her peculiar civilization, not even in her temple and its rites, but in her God. No other contemporary nation worshipped one, pure, righteous, pitiful God, who sought the well-being, material and spiritual, of all his children. Well may we, to whom God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, claim that *our* God is the glory of our land.

Vers. 44, 45.—*The hope of the exile.* Israel in exile had no hope at all, but in the mercy and the faithfulness of her redeeming God (Lev. xxvi. 41, 42). When a human soul is far away from God, and can sing no song of joy in the "strange land" of sinful alienation; when it is brought very low with a sense of Divine disapproval, and of a future which it dare not face; when it shrinks from the society of those with whom it once had sweet and sacred fellowship, and shuns the eye of human piety;—there is one thing to remember, one refuge in which to hide—the boundless mercy and the inviolable Word of God. That will not fail a human soul at its very worst. Up that pathway there is an escape from the "lowest hell" to the highest heaven.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—48.—*The “nevertheless” of God’s mercy.* This is actually expressed in ver. 44, but it is the theme of the whole psalm. Note concerning it—

I. IT IMPLIES PREVIOUS AND TERRIBLE PROVOCATION. And, indeed, there had been such: 1. *In sins actually committed.* What a catalogue of them the psalm contains! Sin at the very beginning (ver. 7). The former psalm reviewed the history of God’s people as a subject for adoring praise, because of God’s never-failing care. Here, also, a “Hallelujah!” is raised, in view of the same history, because of God’s never-failing forgiveness. And the sins that needed this forgiveness are confessed here—the short-lived gratitude (ver. 13); the shameful murmuring (ver. 15); the wicked envy (ver. 16); the disgraceful idolatry (ver. 19); their unbelief (ver. 24); their sacrifices to Baal-peor (ver. 28); their murmuring at Meribah (ver. 32); their disobedience (ver. 34). What a melancholy list it is! And this is not all; for see: 2. *The mercies of God despised.* (Ver. 13.) 3. *Their treatment of Moses.* (Vers. 16, 23, 32.) 4. *Their hardened resistance,* so that God’s punishments had no power to change their evil will (cf. John i. 5). Yes, there had been provocation indeed.

II. IT PROCLAIMS THE INFINITE COMPASSION AND FORBEARANCE OF GOD. Sin is the dark foil on which the brightness of God’s mercy is all the more seen. That is why the angels of God can never render the praises of the redeemed. What a marvel it is that he should have spared Israel! It is equalled only by the marvel of his sparing us.

III. WHEN THE SOUL BECOMES CONSCIOUS OF ALL THIS, IT IS OVERWHELMED IN GRATITUDE, LOVE, AND PRAISE. See the opening of this psalm and its close. Thus is God’s mercy the spring and abiding impulse of the new life unto him. See the well-known verse—

“Oh the sweet wonders of that cross
On which my Saviour groaned and died
Her noblest life my spirit draws
From his dear wounds and bleeding side.”

S. C.

Ver. 3.—*The blessedness of the holy life.* I. SUCH LIFE IS POSSIBLE. It would not be spoken of here and throughout the Scriptures as it is, if it were only an ideal but not a possible life. Surely, if sin be the abominable thing which God hates, he must have contemplated, in his redemptive work, our deliverance from it. What is the first and great commandment, but a command to cherish that spirit towards God which is the spring of the holy life?

II. IT IS ENTERED INTO BY A DEFINITE WAY. 1. *By self-surrender,* which consists in the abandoning of whatever we know to be contrary to the will of God; giving it up, though it be dear as the right hand or eye; and in the surrender of all our powers and possessions to the absolute control and direction of God. 2. *Then, when we have thus given ourselves up to God, we are to believe that he accepts us, and we are to keep trusting him,* day by day and hour by hour, to cleanse us by the blood of Christ from all sin. If we will persevere in this surrender and trust, nothing can hinder our entering into this holy life. Then—

III. IT IS MOST BLESSED. 1. *For what it escapes:* the misery of a condemning conscience; of paralyzed power—for none can effectually work for God if they are abiding in sin; of knowing that your influence has been evil rather than good; of God’s face hidden from you. 2. *For what it wins:* the blessedness of inward peace; of confidence towards God; of power with God for man, and with man for God; of the possession of God’s loving-kindness, which is better than life (Ps. lxxiii.); and of assured hope. When the people of God live this life, then there will be a turning to God on the part of the world, as now there is not, and for long ages has not been. For men will see that God’s people possess a secret spring of joy, and peace, and purity, and strength, and they will come to covet it with a great desire (vers. 4, 5).—S. C.

Vers. 4, 5.—*A holy aspiration.* It is threefold (see ver. 5), and it is preceded by

earnest prayer for that grace of God which, in the psalmist's belief, was indispensable for its fulfilment.

I. THE ASPIRATION. 1. "*That I may see the good of thy chosen.*" He regards God's people as the subject of a Divine choice; as, indeed, they are. There were many others who, to human eyes, seemed more worthy and more likely to bring glory to God. But God had chosen them. And he had appointed "good" for them. Good outwardly, in the possession of the promised land; good inwardly, in the possession of God's Holy Spirit and the Divine Law written on their hearts; good instrumentally, in the blessed influence they should exert on others (cf. Ps. lxxvii.). And all this abiding evermore. And this he craved to see; that is, to share in. It is a good desire. 2. "*That I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation.*" He believed Israel to be God's nation; as, indeed, the true Israel of God are. And he believed that the mark of their life was gladness. In their best days Israel was a glad people (Ps. cxliv. 15). And the Israelite, indeed, is ever a happy man. We are made for gladness—the ways of the Lord lead surely to it; but men do not believe this. Nevertheless, these "ways are ways of pleasantness," etc. (Prov. iii. 17). And in this gladness the psalmist would share. 3. "*That I may glory with thine inheritance.*" Note, again, the title given to the people of God. They will glory in God himself, for he is their "exceeding joy;" in what he has done for them, in them, through them. What themes for glorying there are in all this! "Worthy is the Lamb," etc. (Rev. v. 12). Now, this holy aspiration is preceded by ver. 4.

II. THE PRAYER for what is needed for its fulfilment. He prays: 1. "*Remember me, O Lord, with,*" etc. What a humble prayer it is! as if he feared he might be overlooked and forgotten, and felt that he deserved to be. And what a holy prayer! And it is one that has never yet been refused. 2. "*Visit me,*" etc. He would that God would have compassion on him, and actually bring him his salvation.—S. C.

Ver. 15.—"*But sent leanness into their soul.*" Kibroth-Hattaavah, or "the graves of lust." So the place has been named, for it testified to the terrible truth declared in our text. The history to which it refers is familiar enough. And what followed for Israel has followed again and again, and does so still.

I. SEE INSTANCES OF IT. 1. *Israel here.* The leanness in their souls was caused by a sense of God's condemnation—they knew they had done wrong; terror of his wrath; hardening of their hearts in sin; the plague that followed. 2. *Israel's desiring a king* (Hos. xiii. 11). 3. *Judas.* He had plotted and planned, and thought success was sure; but when he saw Jesus was condemned, those thirty pieces of silver burnt him as with the fires of hell. 4. *The rich fool.* His desire for wealth had been granted; but the Lord had said, "Thou fool" (cf. also 2 Sam. xiii. 15). The full purse and the lean soul are common companions. 5. *The "whips" with which "our pleasant vices" scourge us.* Cf. Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities; all," etc.; cf. Ahab's getting Naboth's vineyard, and Elijah along with it. "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (1 Kings xxi. 20).

II. THE CAUSES OF IT. 1. *Not necessary.* If God give us our heart's desire, that need not send leanness into our soul. Cf. Ps. cxvi.: there was no "leanness" there, but the reverse. And, indeed, the sense of God's favour and help does aid the soul's true life. 2. *But are found in the motive of the prayer,* which may be sinful and selfish only; and in the use we make of the answer. If we love God's gifts better than the Giver of them, then "leanness" will be sure to follow.

III. THE LESSONS OF IT. The lines which follow tell them—

"Not what we wish, but what we want,
Oh let thy grace supply!
The good, unasked, in mercy grant;
The ill, though asked, deny."

S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Goodness is graciousness.* "For he is gracious" (Prayer-book Version). The term which the Authorized Version and Revised Version render "good," the Prayer-book renders "gracious;" and so is suggested what is perfectly true when applied to God, that goodness is graciousness. The goodness of God dwelt on in this

psalm is his patience and long-suffering gentleness with his most trying and wilful people. Ps. cv. treated Israel chiefly as the passive recipient of Divine favour. Ps. cvi. portrays Israel as continually set in opposition to Jehovah; faithful only when afflicted, and succoured only to apostatize again. Eight illustrative instances are given.

I. GOODNESS IN THE LIGHT OF MAN'S RELATION TO GOD. In that light goodness is *rightness*; it is accordance with an authoritative standard. A good man is a good creature who is right with his Creator, a good servant who is obedient to his master, a good son who does the will of his father. This being man's goodness, and man's idea of goodness, he tries to transfer it to God, who then becomes the eternally right One. The "Judge of all the earth does right." God is good in the sense of *being* right, in the sense of *willing* that which is right, and in the sense of approving those who do the right. "Righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works."

II. GOODNESS IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S RELATIONS WITH MAN. In this psalm with man corporate. But the national relations do but illustrate the personal and individual. Here comes in a difficulty. God, the infinitely right One, dealing with creatures who were right in all purpose and endeavour, would not need to show the special characteristics that are gathered into the word "gracious." God had to deal with a nation that was wayward, wilful, and self-pleasing, with a stiff-necked generation, one that was troublesome as any spoiled child. Goodness in dealing with such a nation must show itself as patience, pitifulness, considerateness, gentleness, or, to sum up in one word, "graciousness." Illustrate it as (1) goodness that can chastise; (2) that can limit chastisement; (3) that can restore, and give fresh opportunity; (4) that cannot be wearied out; (5) that gives the fullest influence to all qualifying considerations; (6) that keeps on hoping for the best, and working for it. It may also be shown that the gracious goodness of God makes necessary judgments inflicted on some educational and moral forces for the warning and guiding of all.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*The roots of disobedience.* It is not sufficient to say that the root of disobedience is "wilfulness." Fairly reading human nature, we can find other roots from which it springs. In the history of the people Israel we can see that they did not always sin from sheer wilfulness. Sometimes they had really lost their faith-hold of Jehovah, and sometimes the burdens and trials of the way brought them into conditions of despondency; and unbelief and despondency became roots of disobedience. It is usual to treat the conduct of the Israelites without giving due consideration to their difficult, perilous, perplexing, and wearisome circumstances. Rightly viewed, it would have been the supreme human marvel if they had *not* failed in obedience and trust. Think what a mighty host it was, yet how imperfectly organized. Think of the strain of their manifest peril at the Red Sea, and the exceeding toil and weariness of their climb up the wadies to Sinai. Think of the difficulty, in that arid region, of providing food and water for so many creatures. Think kindly of them, and though the sense of their sin is not lightened, considerateness for the sinners is nourished. The disobedience that roots in unbelief, or in despondency, puts men into the pitifulness and mercy of their God.

I. DISOBEDIENCE ROOTED IN UNBELIEF. Here a distinction is necessary. Here is an unbelief which is wilful, which a man chooses, and for which he seeks reasons, and this is wholly sinful, and needs humbling punishment. And there is an unbelief which is the natural human response to difficult and trying circumstances, which seem to force doubts upon us. All are liable to this kind of unbelief in sharing the trials of human life. But there is a Divine *gentleness* in the dealing with the disobedience which has its root in this unbelief.

II. DISOBEDIENCE ROOTED IN DESPONDENCY. This reminds us how differently things affect different dispositions. Some are naturally despondent. They always see the dark sides, are ever ready to give up in despair. And this spirit often leads to failing obedience. Men have not spirit enough to do what they ought. But God "knoweth our frame."—R. T.

Ver. 15.—*Gratifying sinful wants creates sinful wants.* "And he gave them their desire: and sent leanness withal into their soul" (Prayer-book Version). These people longed for food of a luxurious character; they asked for it, received what they

asked, and discovered that self-indulgence nourished appetite into passion, which carried them away beyond all possibility of self-restraint. Indulgence involved loss of moral power. Feed the body and you will inevitably starve the soul, bring "leanness into the soul." "The gratification of wilful and presumptuous desire begets only an intenser sense of want." Chateaubriand tells how the "Meschacébé, soon after leaving its source among the hills, began to feel weary of being a simple brook, and so asked for snow from the mountains, water from the torrents, rain from the tempests, until, its petitions granted, it burst its bounds, and ravaged its hitherto delightful banks. At first the proud stream exulted in its force, but seeing ere long that it carried desolation in its flow, that its progress was now doomed to solitude, and that its waters were for ever turbid, it came to regret the humble bed hollowed out for it by nature, the birds, the flowers, the trees, and the brooks, hitherto the modest companions of its tranquil course." In Numb. xi. 4 we are told that "the mixed multitude that was among them fell a-lusting," and the Israelites joined them in crying for flesh to eat. What ought they to have done?

I. SINFUL DESIRES WILL SOMETIMES ARISE EVEN IN GOOD MEN. Wanting what is not provided, or what is contrary to the Divine will, under the urgings of bodily passion, is a constant experience. It is even illustrated in the idea of making bread out of stones, to satisfy hunger, which came to Jesus in the wilderness. Every man must take account of the fact that his bodily passions may at any time become temptations.

II. SINFUL DESIRES MUST BE REPPRESSED WITHIN SAFE LIMITS. And this we do by refusing to let them say anything or do anything. Compelled silence soon weakens them. That power of self-mastery a man may have and hold if he gains it in the first occasion of struggle with uprising desires; but it is very hard to win again if once it is lost.

III. SINFUL DESIRES INDULGED GAIN RUINOUS MASTERY. The common law of wanting to do a thing again which we have once done acts in this. And all indulgence tends to weaken moral power. Illustrated by the drunkard and by the devil-possessions (Legion) of the New Testament.—R. T.

Ver. 16.—*The character of Aaron.* "The saint of the Lord." Perowne renders, "the holy one of Jehovah." The word "saint" is equivalent to "set apart one," "consecrated priest." "The term denotes official sanctity—that derived from a Divine consecration. It will be remembered that Korah, Dathan, and Abiram denied the privileges of the priesthood on the ground that all the congregation were *holy*, every one of them, and that Moses replied, 'The man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be the holy one'" (Numb. xvi. 3—7). Every man, to be studied fairly, must be viewed both in his public and his private character. Officialism may but present to us a character *put on*. It may be the fair and honest expression of what a man really is.

I. THE CHARACTER OF AARON AS A MAN. It has been summarized in this way: "Aaron was of an impulsive character, leaning for the most part on his brother, but occasionally showing, as is not infrequent with such minds, a desire to appear independent." It must be borne in mind that Aaron received no such personal revelations from God as Moses received, and that he never occupied other than a subordinate place, and so never felt the sanctifying pressure of supreme responsibility. He was a man who could follow, but could not lead; who could serve, but could not rule. There are such among us; men who are good and trustworthy servants, but who ruin every business of which they have control. And these very men are often like Aaron, hankering after the positions for which they are unfitted. There is tinder of jealousy in such men at the success of others, which a spark will easily set alight. Aarons can carry out; they cannot initiate.

II. THE CHARACTER OF AARON AS A PRIEST. This office suited him precisely, because in it he could be wholly occupied with providing details. A priest is a man who is not required to have a will of his own. A course is prescribed; he is to be loyal in following out that course. Aaron's official character comes out well, but it was subject to some severe strains. He would have kept all right if things had continued in their regular routine. Routine does not weary the Aaron-type of man.

But the unusual upset him. He felt nervous. He could not decide and stand firm; he let others overrule him, and unduly influence him; he could not rely on his own judgment; he tried to master difficulties in the weakest of ways, by compromises.—R. T.

Vers. 19, 20.—*The sin of the golden calf.* “They changed their glory for the likeness of an ox that eateth grass” (Revised Version). “Into the similitude of a calf that eateth hay” (Prayer-book Version). The idea is that the revelation of God as an unseen spiritual Being, requiring the service of righteousness, was the distinguishing glory of Israel. But this revelation they did not rightly value, but, at the first opportunity, bartered it away for a material god, of sensual character, who was served by the licence of self-indulgence. In this they were not merely disobedient; they showed their incapacity for high things, their unfitness to become the agents of God’s most gracious designs for the human race. The sin was a fourfold one.

I. IT WAS THE SIN OF DISOBEDIENCE TO COMMAND. It should be clearly shown that Israel was bound to obedience to Jehovah before the Decalogue was given. The scene of Sinai is improperly called the *giving* of the Law; it is properly the *formulating* of the Law. The people owed allegiance to the God of their fathers, to the God who had delivered them from Egypt; and their willingness to obey was actually pledged afresh before Moses ascended the mount (see Exod. xix. 7, 8). They were bidden *wait* to receive a communication from God; they disobeyed, and *acted* without direction. Disobedience is often due to the restlessness that cannot wait.

II. IT WAS THE SIN OF UNFAITHFULNESS TO TRUST. The spirituality of God was the supreme national trust. Neither Abraham, Isaac, nor Jacob ever saw God, but he was a real Power in their lives. In Egypt God was never seen, but he did mighty deeds. Put fully, the unity, spirituality, and holiness of Jehovah were committed to the care of the Abrahamic race, and that race was to preserve these truths while the rest of the world freely experimented on constructing religions and deities for itself. To make idolatrous images of God, the spiritual Being, was unfaithful to trust.

III. IT WAS THE SIN OF “FOLLOWING THE DEVICES OF THEIR OWN HEARTS.” Or self-willedness. They asked what *they liked*, as if they were independent; not what God liked, as if they were dependent on him. The essence of sin for a creature is *self-will*. Triumph over self-will is the supreme aim of religion. That golden calf was a self-willed thing; as such there could be no religion in it. Through, and by means of, that golden calf the people did but worship themselves; what they personified was *their own will*, not God. Men deceive themselves when they fashion their own gods; they can only rightly take God as revealed to them.

IV. IT WAS THE SIN OF DISHONOURING GOD. The symbol they chose was an insult. True, their associations in Egypt suggested no other; and perhaps the *ox* was in some sense their national symbol. So their god was the personified nation. The spiritual Jehovah is degraded in men’s minds when associated with a mere beast.—R. T.

Ver. 23.—*Moses as mediator.* “Had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.” “The intercession of Moses is compared to the act of a brave leader, covering with his body the breach made in the walls of his fortress.” See the figure as given in Ezek. xxii. 30. The account of Moses’ intercession is found in Exod. xxxii. 10—14. The point on which we dwell is the fitness of Moses to be the mediator on this occasion.

I. THE FITNESS ARISING FROM HIS OFFICIAL POSITION. He was the agent appointed by God, through whom his will might be sent to the people. He was the representative of the people, appointed by them to conduct all negotiations with Jehovah in their name. He was the proper person; and foreshadows the Lord Jesus Christ as revealer of God to men, and negotiator for men with God.

II. THE FITNESS ARISING FROM THE CONFIDENCES MOSES HAD WON. He had gained both power and right by his faithful service of the people, and by his holy familiarity with God. We may say that God had proved him, and so had confidence in him. And the people had proved him, and knew well that they had no better friend. Christ is “beloved Son,” and our best Friend.

III. THE FITNESS ARISING FROM THE PERSONAL FEELING OF MOSES. He was

supremely indignant at the sin of the people; so much so as to have lost his self-control, and flung down the tables. That right feeling towards the sin fitted him to mediate. He made no excuse; he could but plead for pardon. A man with no adequate sense of the iniquity could not have been acceptable as a mediator. But Moses was also supremely pitiful towards the erring people, and this gave him the fitting tenderness in pleading for their forgiveness. So in Christ we find deepest impressions of the evil of *sin*, uniting with supreme love for the *sinners*.

IV. THE FITNESS ARISING FROM THE VIGOUR OF MOSES' RULE. God knew that Moses could punish; and if the more serious judgment on the sin was removed, still there must be such punishment as would adequately impress the evil of the sin. Moses was a fitting mediator, because God was assured that he would not neglect this educative and disciplinary judgment. God, if we may so speak, graciously yielded to Moses' persuasions, because he knew that his honour was safe in Moses' hands. So Christ in his mediation "magnifies the Law, and makes it honourable."—R. T.

Ver. 30.—*The atonement of Phinehas.* (See Numb. xxv. 11—13.) "Phinehas, himself perhaps a judge in authority, became the type of a righteous zeal, exercising summary vengeance, informal and unbidden, against outrage on decency and on reverence for God" (Dr. Barry). "It is a picture of the one zealous man rising up from the midst of the inactive multitude, who sit still and make no effort." The incident occurred toward the close of the wanderings, when the Israelites were in the neighbourhood of Moab. Unable to gain the right to curse Israel—as Balaam wished, and as it would have paid him well to do—Balaam persuaded King Balak to allow free intercourse between his people and them. "Let the Israelites fall into immorality and sin, and then their God will destroy them, and your end will be accomplished." The scheme succeeded. The vice and iniquity of Israel was full in God's sight, and the immediate execution of the Divine judgment was commanded. Some great public act of vindication was called for; such a manifest upholding of the Divine authority and holiness as would make a *sin-cover*, occupy the Divine attention, gain the Divine approval, and be a basis on which judgment might be stayed. Phinehas was the man to do it. A flagrant case of unlawful intercourse had occurred, and when he saw the wicked couple he "rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel."

I. PHINEHAS WAS ZEALOUS FOR THE HONOUR OF JEHOVAH.

II. HIS PUBLIC ACT OF VINDICATION MADE A SIN-COVER.

III. BECAUSE OF THAT SIN-COVER, JEHOVAH'S JUDGMENT MIGHT BE STAYED.

See, then, what we must look for in the great atonement, made for us by the Son of God, is some fitting vindication of the outraged honour of God our Father, and so restored relations. Reconciliation can only come with solemn honouring of God's authority and claim by some public act of loyalty. Scripture presents to us different things that made atonement. A man's prayer made atonement (case of Moses). An act of official duty made atonement (case of Aaron). An act of judgment made atonement (case of Phinehas). We are left to think what act of Christ's made atonement for us all.—R. T.

Vers. 43, 44.—*The Divine pity and patience.* The exiles, when about to return to their own land, were brought to repentance by their sense of the goodness of God to them. In the spirit of penitence, the psalmist, a devout exile, reviews the national history, and finds that over and over again his people had to be penitent for their sins, and over and over again their God found them space and opportunity for repentance. Now, that exile read the national history aright, and he helps us in the endeavour to read our lives aright, and find in them ever-recurring proofs of the Divine pity and patience with the wilful and the wayward.

I. SOME OF THE SOURCES WHENCE COME OUR SINS. 1. Fear. Illustrate by provocation at Red Sea (ver. 7). 2. Lust. Inordinate desire. Putting God to the test (ver. 14). 3. Story of Dathan (ver. 17). 4. Unspirituality. Incident of the calf (ver. 19). 5. Impatience. Despising the pleasant land, because it did not come

to them at once (ver. 24). 6. Licence. Case of immorality at Beth-peor (ver. 28). 7. Distrust. Waters of strife (ver. 32). 8. Imperfect obedience, a sign of self-will. They did not destroy the Canaanites, which they were commanded to do (ver. 34).

II. THE SORROWS WHICH OUR SINS HAVE CAUSED GOOD MEN. These help us to realize how bad those sins must be. See what sorrow Moses felt in connection with the sin of the golden calf. See what sorrow Aaron felt in the matter of Dathan's rebellion. See what sorrow Phinehas felt in the matter of Baal-peor.

III. THE PITIFUL PATIENCE WITH WHICH GOD HAS EVER DEALT WITH OUR SINS. 1. Waiting until we came to a better mind. Let evil do its own work; it will be sure to punish and humble. God often does so much for us by doing nothing, leaving us to suffer the natural consequences of our sins. 2. Helping us by chastisements to come to a better mind. There may be occasions on which the infinite wisdom decides that it is better not to wait, because there may be active leaders in the evil, or strong self-will, which needs to be dealt with at once. Judgment for some, as in Dathan's case, may be chastisement for all. The worst thing that could happen to us would be to be finally "let alone." If God is in our life—acting in our life—all is right, however trying the circumstances of life may be.—R. T.

Vers. 40—46.—*Man's misery and God's compassion.* "The design of the whole psalm is to awaken the people to a lively consciousness of the truth, that though there is much of sin in us, there is much more of grace in God;" that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Suggests—

I. GOD LOVES ALL HIS CREATURES, BUT HATES THEIR SINS. (Ver. 40.) That is, he makes us feel sensible that he is for ever opposed to our evil conduct, and creates in us a terror of the consequences of our sins—the punishment they entail.

II. PART OF THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN IS THAT WE ARE GIVEN OVER TO ITS TYRANNY. (Ver. 41.) Give ourselves over. This is a natural consequence, a Divine law of our constitution, and is a galling and terrible penalty of the habit of transgression. Our passions come thus to rule over us, instead of our ruling over them.

III. WHEN WE ATTEMPT TO RESIST THIS TYRANNY, WE FIND THAT OUR SLAVERY IS MORE OPPRESSIVE THAN WE THOUGHT. (Ver. 42.) Men often may make some effort to break off from evil ways, but discover that they are under a heavier bondage to their sins than they had supposed. This, too, is a part of the punishment of sin—its enfeebling, debilitating influence.

IV. MEN WHOM GOD SEEMS TO HAVE DELIVERED FROM THEIR SINS, AFTER A TIME RETURN TO THEIR FORMER INIQUITY. (Ver. 43.) They are then brought low, or impoverished, or weakened—lower than they were before, because now they begin to lose all hope of recovery. House "swept and garnished" is prepared for the return of sevenfold powers of evil, that rule more absolutely than ever.

V. SUCH HELPLESS MISERY EXCITES THE DIVINE COMPASSION. (Ver. 44.) "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." God pities those whom he cannot save—because of their unwillingness. "How often would I have gathered thee as a hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

VI. GOD DOES NOT REPENT TILL MEN REPENT. (Ver. 45.) God does not change his laws to relieve the disobedient from suffering; but when they change from disobedience to obedience, the result is so great that God seems to them to have changed. To row *against* the current and to row *with* the current seems like rowing upon a different river.—S.

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