

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.  
**THE PSALMS.**

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OR,

ANECDOTES, SIMILES, EMBLEMS, ILLUSTRATIONS, EXPOSITORY,  
SCIENTIFIC, GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND HOMILETIC,  
GATHERED FROM A WIDE RANGE OF HOME AND  
FOREIGN LITERATURE, ON THE VERSES  
OF THE BIBLE.

BY

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**THE PSALMS.**

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## THE PSALMS.

### PSALM LI.

VERS. 1-19. **Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness.**—*The fifty-first psalm*:—A darker guilt you will scarcely find—kingly power abused—worst passions yielded to. Yet this psalm breathes from a spirit touched with the finest sensibilities of spiritual feeling. Two sides of our mysterious twofold being here. Something in us near to hell; something strangely near to God. It is good to observe this, that we rightly estimate: generously of fallen humanity; moderately of highest saintship. The germs of the worst crimes are in us all. In our deepest degradation there remains something sacred, undefiled, the pledge and gift of our better nature. I. SCRIPTURE ESTIMATE OF SIN. 1. Personal accountability. "My sin." It is hard to believe the sins we do are our own. We lay the blame anywhere but on ourselves. But here David owns it as his. 2. Estimated as hateful to God. The simple judgment of the conscience. But another estimate, born of the intellect, comes in collision with this religion and bewilders it. Look over life, and you will find it hard to believe that sin is against God: that it is not rather for Him. No doubt, out of evil comes good; evil is the resistance in battle, out of which good is created and becomes possible; it is the parent of all human industry. Even moral evil is generative of good. Thoughts such as these, I doubt not, haunt and perplex us all. Conscience is overborne by the intellect. "Perhaps evil is not so bad after all—perhaps good—who knows?" Remember, therefore, in matters practical, conscience, not intellect, is our guide. Unsophisticated conscience ever speaks this language of the Bible. 3. Sin estimated as separation from God. It is not that suffering and pain follow it, but that it is a contradiction of our own nature and God's will. This is the feeling of this psalm. Do you fancy that men like David, shuddering in sight of evil, dreaded a material hell? Into true penitence the idea of punishment never enters. If it did it would be almost a relief; but oh! those moments in which a selfish act has appeared more hideous than any pain which the fancy of a Dante could devise! when the idea of the strife of self-will in battle with the loving will of God prolonged for ever, has painted itself to the imagination as the real infinite Hell! when self-concentration and the extinction of love in the soul has been felt as the real damnation of the devil-nature! II. RESTORATION. 1. Sacrifice of a broken spirit. Observe the accurate and even Christian perception of the real meaning of sacrifice by the ancient spiritually-minded Jews. It has its origin in two feelings: one human, one divine. The feeling that there must be something surrendered to God, and that our best, is true; but men have mixed up with it the false thought that this sacrifice pleases God because of the loss or pain which it inflicts. Hence, the heathen idea of appeasement, to buy off his wrath, to glut his fury. See story of Iphigenia, Zaleucus, etc. These notions were mixed with Judaism, and are even now found in common views of Christ's sacrifice. But men like David felt that what lay beneath all sacrifice as its ground and meaning was surrender to God's will: that a man's best is himself; and to sacrifice this is the true sacrifice. Learn, then, God does not wish pain, but goodness; not suffering, but you—yourself—your heart. Even in the sacrifice of Christ, God wished only this. It was precious not



because it was pain, but because the pain, the blood, the death, were the last and highest evidence of entire surrender. 2. Spirit of liberty. "Thy free spirit"—literally, princely. A princely is a free spirit, unconstrained—"the royal law of liberty." (F. W. Robertson, M.A.) *The exceeding sinfulness of sin*:—I. THE NATURE OF SIN IN THE EYES OF ONE WHO SEES GOD. Just as one crime against the State can set all the machinery of our civilization against us, on which our existence now runs so smoothly; and the network of law, which secured us freedom of motion in the right path, serves only to trip us up when we have left it; so, one great act of sin against God has the power to pervert all the spiritual relationships of our life. In an ethical study by a popular writer, in the form of a story; at a critical moment the heroine is vouchsafed a vision of a successful sin in all its hideous nature, and shrinks back appalled. David sees it here, but, alas! too late to save his life from the shadow which never again left it. II. WHERE INIQUITY DID ABOUND, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND. The penitent, having laid bare his sin, now asks for God's grace. First he asks for mercy. When the foe lay vanquished in the power of the conqueror, to cry, "Mercy!" meant "Ransom!"—"Spare my life and take a ransom!" What a meaning it may have to us if, when we cry, "Mercy!" we feel that we are asking God to take a ransom! "The soul that sinneth it shall die;" but He in His pity allows me to plead those precious merits, and so obtain pardon and peace. But he goes on to ask God to do away his offences; to "blot them out," as we read elsewhere. Sin remains as a witness against us, and only God can blot it out. This is what we mean by Absolution. But David goes even further. It is a bold prayer, an awful prayer: "Wash me thoroughly"—more and more. Have we courage to pray thus? Alas! we soon cry out. III. THE GROUNDS ON WHICH HE ASKS FOR PARDON. 1. There is the multitude of God's mercies. Each day we live in an argument in our favour. God sent me here; God has rescued me so often; God is always helping me; though I fall, I shall not be cast away. Hope is a great power. We seem like people forced to climb higher and higher up the face of the cliff by the sea driven in before the gale. It seems impossible to climb any further, and the spray is dashing in their faces, and the rock quivers to its base as the waves are shivered upon it. And then they find, it may be, at their feet, grass and flowers in the cleft of the rock, which could only grow above the highest water-mark, and at once they feel there is hope, and with hope comes an access of strength. So there are flowers in the lives of all of us here, which could only grow at a height above the devouring level of mortal sin. Let us hope. 2. He has told God everything; he has concealed nothing. 3. He acknowledges the true relation of sin to God. It is not the injury done to Uriah or to society; it is the insult done to God. God knows how weak we are. "Behold, I was shapen in wickedness;" and therefore "the truth in the inward parts" can only be reached when the plenitude of mercy touches the magnitude of sin. (Canon Neubolt.) *David's repentance*:—I. THE CRY OF CONTRITION. Like a perfect master of medicine, unfolding in his clinical teaching, feature after feature of the special case under treatment till the very hereditary taint is manifest, David searches out this worst sickness; like the stern, skilful prosecutor summing up the damning evidence against a criminal, David lays bare fact after fact of his unmitigated guilt; like a faithful, solemn judge according just recompense to the evil-doer, David pronounces on himself the penalty of God's righteous law. II. THE CRY FOR CLEANSING. This cry for cleansing is twofold—cleanse the record, cleanse myself. Two faces are bent over the proofs of his sin—God's and David's. From each gazer these sins must be hidden—from the one that there may be no condemnation, from the other that there may be full consolation. Cleanse me, wash me, make me whiter than snow. What orderliness, what Spirit-taught wisdom in this prayer! A polluted stream may be run off, but a poisoned spring must be cured. The wells of Marah and the springs of Jericho call for their Maker's hand. So does my heart. What a terrible but fruitful view of sin! III. THE CRY OF CONSECRATION. These new powers shall not be wasted. The new heart and the new spirit long for work. This fresh and unstinted grace to David fills his soul with thankfulness, and thankfulness embodies itself in toil for God and man. Praise is not wanting. But words surpass words. Grace from God always produces giving to God. Labour is as love, and love is as forgiveness. Where there is no condemnation there should be full consecration. (J. S. Macintosh, D.D.) *The prayer of the penitent*:—I. THE PRAYER. It was both general and specific. He desired mercy, and he desired it to be specifically manifested in several ways, which he enumerates. 1. The general petition. "Have mercy upon me." Ho

did not plead right or merit; he did not plead a mitigation of the righteous law of God. He knew exactly what he needed; and so, like the publican, he sent the arrow of his prayer straight to the mark of his need. 2. The specific petition. (1) "Blot out my transgressions." All of them; the covetousness, the adultery, the murder. To blot out carries with it the idea primarily of forgiveness (Isa. xliii. 25; xlv. 22). (2) "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity." This is a prayer for justification, as the former petition was for forgiveness. Forgiveness is an act of the gracious and sovereign will of God; but to justify a man from his iniquity is to do so on the ground of some expiation. Hence David's allusion to the ceremonial law (vor. 7). (Compare Lev. xiv. 4, 9; Num. xix. 18; Heb. ix. 22.) The allusion may be illuminated if we remember the word of Isaiah to sinful Israel (Isa. i. 18), and the ascription of praise to the Lord Jesus (Rev. i. 5). (3) "Cleanse me from my sin." This is a prayer for sanctification. Sin is an offence against God, against the law, and it leaves a stain deep and dark on our souls. God's mercy provides for this also, and we are assured of such cleansing (Eph. v. 25-27).

II. THE CONFESSION. 1. Frank acknowledgment. No excuses; no justification. "I have sinned"—that is the long and the short of it. He did not lay the blame on Bathsheba, as Adam on Eve. 2. A standing offence. Unforgiven sin is before us and before God; but forgiven sin is cast behind God's back, and is among the things upon which we also may turn our backs. 3. An offence against God. God was more wronged even than man, and while no doubt he sorrowed that he had wronged his friend and his friend's wife, he most bitterly grieved that he had wronged God in them. 4. Deep conviction. "Behold I was shapen in iniquity," etc. David is convinced that an inherent depravity of nature is the evil root from which all sin springs. So herein he confesses his sinful nature as well as his sinful deeds. It is out of the heart that all evil proceeds. Hence his further prayer, "Behold Thou desirest truth in the inward parts," etc. In this we have a strong hint of regeneration. The nature that is spoiled by sin must be renewed inwardly.

III. RENEWED PETITION. He repeats his prayer for purging and washing, just as oftentimes, even after we are forgiven, the memory of the bitter sins still remains, and we are in some doubt whether it is all gone. It is like the burning of a wound that is healed. It is the sign of returning health; the desire of the soul for an after-bath in the cleansing tide. 1. Joy and gladness. 2. He prays for a new heart. 3. He prays for the restoration of salvation's joy. 4. A vow of consecration. (*G. F. Pentecost, D.D.*) *A petition and an argument*:—I. THE PETITION. "Have mercy upon me," etc. 1. Forgiveness of sin is mainly desirable of every sinner. (1) It frees us from the greatest evil—sin. (2) It entitles us to the greatest good—forgiveness. (3) It comforts in the greatest afflictions incident to us. (4) It sweetens all other comforts. 2. This serves to stir up our affections and desires in this particular. 3. And the sooner we do this, the better. It is not good or safe for any to suffer sin to be festering in their souls, but to be rid of it as soon as may be, and of the guilt adherent to it; by humiliation of themselves before God, and seeking to Him. (1) Confession and acknowledgment of miscarriages. (2) Prayer and seeking to God. (3) Forsaking it and turning from it. (4) Forgiveness of others. By these, and the like means, we see how we may attain to this mercy of pardon and forgiveness of our sins. II. THE ARGUMENT. "According to thy lovingkindness," etc. 1. Here is something supposed; viz. that there is in God lovingkindness and a multitude of tender mercies. (1) Lovingkindness, i. e. grace (Ps. cxvi. 5; lxxxvi. 15; cxlv. 9). Here is matter of praise and acknowledgment. We may take notice of it also in a way of information, that we may be able rightly to discern of God's love and affection to us; we cannot judge of it by His kindness, for that is general and common to all; and there are none (though never so bad) but they do in a degree partake of it, thereby to stop their mouths against Him, and to leave them without excuse. God's kindness is a lesson to us, to teach us to follow His example. (2) Mercy or compassion. (a) The tenderness of God's mercy is seen in—(i.) His prudent consideration of the state and condition of the person who sins against Him (Ps. cxiii. 13). (ii.) His deferring and forbearing to punish and correct, where, notwithstanding, there is ground for it (Ps. lxxxvi. 15; Joel ii. 13; Jonah iv. 2; Nahum i. 3). (iii.) The moderating of His corrections (Jer. xxx. 11). Severity knows no limits when once it begins; but tenderness puts a restraint upon itself; and this also is in God (Ps. cxiii. 10; Ezra ix. 13). (iv.) The seasonable removal; there's tenderness in that also (Ps. cxiii. 9). (b) The greatness of it (Ps. lvii. 10; cxix. 156). (i.) In regard of the object of it. It extends to the pardoning and forgiving of great sins (Isa. i. 18; 1 Tim. i. 13). (ii.) For the free-

ness of it (Rom. ix. 17; Isa. xliii. 25). (iii.) For the duration (Isa. liv. 7, 8; Ps. ciii. 17; Lam. iii. 22). (c) The number and plurality. He has mercy for— (i.) Many persons. (ii.) Many offences. (iii.) Many times of offending (Isa. lv. 7; James ii. 13; Rom. v. 20; Hosca xiv. 4; Ps. ciii. 3).

2. The inference. (1) Our knowledge of God is then right, and as it should be, when it is improved and drawn down to practice and our own spiritual comfort and advantage. (2) The best of us stand in need of mercy in their approaches to God. (3) Great sinners require great mercies for the pardoning and forgiving of them (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) *The psalmist's prayer for mercy*:—I. TO WHOM THE PRAYER IS ADDRESSED. He does not address himself to God under the name Jehovah; but makes use of the plural title, which is commonly employed in Scripture when the gracious intercourse of Deity with fallen creatures is spoken of. The title implies the covenant relation to sinful man which God has been pleased to reveal through Jesus Christ our Lord. In our Litany mercy is implored by the use of this title from each of the three Persons in the adorable Trinity separately; and from the Trinity, as three in One.

II. THE OBJECT WHICH A PENITENT SINNER PROPOSES TO HIMSELF IN DRAWING NEAR TO GOD; AND THE SPIRIT OR FRAME OF MIND IN WHICH HE ADDRESSES HIM. A recovery of Divine favour is the grand object of desire to those who are made conscious of its value and of its forfeiture. "In Thy favour is life." Guilt, natural and acquired, constitutes the impenetrable veil which separates between God and the contrite sinner; and the mediation of Christ, the light of life, is regarded as the only agency by which the dense veil can be swept away.

III. THE MEASURE OR RULE, ACCORDING TO WHICH A PENITENT SINNER DESIRES TO BE DEALT WITH IN THE EXPECTED ANSWER TO HIS PRAYER. "According to Thy lovingkindness." How delightful is this co-operation of the persons of the Godhead in effecting the salvation of sinners! The grace of the Father provided and has accepted the needful atonement; the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished the work of propitiation; and the grace of the Holy Ghost enables us to pray for an interest in that atonement, and then reveals it, in all its freedom and sufficiency, to the afflicted heart. Thus is the life that is restored to a sinner, in every point of view, "the life of God in the soul of man." The term "lovingkindness" seems literally to import a confluence of streams to form one vast river. And is not this the view which faith takes of Divine grace—a river deep and wide which is formed by a confluence of all the perfections of the Godhead? Omnipotence, omniscience, infinite justice and holiness all flow into this "river of the water of life." (*T. Biddulph, M.A.*) *The greatness of sin to a true penitent*:—1. The true penitent sees sin as against God. 2. The penitent sees in his sin a corruption of nature. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity." 3. The penitent acknowledges that all his religious acts are a mockery of God. "Thou desirest not sacrifice. . . Thou delightest not in burnt offering." If religious acts, offerings, prayers, labours, penances, could cover sin, how gladly would he bring them! We have made clean the outside. God desireth truth in the inward parts. 4. The penitent sees that sin deprives him of joy, and thus of spiritual power. 5. The penitent sees his sin as destructive to the Church. To the opened eyes of David his sin had, as it were, thrown down the walls of Zion. "Build thou," he prays, "the walls of Jerusalem!" Every backslider's sin has this destroying power. 6. The true penitent offers no extenuation for sin. Beware of palliations. They may exist. Let others find them. Let God allow for them if He will. But in the penitent they always indicate that the work in him has not been thorough. 7. The penitent sees that the evil of sin is its sinfulness. He felt himself, by his sin, separated from God. 8. The penitent sees that public sin demands a full and public confession. Perhaps there are sins in our lives, which in our confessions we have slighted. They were known to others; they had publicity. And men who knew us said, "If he ever repents he will confess that sin. That shall be the test with us of the genuineness of his repentance." But we did not confess. We tried. Often it troubles us. 9. The true penitent justifies God in His judgment upon sin. 10. The penitent acknowledges that sin requires a great remedy. He needed inward cleansing. "Purge me with byssop" refers to the Levitical sacrifice which prefigured the atonement. Only when we make sin great do we give the sacrifice of Christ its due honour. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *The prayer of the Penitent*:—I. THE GUILT OF SIN. Titles of lighter meaning have been substituted in its place—"vice" as though it were merely an evil against self alone; "crime" or an offence against society. All such subtleties are simply a glossing over of what is a moral evil in its relations to God. You cannot touch man without touching God; cannot wrong him without

wronging God. II. **THE DIVINE FORGIVENESS.** Between blinding one's eyes against the guilt of sin and seeking infinite mercy to overcome such guilt, there is almost an infinite remove. It exalts the Divine character to know His readiness to forgive sin, while at the same time God can be justified when he speaks, and be clear when He judges. III. **THE NEW HEART.** There must be more than the outward cleansing of the cup to make it clean. All things must become new in the new creature in Christ Jesus. IV. **THE FRUITS OF THE NEW LIFE.** 1. He seeks first the personal rest freed from the goadings of his sin. He longs for the joy he once had, but which is now lost. He seeks a strength other than his own. 2. He recognizes the connection between the character of the leaders and the followers in the service of God. "Then will I teach transgressors," etc. (*David O. Mearns*.) *The moan of a king*:—The prayers of the Bible are among its sublimest treasures. Prayer does not set forth merely what I am, but what I would be; it is my ideal life; it is a glimpse and a struggling after a higher mode of being. "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." Mark the thoroughness of this desire. Not only must sin be blotted out, but the sinner himself must be washed and cleansed. There must not be merely a change of state, but a change of nature. Not only must the debt be forgiven, but all disposition to contract further debt must be eradicated. David at the outset of the psalm appeals for mercy. No penitent asks for justice. The Pharisee may, not the publican. But for sin we should never have known the merciful side of the Divine government. We should have known nothing but law. As we are indebted to the storm for the rainbow, so we are indebted to sin for the better boon of earth-encircling mercy. "I acknowledge my transgressions." Confession is a necessary basis for forgiveness, and is a convergence of right judgment, right feeling, right action. But there are many kinds of expression which are wholly unavailing. As the selfish confession of the criminal who turns king's evidence. The defiant confession of the man who glories in his crime. The careless confession made with an air of indifference and is insensible of the turpitude of his crime. But David's is far other than these. "My sin is ever before me." The point to be noted here is the distinct personal relation which every man sustains to his own sin. Try for a moment to embody sin. Personify iniquities! Let each transgression assume material manifestation. Covetousness—a lean, gaunt, spectral image; with outstretched bony fingers; with eager eyes, in which is written the expression of an insatiable hunger. Look at that and call it your sin. Unholy anger, with swollen lips and fire-lit eyes, and heaving breast; oaths and blasphemies might well burn on such lips and glare out of such eyes. That unholy anger is yours (ver. 4). "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned." Some sins exclusively against God, others against man also; but none are exclusively against man. But whosoever sins against man sins against God. Let all oppressors heed this. While it is true, therefore, that you can sin against God without directly sinning against man, yet it is equally true that you cannot sin against God without diminishing your power to promote the highest interests of man; so that sin is an enemy in every respect—hateful to God, hurtful to man, darkening the heavens, burdening the earth! What shall be our prayer in relation to it? "Wash me thoroughly," etc. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The penitent sinner*:—I. **THE PENITENT'S PRAYER.** 1. A prayer of pity. Three ways of treating sin: indifference, severity, mercy. God's way, as revealed specially by Christ, unites both justice and mercy. 2. A prayer for pardon. Sin must be blotted out before peace can be restored. 3. A prayer for purification. There is here a recognition—(1) Of his perilous position; and (2) Of his personal accountability: "my sin." II. **THE PENITENT'S PLEA.** He does not plead past purity, pious parentage, public position, princely prowess; but the plenitude of God's mercy. A "multitude" of tender mercies! (*Homilist*.) *Lessons*:—1. To fly to God is the only true way to find comfort in the time of spiritual distress. (1) There is a commandment for it (Ps. l. 15). (2) There is a promise of success (Isa. lxx. 24). (3) There is ability in God to give a gracious issue to all our distresses (Prov. xviii. 8; Eph. iii. 20). (4) He is ready both to be found and to afford that which is desired (Psa. xli. 1; Micah vii. 18; Ps. cxlv. 18). (5) Because He would have all His diligent in this course, He hath furnished them with the Spirit of prayer (Gal. iv. 6; Rom. viii. 26). 2. The mercy of God in the pardon of sin is a blessing of exceeding worth. It is the hungry soul that can best judge of the worth of good. It is he which lieth sick upon his couch, and not able to stir for weakness, that can tell the worth of health. When thy soul is pained with the horror of sin, then thou wilt be fit to apprehend the truth of this doctrine, and then thou wilt need but little quickening

to this kind of suit. 3. In forgiving of sin, there is an utter abolishment on God's part of the guilt of sin (Ps. xxxii. 1, 2; Isa. xlv. 22; Micah vii. 18, 19; Jer. xxxi. 34; l. 20). 4. Man hath no plea but the freedom of God's grace in making suit for the pardon of his sins (Ps. cxxx. 4; Ezra ix. 8, 10, 15). (S. Hieron.) *The prayer for mercy*.—1. The true suppliant believes that there is mercy with God. This is the greatest wonder of the Divine being. The omniscience of God is a wonder. The omnipotence of God is a wonder. God's spotless holiness is a wonder. None of these things can we understand. But the greatest wonder of all is the mercy of God. In heaven men are humbled at the thought of it, and never cease to adore and thank God for His mercy. For there God is known as the Holy One. 2. The suppliant also feels that he has need of mercy; that nothing but free grace alone can be his hope. 3. He desires also that mercy may be shown to him. That God is merciful, he cries, that I know there is great mercy with God, that there is mercy for all can still bring me no rest. What I need to make the anxious heart peaceful is, that I should know God is merciful to me. Be merciful to me, yes, to me, O God of mercy. 4. This longing is in full harmony with what God's Word teaches us on these points. The Word speaks always of finding mercy, obtaining mercy, receiving mercy, partaking of mercy, having mercy; and looked at from the side of God as an action, it is called giving mercy, showing mercy. (Andrew Murray.) *God's lovingkindness*.—God's kindness is more than ordinary, and more than extraordinary; it must be called "loving." The kindness is loving, and the love is kind. There is no love like His, no kindness like His. All kindness but this, if you use it often, wears out. However great the kindness of a neighbour be, if you keep daily drawing upon it you will soon exhaust it. The kindness of a friend has limits which are soon reached and passed. The kindness of a father or a mother—for that is the kindest that this world possesses—that, even that, has its limits. God's kindness is loving. It is the strong band of love that makes it so long and so lasting. You cannot break that cord, it is so fine and yet so strong. (T. Alexander, M.A.) *According unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions*.—*God's mercy*.—The greatest comfort that Christians have in their trouble is, that they have to do with a merciful God, and not rigorous, nor one who will chide with us continually, but one who is slow to anger, ready to forgive, whose name is mercy, whose nature is merciful, who hath promised to be merciful, who is the Father of mercies. The earth is full of His mercies, they are above the heavens and the clouds; His mercy is above all His works, extending to a thousand generations, whose mercy endureth for ever. (I. Symeon.) *God's tender mercies*.—They are unbounded, and they are "tender." Our mercy is not tender. What little mercy you find in man is often harsh and hard. It is a common saying among us, "I forgive, but I do not forget." There is often harshness, hardness, unkindness in the way in which our mercy is bestowed. And even when that is not so, but when man bestows his kindness and vouchsafes his mercy in his blindest way, you could never think of calling it "tender." But God forgives; and when He forgives He does it tenderly. There is no upbraiding. He blots out the transgression, and there is no more remembrance of it at all. He forgets as soon as He forgives. It is done in a gentle way. "Be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." The sin is swept away; it is cast behind His back into the depths of the sea. God's mercies are very tender. And then they are a multitude. Tender in their nature, they are a multitude in their number. They are numberless, measureless, endless. Like the stars, man cannot count them. Like the grains of sand that cushion yonder wave-beaten shore, no man knows how many they be. God's mercies, beginning with our birth, are heaped up around and upon us all day long, and all through our life journey. (T. Alexander, D.D.) *God's former dealings a plea for mercy*.—These words, "According to Thy lovingkindness and tender mercies," may be taken not only absolutely but respectively in reference to his own former experiences of the goodness of God towards him. David had found and felt how gracious God had been to him in former time, in divers mercies which He had bestowed upon him in several kinds and ways; and more particularly in the pardoning and forgiving of sin unto him, and in the assuring of him also of this pardon; and now he deals with God upon terms of His wonted goodness, which he desires still may be continued to him. This shows us the advantage of God's children in this particular, that they can deal with God upon the account of former goodness; that having justified their persons in general, He should remit their special transgression to them; and having forgiven them the sins of their nature, He should therefore consequently

forgive to them likewise the sins of their lives. The reason of it is this, because He is still like Himself, and changes not, so that he that hath done the one, will not stoick to do the other with it; God's mercies are so linked and chained together that we may reason in this manner from them. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) "*Blot out my transgressions*":—The general prayer for mercy is not enough. The Lord desires that we should know and say what we would have mercy to do for us. And the first thing is this, "According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." The law of God takes reckoning of every transgression that we commit. In the great account-book of heaven they stand against us as a record of our guilt. David knew that there could be no intercourse with the holy and righteous God so long as this old guilt was not abolished, was not blotted out. He knew that mercy could not convert or change the sinner, or bring him to heaven, unless his guilt was first blotted out. The wrath of God must first be appeased. The old guilt of the past must first be taken out of the way. The sinner must have acquittal and the forgiveness of his sins. This is the first work of Divine grace. Without this, God the Holy Judge cannot receive the sinner into His friendship; and therefore he prays, "Have mercy upon me. Blot out my transgressions." (*Andrew Murray.*) *Sin blotted out*.—A boy ran in to his mother one day after he had read that promise, "I will blot out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions." And he said: "Mother, what does God mean when He says He will blot out my sins? What is He going to do with them? I can't see how God can really blot them out and put them away. What does it mean—blot out?" The mother, who is always the best theologian for a child, said to the boy, "Didn't I see you yesterday writing on your slate?" "Yes," he said. "Well, show it to me." He brought his slate to his mother, who, holding it out in front of him, said, "Where is what you wrote?" "Oh," he said, "I rubbed it out." "Well, where is it?" "Why, mother, I don't know." "But how could you put it away if it was really there?" "Oh, mother, I don't know. I know it was there, and it is gone." "Well," she said, "that is what God meant when He said, 'I will blot out thy transgressions.'" (*Campbell Morgan, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.*—*David's cry for pardon*.—I. How DAVID THOUGHT OF HIS SIN. The repetition of these petitions show his earnestness of soul. In like manner he asks for the gifts of God's Spirit. 1. He speaks of transgressions, the individual acts of sin; and then—2. Of the iniquity which is the centre and root of them all. Further, in all the petitions we see that the idea of his own single responsibility for the whole thing is uppermost in David's mind. It is my transgression, it is mine iniquity and my sin. He has not learned to say with Adam of old, and with some so-called wise thinkers to-day, "I was tempted, and I could not help it." He does not talk about "circumstances," and say that they share the blame with him. He takes it all to himself. The three words which the psalmist employs for sin give prominence to different aspects of it. Transgression is not the same as iniquity, and iniquity is not the same as sin. "Transgression" literally means rebellion, a breaking away from and setting oneself against lawful authority. "Iniquity" literally means that which is twisted, bent. "Sin" literally means missing a mark, an aim. Think how profound and living is the consciousness of sin which lies in calling it rebellion. It is not merely, then, that we go against some abstract propriety, or break some impersonal law of nature when we do wrong, but that we rebel against a rightful Sovereign. Not less profound and suggestive is that other name for sin, that which is twisted, or bent, mine "iniquity." It is the same metaphor which lies in our own word "wrong," that which is wrung or warped from the straight line of right. David had the pattern before him, and by its side his unsteady purpose, his passionate lust had traced this wretched scrawl. Another very solemn and terrible thought of what sin is lies in that final word for it, which means "missing an aim." How strikingly that puts a truth which we are for ever tempted to deny. Every sin is a blunder as well as a crime. Sin ever misses its aim. It is a temptress that seems so fair, and when he reaches her side, and lifts her veil, eager to embrace the tempter, a hideous skeleton grins and gibbers at him. Yes! every sin is a mistake, and the epitaph for the sinner is "Thou fool." II. How HE THINKS OF FORGIVENESS. As the words for sin expressed a threefold view of the burden from which the psalmist seeks deliverance, so the triple prayer, in like manner, shows that it is not merely pardon for which he asks. Forgiveness and cleansing run into each other in his prayer as they do in our own experience.

for they are inseparable one from the other. The first petition regards the Divine dealing with sin as being the erasure of a writing, perhaps of an indictment. Our past is a blurred manuscript, full of false things and bad things. And we want God to blot them out. Ah! some people tell us that the past is irrevocable, that the thing once done can never be undone, that the life's diary written by our own hands can never be cancelled. Thank God, we know better than that. We know who blots out the handwriting "that is against us, nailing it to His cross." We know that of God's great mercy our future may "copy fair our past," and the past may be all obliterated and removed. Then there is another idea in the second of these prayers for forgiveness, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity." The word expresses the antique way of cleansing garments by treading and beating. He is not praying for a mere declaration of pardon, he is not asking only for the one complete, instantaneous act of forgiveness, but he is asking for a process of purifying which will be long and hard. "I am ready," says he in effect, "to submit to any sort of discipline, if only I may be clean. Wash me, beat me, tread me down, hammer me with mallets, dash me against stones, rub me with smarting soap and caustic nitre—do anything, anything with me, if only those foul spots melt away from the texture of my soul." A solemn prayer, if we pray it aright, which will be answered by many a sharp application of God's Spirit, by many a sorrow, by much very painful work, both within our own souls and in our outward lives, but which will be fulfilled at last in our being clothed like our Lord in garments which shine as the light. The deliverance from sin is still further expressed by that third supplication, "Cleanse me from my sin." He thinks of it as if it were a leprosy, incurable, fatal, and capable of being cleansed only by the great High Priest, and by His finger being laid upon it. III. WHENCE COMES THE CONFIDENCE FOR SUCH A PRAYER. His whole hope rests upon God's character as revealed in the multitude of His tender mercies. This is the blessedness of all true penitence, that the more profoundly it feels our own sore need and great sinfulness, in that very proportion does it recognize the yet greater mercy and all-sufficient grace of our loving God, and from the lowest depths beholds the stars in the sky, which they who dwell amid the surface-brightness of the noonday cannot discern. (A. Mac-laren, D.D.) *The repentance of David*.—I. THE MEANS WHICH WON HIM TO IT. It was the preacher's voice. How wretched, how fearful, how nigh unto reprobation was his state ere Nathan came to him. And now he breaks down like the snow-wreath when the sun looks full upon it. II. THE SIGNS WHICH MARK HIS SINCERITY. They are—1. That the one thought which fills his soul is, "I have sinned against the Lord." True, he had sinned against man as well as God, yet, because the aspect of his sin as committed against God was so much more terrible and awful to him that it filled up the whole field of his view, and he could see nothing else. 2. And he sees his sin in all its hugeness and vileness. There is no diminishing or excusing it, no paring it down. 3. He takes willingly the disgrace of his sin; and—4. Its punishment. But whilst he asks not deliverance from these, there is a cry—5. The cry for cleansing. "Create in me a clean heart," etc. 6. He turns straight to God, clinging to Him, even in this hour of shame. 7. His one terror is lest he be cast away from God's presence. 8. There is the devotion of all his after life to God's service. III. CONCLUSION. 1. Have you ever trembled under the word of God? 2. Are these marks of true repentance visible in you? Go over them one by one. 3. Seek the blessing of true repentance by prayer to God for it; it is His gift. It is the work of that "free Spirit" which is Christ's special gift. Until that heavenly dew falls upon thy soul, it will be, must be, dry and cold, and bare. Thou canst not work thyself into penitence. But when that gracious shower is poured upon the heart, all is done. Then the voice of the turtle is heard. Then the heart mourns apart. It is like the breaking up of some mighty northern frost, which has bound the swelling sea fast beneath its iron band, when the western gale has breathed upon it, and the hard, thick-ribbed ice-crest has broken up as a cobweb under the grasp of a giant. And then all is changed; on the ocean's breast the mighty currents wake again into life, bearing on and on to the frozen north the life-giving streams of southern waters; and as the warm gales breathe on the snowy plains of the neighbouring shore, the long-banished verdure flashes again into colour and beauty, and the sweet spring comes on apace, the birds begin their songs, the fountains awake; and every blade and leaf, with all the tribes of life around them, rejoice before God in the blessed sunlight. And yet, what is all this to the breaking up of the ice-crest which has bound down a living soul for which Christ died? And 2. Remember thy sins. 3. Revenge thy fault

(2 Cor. vii. 11). 4. As thou gazest upon thy sin, gaze more earnestly upon the face of thy Lord who, by His cross, delivers thee from thy sin. (*Bishop S. Wilberforce.*) A specific plea for pardon:—I. THE KINDS OF SIN are laid down in a variety of expressions: transgression, iniquity, sin. All of them together, for the nature of them, are here exhibited as polluting and defiling. This point sets a price upon the blood of Christ, which "cleanseth us from all sin." II. THE DESIRE AND ENDEAVOUR OF A GRACIOUS HEART; and that is, to be freed and delivered from this defilement. 1. The object specified. "Mine iniquity and my sin." 2. The act propounded, "Wash me," etc. This washing it may be conceived of two sorts. Either first, in reference to justification, "Wash me," that is, free me from the guilt of it; or else secondly, in reference to sanctification, "Wash me" from the defilement. 3. The intention of the act. "Thoroughly." It was not any slight kind of sprinkling which would serve David's turn; no, but he would be washed to purpose; he would have this work complete in him. And here we have still a further property in the true servants of God, which is considerable in them; and that is, to have the work both of forgiveness, and likewise of holiness perfected to them. A good Christian would have nothing left impure or unsanctified in him, but would be sanctified throughout; in his understanding, will, affections, outward man, and where he is any way failing; he would have all corruption cleansed from him, he would be generally and universally good as much as may be; and he sets upon reformation of particulars by reforming in general. The reason of it is this—(1) Because one sin draws on another, in the nature of the thing itself; sins seldom go alone, but have more at the heels of them. (2) Because the heart of man, being polluted and defiled with sin, is now ready and prone to more; so long as there's any corruption left at the bottom in us, we are never secure from the actings of it at one time or other; and if it chance not to break out now, yet at another time we are sure to hear of it. 4. The vehemency of the affection. "Wash me, . . . and cleanse me." We should be importunate with God in such petitions, and not easily be put off from them. III. THE MANNER AND PRACTICE OF GOD AS TO FORGIVENESS AND HOLINESS. And that is, to go through with them. 1. Forgiveness is an utter abolition of all kinds of guilt (Ps. xxxii. 1, 2; Isa. xlv. 22; xxxviii. 17; Jer. xxxi. 34; Micah vii. 18, 19). 2. So as to sanctification; God is also complete in this work, He works thoroughly. (1) He works in His servants a thorough fight of that evil which is in their hearts, the general corruption of their whole nature. (2) He works in them also a thorough hatred and detestation of all sin, so as to allow of no evil at all in themselves. (3) He gives sin its mortal wound and death-blow in them; from whence, though it be not absolutely dead, yet it is dying still in them. (4) He will also one day, and at the last, wholly and absolutely free them from sin. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) *Deliverance from iniquity and sin sought:*—I. THE EVILS FROM WHICH A TRUE PENITENT IMPLEORES DELIVERANCE. Sin is imputed, it is communicated, and it is committed. II. THE NATURE OF THE DELIVERANCE WHICH THE PENITENT IMPLEORES. The blessing of purification from the love and power of sin always accompanies deliverance from its guilt; and as these blessings are never separated, the one from the other, in a communication of grace, so are desires after them always united in the experience and prayers of penitent sinners. Is it not wisdom to submit to the means which are necessary for restoration to health, though those means may be, for a time, painful and distressing? (*T. Biddulph, M.A.*)

Ver. 3. **For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.**—*Acknowledgment of transgression:*—I. THE PROPOSITION. "I acknowledge my transgressions," etc. 1. Simply and absolutely. (1) There's the mental acknowledgment in the mind, so as to own it. This was one thing which David here did, as an example to all other converts; he owned that iniquity which was in him. And there's two things more which belong to this—(a) An acknowledgment of that to be sin which indeed is sin. (b) An acknowledgment of his own interest in that sin. Now, the improvement which we may make of this observation to ourselves is, to meet with the miscarriage of most men in each particular. First, there's a great deal of wilful blindness, from whence they will not acknowledge that to be sin, which indeed is so. And secondly, there's a great deal of pride and self-flattery, from whence they will not acknowledge themselves to be guilty of it. (2) The second is verbal, in the mouth to confess it. Wherever there is a true owning to sin, there will be also an ingenuous confession (Ps. xxxii. 5). This is a practice which God requires of us upon a double consideration. First, in reference to Him—



self, as bringing honour and glory to Him, for so it does (Josh. vii. 10). By confession we give glory to God, and that in sundry particulars—in His omniscience, in His justice, in His power, and so of the rest. Now, because we do so, therefore confession is very pertinently required of us. Then secondly, also in reference to ourselves, in two particulars. First, as a disburdening of conscience. Secondly, as an engagement against sin for time to come. 2. The reduplication of it in these words: "And my sin is ever before me." Now, this passage does express unto us the condition of a sinner at large; and it may admit of a threefold notion in which it holds good. David's sin might be said to be before him three manner of ways. (1) In a way of temptation; it is before me, so as to provoke me and to allure me to evil. (2) In a way of distraction; it is before me, so as to disturb me and hinder me in good. (3) In a way of computation; it is before me, so as to accuse me and to condemn me for guilt. II. THE CONNEXION. "For." 1. Take it as an account of importunity. "For I acknowledge," etc. The more any one sees his sin, the more will he be humbled for it, and sue to God for the forgiveness of it (2 Sam. xxiv. 10; Ps. xxv. 11). Look as it is in the body, the more a man is sensible of his sickness, the more will he look after his physician; even so it is also in the soul, the more a man sees these his spiritual distempers, the more will he beg the removing of them. (1) It shows us the cause why so few there are in the world which do really mind such petitions as these are; or such practices as these are of humiliation, and begging of pardon; why, it is because they are not indeed sensible of the condition in which they are. (2) It shows also what is the best and readiest course whereby to make either ourselves or others affected with sin, and to be brought to humiliation for it. And that is, by working in them a true sight and apprehension of it. 2. An argument for mercy on God's part. As if he had said, Lord, it is time now for Thee to pardon me, for I acknowledge my trespassing against Thee. And so there is this in it, that where sin is most owned, it will be there soonest pardoned (Ps. xxxii. 5). That which God chiefly works at in us is, to bring down our stomachs, and to cause us to submit to Himself; now, when this is once done in us, then there's an end, and He has no more to say to us, but is ready to be friends with us. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) *Confession of sins*:—I. THE PERSON TO WHOM WE MUST CONFESS IS GOD. The Scribes and Pharisees, though they were corrupt in many things else, yet they held this for a truth, that none could forgive sins but God only (Mark ii. 7). And this doth the Lord testify of Himself (Isa. xlv. 35; 1 John i. 9). Besides the precepts in the Word of God, there is recorded the repentance of God's children, who have humbly acknowledged their sins before God as Manasses (2 Chron. xxxiii.); David (2 Sam. ii. 11); the Prodigal Son (Luke xv.). So true is that saying (Prov. xxviii. 13). II. THE MANNER IN WHICH WE MUST CONFESS OUR SINS. 1. We must take heed that we do know our transgressions, the number of them, the greatness of them, the danger of them, how they make us most vile in the sight of God. Now, there is a twofold knowledge of our sin; first, general; second, special. General knowledge never worketh any reformation, for this is found in all men that can say they are sinners; but there is a special knowledge of sin which God will once discover unto us, either in mercy to our good and salvation, as here, to David, to Peter, to Mary Magdalen, etc., or else in wrath, as He did to Judas, Cain, Ahithophel, etc., to their final condemnation. 2. Our confession of our sins must proceed from sorrow of heart for them, with a hatred of them, so as nothing do more grieve us than our offences. 3. It must be frank and free, not wrung out by compulsion. We must be as forward and as ready to confess them to the glory of God, as we were to commit them to His dishonour (Ps. xxxii. 5). 4. We must confess our sins with purpose to forsake them (Isa. lv. 7). (*S. Smith.*) *Of the duty of confession*:—I. THE NECESSITY OF THIS DUTY OF CONFESSION. 1. Confession is a considerable part and branch of prayer (Dan. ix. 4, 20; Ezra x. 1). 2. God's glory is much advanced by our confession. He is most exalted in our abasements, and then are His wisdom, and goodness, and holiness, and other His attributes set forth to most advantage, when we humbly acknowledge our own vileness and wretchedness, and that which is the cause of both, our wickedness. 3. Our own interest is concerned in our confession, as that by which our pardon is procured (Ps. xxxiii. 5). The readiest way for the cleansing and healing of a wound or ulcer is to lay it open, to search it to the bottom; to apply corrosives to the dead flesh, and fetch out all the putrefied matter; and so it is with a conscience galled with sin, which, by dissimulation and concealment, may palliate a cure, but not effectually work it without confession. 4. Confession is an evidence of true conversion, and without it there is no assur-

ance of pardon. 5. It is a condition of the new covenant (1 John i. 9). When we repent of our sins, and declare our penitence by a confession of them, then, and not till then, we may challenge pardon upon Gospel-terms; then, and not else, we may appeal to God's faithfulness and justice, as He stands engaged by promise in that covenant to justice and to sanctify us, to forgive the guilt, and to release us from the penalty of our sins; to cleanse us from the filth, and to free us from the power and dominion of them. Otherwise those attributes of His, His truth and His righteousness, will oblige Him to condemn us with our sins, and to punish us for them, and not to accept us in them, or forgive them to us without confession. 6. It is a qualification which is to virtuate the sacraments themselves, and make them effectual to us. Now, the sacraments are seals of that covenant, whereby it is confirmed to us, and the benefits and advantages of it are derived and conveyed unto us in the pardon of our sins, and God's gracious acceptance of us. II. AFTER WHAT MANNER IT MAY BE PERFORMED, SO AS BEST TO ANSWER AND MAKE GOOD THOSE ENDS. 1. Let thy confession of thy sins be open, and free, and plain as thou canst make it, with a declaration of all the aggravating circumstances, without any disguise or extenuation; because thou hast to do with a God who sees the secrets and innermost retirements of thy hearts. 2. Let it be sincere, and in good earnest; such as may be accompanied with a hearty sorrow for God's displeasure, which thy sins have procured thee; with a thorough shame for the turpitude of them that they have made thee odious to God, and scandalous to good men; with a perfect heart. 3. Let it be humble, in a prostrate adoration of God in all His gracious and glorious attributes and perfections; and in a due acknowledgment of thy own vileness and sinfulness, weakness and wickedness. (*Adam Littleton, D.D.*) *Man's sin*.—I. A MAN'S SINS ARE HIS IN A SENSE THAT CANNOT BE AFFIRMED OF ANYTHING ELSE HE CALLS HIS OWN. They are—1. Generated by himself. He is the parent, they are his offspring. 2. Like himself. A sinful act is an outward expression of the unseen mind and heart. Hence we affirm he is—3. Himself chargeable with the consequences. II. A MAN WHO IS GUILTY OF SIN IS EVER ANNOYED BY AN ENEMY WHO CONFRONTS HIM. This is—1. A grim fact. Illustrated by the upbraidings of conscience; the unbidden recollections of the past; the tyranny of habit; the force of example. This may be, to say the least of it, a source of—2. Unrest for the present. It is torture for a man to be compelled to face his sins in this way, but it may be a decided—3. Advantage in the future. It makes a man feel his individual responsibility, and induces him to be reconciled to God. III. THE STRENGTH OF A MAN'S SIN CANNOT BE DESTROYED UNLESS HE WILL COMPLY WITH THE CONDITIONS OF DIVINE SALVATION. 1. Confession. 2. Abandonment of sin. 3. Trust in Christ. His mission is "to put away sin." (*R. Hebron.*) *My sin is ever before me*.—*David's repentance*.—I. DAVID KNEW THAT HE HAD SINNED. He says, "My sin is ever before me." It is seen not with the eyes in the head, but with those of the heart. No one could look at David and see his sin, but he could see it. And it had made his heart very bad and black, and whenever he looked down into it, it made him afraid. You have read of haunted houses; he was a haunted man. The murdered Uriah haunted him. He saw his face all ghastly, and his glazed eyes seemed to stare at him. And each time that he thought of his sin, his face turned red with shame, and a new pang of grief wrung his heart. His sin was like one of those portraits which, in whatever part of the room you may be, it seems to be always looking at you. No matter where he was, how he was employed, David's sin was ever before him. If he took up his harp to sing a sad psalm, he saw stains of blood all over his fingers, and the harp only groaned, and he laid it down again. And you remember how Adam, after he had sinned, was afraid to meet the Lord, and hid himself. So David could not find any peace. The song of the birds, the leaves of the trees—all seemed to say to him, "Thy sin, thy sin." Oh, what a hard and bad thing it is to sin! II. BUT DAVID FOUND THE FORGIVING LOVE OF GOD AS GREAT AS ALL HIS SIN. For all the time he prayed to the Lord for pardon. He said that his tears were his meat day and night. He was constantly praying, "Lord, wash me; cleanse me from my sin." God keeps a book of guilt, and David asked Him to blot out all his sin, just as you would like a pen run through a debt that you owed. And the Lord did pardon him, as He only could. Pilate washed his hands, but he could not wash his heart. Jesus can. And He will for us, if we come and ask Him. (*T. Armitage, D.D.*) *The reality of sin*.—1. There is no sort of palliation, no self-deception, no endeavour to equivocate, no attempt to excuse himself to himself, or to gloss over the heinous crime of which he has been guilty. See, on the other hand, how easy men find it to slide into the comfortable assur-

ance that their own case is not so bad after all, that it admits of palliation, that they are no worse than their neighbours, no worse than other men of their own age, position, or calling, or that an equitable judgment must be pronounced over them, which shall take account of their whole lives, balancing the fancied good against the real evil. Now, one of the most fertile sources of this terrible hallucination is the want of a real, true sense of the reality of sin. This want may take various shapes and spring from various causes. We sometimes meet philosophical speculations which go to the practical denial of all moral evil. It is argued that man is a complicated piece of mechanism, an automaton, so to speak, which, placed in given circumstances, will inevitably produce ascertained results; or again, that what we call moral evil is incidental to an imperfect creature gradually struggling onwards and upwards to perfection, the growing pains which, in fact, belong to moral progress. But such theories are not only false to Christianity, but utterly subversive of common morality. Each class, men say, and each age and rank, have their temptations; it is not difficult to argue that the errors to which those who possess them are exposed beyond other men, are not merely innocent in them, but almost necessary to their position. The poor also have their temptations; for which men are always ready to plead their poverty, not merely as a palliation, which it may be, but as an excuse, which it is not. Two of the most common causes of this delusion are to be found in habituation to sin in others, or in habituation to it on our own part. On the one hand, it is very difficult to rise above the conventional standard of the country, class, or society in which we live. On the other, familiarity with evil deadens our sensitiveness to it; the conscience, which could once start back at its approach, as from a deadly reptile, becomes indifferent to it, and even ignorant of its existence. 2. But religion requires from us a conception of wrong-doing distinct from and beyond that which satisfies mere morality. These words, "against Thee only," contain the kernel of the whole matter. Sin is always sin against God. It is wrong-doing regarded in its relation to God. If the word be otherwise used, it is improperly used. And so, evil-doing rises into the conception of sin when we regard God as a living personal God, not a vague abstraction, or a convenient name for the universe, but a real person. But men are tempted much to doubt this, and to resolve the idea of God into one of general laws. Or they persuade themselves, when the faith of the personal God cannot be set aside, that He is too great to notice such trifles as our sins. Or even if He do, has He not made us what we are? and at the worst we have done Him no wrong, though we may have to our fellow-man. But David in this psalm allows none of these pleas. 3. David does not simply confess his sinfulness, but his sin. He does not complain merely of the evil tendencies of a corrupt nature, but refers to a particular act of sin. "Against Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." And so, if our repentance is to be worth anything, it must not waste itself in generalities, it must deal with our sins in detail, it must pick out each sinful appetite, each fault of temper, each form of self-seeking (nay, so far as our memory will serve, every example of their several workings), and spread them all forth before the Lord, with an act of hearty renunciation. Yes, it must ever be not merely, "I am a sinner," but, "I have sinned"; not only, "I am evil," but, "I have done this evil." (W. B. Jones, M.A.) *A penitential vision*:—I. IT IS IN HARMONY WITH THE CREATOR'S DESIGN. The fact that it is inevitable shows this—it is rendered inevitable—1. By the proper exercise of the capacities of our own being. Conscience, memory. 2. By the true use of the Bible. A mirror, a judgment-seat. 3. By the spontaneous thought of God. For "God is love," and what does such a thought so much as fall like the shining of a bright light upon all the dark spots of our life? And God is holy, and who can think of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and not see the guilt of his life before him? 4. By the cross of Christ. II. IT IS ESSENTIAL TO THE CORRECTION OF SIN. 1. Not as a Nemesis. For such there could not be stronger consolation. 2. Not to leave them hopeless. Why? (1) As something ever to deplore. As long as there is life there ought to be a broken spirit. (2) As a beacon ever to warn. The vision of our guilt lets us see the rocks and quicksands where we made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. (3) As a fact ever to humble. (4) As a condition ever to advance. (H. J. Martyn.) *Benefits from calling sins to account*:—1. It is a good means to prepare to true repentance and humiliation for them (Lam. iii. 40). 2. It is a special means to make us hate them, and dislike them, seeing the danger of them, how loathsome they be in God's sight. 3. The remembrance of our sins makes us wary, that we fall not into them again; but our former falls make us to take heed

of falling in time to come. 4. The remembrance of our sins makes us pity other men, because, though they fall dangerously, yet we know we have fallen as well as they, therefore we hope God will give unto them repentance. 5. The continual remembrance of our own sins puts us in mind of God's mercy in the pardon of them; and when men calmly suffer their old sins to pass away and slip out of their minds, they will easily fall into new, and soon forget the mercy of God, and how much they are bound unto Him. Paul gives this excellent example, who, remembering how he had persecuted the Church, said, "Notwithstanding God was merciful unto me," so that the continual remembrance of our sins puts us in mind of God's merciful dealing with us, and must stir us up to thankfulness. (*S. Smith.*)

*Think less of our virtues, more of our sins:*—Our tendency is to do the reverse of this, to think much of our virtues, and very little of our sins. This is natural, but not, therefore, good. I. TO THINK MUCH OF OUR VIRTUES DOES NOT ACCORD WITH THE TEACHING OF CHRIST (Luke xvii. 10). Our Lord intended thus to check in His disciples their over-estimation of their own merits. He discourages any opinion of our merit even in those who had the best pretensions to entertain it (Phil. ii. 12), where "fear and trembling" are enjoined on Christians; the very opposite of all self-satisfaction. And ever in the New Testament the evangelical character is "contrition." We are ever bidden "repent." II. AND SEE HOW PAUL (Phil. iii.) RENOUNCES ALL TRUST IN HIMSELF. In 1 Cor. xv. he says, "I am the least of the apostles, not worthy," etc. (1 Tim. i. 16). III. SELF-ESTEEM IS OPPOSED TO ALL GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR OUR REDEMPTION. Hence we are ever being told that we are all to "grace, not of ourselves, lest," etc. Thus would God bend down and humble all sentiments of merit. (*Archdeacon Paley.*) *Further reasons for thinking more of our sins and less of our virtues:*—I. THERE IS NO OCCASION WHATSOEVER TO MEDITATE UPON OUR VIRTUES. God will not forget them (Heb. vi. 10). We shall not make them any better by thinking of them. But it is not the same with our sins. Thinking on them may lead to effectual repentance, and so the sin of our conduct may, through God's mercy in Christ, be done away. And we may be led thereby to make reparation, so far as we can, for the wrong we have done. And would we have the comfort of religion, it will not be by thinking on our good actions, but by conquering our sins. It is sin and nothing else which spoils our religious comfort. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." II. THE CUSTOM OF VIEWING OUR VIRTUES TENDS TO FILL US WITH FALLACIOUS NOTIONS OF OUR OWN STATE AND CONDITION. III. HAS AN UNFAVOURABLE EFFECT UPON OUR DISPOSITION towards other men (Luke xviii.), the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. Let our sins then be ever before us, as they well may be, for we all have many sins to think of. (*Ibid.*) *The indebtedness of sin:*—"My sin is ever before me." I desire to make this statement as general as possible, and not to confine it to the instance in which it was first uttered. In one sense no single thought or subject can be perpetually in a man's mind. Nobody needs to be told that. The stormiest heart has moments when the tempest is hushed. The most sorrowful life has moments or hours when the weight of the great sorrow is not present, and the man whose conscience is most deeply burdened with guilt has times of calmness and peace. We all know that. Still, "My sin is ever before me," the penitent soul may say to itself; "for I cannot throw off old memories, or be blind and deaf to inner warnings. I cannot help feeling the bitter effects of old errors and follies, of old habits and acts, which cast a dark shadow over my life, and remind me continually that it is I myself who have offended." There are some circumstances, however, which might seem to destroy this permanent sense of evil. 1. Repentance is one of these. One might suppose that if once a man heartily regretted a wrong act or course, it would cease in any sense of the word to be his. He has disowned it. Still, it is not possible to forget our identity with our former selves; it is not possible to think of what we were and of what we did without pain. 2. Again, it may be thought that the pardon of sin would destroy that perpetual bitterness of its remembrance, and that no man who had really been forgiven could say, "My sin is ever before me." If God has forgiven, people may say, If He has, in the language of Scripture, cast our sins into the depths of the sea, why should we fret about them, as if they could be brought to the surface again and laid to our charge? It seems a logical enough argument, but, after all, it does not come to much; for human feeling and human remorse are not governed by figures of speech, such as the casting of sins into the depths of the sea. 3. There is still another circumstance which might seem to justify our forgetting or leaving out of view our sin, and that is when it has been visited with chastening or punishment.

But if neither repentance nor pardon will remove it out of our memory or conscience, neither, finally, will punishment. There is a voice within us which whispers to us, after all our sufferings from our wrong-doing, that it has not ceased to be ours. Penalty for evil-speaking has not taken away the spirit of uncharitableness and malice. "My sin is ever before me" is the voice of true contrition and humility. There is the deed, or crime, or course of sin "ever before me." Repentance has not destroyed it; pardon, though it has brought consolation, has not destroyed it; nor can punishment blot out its bitter memories. (*A. Watson, D.D.*) *The prospect painful but salutary*.—Is that the prospect that is ever before our eyes and minds? Do we train ourselves to think habitually of our faults; our unworthiness; the foolish things we have often said; the hasty, silly, ill-set, conceited, false, unjust, sinful things we have often done? Or would it not be nearer the truth, in the case of many a man, if he were to say, "My eminent abilities and deservings are ever before me; and it shall not be my fault if I do not bring them conspicuously before my fellow-men"? And hence come discontent and ingratitude, envying and grieving at a neighbour's good success; and undutiful murmuring at the appointments of God's providence. Hence comes, too, a self-sufficient spirit far removed from humility. All this and more comes of our looking at our merits rather than at our sins. Look at the other side of the page, and see how the account stands against us as well as for us. Ah, if it were with us more, as it was with David; if we bethought ourselves, oftentimes, of our sins, our failings, our mistakes, our ill-deservings, we should be more humble, more thankful, more content, more earnestly desirous to fly to that Saviour in whom is all sufficiency, and help, and grace! To look back on our past history would effectually take us down from all high thoughts of ourselves; would keep us lowly; would lead us, in our utter helplessness, to the Redeemer's feet! There are many things in Holy Scripture which teach us that however natural it may be, it is not a Christian disposition to be dwelling on our good doings and deservings. For example, our Lord's command, "When ye have done all . . . say, We are unprofitable servants." Paul's, "to save sinners, of whom I am chief." And his charge to us, "Work at your own salvation with fear and trembling." And now, let us think what good we may get through doing as David did, and having our sins ever before us. There is no doubt, the view is not a pleasant one. There is hardly anything that men like less than to be reminded by another of their sins, unless, indeed, it be in very general terms, which do not really touch the conscience. Yet things which are painful are sometimes profitable; and assuredly it is so here. First, it will make us humble to think habitually of the many foolish and wrong things we have done. The habitual contemplation of our sinfulness will also tend to make us thankful to God; to make us contented with our lot; to put down anything like envy in our hearts at the greater success and eminence of others. And now, let us think of something even better and more valuable as resulting from having our sin ever before us, than these things of which we have been thinking. To feel our sinfulness; to have our sins set before us, by God's Spirit, in such a way that it will be impossible to help seeing them, and seeing them as bad as they really are, is the thing that will lead us to Christ; lead us to true repentance on account of our sins; and to a simple trust in Him who "saves His people from their sins." It is good for us to think of our sins. There is no need to think of our good deeds—if, indeed, we have many to think of; we cannot change them now. But to think of our sins may make a great difference upon them. For though the deed remains, yet the sin may be blotted out by true repentance and justifying faith. To think of our merits, and dwell on them, is a mere piece of selfish gratification; but to think of our sins, and dwell upon them in a right spirit, may lead to the most precious practical results. What humble-minded, kindly, charitable, thankful, contented Christian people would all men be, if, to good purpose, they kept their "sin ever before them." Therefore may God help us so to do. (*A. K. H. Boyd, D.D.*) *Sin: a soul-prospect*.—I. A VERY DISTRESSING ONE. Man can look at nothing more terrible. II. INEVITABLE. As certain as the laws of nature bring us light, the laws of convenience and memory will bring up before the eye the hideous forms of sin. III. VERY SALUTARY. 1. It humbles the soul. 2. To reconcile to painful providences. 3. To prepare for the Gospel, whose mission is to tell of Him who "puts away sin." (*Homilist.*) *Sorrow for sin habitual*.—Sorrow for sin is habitual to the regenerate soul. It is mingled with all the exercises of faith in the atonement, and with all his hopes of future glory. The penitent does not wish to be freed from it, if he could be; but

he cannot. He has an hourly remembrancer in his own bosom, while he feels that sin yet dwelleth in him. A continual consciousness of defect in his love to God, the constantly occurring temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh, the failure of spirituality in all his thoughts, words and actions, remind him that he is a sinner, and often bring before his eyes his past transgressions in awful review. This keeps him humble, bows down his soul into the dust before God, and makes the name of Jesus precious to him. Like the sinful woman in the Gospel, he loves much, because much has been forgiven him. (*T. Biddulph, M.A.*) *Upon what condition a working conscience is a blessing*:—It is true in the general that a working conscience is a blessing; but it is only with this caution, that if it be hearkened to. It is possible for us to turn that which in itself is a blessing into a curse. As it is a blessing to have children, yet a man may make them no blessing by the neglect of education. It is a blessing to live under a faithful ministry, yet, through it, if a man be not a good hearer, he may increase his own judgment. It is a blessing to have a friend which, upon every occasion, is apt and ready to admonish; but yet, if a man be like the deaf adder, that stoppeth his ears, he shall but heap up wrath unto himself by that occasion. Look, as God dealeth with whole societies of men in taking away from them the benefit of a powerful ministry, when the same is not hearkened unto; so dealeth He with particular persons in striking a dumbness into the conscience when the voice thereof is not regarded. Thus, then, we are all here taught to take it as a blessing when the conscience shall faithfully present us with the most exact survey of our sins, and so accordingly to use it as a blessing. Be sure never to turn thine eyes from beholding that which thy conscience offereth to thy view; whatsoever thy conscience doth herein, it doth by authority and special commission from God, and as His deputy, and it deserves regard. I do not doubt but while David lived upon earth this particular sin was ever in his sight. What warrant or colour of reason to think that there went a day over David's head, after Nathan had awaked him, in which he thought not upon this fact? what if thou have once or twice, upon the importunity of thy conscience, humbled thyself before the Lord; shall it be any hurt unto thee to renew thy repentance every day? Nay, know it, thy repentance is not sincere, nor unfeigned, if thou once comest to think that which thou hast done by way of repenting is sufficient. Oh, how happy and profitable shall it be for thee to be summoned to a continual reckoning! How will it avail thy soul and break thy heart! How will it season thee with humility! How will it quicken thee unto thankfulness to God, which hath freed thy soul from such a trespass! (*S. Hieron.*)

**Ver. 4. Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.**—*Unimpeachable justice*:—Our subject will be, that both in the condemnation and in the punishment of every sinner God will be justified. Now, concerning such condemned ones, we will speak—I. **OF THE CHRISTIAN WHOSE CONSCIENCE CONDEMNS HIM.** He will make the words of our text his own, and will say, "Thou art justified when Thou speakest, and," etc. For—1. He makes a confession. He owns God's sentence just. And his confession is sincere; abundantly sufficient, without any attempt at extenuation, or promise that he will, of himself, do better. And not only does his confession justify God in condemning him, but—2. There is the fact that God Himself witnessed his crime; "In Thy sight," he owns that it was done. And the witness of his conscience he owns to be true and abundant. 3. The Christian has no doubt about the justice of the punishment, however severe. For he remembers not only what he himself has done, but how he has made others sin. II. **THE CONDEMNATION OF THE UNGODLY.** This is far more terrible. But in it God will be clear. 1. Because of the sinner's own confession. 2. The witnesses that will be against him. 3. And in the sinner's heart there will be no doubt at last as to the righteousness of his punishment. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Actual sin*:—When speaking of original sin we had to prove its existence; but there is no need of that here. No one denies actual sin. But the readiness of this admission is our great difficulty in dealing with this subject. Its familiarity has bred indifference. But in spite of this, let us come to its consideration, and we speak—I. **OF ITS GUILT.** Take the very smallest sin and see its guilt in the fact that it has been committed against God. Thus David viewed his sin. "Against Thee, Thee only," etc. This swallows up all other considerations. We are ever saying that we have not been a great sinner, never injured any man. As if the guilt was great only when man was wronged: the wrong to God being of little moment.

But that a sin is against God—is that in which consists the greatness of its guilt; for, even among men, we measure the guilt of crimes not by the actual injury resulting from them, but by their injurious tendencies. The traitor who has attempted the life of his sovereign—the rebel who has tried to overthrow his authority—are rightly held as guilty when they fail as if they had succeeded. They are punished, not for the harm that their rebellion or their treason has done, but for the harm which rebellion and treason must do if not repressed. Now, what is a sinner but a rebel? He who sins has defied the sovereign authority of his God—he has set the will of the creature against the will of the Creator. But in this, your one small sin against God, you are guilty not only of rebellion, but of ingratitude. You have sinned against a Father who has made you, and preserved you, and blessed you with blessings innumerable. But more than this, there is in your sin against God not only rebellion and ingratitude, but insult. He who sins against God has been guilty of first making to himself an idol god whom he may offend with impunity, one who has eyes that see not, ears that hear not, and hands that smite not him that goeth on still in his wicked way. But you will say you never thought there could have been any harm in such a trifle. But has it ever occurred to you that this very thing that you allege in your excuse is an aggravation of your guilt? For ignorance, such as you plead, is an excuse for sin only where there is no law; where there is a law, there ignorance of that law is a sin, and a great one; it is the sin of refusing to hear God when He speaks. And if it were not so, if sins of ignorance were always guiltless, then there would be a direct bounty upon ignorance; this would be to give a revelation, and, at the same time, to give men the strongest inducement not to read it. But you will plead the force of habit, that you did it unconsciously. But this shows you have gone on in sin, and the plea is rather an aggravation of your guilt. II. THEIR NUMBER—how incalculable. There are three kinds of sin,—sins, namely, of thought, word and deed; and each of these may be committed in two ways—by omission or by commission; and, further, that every sin of commission involves one of omission—that we can never do what we ought not to have done without having left undone what we ought to have done. And now, remembering the searching and comprehensive character of that law of which every transgression is a sin, try and form some remote idea of the number of your offences. And we ask you to compare sin as it appears in God's sight, with sin as it appears in the sight, and as it is pictured in the language of men. How do men generally speak and think of sin? There are some who boast of it. But these are the exceptions, these are open profligates, whom moral and respectable society excommunicates. How, then, do morality and respectability think and speak of sin? Why—provided it offends not against the decencies and the proprieties of life—gently, indulgently, almost respectfully; there is no lack of polite phrases by which society can cloak sins, which, in their native and undisguised grossness it professes to repudiate. Adultery is gallantry; and profligacy is wildness; and profanity is a light way of speaking; infidelity is unsettled ideas about religion; and revenge is high spirit; and drunkenness is conviviality; and heartless and frivolous dissipation is innocent gaiety. And then morality and respectability have favourite vices which they will introduce to you as virtues—avarice is carefulness; and selfishness is prudence; and deceit is politeness; and wasteful luxury is hospitality; and pride is becoming self-respect—until, if you would believe them, you would be persuaded that sin was almost banished from good society, and that certainly there was no such thing to be found there as a "miserable sinner." (*Archbishop Magee.*) *Repentance*:—There are two kinds of this—the sorrow of the world, and that of God. This latter regards sin as against God. It is the object of sin rather than its consequences that affect Him. For all sin is against God, more than it is against any other being. However it may despise human authority, it involves a greater contempt of His. It is a great error to say of a man that he is nobody's enemy but his own. For "the carnal mind is enmity against God." And this is sin's greatest aggravation, for see how glorious, how holy, how gracious God is. Failure to see this aggravation in our sin is the cause why conviction of sin is often so slight. True repentance equally regards all sin, for every sin is against God. And the reformation that follows such repentance is thorough. No sin can be a trifle, since it is against God. (*W. Nevins, D.D.*) *David's accusation of himself and acquittal of God*:—I. THE CENSURE OR ACCUSATION WHICH HE PASSES UPON HIMSELF. 1. The simple acknowledgment or confession. "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned." (1) His sin in the direct notion of it. The sins which are committed against our brethren and neighbours

are committed against God Himself—(a) As Lawgiver. (b) As Creator. (c) As Redeemer. (2) The reduplication. "Thee, Thee only." "Only" is here to be taken for chiefly; and that not only in regard of the sin itself, but likewise in regard of his affection and apprehension about it. This is that which should principally affect us in all our miscarriages, that they are trespasses upon God Himself. (a) Thee, an only God; a God of pure eyes, and that cannot endure to behold iniquity. (b) Thee, a just God, who wilt punish sin wheresoever Thou findest it. (c) Thee, an Almighty God, a God of power and strength. 2. The additional ingeneration of it. "And done this evil in Thy sight." (1) He acknowledges that his sin was not unknown to God, who saw and discerned all the windings and turnings of it. (a) The thought and intention. (b) The execution of it. (c) All the excuses and pretences made for it. This may serve to awaken and affright men in this respect; and especially as to secret miscarriages. There are abundance of people in the world who carry it fairly as to outward appearance, who yet have their private excursions into ways of wickedness, and their secret haunts of sin; and these please themselves oftentimes in the thought of their concealment from the world. Yea, but there is an all-seeing eye that beholds them in their greatest retiredness, an eye that neither slumbers nor sleeps. (2) The enlargement and aggravation. (a) His non-attendance. He did not consider that God beheld him. (b) He did not regard the presence of God. For a thief to steal in the very sight of the judge is the highest piece of impudence that may be; and thus it is for any man to offend in the sight of God and not to be moved with it. Therefore, let us look to this, and consider what influence it has had upon us; the observing eye of God, and what it has not; what a shame is it for any to tremble at the presence of frail man, yea, it may be some little child, and beholding them in the commission of sin, and not regard the presence of the holy and pure God. II. THE ACQUITTING OF GOD. 1. A gracious heart gives testimony to the Word of God; it acknowledges the truth of God in that which comes from Him (John iii. 33). This may be drawn forth according to all the words which are spoken by God. In His word of threatening, it justifies Him here by fearing and trembling at His word; as good Josiah, when he rent his clothes, and his heart was melted, etc. In his word of reproof, it justifies him here by acknowledging of the fall; "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken," says Hezekiah, when he was told of his sin. In His word of promise, it justifies Him here by believing it, and expecting its accomplishment, as (Ps. cxix. 49). In His word of command, it justifies Him here by yielding obedience to it, and putting it into practice. 2. A submitting to the judgment of God. This is another temper and disposition of a gracious soul to clear God in His judiciary proceedings (Ps. cxix. 75; Jer. xii. 1; Micah vii. 9; Rom. iii. 2, 19). And this is another thing which we should therefore in a sweet manner bring ourselves to; to submit with meekness and patience to God's correction, acknowledging the justice of them, and that our punishment is still less than our iniquities have deserved. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) *David's acknowledgment of God's justice*:—David is in thorough earnest with every confession. Here he presents the reasons why he thus avows his sin. He desires to approve the sentence of God, and to acknowledge that His verdict concerning Him could not be other than the righteous judgment which he had deserved. He could adduce nothing on which he could plead for any other sentence. If he were still to be received, it must only be upon the footing of free, undeserved grace. O, what a different experience is this from the superficial confession of sin with which most men rest content. They confess, indeed, that they are sinners; but the sin is a weakness, an infirmity, a misfortune. They have to sympathize with the sinner, but of the honour of God they think but little. The poor sinner must be comforted; but whether the honour of God's law is maintained concerns them not. O my fellow-man, that is not repentance as the Spirit of God works it in the heart. No; he that is truly convinced of sin by the Spirit of God does not merely think of himself and what concerns him; but his great sorrow is that he has dared to commit transgression against such a God, with such a perfect law; and his great concern is how he can possibly restore that which he has destroyed; and since he can do nothing else, he lays himself down at the feet of God to yield to Him the only honour that he now can give, namely, to acknowledge that He is righteous in His judgment. (*Andrew Murray.*)

Vers. 5-7. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.—*Original depravity*:—Men may come upon this doctrine one of two different



ways.—1. As a dogma in theology. The first thing that some theologians do is to assail human nature, to describe it as covered with wounds, bruises and putrefying sores, and as deserving nothing but eternal burning. And human nature denies this. It says, "No, I have good impulses, upward desires, generous emotions; I resent your calumnies." 2. The second way is totally unlike this. Here is a true believer in Jesus Christ, one who loves Him with passionate devotion, and grows daily more like Him. From this attitude he looks back upon his former self, compares the human nature he started with, with that which he has attained, and involuntarily, by the sheer necessity of the contrast, he says, "I was born in sin." What he never could have understood as an opinion he realizes as a fact. Let a tree be conscious. Tell it in April how bare and barren it is. It will defend itself stoutly. Go to it after it has had a summer's experience, and it will confess, "I am not what I was; I was as you said, but now I feel as if I had been born again." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) Of original sin;—The end of the Gospel is to bring sinners unto Christ; for this they must feel their misery without Christ. And this misery consists in our sin, original and actual. I. NATURAL CORRUPTION IS A SIN (*Rom. vii.*), where you may find near twenty aggravations of this sin. And it is not a valid objection that this sin is not voluntary, for what is involuntary may be sin. But original sin is voluntary both in respect of Adam who represented us all, and in respect of us by our after consent. II. WE ARE TAINTED WITH IT FROM OUR BIRTH (*Isa. xlviii. 8*). Stay not to inquire how sin is conveyed to us in the womb, but consider how to be set free from it. III. IT SHOULD BE THE GROUND OF OUR HUMILIATION. 1. It is a privation of all good (*Rom. vii. 18*). 2. There is an antipathy to God and the things of God (*Rom. viii. 7*). The carnal mind is not only an enemy, but "enmity." Naturalists write of a beast that will tear and rend the picture of a man if it come in his way; whence they argue his great antipathy to man. And so we may argue antipathy to God when men will tear and despise His image. What cause, then, for humiliation. IV. PRESS HOME THIS DOCTRINE. Consider, therefore—1. The unnaturalness of this sin. We hate vermin that are naturally poisonous more than any other. 2. The sinfulness of it; for it violates not one of, but all, God's commands, and that always without interruption; there is no cessation from it. 3. The causality of it. All actual sin springs from it. 4. Its habitualness both in respect of permanency—see leprosy (*Lev. xiv. 41, 42*)—and facility in acting (*Rom. vii. 21*; *Jer. viii. 6*). 5. Its pregnancy; it is all sin virtually, for all sin is wrapped up in it. 6. Its extent. It has overspread the whole man (*Isa. i. 6*). 7. Its monstrousness; see the deformity it has brought upon the soul by defect, impotency, dislocation. 8. Its irresistibility and strength. 9. Its devilishness, brutishness and incorrigibility. (*D. Clarkson.*) Original sin;—We purpose considering the subject of original sin—what it is that David means, when he says, "I was shapen in iniquity." This implies two things—guilt and corruption, that every man is "born in sin and a child of wrath"—there is guilt imputed to him. This guilt which is imputed to him is the guilt of Adam, his representative, and this sin which is derived by him is that of Adam, his progenitor. This is our twofold inheritance from our first parent—original sin. Let us take each of these in its order. Our first proposition is, that we inherit from Adam guilt; that he stood before God the representative of all humanity—their federal head, in whom they entered into covenant with their Maker. In him we all once stood upright, in him we were tried, fell, were judged and condemned. Is it true? Turn, then, to *Rom. v. 19*; *1 Cor. xv. 45*; *Rom. v. 12*; "Death has passed upon all men," because "all have sinned." But the only sin they could have suffered for was the sin of Adam. Stern and strange as this doctrine may seem, it is not more stern or more strange than the undeniable fact which proves it. We take the man who denies it to the bedside, where lies the corpse of a newborn babe that has just breathed out its few short hours of painful life. Why is this? Pain has been here, and death—what brought them? What had that little sufferer done, that the dread penalty of death should be extracted from it, and its young life untimely snatched away? It "was shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin." But this fact, that death has passed upon all alike, not only proves the doctrine of original sin, but supplies, to a certain extent, an answer to the objection made on the score of justice; for the injustice of imparting to us Adam's guilt is certainly no greater than that of inflicting upon us Adam's punishment. In this world the innocent do suffer for the guilty, and the sins of the parents are visited upon the children. Ask the offspring of the drunkard, the libertine, the criminal, the spendthrift. And the sins of one age are visited upon the next. A godless

statesman suffers a nation to grow up in ignorance, and the next generation reap the bitter fruits of his neglect in misery and crime. A faithless ministry leave their flocks unguarded and unfed, and they who come after them toil painfully, and almost hopelessly, to recall those sloop to the fold from which the carelessness of others had suffered them to stray. Wherever we turn, then, we see men suffering for the sins and smarting for the follies of others. Why, then, should it startle you when we ask you to admit a fact which is not one whit more opposed to justice, nay, which throws the only gleam of light along this dark chain of sinful cause and sorrowful effect—namely, that we not only suffer the consequences, but also share the guilt, of our first parent's first offence? If you object to the doctrine of original sin as revealed in the word of God, you must object against the fact of vicarious suffering as ordained in the providence of God. There is no stopping-place between Atheism and the faith of the Christian who believes, in spite of all mystery, that God is just and good. But you say it is unjust that I should be held to have sinned in Adam—what, then, is it you would demand? A trial in your own person—that you should be placed as Adam was, in a state of probation, made upright, with the option of so continuing, if you could; this, you will say, would have been just. But if you were so placed, do you imagine that you would have fared better than he did? Was he not the very perfection of humanity? Was there any weakness in him there would not have been in you? Is there any strength you could have that he had not? What could you have been at best but another Adam, sure to yield to the very same temptation to which he yielded? What difference, then, is there, in point of justice, between this trial having been made for you or by you, if the result would be the same in either case, and if you are only held guilty of a sin which you would assuredly commit, had you the opportunity of committing it? But the vindication is more complete and triumphant when we remember that over against the sin of the first Adam is placed the grace of the second, so that "where sin did abound, grace," etc. (*Archbishop Magee*.)

**Original sin:**—I. MAN BY NATURE IS SINFUL. 1. Prove this by Bible testimony (Gen. vi. 5; viii. 21). 2. Every page of human history tells the sad story of man's natural corruption. 3. What we observe in others we have to confess to be even more true of ourselves. We know not only the fact of this tendency to sin, but its strength; for we have had to struggle against it in order to do good, and to abstain from evil. Any righteousness in man is the result of an effort to work up-stream against his own nature. 4. This has been the testimony of the best men in all ages (Job xlii. 6; Isa. vi. 5; 1 Tim. i. 15; Rom. vii. 23). 5. The same is testified to by highest reason. If you try apple after apple from every part of the tree, and all alike sour, you cannot but conclude the tree itself is bad. If you drink from a stream and find it brackish, day after day you conclude that the fountain itself is bitter. Now, when you observe man after man sinning day after day, in all ages, under every form of government and society, you must conclude that the troubles lie in the very nature of man. II. THIS CORRUPTION IS UNIVERSAL AS TO THE WHOLE RACE, AND TOTAL AS TO EACH MAN. Like leprosy, it may not be visible in the whole face or body, but being in the blood it is only a question of time as to when it will claim every part. Do not deceive yourselves. However you may manage to hold your inward corruption in check, it will sooner or later work out your total corruption, if not in this world, in the world to come. Death will remove all restraining motives and you will in eternity be left to the unrestrained operations of your sinful nature. III. WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR SINFUL NATURE. I do not believe that God's Word teaches that we were guilty of original sin in Adam. But the Word of God is clear that you are guilty and responsible for original sin by your own act. We have inherited sin; God does not condemn us for having inherited it, but for choosing to stand by the sin we have inherited, and refusing to give it up and turn from it when He calls upon us to forsake it and accept His abundant mercy in forgiveness, together with a new nature in Christ Jesus. (*G. F. Pentecost, D.D.*)

**The natural state of mankind in regard of sin:**—I. THE ORIGINAL OF IT. "I was shapen," etc. Original sin, wherewith the nature of man is so infected, consists in two things. First, in Adam's voluntary transgression in eating of the forbidden fruit, imputed to all his posterity. Secondly, in the hereditary corruption of nature, propagated and derived to his posterity. II. THE MANNER OF IT, HOW IT IS CONVEYED. There are divers opinions about it, and each have their arguments for them. It is enough for us to know this, that man produces his like not only in nature, but also in corruption; and the one is consequent upon the other; so that it is impossible for a sinner

to produce any other than a sinner (Job. xiv. 4; John iii. 6). The consideration of this point is thus far useful unto us. 1. As it teaches parents how to carry themselves towards their children; which, although it be not to indulge them, yet to pity corruption in them, as considering how themselves have been the occasions of conveying it to them. And further, it will hence concern parents to be so much the more careful and industrious of freeing their children from sin, so far forth as lies in their power. As they have been the occasion of corrupting them, so they should be likewise instruments of reforming them; and as they have been the conveyers of sin, so they should be also of grace. Now, this is especially done three manner of ways. (1) By hearty and earnest prayers to God for them. (2) By good and careful education. (3) By godly example. I might add as an appurtenance hereunto the bringing of them to the Sacrament of Baptism, the laver of regeneration (Tit. iii. 5), as that which seals to all true believers their new birth in opposition to their corruption of nature. 2. Here is an item also to children from hence, not to glory too much in their pedigree and natural birth into the world. Thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite; thou wast shapen in iniquity, and in sin did thy mother conceive thee. III. THE NOTORIOUSNESS OF IT. "Behold." David sets a mark upon this sin as being most grievous. And so it is. 1. In respect of the largeness of it; for it comprehends in it all other sins and evils. 2. In regard of the strength and power of it. (1) As it hinders us from good (Rom. vii. 18; Gal. v. 17; Rom. viii. 7; Jer. xiii. 23). (2) As it carries forcibly to evil (Jer. viii. 6; Gen. xi. 6; Eph. iv. 19). 3. The inherence and permanency of it (Rom. vii. 17). As for many actual sins, they may be wholly suppressed in us so as we may never return to them again. But this corruption of nature will always more or less continue; and we shall never be freed absolutely from the actings and stirrings of it so long as we live. Now, the application of this point thus explained may be drawn forth into this improvement, namely, as matter of just abasement and humiliation to us, and that which may lay us low both in our own eyes and the eyes of God. And it may do so to two sorts of persons. First, those who are yet in their natural condition; here's a word of astonishment and advertisement also to them. By how much the more grievous original sin is in its own nature, by so much the more sad and lamentable is their estate, and they have cause to be affected with it. Now, further, there may be an improvement of it likewise to the regenerate, and that to sundry intents. First, in a way of thankfulness to God for their freedom and deliverances. The worse that original sin is, the greater mercy to be freed from such an evil. Secondly, in an endeavour to make others partakers of this birth so far forth as we are able; it is that which Paul professes of himself in the behalf of the Galatians (Gal. iv. 19). Thus should ministers for their people, parents for their children, Christian friends one for another, seeing a natural condition is so grievous, therefore being renewed themselves, to endeavour likewise the conversion of others. Thirdly, in a way of caution and wariness for themselves. They should hence be persuaded to keep a watch over their own hearts, and to remember that they have flesh in them as well as spirit, from whence they may not make too bold with the occasions and temptations to sin, but may suppress and subdue them in them betimes. And further, to have sober thoughts in themselves when they behold the enormities of others; not to be high-minded, but to fear. (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *Total depravity*:—Total depravity is the entire alienation of the will and affections from God; and that carries all the good qualities as well as the bad ones away from God and enlists them against Him. A daughter, tenderly reared and carefully educated, in an evil hour yields to temptation and loses her virtue, and subsequently chooses to lead a life of sin and shame. So far as her standing in society and among virtuous people is concerned she is totally depraved; and yet in her sin and shame she retains her accomplishments, and if not all her former graces and kindness of heart and disposition, at least very much that is good. But who will deny that, for all this, she is in every sense a bad and totally lost woman, so far as virtuous society is concerned? I have recently wandered over some of the splendid ruins of Europe—through many an ancient abbey and cathedral. In some, if not all, there were the remains of their ancient and exquisite beauty. Here was a window with its exquisite tracery in stone as complete as when it was built; there an arch as entire and strong as of yore; and here again a cloister-room as entire as when it was occupied by one of the priests of the chapter. But for all this, the cathedral as such was a total ruin. Who has not admired with a constantly increasing admiration that grandest of European ruins, the old castle at Heidelberg! Much of

it is still intact; its splendid and elaborately carved and sculptured façades are still there and the chapel scarcely decayed; and so of many other parts. And yet it is a mournful ruin, entirely and utterly destroyed so far as the purpose for which it was originally built is concerned. Out here in our own beautiful harbour a few months ago there was a collision between two ships, and one of them went to the bottom. The divers went down to examine her hull and see if it would pay to attempt to raise her, and coming up they pronounced her a "total wreck." Now, some one objects to that report and says, "while the ship is wrecked, to be sure, there are many parts about her that are as good as ever; keel and bow, and one entire side, boiler and engines scarcely damaged—why should she be called a total wreck?" Why? Because she is beyond repair. The materials out of which she was built may be recovered and sold for old iron, but the ship as a ship is wholly ruined. In this sense man, with his many remainders of original beauty and perfections, is a totally depraved being. Made originally upright, and to serve and enjoy God, he has "sought out many inventions"; he has become entirely alienated from God; and what of his powers have not become the prey of low and disgusting sins have been preserved for selfish uses and wholly withdrawn from the service of God. Could a man be found who was a model of intellectual and moral perfection who yet withdrew from the fellowship and service of God and used those unimpaired and beautiful faculties against Him, he would be a totally depraved man. (*G. F. Pentecost, D.D.*) *Nothing but sin*:—So the knowledge of this one sin bringeth him to the examination of his whole life, till he find nothing in himself but sin. For if the fountain be poisoned, what will the streams be that flow from it? If we would look back to our original sin, we might have cause the more to lament our actual sins as poisoned streams flowing from such a fountain. So soon, therefore, as our conscience accuseth us of any one sin, we should call to remembrance the whole course of our life, that it hath been nothing else but a continual sinning against God; that thus the last putting us in mind of the first, we may not be content to repent and ask pardon for one, but for all. A sick man having obtained health, doth remember how long he was sick, whereby for the present he both considereth his own frailty and God's mercy in delivering him, as also encourageth and animateth himself against the time to come, by remembrance of former mercies obtained. Happy were we if we would begin to remember our miseries and God's mercies. (*A. Symson.*) *The fact of original sin indisputable*:—Sin must be within us naturally, since the best training does not prevent it. Children secluded from the sight or hearing of evil, kept as it were within a glass case, yet run to it when the restraint is removed. As the young duck which has been reared in a dry place, yet takes to the water as soon as it sees a pond, so do many hasten to evil at the first opportunity. How often it happens that those young persons who have been most shut out from the world have become the readiest victims of temptation when the time has come for them to quit the parental roof! It must be in them, or it could not thus come out of them. In many cases evil cannot be the result of mistaken education nor of ill example, and yet there it is; the seed is in the soil, and needs no sowing. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

**Ver. 6. Behold Thou desirest truth in the inward parts.**—*Truth in the inward parts*:—Some of us may remember the interesting story with which the apocryphal book of Esdras commences. The inquiry is started, "What is strongest?" and this is submitted to the judgment of three young men of the king's guard. Wine, and the king, and women, are severally mentioned; but the last, who is said to have been Zerubbabel, maintained that of all things "truth is the strongest, and liveth and conquereth for evermore." And having concluded his speech upon this subject, it is said that all who heard him broke forth with the shout, "Great is truth, and mighty above all things." Now, whether the narrative be fact or not, it would be well for us if we believed more fully in the power of truth, and realized how invincible it must be. Truth in Scripture often means objective truth, "the agreement of thought with thing," and we have the truth when what we believe is really what it is. But the word, also, and often, means truthfulness, moral honesty and sincerity. But it is this second sense of the term that our subject invites us to consider. God desires "truth in the inward parts"—truth, evidently, not in the sense of mental illumination, but rather in the sense of moral honesty and sincerity of purpose. As it is this that God desires, so it is the presence of this that gives the greatest joy to the spiritual Father who watches with tender solicitude the progress of the souls to whom His ministry has been

made a blessing. Now let me point out the importance of this subject. We need to have our attention emphatically called to it, because, in the first place, we have hearts which the prophet describes as "deceitful above all things," and we each of us possess the strange and terrible faculty of deceiving ourselves. God we cannot deceive. Our neighbours in the long run are sure to find us out. But ourselves it is only too possible to deceive; and when we allow ourselves to fall into the habit of self-deception, the most dangerous feature of this habit is that it becomes almost unconscious. We scarcely know when we are true and when we are false. Or the importance of this subject may be argued from its position. For truthfulness lies at the root of everything else in Christian experience. Having this, we are in fair way to possess all; but without this, all must be lost. See the parable of the Sower. The seed yields good fruit only when sown in "an honest and good heart." In one sense we may say no heart is such, but in another and practical one we know that there are such, for they do truly desire to be other and better than they are. And this truthfulness is needed not only at the beginning, but all the way along in our spiritual career. The life of faith depends on it. I would bear witness that I thank God with a full heart that recently so much attention has been given to the importance of the great truth that, as we are justified, not by our own works, but by faith in the Son of God, so we are to be sanctified, not by the struggling efforts of our own will, but equally by our acceptance through faith of all that the power and love of God have brought within our reach. This truth required to be prominently brought forward and emphatically stated; and to how many believers has the message been one of liberation from bondage, from fruitless toil, from inward tumult! But in order that this sort of teaching may be of the service to us that it should, it is most important that we should bear in mind the relation of faith to moral truthfulness and honesty of purpose. In a word, we cannot trust the Lord Jesus to deliver us from that which we know He hates, while all the time we are secretly clinging to it, or endeavouring to discover some cunningly devised compromise between our allegiance to Him and our indulgence in that which we know to be opposed to His will. Let me now point out some of the different ways in which this subtle form of evil may creep into our experience, and the different forms of truthfulness which we require sedulously to cultivate. Let us consider, first, truthfulness in the aim and purpose of life. This from first to last was the characteristic of our blessed Lord and Master. For contrast, see the history of Balaam. His ruin was due to latent dishonesty of heart, for in spite of all his religiousness he "loved the wages of unrighteousness." Solomon, also, and many more. "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." And this is the besetment of us all. There is something also that we put side by side with the "one thing needful." We desire to be good Christians, and to make our fortunes. We must learn to seek first the Kingdom of God, and to live as those who have heard the Master's call, "Deny thyself: take up thy cross and follow me." Next let me point out to you the necessity of truthfulness in the adoption of means towards the end. It is possible for us to have a strong, clear perception of the fact that we are called to live for a definite purpose, and we may be preserved from any conscious acceptance of a lower end, and yet we may fail in our lives because we shrink from employing those means towards the attainment of the end which God has placed within our reach, and which we know to be of the utmost importance to us. It is thoroughly dishonest to offer such a prayer as we do every day—"Lead us not into temptation"—while we place ourselves in a position where we know that our special weakness will be needlessly exposed to the foe. Or again, vainly do we pray for purity of heart and thought, and cry to be delivered from our lower appetites, if we still allow our senses to be exposed to sights and sounds which may act as incentives to the very appetite which we profess our desire to curb. Take the sad example of Eli. He did desire to curb the iniquities of his sons; but he would not take the necessary means. He spoke strongly enough, but he did nothing. Though he might have inflicted death, he did not punish them at all. Once again let me speak of the necessity of truthfulness in our judgment upon ourselves. How little disposed we are to pass a severe sentence upon our own conduct! Saul had already returned a verdict in his own favour before the prophet Samuel met him. "Blessed be thou of the Lord," he exclaims, even before the prophet had made any accusation against him; "I have fulfilled the commandment of the Lord." Had he really fulfilled it? His conscience was uneasy. There had already been a mock trial, so to speak, within Saul's own heart, and the verdict was one of

acquittal passed by a too favourable jury. Oh, self-extenuation is dangerous work. You are in the hands of a loving God who knows whereof we are made. If extenuations can justly be made, He is certain to make them. But who of us is there that has not plenty to confess even where actual sins are not upon the conscience? "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." (IV. H. M. H. Aitken, M.A.) *The importance of forming true Christian character*.—Character is not reputation, but that which makes the man what he is. Our text was David's utterance after his eyes had been opened to his own nature. How often is it that things pass unnoticed until some great event fixes attention upon them. Inadequate provision for egress in public buildings remains unnoticed until some terrible fire and vast loss of life turn all eyes to it. So with tendencies of character, our own inward evil—some terrible sin makes us awake to it as we had never been before. Let us note from the text—I. **THE DIVINE IDEAL FOR THE LORD'S PEOPLE**. "Thou desirest truth," etc. By truth is meant genuineness, reality, sincerity. Long ago Thomas Carlyle awoke a great deal of interest by his vigorous denunciation of shams. He but echoed the Scriptures. For such sincerity a new birth is essential. Yet this is a voluntary exercise (Acts iii. 19). Again, it is said "Make you a new heart." It is the turning of your spirit to Him. And we must be thorough in this. God requires truth in the "inward parts." Christ is the model of such sincerity and truth. But He is not the full model, for He never knew what the qualms of conscience were; never experienced the conflict of the law of His members and the law of His Spirit. Hence, servants of Christ such as Paul are given to us to supplement this ideal. Paul says, "Be ye followers of me." II. **THE DIVINE WORK IN GOD'S PEOPLE**. "In the hidden parts shalt," etc. Note—1. What the teacher is to do. He is to make us know wisdom. This He does through His Word; His providence; His disciples, trials and disappointments. 2. What has the scholar to do? Submit to the Word of God. Walk circumspectly. Try to realize what is the true ideal of character. The Greek word is one which signifies "to engrave." An engraved plate will leave an impression according to what itself is. Character is cut out by circumstances, by the man's own actions. (*John Hall, D.D.*) *Truth in the inward parts*.—I. **A DESCRIPTION OF THE NATURE OF GOD IN GENERAL**. "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts," i.e. a general uprightness and integrity of spirit. 1. God takes a special delight in such a frame of soul as this, from whence men became real and sincere towards Him. (1) God is truth Himself, and so loves it and delights in it, as His own reflection. (2) God desires truth as most suitable to those ends which He propounds to Himself in us. There's no man loves to be deceived, because thereby he is frustrated and disappointed; which although God cannot be said to be directly, yet He may be in regard of our carriage and behaviour of ourselves towards Him, which He would not be. (3) It is that which gives a being to all grace and goodness in us: goodness and truth are convertible and reciprocal, that is, they are one and the same, so that what is not the one is not the other, not only in metaphysics, but in morals. Truth is not a distinct and particular grace in itself, but it is general, and runs through the veins and bowels of all. It is true faith, and true love, and true hope, and true repentance, and so of the rest. 2. Wherein this truth or sincerity consists. (1) In the aim and bias of the soul, whereby and whereunto it is carried. A sincere-hearted Christian looks at God in all (1 Pet. iv. 11; 1 Cor. x. 31). (2) In universality. Where this truth is in the inward parts, there will be a respect had to all God's commandments; and that whether as to the practice of duty or to avoiding of sin. In matter of duty, to do all that God requires, though never so contrary and repugnant to our natural inclinations; in matter of sin, to avoid all that God forbids, though never so pleasing and delightful to flesh and blood. (3) In its intimacy and secret goodness. It is called "truth in the inward parts" because it reaches even to them, and is observable there. (4) In its constancy and continuance to the end. Sincerity is accompanied with perseverance. Where there is grace in truth, there will be grace also in continuance: though there may be ebbs and flowings as to the degrees, yet for the substance it will be still the same; yea, and after some accidental intermissions it will in time again return to its former vigour. II. **AN INTIMATION OF HIS CARriage TO DAVID IN PARTICULAR**. "And in the hidden part," etc. 1. Take it in its proposition. (1) The nature of grace. It is wisdom (James iii. 17). It is called so, and may very well be so, as having indeed the properties of wisdom most agreeable to it. Wisdom is provident for the future, and does not only look at the present; and so it is with grace: wisdom, it takes things altogether, not only singly and

alone by themselves, but in their conjunction; and so grace: wisdom, it looks after the main chance, and that which is chiefly to be looked after in the neglect of impertinencies and superfluities; so likewise does grace. (2) The author of grace is God Himself. "Thou." This seems to be added in opposition to that which he had premised and set down in the foregoing verse: there he had told us that he was born in iniquity, and in sin did his mother conceive him. Corruption it was conveyed to him by nature; yea, but grace it had another conveyance and derivation of it: thus it came not to him from his parents, but from God Himself; flesh and blood had not taught it him, but his Father which was in heaven (Matt. xvi. 17), and so he acknowledges Him in it. (3) The seat or subject of this wisdom, which it resides in, and that is here expressed to be the hidden part; that is, the soul and inward man: though it may also signify the object and matter which this spiritual wisdom is conversant about. And if ye will, we will take notice of both; or further, thirdly, the manner also of conveyance, as if he had said secretly, and after an hidden manner, as some interpreters render the words, which we may likewise add to the former. So, then, here is the sum and substance of what the psalmist does out of these words exhibit unto us: first, that the excellency of religion lies in the inward man: secondly, that a good Christian is acquainted with the mysteries of religion: thirdly, that the conveyance of His grace and spiritual wisdom are oftentimes secret and undiscernible. 2. We may also look upon it in its scope and reflection, and with that force and emphasis in which it comes from the prophet David, who expresses as much to us about himself, that God had indeed wrought this work in his heart, that He had in the hidden part made him to know wisdom. (1) He discerns it, it carries in it an emphasis of discovery; as David had grace wrought in his heart, so he knew it to be there wrought; he saw it, and perceived it to be so. This is that which every one does not do, but yet which may be done. (2) He acknowledges it. David, when he speaks here of God's grace wrought in himself, he does not simply speak of it, but with some kind of affection and enlargement of soul, and as blessing God for it. He speaks of it as a special favour and mercy vouchsafed unto him, as indeed it was; and so should all others do likewise, which are in like manner made partakers of it. (3) He improves it, he makes use of it for his present purpose, and that to a double intent; first, as an aggravation of sin, as it respects himself: and secondly, as a motive and an argument for future mercy, as it relates to God. That God who had given him grace at first, would now bestow further grace upon him; that He who had given him the grace of conversion, would now help him in the exercise of repentance, as a fruit of conversion in him; that He that had sanctified him would pardon him; and that He that killed sin in him in the root would now vouchsafe to kill it further in the branches and effects of it. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) *God desires truth in the inward parts*:—1. This thought summons us to earnestness and godly fear in our sense of sin. (1) Whenever, in consequence of their upbringing or favourable circumstances, the outward life is religious and unblameable, many flatter themselves with the thought that it is also well with the heart: at least, that although they have still many sins, the heart is not quite so bad as has been said. They regard themselves at least not as ungodly, and enemies of God. Oh, did they but know how the Lord proves and searches the heart, they would think otherwise. The Holy One sees the indwelling corruption of the heart. (2) How should this thought keep many a one from the superficial conversion with which men so often suffer themselves to be deceived. Whenever, upon a sick-bed, for example, there is a little anxiety about sin and questions about grace, the soul is at once comforted. Men are not aware that these feelings can easily be awakened, and also very lightly laid to sleep again. 2. This thought gives hope and comfort in the way of conversion. Nothing less will God have from the awakened soul: nothing more will the grace of God require from the penitent. 3. This thought strengthens faith for glorious expectations (Isa. lxi. 8). (*Andrew Murray*.) *Marks of truth in the inward affections*:—1. It is a testimony of truth in the inward affections when one carrieth an universal hatred of all sin, that is, of secret sins as well as of open sins, of lesser sins as well as of greater evils, of such sins as have some special enticement, by some particularity of content or profit, as well as of those which afford neither. A sincere heart is as tender as the eye, which is troubled, and made to smart and water with the smallest mote, or as a straight shoe, which cannot endure the least stone within it, but makes him shrink and tread respectively, and with a kind of favour to his foot, until it be removed. This is one mark. 2. A second, which is in a

manner a limb of the former, is a taking heed to that sin to which a man finds himself most apt; or wherewith he hath at any time been overtaken. Is it rash anger, is it pride; is it wantonness, is it worldliness, is it vain pleasure, etc.? If thou be especially wary and watchful touching that, to prevent the occasions, to stop the beginnings of it, to beware of the inducements to it, this is a notable testimony of sincerity. 8. A third is a willingness to lay open every sin as soon as it is known to be a sin, and to that end a gladness to have the conscience ransacked and ripped up, that that which is sin may be found out. David spake it out of experience when he pronounced the man blessed in whose spirit there is no guile. 4. A fourth mark, when a man makes conscience to be one and the same manner of man at home and in private that he is abroad and in public. This is also a branch of David's sincerity, and of his resolution to walk in a perfect way: "I will walk uprightly in the midst of mine house": his meaning is, he will be the same among his household people, where few behold him, that he is abroad where many see him: he will be as godly in his chamber as in the Temple. (*S. Hieron.*) *Truth in the inward parts*.—I. AS OPPOSED TO IGNORANCE. It is the character of men in an unregenerated state, that they have the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them. The character, in point of understanding, of men in whom God takes pleasure, is no vague or doubtful matter. Seeing God hath given in the Gospel the fullest and most satisfactory information concerning Himself, and the character and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one Mediator, they who have believed the word of the truth of the Gospel—"who have received with meekness" this "engrafted word"—have in one important respect the truth which God desires in the inward parts." There are different degrees, indeed, in which this change actually exists; but all are alike in kind; and they all differ in kind from other men, who are in darkness, and walk in darkness, and know not where they go, because that darkness hath blinded their eyes. II. AS OPPOSED TO INSINCERITY. The spirit of the people of God, in whom the Lord takes pleasure, is that spirit in which there is no guile. Sanctification of the spirit is associated in them with belief of the truth. Sincerity, arising from, and connected with, a spiritual understanding of the truth of the Gospel, forms the temper of their inward man. The truth with respect to God and the Lord Jesus Christ, that informs their minds, enters into their hearts. III. AS OPPOSED TO FALSE AND TEMPORARY AFFECTIONS OF MIND. That practical godliness includes the exercise of the affections of the mind is not to be disputed. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart" is the first and great commandment. There are lively emotions in every truly pious heart. Men who receive the truth of the Gospel "in the love of it," and who have their souls purified in obeying it, delight themselves in the Lord, and love one another with a pure heart, fervently. The principles of vital godliness are like "seed cast into good ground," that springeth up and beareth fruit"; there is first the blade; then the ear; and afterwards the full corn in the ear. (*D. Dickson, D.D.*) *Interior truth* (with John viii. 32):—The same word, "truth," stands in both texts and yet represents in each its own particular matter. "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts;" which means that God looks to find in us a kernel of personal truthfulness, a sound core, a fragment of the aboriginal veracity of God, an oaken knot of probity that can take a blow without flinching, sterling metal that will sound with a long, clear, ringing tone of reverberation. The other is a little apart from this, "The truth shall make you free." This denotes the truth outside of us coming to us, telling upon us, working its emancipation in us. The other was the sterling metal; this is the hammer that sets the wire ringing, the plectrum that sets the metal quivering and humming. The two answer back to each other; they understand each other—the truth that is structural within us, and the truth that comes to talk to us. They are correlates, like the eye and the light that saturates it; the ear and the melody that sings into it. We are never quite discouraged about a man, so long as there remains still in him one single solid atom that retains the old crystalline lines and angles; a rigid basis upon which presented truth can be laid, and into which it can be mortised; a truth-sense to which we can address and press our appeal. It is like dealing with an old and withered building; the window-lights may be shattered, and the paint discoloured, and the casings awry; the flooring seamed, and the joints warped; but, though you may have to tear down a good deal, and replace and pretty thoroughly renovate it, yet there is great vantage secured, if decay and disintegration have not eaten into the foundation, and the masonry lies intact in its bottom courses. It is this which



justifies the confidence we always have in a boy that is truthful; he may be full of roguery and tease his sister and torment his parents; he may easily get angry, and pound the boy that lives across the way; and show himself precocious in nothing so much as in his genius for resisting knowledge and palsying the efforts of his instructors; but, if he is truthful, if truth is in his inward parts, the pith of the matter is in him, a sound core, the spinal marrow; and there is something to address yourself to with assurance, when the time comes for appeals that are more strenuous and exacting. Bye-laws have no grip that is not guaranteed them by the vigour of the constitution. "God desireth truth in the inward parts." An impure heart issues in impure thoughts. Yes; but also impure thoughts issue in impure hearts. Intellect creates thought, but thought turns round and creates intellect. The interior and the exterior are parents and children of each other. Deed expends power, but deed also makes power. To that degree and in that sense we are all of us daily climbing up and down the ladder-rounds of our own actions, feelings, thoughts. So it is with this precious, unspeakably precious, nucleus of personal truthfulness, "truth in the inward parts." We make it more by speaking the truth, doing, thinking, and feeling the truth; we make it less by speaking, doing, thinking, and feeling that which is false. We are confessedly making a good deal of this matter of rectitude, straight-linedness; but it is the plumb-line dropped into us from above, and so must shape and direct all our aspirations towards God; and it is in the plumb-line from which we have to calculate the horizontal that shall determine our dealings with men. Truth is thus the core of piety, and it is the pith of charity. A promise is a promise, whether made in a matter of groceries or Gospel. I cannot go to a man and promise to help him in an enterprise, and then do as I like about keeping my promise. A promise is as holy a thing as Mount Sinai, and as holy as the law that was given on it, and the Lord that came down in thunder and lightning upon it. There are not even so many professed Christians as we might suppose who can be relied on to do as they say they will do, when it is not quite to their taste or convenience to do as they say they will do. Their word is not as good as their bond; and they proceed on principles which, if they were to apply them on the street, would cost them their seat in the Stock Exchange every day. (*C. H. Parkhurst, D.D.*) *Better to be, than to be thought, religious*:—In every action of religion, let us remember to keep sincerity. Who would desire to be called rich, if he want riches; esteemed valiant, if he have not strength? and shall we think it sufficient to be called religious, and not to be so? Better to be rich, than to be called rich; better to be religious, than to be thought or called religious. God loveth truth as He hateth all falsehood; for He is truth. He loveth truth in our profession, truth in our civil life: truth in our profession, is that which He hath commanded in His Word; truth in our civil life, is that which agreeth with the duty of civil conversation, without fraud, deceit or guile, which is different from God's nature, and resembleth the devil, who is a deceiver. (*A. Symson.*) **In the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom.**—*Religion the only true wisdom*:—I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF HEAVENLY THINGS, APPERTAINING TO THE RIGHT WAY OF PLEASING GOD, AND OF SAVING OUR OWN SOULS, IS THE TRUE WISDOM. How shall he be held for wise who wanteth judgment and understanding in the principle? And what is the principle, if not this, to know how to serve God so here as that we may be saved with Him, and by Him, hereafter? What were a man but a fool in case he otherwise knew all secrets, and could speak and discourse in matters of the world, as if one spake from an oracle, or did equal Solomon in discovering the natures of trees and herbs, from the cedar in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall, if yet he were to seek in the matters that concern eternity? All this is but like that wisdom which we tax in a man when we say, He is penny wise, but pound foolish: he will be miserable to save a penny, and yet be prodigal in pounds upon a humour. This is poor wisdom: so, on the other side, how can he be taxed for a fool justly who, whatsoever his reach and depth be in the things of this life (happily he hath not so many politic fetches, nor cannot plod and multiply projects as others do), yet he knoweth the way of salvation; he knoweth Christ crucified? II. THE LORD HIMSELF IS THE PROPER TEACHER OF THAT SPIRITUAL AND HEAVENLY WISDOM WHICH IS ACCOMPANIED WITH SALVATION. 1. The Holy Scripture is the Book of Wisdom, out of which God will give unto the simple sharpness of wit: but, teaching by man, is the pipe by which this sacred wisdom is to be conveyed unto us from the Fountain: therefore God honoureth His ministers with the title of teachers, and hath ordained a deputation of faithful

men, which should be able to teach others also. 2. In waiting upon the appointed means to get this wisdom, we must be furnished with two especial qualities: first, humility; secondly, earnestness. (1) The former I ground upon that often-remembered saying, "He will teach the humble His way," Now, he is humble in this case who hath learned to renounce that wisdom, that sharpness, that sufficiency which he hath in his own opinion in himself. This is that denial of a man's self which Christ requireth in His followers: Paul, "a being a fool, to the end one may be wise." A man must disclaim all possibility of guiding himself, and resign and yield up himself wholly to the Lord's conduct. They which have this disposition are the babes to which God revealeth the mysteries of His kingdom, when He passeth over those which feed themselves with self-conceits. (2) The second quality required is earnestness. Thus the Kingdom of Heaven must suffer violence, and we must go about to take it as it were by force. In this business there must be labouring, striving, giving all diligence, a seeking early. 3. How shall we know that we are taught? The text answereth: Where God teacheth, the heart is taught. Look, then, what is in thy heart. There be some that have gotten some smack of this wisdom into their brains; they have a kind of lip-wisdom, and can talk somewhat plausibly of religion, but it is not yet come to their hearts. Their hearts be not humbled; they have not that which the apostle commended in the Romans—"obedience from the heart." Is thy heart reformed? Is the natural corruption thereof in some good measure subdued and abated? Is obedience sweet unto thy heart, and that which thy soul delighteth in? This is a sign thou art taught of God. III. WHEN GOD BESTOWS ON ANY MAN SPIRITUAL WISDOM AND RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE, HE GIVES SUCH A BLESSING AS DESERVES ACKNOWLEDGMENT. Hath the Lord been gracious to thee in scattering the mist of thy natural blindness, and in enabling thee to see the things which are given to us of God? Are thy eyes anointed with eye-salve, so that thou beginnest to savour the things of the Spirit, better than in times past? Oh, thank His Majesty for this mercy—this, a kindness of greater value than at first, perhaps, thou art aware; labour to increase in this knowledge, strive to have yet a larger and a fuller measure of this spiritual understanding. (*S. Hieron.*) *True knowledge to be sought from God:*—The true knowledge of the way of grace must be sought from God Himself. He alone can make you know the hidden wisdom. The human knowledge of the way of grace which we obtain by the use of our understanding is not sufficient. Mark well: we do not say that this knowledge is not necessary. But this knowledge is not enough. It is possible that one may have a well-nigh perfect knowledge of God's Word and yet be lost. And when we have clear insight into the way of the truth of God, we run just as much risk of resting content with it. Perhaps some one thinks that such a representation is sufficient to make one altogether dispirited. It would indeed be so were it not that we can say in this prayer, "In the hidden parts Thou shalt make me to know wisdom." God gives the wisdom. This is our only security, and that is the only answer that we can give to the question: How do we know if we have a right spiritual knowledge of grace? The Lord can and will make you assured of this. Conversion, faith, is not a work that you must do, and on which you can look back and say, "That is well done." No: the innermost essence of conversion and faith consists in coming to God in surrender to God, in receiving from God the living God, grace to be worked out by Him, in being washed and purified from sin by Him. And just at this point is there in the religion of many so much defect. They do not know that in grace the principal element is that we must come into contact with the living God, and must experience the power of the Almighty. (*Andrew Murray.*)

**Ver. 7. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.**—*Prayer an index of the heart:*—Men's prayers are this. And they show, also, how far men agree with one another, for if we sincerely unite in the prayers of other men, whether living or dead, this shows that we feel as they did and believe what they believed. But it is better to follow the prayers of the Bible, for they are free from the infirmity and error to which merely human prayers are liable. And to provide us with such true patterns of prayer is one reason why the Bible contains so many prayers. If we adopt them we cannot err. And this is especially true of this fifty-first psalm: it teaches the penitent sinner how to pray. Let us take the one petition contained in the text as showing this. I. IT IMPLIES CONSCIOUS DEFILEMENT. There is the consciousness of sin. II. AN INTENSE DESIRE FOR CLEANSING. This does not always co-exist with the sense of defilement. Many men love their sin

too well to give it up, and hence could not pray this prayer. III. THE CONSCIOUSNESS THAT CLEANSING MUST COME FROM OTHER HANDS THAN HIS OWN. It is a confession of inability on the sinner's part to cleanse himself. Else he would not come thus to God. IV. BELIEF THAT GOD CAN CLEANSE HIM. "Purge me and I shall be clean, wash me," etc. And he believes that the cleansing will be complete. Many men are willing to be partially cleansed, but not wholly. But this man not only desires perfect cleansing, but believes that God can thus cleanse him. He says, "I shall be whiter than snow." V. THIS PRAYER IMPLIES FAITH IN THE ATONEMENT OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. Some amongst the heathen, and yet others, have desired entire deliverance from sin, but have not known how it is to be accomplished. But this prayer points to that which was the type of Christ's Atonement—the blood sprinkled with hyssop. Now, unless we accept these teachings, which are all plainly implied in this prayer, we can never make it our own: but if we do, then be sure our prayer shall not long be left unanswered. (*J. Addison Alexander, D.D.*) *David's prayer for cleansing*:—I. THE REQUEST, OR PETITION, WHICH HE MAKES TO GOD IN BEHALF OF HIMSELF. "Purge me with hyssop . . . wash me." 1. He makes use of hyssop, and so has a regard to the outward observation; which shows us what is to be done also in the analogy and proportion by us which are Christians. We are to honour the ordinance of God, and those means which now under the Gospel God hath appointed as helps of our faith; though in themselves, and in outward appearance, never so mean. There is the same general reason, which holds now, that held then, though the things themselves be abolished; and those which are good Christians will accordingly have respect hereunto, even to be as careful of those performances which now lie upon us, as they were of what lay before them. The baptismal water is in its own nature but common and ordinary, but the use and improvement of it supernatural; the Eucharistical bread and wine in themselves the same with others, but resemblances of higher things. The preaching of the Word in appearance but as other kind of speaking, yet according to Divine appointment and institution, even the power of God to salvation to them that believe. Thus those things which simply considered are but mean and contemptible, yet God's ordinance sets a high price and reckoning upon them, for which cause they should be esteemed so by us. 2. The second is his improvement of it, while he rests not in the outward ceremony, but is carried further to the inward grace, which is signified by it. In every ordinance which is used by us there are two things considerable, somewhat which is done on our part, and somewhat which is done on God's; ours is the external performance, His is the inward blessing, and gives power and virtue to the performance; now, this latter is that which David begs here of God, and so should also be done by us. II. THE SPECIAL GOOD AND BENEFIT WHICH HE PROMISES TO HIMSELF FROM THIS PURGING; and that is in two expressions more: first, in the positive, "I shall be clean"; and, secondly, in the comparative, "I shall be whiter than snow." First, we see here in general how David was rightly opinionated of the means of grace; he was sound in this article of justification and reconciliation by Christ. And we see further of what use it was to him in the condition in which he now was, as thereby to hold up his spirit, and keep him from despair, which otherwise he might have fallen into. These words here are not a motive or argument which he uses to God for which He should purge him; but only a comfort and encouragement to himself, when he considers with himself what effect would follow hereupon of His purging of him. As a sick and diseased person, who is repairing to some skilful physician, and, while he goes to him, thinks of that health and recovery which he should obtain by him, so does David here in this place. But then for the particular words themselves: "I shall be clean, and I shall be whiter than snow." It is doubled for the certainty of the thing, and also to show the largeness of David's affection to it. But we must know what is meant by them, and what they refer unto. Now, for this there is a double whiteness or purity of the saints; the one is in point of justification from righteousness imputed, and the other is in point of sanctification from righteousness inherent. Now, it is not the latter, but the former, which is here intended: our sanctification in this life is imperfect, and the whiteness which we have from that is not so transcendent. But David in this text speaks of his whiteness from being washed in the blood of the Lamb, and having this blood sprinkled upon him in justification and remission of his sins for Christ's sake; and so there is in it, That that person which is justified by Christ, and hath His blood sprinkled upon him, he is perfectly free from all guilt in the sight of God, and is in God's account

as if no sin had been committed by him. When we say that a justified person is thus perfectly clean and white, as to the pardon and forgiveness of his sins, we mean it in these two respects especially: first, as to the discharge of him from punishment and condemnation; God will not exact any penalty of him for them: He may chastise His servants (as He did David) after pardon, in a way of discipline; but He does not punish them in a way of satisfaction. Secondly, in regard of God's love and affection. He is now as perfectly friends with him as He was before, though perhaps He may not express Himself so lovingly towards him; as it is thought also He did not now to David, who lost much of his former sweetness in God. The ground and reason of all is, the sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction and obedience which he hath exhibited to God's law for ourselves, both passive and active (Ezek. xvi. 14). Now therefore because the righteousness of Christ is such as is whiter than the snow, therefore are we so upon His account. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) *The complete acceptance of the penitent*:—The imagery of the acceptance, the details, so to speak, of the pardon, are taken from the ceremonies employed in purifying the sufferer from that most loathsome, most deadly disease, leprosy, whose lingering corruption has been called a very sacrament of sin. God is treating us for leprosy. I. **THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPER, WHICH DAVID HERE REFERS TO, IS FULL OF SIGNIFICANCE.** The two birds to be taken speak of Him who is of two natures, human and Divine. The cedar-wood speaks of the fragrant wood of the cross. The hyssop, the lowly plant used for purifying, sets forth the personal application of Christ's pardon to the soul. The scarlet is the royal robe of Him who "reigns from the tree." And these are all bound to the living bird, typical of the Divine nature in Christ, from whom all ordinances derive their significance. And then there is the sprinkling of the blood and water on the penitent, and the living bird carries away the taint, as it were, with him, in his escape to the open field. Truly as we gaze upon the Cross, shining more and more clearly through the symbols, we see His figure bending towards us; we hear Him saying, "This is He that came by water and blood." II. **"THOU SHALT PURGE ME WITH HYSSOP."** Do we quite believe it? That the hyssop is bound to the scarlet robe of the King, and tied to the cedar of the cross, and dipped in the blood and water, and bound up with the living bird—the Divine nature of Jesus Christ? Do we quite believe it, that we can have something more to help us, beyond the strong resolution, so often broken; more than the effort of our own will—the grace of the blood of Jesus Christ Himself, to help us to overcome the old sin. III. **"WHITER THAN SNOW."** More than cleansed: white—whiter than snow; that is, something to be afraid of defiling, something to fear falling away from; not a mere pall of whiteness, hiding corruption beneath, to be trodden down by the busy traffic of life, but in itself white and pure, attracting the rays of heavenly love. In the days of the martyrdoms, it is said that a Christian the night before his sufferings fell asleep in his prison, and dreamed a dream of Paradise. He was walking in a garden of delight, where all was made of the purest transparent glass, clear as crystal. The trees glanced and flashed as they waved their boughs, the ground sparkled and shone; and the people themselves, who moved up and down there, they were of glass too; but as he went along his way, he noticed that hands were pointed at him in amazement. Men shrank from him in horror, and he looked. He was of glass as well; and on his breast was a dark spot, a shadow amidst all this light. In an agony of shame he clasped his hands over the place. In vain! they also were of glass, and the defilement shone through them. And he remembered that he was not in charity with a fellow-Christian; some trifling difference he had thought it, but it was a dark spot in Paradise, and a strange spectacle among the blessed. He sent for him, he asked his pardon; he was called to Paradise. If a Christian could feel thus of an act or thought simply wanting in charity, what of our whiteness; what of our hearts? IV. **"THAT THE BONES WHICH THOU HAST BROKEN MAY REJOICE."** The broken bones of our life may yet be sources of joy. Selfishness may be so completely crushed out as to leave us the real virtue of self-respect. Cowardice, which shrunk from danger, may lead us, still feeling the danger, to be the first to meet it. Faults of temper, want of self-control, undisciplined life, indolence—in all these points, where we sink back beaten, we may yet rejoice. Is not this something for us to do this Lent? (*Canon Newbolt.*) *Forgiveness of sins*:—I. **THE MEANING OF THE PSALMIST'S PRAYER.** 1. A deep sense of sin. (1) Sin is a disease odious in its nature. It is contrary to the nature of God, and defiling to the soul of man. (2) Sin, like leprosy, is contagious in its influence. All ranks and orders of men are pervaded

with it. (3) Sin, like leprosy, is fatal in its effects. If it be not speedily cured, it will issue in death, an everlasting separation of soul and body from God. (4) Sin, like leprosy, is incurable by any remedy of our own prescription. It bids defiance to every hand but God's. 2. A believing discovery of the only effectual way of deliverance from sin. (1) The blood of Christ is of value sufficient to cleanse from all sin. (2) In order to enjoy its virtue, it must be applied. (8) Wherever it is thus applied, its transcendent efficacy will be made apparent. II. IMPROVEMENT. (1) The encouragement which the Gospel affords to awakened sinners, and to drooping saints. 2. The character of those who will be welcome guests at the table of the Lord. (*T. Chalmers, D.D.*) *Human sin and Divine cleansing*.—I. THE DEER CONVICTION OF SIN IN AN AWAKENED SINNER. II. THE POWER OF GOD TO CLEANSE FROM SIN. "Purge me with hyssop," etc. 1. Sin and its stains may be removed from the soul. "The blood of Jesus Christ" is but another word for the love of God, which found its supreme expression in Christ's death for us. 2. The cleansing power of the Word of Christ is more than sufficient for the removal of the stains of sin, "whiter than snow." III. THE WAY BY WHICH THE EXERCISE OF THIS POWER IS SECURED. Some men are cleansed from sin, yet not all men. What is the reason? 1. To be personally effective, this cleansing power must be personally realized. Water is abundant, but only those who apply it to their bodies are cleansed by it. 2. To be personally realized, it must be personally solicited. Asking is the condition of receiving. (*William Jones.*) *Hyssop an emblem of Christ*.—The hyssop hath many things wherein it representeth Christ very nigh. 1. It is obscure, humble and abject; so that Solomon is said to have written of all trees, from the cedar the highest tree, opposed to the hyssop springing out of the wall, that is to the basest and most common: growing amongst stones, not through man's industry planted, as other trees are. So Christ in whom we believe was contemptible, in Him was no beauty, with Him no riches or earthly honours, which make men come in credit and account. 2. Hyssop is bitter and sour, not pleasant to the drinkers: so the cross of Christ, by which our affections are mortified, is very odious to the flesh, and agreeth not with its taste. His cross is therefore a stumbling-block to the Jews, and folly to the Gentiles. 3. Albeit it be sour, yet it is most wholesome: so albeit the doctrine of repentance (wherein we are taught to run out of ourselves and to take hold on Christ) be irksome and unsavoury to the flesh, yet it is wholesome to the soul. Natural men esteem this doctrine to be an enemy to them, which would slay their corruptions and lusts. Medicine, which at first seemeth bitter, afterwards becometh more comfortable: so the doctrine which is salted with salt and hyssop, is fitter for us than that which is sweetened with honey; for honey was never appointed to be used in the Lord's sacrifices, but salt. (*A. Symson.*) *Whiter than snow*.—I. HERE IS A PRAYER WHICH IS UNIVERSAL, AND YET PERSONAL. Like some great battle-plain at nightfall, where the wild hosts have contended, leaving the shade to cover the dying and the dead, the whole world is vocal with wailings and desperation and pain and hopeless agony. Pierced and bleeding, souls suffer and cry, and each one says "me" and "my" with a dreadful sense of ownership, and yet all seem to say the same. II. THIS PRAYER IS INTENSELY SPECIAL, AND YET THOROUGHLY INCLUSIVE. III. THIS IS A PRAYER WHICH IS CHARACTERIZED BY UTTER DESPERATION, COUPLED WITH A SUPREMELY CONFIDENT HOPE. When the guilt-burdened penitent prays, "Wash me," he is certain that he has reached a point at which he cannot wash himself. He lets go of all dependences he had previously tried to lean upon, precisely as Naaman did when he gave up his pleading for the rivers of Damascus, and started for the Jordan, commanded to bathe there and be clean. He accepts help on the helper's terms. IV. THIS PRAYER IS UNUSUALLY EXTRAVAGANT IN UTTERANCE, AND YET ENTIRELY LEGITIMATE IN ITS MEANING. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *Whiter than snow*.—"Whiter than snow!" What can be whiter than newly fallen snow? You have seen it in the first early light of the morning, before it has been stained by the world, and it has been so dazzlingly pure that it has made your weak eyes smart with the brilliance. It stretches out before you clean and white as an angel's wing. Then the city awakes. Its fires are lighted. Its chimneys pour out continuous streams of smoke. The atmosphere becomes thick and heavy, and dirty. A thousand impurities pass over the white snow-robes, and leave the black impressions of their unclean feet. It loses all its radiance. It becomes more and more impure, until at last it becomes the uncleanest of all things, dirty snow. Now, the whiteness of the snow is our type and symbol of innocence. We speak and think of the little ones as innocent, and when we wish

to express their purity, we use the figure of nature's purity, and declare them "white as snow." But the snow is soon soiled. Innocence is soon lost. The foul air of worldliness is breathed upon it, and its white lustre is gone. Well, now, placed in that atmosphere, what does the Lord expect of us? Does He expect us to retain our whiteness? Yea, we have to keep our garments undefiled. His purpose is that we should pass through temptation, and yet stand before Him at last "not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." The demand of our religion is that we keep ourselves "unspotted from the world." Our Master prayed that we might be in the world, and yet not of it; in the world but not worldly; not merely walking in innocence, but in the more perfect whiteness of holiness. Now, can that be realized? Take the life of a business man in these days when there is such a terrible strain in the procuring of daily bread. There is, in business circles to-day, an immense quantity of defiling pitch. Can any man keep himself white and unspotted? Again and again I have heard the answer, "No, it is impracticable and impossible. A man must be spotted; he cannot keep himself white, and if he is wise he will go into the world with garments that will show spots as little as possible, garments as near the world's colour as he is able to procure." So much for the business man's life. Now, take a minister's life. A minister can sell his honour to gain the bread of applause. He can be besmirched by flattery. He can be lured by a false ambition. He is beset by innumerable temptations to worldliness. Can the Master's ideal be realized? Can he keep his garments white? Can we appeal to experience both for the minister and the business man? I do not believe in that sweeping condemnation of business men, which proclaims them all to be a spotted flock. There are men who in their business life keep their hands as clean and their hearts as tender as when they pray, or as when they talk to their little child. Social life with all its uncleanness is illumined by souls who walk in spotless white. The ministry is adorned by many men whose hands and hearts are undefiled. There are souls who wear the white flower of a blameless life. But even if we had no such examples of pure and spotless lives, to which we could make appeal, we have still before us the Word of God, with its clear demand for spotless purity. The Bible never makes a compromise. It never lowers its standard. Jesus of Nazareth passed through our world unspotted, with garments whiter than snow. He lived our common life. He experienced our infirmities. He was beset with temptations, hedged about by worldliness. He felt the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. I ask, how was it accomplished, that in a corrupt and sinful world He kept Himself unspotted from the world? I turn to the simple record of His life, and there is one outstanding feature which impresses me deeply from beginning to end. I am impressed with Jesus' overwhelming sense of the reality of God's immediate and continual presence. He carried about His own atmosphere. So did Paul. So do all true followers of Christ. We must carry about with us the atmosphere of heaven if we are to escape defilement from the atmosphere of earth. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *Whiter than snow*:—What could be blacker than this man as he lay in his sins? His soul was stained with the most horrid and repulsive sins. Yet he seeks to be washed, and knows that, when washed, he will be clean, whiter than the driven snow. Ah, that virgin flake is very white, as it spreads its delicate network on the withered leaf: but there is one thing whiter still. Who are these in white robes, and whence came they? These are they that came out of great tribulation; out of dark pits of sin and death. Some were thieves, and some were murderers: and some were adulterers and murderers combined, as David was. Manasseh is there, who filled the streets of Jerusalem with innocent blood; and Mary Magdalene, out of whom Christ cast seven devils; and thousands more, once vile as they: but now there is not a stain on their garments; they have all been washed in the blood of the Lamb, and they are all whiter than snow, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. (*T. Alexander.*) *Whiter than snow*:—The Prince of Wales (now King Edward) once heard an unexpected sermon from a little girl, and it came about in this way. A nobleman, a widower, had a little daughter under ten years of age. He was very fond of his daughter, though his engagements prevented him seeing very much of her. The child was, therefore, mostly in the society of her governess, or in the nursery. Now, her nurse was an earnest Christian woman. She felt for her motherless little charge, and early stored the child's mind with Scriptural truths. The father used sometimes to amuse his little daughter by asking riddles; and one night, when she came in after dinner for dessert, she said to her father, who was not a Christian, "Father, do you

know what is whiter than snow?" "No," said he, somewhat puzzled; "I do not." "Well," replied the child, "a soul washed in the blood of Jesus is whiter than snow." The nobleman was surprised, and asked, "Who told you that?" "Nurse," was the reply. The father did not discuss the point, and conversation changed to other topics; but he afterwards privately requested the nurse, whose opinions he respected, not to mention these matters to his daughter, as at her tender age he feared she might take too "gloomy" a view of life. The incident was accordingly forgotten; but not long after the Prince of Wales was visiting the house, and the little girl was allowed to be present. The Prince, with his usual affability, noticed the child, and, thus encouraged, she said, "Sir do you know what is whiter than snow?" The Prince, not seeing the drift of the question, smiled as he answered, "No." "Well," she answered, "a soul washed in the blood of Jesus Christ is whiter than snow." The remark was overheard by the father; his little girl's words, heard by him a second time, were used to carry conviction to his heart; he became an earnest and devoted Christian, and thousands will hereafter rise up and call him blessed. *God Almighty's White*:—The Rev. F. B. Meyer, in the course of his visitation, saw a woman hanging out clothes which impressed him as being unusually white, for which he commended her. After spending a short time with her in the house, and coming to the door, he found a flurry of snow had whitened the ground. "Ah," said Mr. Meyer, "the clothes do not look so white as they did." "Oh, sir," cried the woman, "the clothes are right; but what can stand against God Almighty's white?"

Vers. 8-10. **Make me to hear of joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.**—*The depression of believers*:—This is the language of David at a period of trouble. His soul was depressed. He was fully conscious of his sins, but he was not conscious of forgiveness. He pleads with God for pardon, and, sensible of indwelling sin, he pleads for deliverance from its dreadful power. We can readily perceive some reasons why such depressions of mind should sometimes exist. 1. There are many instances of great unfaithfulness in the love and service of God. In such instances, doubts and difficulties of mind arise on both gracious and natural principles. It is a principle of grace, in God's dispensation of it, to withdraw His Spirit from those who forsake Him. He puts out their light. He leaves them to wander in the darkness of a spiritual abandonment, as an act of discipline, sometimes as intolerable to the soul as it is deserved. And such depressions arise—2. From the difficulties of determining character. Almost anything else is more easily determined than the question of character in the sight of God. But we lay down this principle: We affirm that there is a difference between the religious doubting, darkness and depression of mind which sometimes assail a true believer, and the doubting, darkness and depression which would belong to him if he were not a true believer; we affirm that there are peculiarities of grief and fear and anxiety in the dark soul-troubles of a child of God. We aid him as far as we can. We name some of the peculiarities accompanying a true believer's depression of mind. 1. In his depression of mind, when he doubts sometimes of his piety and fears final ruin, or mourns because he has no more evidence of his adoption; a true believer finds his soul uneasy and troubled more constantly than it would be if he were not a true believer, but were only a Christian in mere name. 2. Christian depression has a kind of supremacy about it. It swallows up all other things and regards them in comparison as trifles. A believer in his trouble is not tempted by the world. An unbeliever may be. He would renounce anything to attain that for which his soul longeth. It is supreme with him. 3. There is a deeper sensibility and a greater degree of anguish with a believer in his spiritual abandonment than an unbeliever knows anything about. He does not feel like the orphan that never knew a father; he feels like a disowned and outcast child. He has no more a father, no more a home or a hope. There is nothing for him to turn to, and no friend for him to hope in. 4. In the seasons of his sadness a true Christian will be looking very much to God for relief. The psalm before us is an example. 5. Notice the resort to this means of grace will always mark the course of a troubled Christian. Pray he will. He will pray when, from his dark and unsoothed experiences of anguish, he finds and knows that prayer does him no good. 6. Amid the dark glooms of a believer's trouble there will be occasional flashes of light. The cloud will sometimes break away. The sun will appear, if not in its glory, at least in its glimpses. And, accordingly, you find in the prayers of depression and doubt recorded in the Bible such a mingling together of

complaint and complacency—of gloom and gladness—of trial and triumph, as makes them appear to an unwise mind like inconsistencies and absurdities. Job was compelled to make one of the bitterest of all possible lamentations. But there came flashes of light. "He knoweth the way that I take." 7. In all the depression and gloom of a believer, there are very few ideas of darkness and trouble which have their origin in any uncertainty of mind in respect to the realities of religion in respect to God or any of the truths of Christianity. He knows the reality of religion. He knows the security of it. He knows the blessedness of its experience. His trouble is that he cannot get at such blessed realities for himself. He would be less troubled if he had any doubt about the good he longs for, and if he did not set upon it such an indescribable value. (*T. S. Spencer, D.D.*) *David's prayer for joy and gladness*:—I. THE REQUEST ITSELF. 1. The thing petitioned for. "Joy and gladness." (1) As there is a spiritual life, so there is also a spiritual joy, and the one follows from the other: every kind of life has its joy, which is attendant upon it: not only the rational life, which is the highest of the life of nature; but also the sensitive, as the life of beasts; and the vegetative, which is the life of plants. These have their proportionable cheerfulness, and comfortableness, and joyfulness, which is belonging unto them; and therefore the life of grace in a more especial manner. And as in this there is joy for the principle, there is a spirit and affection of joy; so there is also joy for the object, there is matter and occasion of joy for that principle to close withal. There is joyful tidings and occurrences; there are such things as do provoke joy in those persons which are capable of it, and are fit subjects for it, as pardon of sin, and assurance of this pardon, and communion with God, and hopes of heaven: these are things which put gladness into the hearts by way of object and occasion to it. (2) The properties and effects of it. (a) This inward spiritual joy, this joy which is peculiar to religion, is an enlivening and strengthening joy. The joy of the Lord is your strength; it enables a man in some measure for those duties which God requires at his hands. It is compared to oil (*Ps. xlv. 7*). Now, we know the property of oil is to supple and qualify the parts and members of the body, and make them fit for service: so does this joy of the spirit. Sadness, and melancholy, and discontent, it is a lumpish business, it takes men off from doing their work; but joy it puts life into them, it expedites them, and makes them ready to every good work. (b) As it makes men active in doing good, so also patient in suffering evil. It carries a man through crosses and tribulations with a great deal of support above other men (*Rom. v. 2, 3*). (c) It is durable and lasting, a joy which no man can take away (*John xvi. 22*). This is the difference betwixt a Christian's joy and a worldling's; betwixt a believer's and an hypocrite's. As for the latter, it quickly withers and comes to an end; it is but for a moment, as Job speaks (*Job xx. 25*). It is like the crackling of thorns under a pot, as Solomon (*Eccles. vii. 8*). But the former it lasts and continues, though not always in the same measure and degree for the vigour and liveliness of it, yet for the substance of it still it does; and especially for the true ground, and matter and occasion of it. (d) It is a transcendent joy, it does transport and raise the soul after an eminent manner (*1 Pet. i. 8*). It is such a joy as the greatness whereof is unable to be expressed unto us, especially when it is in that measure and degree as sometimes it is; as some of the blessed martyrs have sometimes had experience, when they have been so filled with joy as that they have despised their greatest torments themselves. 2. The manner and conveyance of this joy and gladness to the soul. "Make me to hear," etc. When we speak of the hearing of joy, we may conceive of it two manner of ways; either, first, by the hearing of the ear in the ministry of the Word; or, secondly, by the hearing of the heart in the application of the Spirit to the conscience: both these ways did David pray that he might hear joy and gladness. 3. The author and worker of all this in us, the spring and fountain from whence it proceeds, and that is God Himself, "Do thou make me to hear." This it may be carried respectively to all which hath been said before; and we may take notice of it in a threefold reference. (1) To the occasion. "Make me to hear joy and gladness:" that is, send me such a preacher as may speak seasonably and comfortably to me. It is God who hath a hand in this (*Ps. lxxviii. 11*). (2) To the performance. Make me to observe what I hear. (3) To the success. As the Word itself is comfortable, so let it have a comfortable effect upon my heart to fill it with comfort. II. THE ENLARGEMENT OR AMPLIFICATION OF THIS REQUEST, FROM THE END OR DRIFT IN PROPOUNDING IT. "That the bones," etc. The meaning of it is this; that I may receive comfort after so much terror and trouble and dis-



traction as I have been exercised withal. These broken bones are a metaphor taken from the body applied to the soul, to express unto us the anguish and vexation of it. There are two things considerable in this clause; first, here is somewhat implied; and, secondly, here is somewhat expressed: that which is implied is David's condition, and that is to have broken bones, that which is expressed is David's desire, that these broken bones might rejoice. 1. We see here that a condition of humiliation is not always a condition of despair. Broken bones are recoverable: a soul may be brought very low through the hand of God, which it is exercised withal, and yet not in a forlorn estate; thus David here, and so other of the saints elsewhere, as Job, and Heman, and Hezekiah, and such as these, they had all a share in these broken bones, and yet for all that recovered and got them up again. 2. Observe somewhat from the order; that great rejoicing it hath oftentimes great trouble preceding and going before it: the broken bones usher in the exultation. This is God's usual method, to bring to heaven by the gates of hell; and to make great dejections proper always to great enlargements. This He does, that so He may hereby set a price upon His own comforts, and have them had in greater esteem, and so much the better relished by us, which otherwise they would not be. 3. Observe somewhat also from the opposition of state to state, a state of sadness to a state of rejoicing, and the one promoted by the other; and so there is this in it; that those who have felt most of God's terrors are most affected with His comforts: such as these leap for joy, as coming from one extreme to another, from a dark and dismal dungeon into a glorious sunshine. 4. In this transcendent expression, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice; we have this observation likewise intimated to us; how that the servants of God (occasionally and accidentally) gain by their very falls. This is that which David supposes as possible in this petition. As an arm or leg which is broken, when it is once set, is the stronger afterwards; so it falls out to be sometimes in this case with the servants of God. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) **That the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.**—*Broken bones*:—Backsliding is a most common evil, far more common than some of us suppose. We may ourselves be guilty of it and not know it. The cunning hunter makes the passage into his pits most easy and attractive, but out of them the way is difficult indeed. So Satan makes the way of apostasy to be very seductive to our natures, but the way of return, were it not for God's grace, no human soul would find possible. I. **THE PLIGHT IN WHICH DAVID WAS.** His bones had been broken. People speak flippantly of David's sin, making out of it an accusation against godliness and an excuse for their own sin. But they should look also at David's repentance, for if his sin was shameful, his sorrow for it was of the bitterest kind; and if the crime was glaring, certainly the afflictions which chastised him were remarkable. Children of God cannot sin cheaply. Certainly, David did not. His word here tells that his plight was—1. Very painful. His bones were broken. A flesh wound is painful, but here was a more serious injury. No punishment was probably more cruel than that of breaking poor creatures alive upon the wheel. To such pain David likens his. 2. Very serious. 3. And complicated. It was not one bone, but many. How can they be all set again? And so with David, the greater powers of the soul were grieved and afflicted. In our spirits there are certain graces which are, so to speak, the bones of the spiritual man. Faith, hope, love are amongst them. But how they suffer when a soul is in such plight as David was! 4. Very dangerous, for where several bones are broken, every surgeon perceives how likely it is that the case will end fatally. It is a dreadful thing to be spiritually in such case—faith broken, hope broken, love broken, and the entire man, as it were, reduced to a palpitating mass of pain. It is a dreadfully dangerous condition to be in; for, alas! when men have sinned and suffered on account of it, they may yet turn again to their sins with greater hardness of heart than ever. Read Isaiah i. And, again, the case of David was—5. Most damaging. For even when God in His mercy heals the broken bones, it is a sad detriment to a man to have had them broken at all. But—6. His case was still hopeful. The saving clause lies here, "The bones which Thou hast broken." For He who wounds can bind up. II. **THE REMEDY TO WHICH HE RESORTED.** He did not lie down sullenly in despondency, but he turns to God in prayer. And—1. He believed that there was joy and gladness even for such as he. And—2. That it must come to him by hearing. The gate of mercy is the ear. "Incline your ear, and come unto Me, hear and," etc. Some despise preaching, and say that prayers are everything, especially the public saying of them. But it is to be noted that nowhere in this

New Testament did Jesus commission men to celebrate public prayer, but He did say to His disciples, "Go and preach." Very little is said about public worship, but the Book teems with references to preaching. The fact is, the sermon reverently heard, and earnestly delivered, is the highest act of worship. And it is the main instrumentality for the salvation of men. May the Lord "make" us to hear.

III. **THE HOPE WHICH HE ENTERTAINED.** Not that his bones might merely be quiet and at rest, but "rejoice." He had been a mass of misery, mercy shall make him a mass of music. The music is generally soft and gentle, and has much of God in it, and goes on unceasingly. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The torment of a roused conscience:*—When David's conscience was roused by Nathan's ministry, and set upon the rack, so that he now was sensible of the terror of the Lord, and of the heinousness of his sin, the case was altered, and that which before pleased him at the heart was now a pain to his heart, the vexation far exceeded all the former pleasures that he found. The pleasingness of sin was gone, the torment following it stuck by him, and it was no easy matter to remove it. (*S. Hieron.*) *David's reiteration of requests:*—He had made it already in vers. 1 and 7, and now again he repeats it. Yea, we may observe how he does it in some respects confusedly, without observing any method or order at all; there is no method in a broken heart: while he is praying for one thing, he does by the bye thrust in another; and while he is praying for assurance, he does preposterously pray for forgiveness, for pardon after joy, which is a thing antecedent thereunto. 1. Here is the necessity of this request of all other besides, to desire that God would pardon us our sins; it is that which we have need to put in the front of all other desires; nay, not only in the front, but in the rear; yea, and further, in the whole body of all. Whenever we draw near to God, make any suit or petition to Him, this had need to come in still, as we may say, for the burthen of the song, "Hide Thy face from my sins." The reason of it is this, because this is the groundwork and foundation of all other comforts besides: all the good which we receive from God is laid in our reconciliation with Him; and all our boldness and freedom, as to the asking of any good at His hands, so long as there is any guilt charged upon us, we cannot so easily do this; this puts an obstruction to those mercies which we expect from Him. 2. The second is the difficulty of it. Great sins make great impressions and wounds upon the conscience, which are not easily healed and made up. And this God will have to be in His infinite wisdom upon a double account: first, to put a weight upon sin; and, secondly, to put a price upon pardon; that the one may not be too easily ventured on, and that the other may not be too lightly esteemed and slighted, and made nothing of, as it would be ready to be. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) *The reparation of sin's ravages:*—David's prayer here is for more than forgiveness, more than remission of punishment, more than abolition of sin; it is for restoration to what he was before. I. **HE ASKS GOD TO FORGET IT ALL;** to forget the home left, the squandered property, the being driven in to God, unwilling and degraded. And all this to be as if it had never been! Is this possible? In one sense, yes; in another sense, no. Think only how we have altered our lives. It is said to have been the constant prayer of a very holy man, "O my God, make me what I might have been if I never had sinned!" Some of the Jews every Friday go to a place in Jerusalem, known as the Jews' wailing-place, where there are just a few foundation-stones of the old temple, and there lament their fallen greatness. There are wailing-places, it may be, and always will be, in our own lives. But a new city has risen up, and new duties and new hopes, and God has promised to forget. II. **HE ASKS FOR RESTORATION TO STRENGTH,** as shown in the clean heart and right spirit. The clean heart being a desire for right things in the seat of the affections; the right spirit being a susceptibility to heavenly influence in the seat of the conscience, the inner man. III. **HE ASKS FOR THE COMFORTS OF RELIGION.** "The comfort of Thy help." How much there is in these words! (*Canon Newbolt.*)

Vers. 9, 10. **Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.**—*God's pardoning grace:*—This psalm is made up partly of confessions and acknowledgments of his great crimes, partly of petitions and supplications, wherein he intercedes for pardon, and prays for forgiveness. And this was but necessary to complete the duty of confession, which without this additional act of devotion might have looked rather like a daring defiance of Divine justice; God having nowhere promised us His pardon, or indeed any other blessing without our asking; nor that He will open the gates of His mercy to penitent sinners, and grant them

readmission into His favour again, but upon their earnest applications and importunate knocking. **I. THE SENSE AND MEANING OF THE WORDS.** 1. By "sins" we may understand offences of a high nature, wilful and deliberate transgressions, such as are mightily provoking in the sight of God, from which, therefore, he prays God to "hide His face." 2. By "iniquities" may be understood the common frailties and ordinary miscarriages of our lives, those which with the greatest care we can use, cannot well be avoided; such as we daily run on score with God, which, therefore, he desires may be "blotted out." 3. God's "hiding His face" from anything is His passing it by, and His not regarding it (Ps. lv. 1; Ezek. xxxix. 29). Proportionably to "hide His face from our sins" is to overlook them; particularly to suspend sentence, not to proceed to judgment against us, but to forbear us. And this is properly that act of forgiveness the Latins call *Ignoscentia*, to seem not to know, not to resent injuries, and to put up affronts which are done to His Heavenly Majesty. And, oh blessed God, may every one of us, sinners as we are, say, how do we all of us stand obliged to Thy goodness, that Thou hast not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities; but hast lengthened out our time and Thy patience, and given us space of repentance, and left us still in a possibility of salvation, and hast from time to time hid Thy face from our provoking sins, even when we have boldly and deliberately dared Thy justice to Thy face! Oh, praised be that unspeakable mercy of Thine. 4. To "blot out all our iniquities" is so to forgive them as that they shall never be remembered more (Ezek. xxxiii. 16). This is a metaphor taken from the usual discharge of debts and release of suits and actions we may have against any man, when we wipe out the score, and cancel all bills and obligations whatever, and give him a free general pardon and quit-claim of all dues or demands. And this is that act of forgiveness which in Latin is called *condonatio*, an absolute and full discharge. And this is the very term and tenor of evangelical pardon, as Himself hath declared it by His prophet (Isa. xliii. 25). Gracious God, be always pleased to hide Thy face from our sins, but never hide it from our persons or from our prayers; which is the severest token of Thy heaviest displeasure. **II. THE NATURE OF GOD'S PARDONING GRACE.** Consider the wonderful goodness of God's nature in Himself and of His will towards us, that He doth as it were lay aside all His glorious attributes almost, to serve us; and shows us mercy, even in disparagement to His infinite knowledge and holiness and justice; that, though He cannot but see and know our sins, because He knows all things, yet He takes no notice of them: and because they cannot be hid from His face, He hides His face from them; though He cannot but abominate sin, and bate it with a perfect hatred, yet He loves and bears with the sinner; and though He stand obliged as a righteous judge to punish sin, wherever He finds it, yet He delays the punishment in expectation of our repentance. And this is the first act of pardon, or, at least, step towards it, that God doth not rebuke us in His anger, nor chasten us in His hot displeasure; that there is a suspension at least of punishment, a reprieve in order to a full pardon; which follows in the next place, the blotting out of all our iniquities, so as never to be remembered more; and this is the removal of guilt, a total and final discharge for the future, as that is a forbearance of vengeance at present. That in a manner is but present impunity; this is an absolute discharge for ever; and that—1. Total: all mine iniquities; and—2. Final: by being blotted out. **III. HOW THIS FORGIVENESS AND FULL PARDON MAY BE ATTAINED.** 1. Contrition. Labour to be thoroughly convinced of thy sins; consider and lay to heart thy dangerous estate; spread thy sins before thy own conscience first, before thou lay them before God in thy confession. Fruit is first bruised and squeezed before it yields its precious liquor; stones, and the hardest metals themselves, when they are melted down, will run. Then, when thou art thus contrite, when thou hast broken thy heart, and melted it with the coals of Divine love, thy soul will pour out itself. 2. Supplication. Get thee to thy Lord right humbly; beseech His mercy to accept thy repentance, and His grace to improve it. Let Him not alone till thou hast obtained a gracious answer. 3. Lay hold on Christ; plead His passion and merits. In His name and mediation thy supplications must hope to speed, and have their designed effect. Let thy prayers be performed in the censer of thy High Priest, and be mingled with His intercessions. 4. Amendment of life; or else all that thou hast done hitherto falls short and comes to nothing. **IV. THE BLESSED EFFECTS AND CONSEQUENCE OF THIS PARDONING GRACE.** 1. The favour of God as now reconciled in Christ. If thou hast this pardon, thou hast the light of God's countenance shining upon thy inner

man, and art in the same condition as a child restored to his father's love. And this thou mayest know by thy own dutiful behaviour and ingenuous affections, as well as by His kind reception; if thou givest Him cause by thy filial diligence to rejoice in thy return, as thou thyself rejoicest in His reconciliation. 2. This favour procures the peace and quiet of conscience. 3. The gracious assurance of thy present acceptance, both of thy person and performances. 4. The ascertaining of thy future hopes. Present acceptance goes a great way with a faithful servant; but to have, beside and beyond this, an ascertainment of what expectations and future rewards such a servant may look for at the hands of a kind master; this cannot but raise, as well as quiet, his spirit. This will not only fix, but elevate him in his loyalty. V. MARKS WHEREBY A SINNER MAY KNOW WHETHER HE HATH ATTAINED THIS PARDON. (*Adam Littleton, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.—*A clean heart*.—I. THE BLESSING ASKED FOR. It may refer to two distinct graces, conversion or entire sanctification. For when a man is converted there is still in him an inclination to evil, the struggle between the flesh and the spirit: his soul is not altogether pure. He has need of a more complete sanctification, of deliverance from all sin. And to this our text may be referred. A clean heart is one purified by the Holy Spirit from everything that is contrary to holiness. And it is also a constant heart. "Renew within me a constant spirit"—so may the words be translated. There is, then, the idea of constancy and establishment (2 Cor. xiii. 9, 11; 1 Pet. v. 10). And there is no entire sanctification without it. The Spirit who inspired David with the prayer of our text is the same who dictated to the apostles the pictures of Christian virtues united together, which compose sanctification. David is persuaded that sanctification implies perfect sincerity: "Behold, Thou desirest truth within"; he knows that it comprises the wisdom which is the fruit of the instruction of the Holy Spirit: "Thou didst teach me," or "make me to know wisdom in the secret of my heart" (ver. 6). II. THE DISPOSITIONS FROM WHICH THE PRAYER OF DAVID PROCEEDED. It is evidently a fervent prayer, which causes his whole being to rise towards God. But by what way he had been brought to make this request is not the essential thing for us to know. What is clear is that David had fallen very grievously; that his repentance was deep and painful; and that serious reflections on the inward cause of evil occupied his mind. It was his outward sin which obliged him to look within, and attentively examine the state of his heart and tendency to evil. It is as if he had said, "What Thou detestest is not only sin manifested without, but its inward principle; the sin which is hidden in the heart, and which is the cause of outward evil." The Christian cannot, indeed, have at first a perfect view of his inward pollutions. When conversion has been prompt and marked, when the sorrow for past sins has been deep, the agreeable feelings which succeed that sorrow as a consequence of our faith in Christ, the lively joy, the fervent love, check for a time the manifestations of evil. Sin is struck down and bruised; its power is broken. Perhaps God also, in His Fatherly wisdom and tenderness, does not permit His feeble child to see all his corruption from the beginning of his new life. That painful revelation might discourage him if it were made before his faith was strengthened. But if the evil is not yet evident, it is real; the light of the Holy Spirit will manifest it at the right time. And oh, what discoveries he speedily makes! What a mixture in his best actions, and in his whole life! What pride! What envy! What evil thoughts! What avarice! What a legion of other guilty feelings! III. THE MOST POWERFUL ENCOURAGEMENTS TO FAITH. 1. The fact that the Holy Spirit inspires that request is to you a sufficient proof that it is agreeable to God, and that He will hear it. Can you suppose that God would reveal to you the existence of a malady of which you could not be healed? Would He take pleasure in tormenting you by the view of impurity which He would not remove? Such a supposition would dishonour God. Courage, then, ye afflicted ones who heartily take part in the prayer of David, and say, "O God, create in me a clean heart!" That prayer itself is the pledge of your deliverance. 2. A further encouragement is found in the fact of God Himself delivering His Son to death for you. When it is well understood and felt, is it not a powerful motive to sanctification? Does it not make an irresistible appeal to our love? 3. But, further, the commandments of God enjoin upon us sanctification. "Be ye holy; for I am holy." Does not every commandment imply a promise of grace to accomplish what it requires? I bind you, then, not to limit the Holy

One of Israel. Wait to receive now the blessing of a pure heart. Begin to ask for it as you have never yet done. Seek it in the spirit of Jacob when he wrestled with the Lord. (*J. Hogart.*) *David's cry for purity*.—I. A REMARKABLE OUTLINE OF A HOLY CHARACTER. He possessed the Holy Spirit, or he could not have prayed that that Spirit might not be taken from him. God had departed from Saul, because Saul had refused His counsel and departed from Him; and Saul's successor, trembling as he remembers the fate of the founder of the monarchy, and of his vanished dynasty, prays with peculiar emphasis of meaning, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." "A right spirit"—"a constant or firm spirit" is the meaning. Then consider the third element in the character which David longs to possess—a "free" spirit. He who is holy because full of God's Spirit, and constant in his holiness, will likewise be free. That is the same word which is in other places translated "willing"—and the scope of the psalmist's desire is, "Let my spirit be emancipated from sin by willing obedience." This goes very deep into the heart of all true godliness. And so the psalmist prays, "Let my obedience be so willing that I had rather do what Thou wilt than anything besides." II. DESIRES FOR HOLINESS SHOULD BECOME PRAYERS. David does not merely long for certain spiritual excellences; he goes to God for them. There are some of you that are wasting your lives in paroxysms of fierce struggle with the evil that you have partially discovered in yourselves, alternating with long languor fits of collapse and apathy, and who make no solid advance, just because you will not lay to heart these two convictions—your sin has to do with God, and your sins come from a sinful nature. Because of the one fact, you must go to God for pardon; because of the other, you must go to God for cleansing. There, in your heart, like some black well-head in a dismal bog, is the source of all the swampy corruption that fills your life. You cannot stanch it, drain it, sweeten it. Ask Him, who is above your nature and without it, to change it by His own new life infused into your spirit. He will heal the bitter waters. He alone can. III. PRAYERS FOR PERFECT CLEANSING ARE PERMITTED TO THE LIPS OF THE GREATEST SINNERS. Such longings as these might seem audacious, when the atrocity of the crime is remembered, and by man's standard they are so. Let the criminal be thankful for escape, and go hide himself, say men's pardons. But here is a man, with the evil savour of his debauchery still tainting him, daring to ask for no mere impunity, but for God's choicest gifts. Does not a prayer like this seem as if it were but adding to his sin? But, thank God, it is not so. Let no sin, however dark, however repeated, drive us to despair of ourselves, because it hides from us our loving Saviour. Though beaten back again and again by the surge of our passions and sins, like some poor shipwrecked sailor sucked back with every retreating wave and tossed about in the angry surf, yet keep your face towards the beach where there is safety, and you will struggle through it all, and, though it were but on some floating boards and broken pieces of the ship, will come safe to land. He will uphold you with His Spirit, and take away the weight of sin that would sink you, by His forgiving mercy, and bring you out of all the weltering waste of waters to the solid shore. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Purity*.—I. INQUIRE INTO THE MEANING OF A CLEAN HEART, or the proper ingredients and expressions of such a temper of soul. 1. A fixed habitual abhorrence of all forbidden indulgences of the flesh. This is that which principally constitutes a clean heart; and from this all the other fruits and expressions of such a temper will proceed. 2. All past impurities, either of heart or life, will be reflected on with shame and sorrow (*Jer. xxxi. 19; Ezek. xvi. 63; xx. 42, 43*). 3. A clean heart imports that the heart is actually freed in a good measure from impure thoughts and irregular desires; or at least that they are not entertained with pleasure and delight. He cannot be at rest till they are dispossessed and gone. 4. A clean heart discovers itself by a cautious fear of the least degrees of impurity. He dares not allow himself to go to the utmost bounds of things lawful, because he reckons himself to be then upon a precipice. 5. A clean heart necessarily implies a careful and habitual guard against everything which tends to pollute the mind (*Prov. iv. 23*). All loose and vicious company will be avoided as much as may be by those who have a clean heart. Intemperance will be carefully avoided by those who have an earnest concern to maintain their purity. II. REPRESENT THE OBLIGATIONS THAT LIE UPON US TO SEEK AFTER SUCH A PURITY OF HEART. 1. A ruling inclination to sensuality is directly contrary to the purity and holiness of the Divine nature. 2. Sensuality has a special tendency to extinguish the light of reason, and to unfit for anything spiritual and sacred. 3. Sensuality is most contrary to the design and engage-

ments of Christianity. Our Lord inculcated the strictest purity upon all His disciples; not only an abstinence from gross outward acts, but from polluting thoughts and desires (Matt. v. 27-30). 4. The blessed hope with which Christianity inspires us, lays us under a forcible engagement to present purity. (1) Those of the contrary temper are absolutely excluded, by the express declarations of the Gospel, from the kingdom of God (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10). (2) On the contrary, the promise of the future blessedness is most plainly made to the pure in heart (Matt. v. 8). (*J. Evans, D.D.*) *The uncleanness of the heart, and how it is cleansed*.—I If the heart must be created anew before it can be a clean heart, certainly, before it is thus new-formed, it is AN IMPURE AND UNCLEAN HEART. And this that is here implied is frequently in the Scriptures directly affirmed (Gen. vii. 5; Jer. xvii. 19; Mark vii. 21). All the evils that are in the world are but evidences of the impurity of the heart, that unclean fountain and original of them. II. WHEREIN THE UNCLEANNESSE OF THE HEART CONSISTS. A clean heart is such a heart as hath clean desires and affections; an unclean heart is that which hath unclean and impure desires, a heart full of evil concupiscence. III. THE CAUSES OF THIS UNCLEANNESSE OF THE HEART. 1. The impetuosity and continual solicitations of the sensual appetite, which continually sends up its foul exhalations and steams into the heart, and thereby taints and infects it. 2. The weakness and the defect of the imperial part of the soul, the reason and understanding. IV. HOW IT COMES TO PASS THAT A HEART THUS NATURALLY UNCLEAN IS CLEANSSED, which in general is by a restitution of the soul to its proper and native sovereignty and dominion over the sensual appetite; and those lusts that arise from the constitution of the body, and the connection of the soul to it. (*Sir M. Hale.*) *Reformation of heart the main thing needed*.—This is the main thing desirable, even purity and cleanness of heart, that God would bestow this blessing upon us. This is that which the Scriptures does abundantly commend unto us in sundry places (Ps. lxxiii. 1; xxiv. 3, 4; Matt. v. 8). This cleanness and purity of heart is commended as the principal thing to be pursued by us, upon a double account. 1. As of the greatest eminence, considered in itself: The heart is the best part of a man; therefore there is cause for desiring of the cleanness of that above all the rest. As we see in an house, one would have all the rooms clean in it; but if there be any better than another, some choice and peculiar chamber that we desire should be so especially. This now is the condition of the heart, it is the best room in all the house: it is best for the constitution of it; and therefore it should be best likewise for the qualification: it is best for its use and employment, and therefore it should be best likewise for its ordering and disposition: that which is the best of us, should be the best in us. We value rooms according to the guests which we entertain into them; and this is the pre-eminence of the heart, wherein God Himself takes special delight to dwell, and to reside; and therefore we should take special care for the cleaning of it, not to put such a worthy guest and friend as He is into a foul and impure lodging: the heart should be clean for its eminence. 2. It should be so also for its influence; and according to this sense especially are we to take it here in this place, in this desire of David. He was now upon the business of repentance, and amendment of life, to set upon a new course of life over what he had of late taken up; and now see here where he lays the groundwork and foundation of such a business as this, namely, in the cleansing of his heart—Create in me a clean heart, O God; he begins with that; this is the spring and fountain of all amendment and reformation whatsoever. They that desire to reform their lives, they must endeavour to reform their hearts; they must labour to have right spirits in them, or else all will be in vain unto them, whatsoever they apply themselves to as concerning this matter. The reason of it is clear, because the heart is the original and spring of all evil, as our Saviour Himself hath told us (Mark vii. 21). (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) *A clean heart*.—"Heart" comprehends not only feeling, but intellect and will. It suggests the impulsive; the sphere of the emotions and sympathy, of hatred and of love. It suggests the directive; the realm of plans and of judgment, the sphere and home of thought. It suggests the executive; the power which prosecutes purpose, the forces of persistence and resistance; the offensive and defensive energies of the life. The dominion of the heart is inclusive of the threefold sovereignty of emotion, intellect and will. A clean heart is, therefore, very much more than refined and sensitive feeling. It is also inclusive of illumined and clarified discernment; of healthy and wholesome will. "Create within me a clean heart" is a very wealthy and comprehensive prayer; make my feelings like clean fire, make my thought like a

sea of glass. Make my will like a loyal soldier, incapable of mutiny. How is this splendid aim to be gained? By an act of creation. "Create in me a pure heart, O God." There is something in creation that is revolutionary: it is the gift of a seed. John Stuart Mill said that a revolutionary force entered into his life on the day he came to know the lady who was afterwards to be his wife. The experience is a commonplace in ordinary life. Intimacies mark the beginnings of revolutions. A father says, "It was a bad day when my lad became intimate with such a one," and he mentions the name with bitterness and shame. But why a bad day? A revolutionary force got hold of him, bad principle possessed him. The seed of devilry was implanted, which worked itself out in all manner of unworthiness and sin. The first step in the creation of devilry is to become related to one. On the good side and on the bad the revolutionary in life is occasioned by the establishment of a new relationship. The first requisite in the creation of the Godlike life is relationship with God. Life is revolutionized when man comes into conscious communion with his Maker. Let me illustrate. Here is a reservoir supplying the needs of a great town. The waters become poisoned and defiled. The vast mains become the agents of destruction, the vehicles and purveyors of disease. Epidemics break out. Pestilence abounds. Let me assume that on pure and unpolluted heights there are discovered unmeasured resources of water, clean and undefiled. Let us assume that we could connect the corrupted mains with the clean and wholesome flood. The linking of the two would be the beginning of a revolution. The epidemic would not be obliterated in a day, even with the opening of the crystal flood. But in the revolution would be the potency of health. And here am I, a member of a race, down whose waterways flow currents of diluted and defiled life. That truth is not only proclaimed in the Scripture, it is the doctrine of modern science. One calls it the legacy of Adam, the other the bequest of heredity. "In Adam all die;" the elements of corruption are transmitted; the reservoir from which I drink has been defiled. Now let us assume that I could become related to some reservoir in the heights, some pure river of water of life. How then? What I bespeak as an assumption has been proclaimed as a gospel. I can change the reservoirs; "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." The heredity can be changed; "heirs of Adam," we can become "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." The first element in the new creation is a new relation. We become "new creatures" when we become "one with Christ." The revolution is succeeded by evolution. Becoming the "heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ," I am subjected to a discipline which is intended to develop all the wealth of my inner life. The discipline is intended to discharge the twofold ministry of instruction and chastening. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *Reformation must begin at the heart:*—A reformation which beginneth at the members and external actions is neither true nor constant. As if a man intending to dress his garden, and purge it from thistles and such-like weeds, would cut off the upper part and leave the roots, which would spring up again: so if thou wouldst chastise thy body and let thine heart remain luxurious, it is nothing. The heart is the fountain, wherefrom springeth all evil, the root from which all sin groweth. He speaketh not of the substance but of the affections and qualities of the heart. No honest man will lodge in a filthy house, or drink or eat except the vessel be made clean; and God cannot abide in a foul, swinish heart. "Keep thine heart diligently," saith the Spirit. As a vessel of gold or silver being through long use wasted and broken, is sent to the goldsmith's to be renewed, so our hearts worn by sin must be sent to God, that He may put them in the fire, and cast them in a new mould, and make them up again. Alas, that we are careful to renew everything, clothes, vessels and all, only careless to renew our hearts. (*A. Symson.*) *Renew a right spirit within me.—Gracious renewal:*—I. THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSITY FOR GOD'S RENEWAL OF US IF WE WOULD PERSEVERE. 1. Nothing that God has made is self-existent. Not the angels even. The very mountains crumble, and the great rivers have to be perpetually refilled from the mountain snows. 2. This is especially true of all wherein life is. Job's war-horse, whose neck is clothed with thunder, must humble himself to his stall and to his provender. Samson himself must have a cleft opened in the rock that he may drink, for though he has slain the Philistines, yet will he perish if his thirst be not quenched. 3. Your own inner consciousness says the same. What downward tendencies there are in us all. We could travel down-hill to hell easily, but upwards to heaven how hardly! 4. And if we will not see this we may be made to, and that terribly, by some surprising sin. See the occasion of this psalm.

5. Unconscious backsliding from God will certainly be upon us unless we experience the renewals of God's Spirit. The Church has rest now-a-days, and is where Pilgrim was when he went through the enchanted ground, and the air was heavy, and he had much ado to keep himself from sleeping. Perhaps it is a truthless legend that the holidays of Capua ruined the veterans of Hannibal, but if it be a legend in his case, it is a fact in ours. Therefore we do need to pray, "Renew a right spirit within me." And because of—II. OUR OWN POWERLESSNESS TO DO THIS. "Without me," said our Lord, "we can do nothing"; but we do not fully know all that means. When a ship is in sailing order and in good condition, yet she cannot speed on her voyage of herself: even though the sails be spread, there is no hope of her making her port unless the wind shall blow. For to renew a soul is as when Christ called forth Lazarus from the grave: it is to go directly opposite to nature. Who can make water run up-hill, or suspend the cataract in mid-air? Every grace is wanted that was needed in our first conversion. Then pray this prayer, but pray it not falsely, as you will if you use not the means through which God works. He is a hypocrite who asks the Lord to visit him and then nails up his door. III. THE BLESSED RESULTS OF SUCH RENEWAL—this another argument for our praying this prayer. What joy, what activity, how useful you will be: how light will be the load of this world's trials. IV. REMEMBER GOSPEL OBLIGATIONS TO RENEW OUR COVENANT WITH GOD. 1. It was well for you at the first to make this covenant. 2. Jesus often renews it with us, and—3. All He has done for us binds us to it. You that have gone astray, pray this prayer. If the Church for thy backslidings has had to cast thee out, if there be still a desire in thy soul to return, Christ waits for thee. And whoever we be, young or old, men or women struggling amid the world's cares, or young men and maidens, or young children, come now and renew your vows unto God. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *A right spirit*:—1. By "spirit" we are to understand either the rational part distinct from the animal, or (which I rather incline to) the rational part in the refinings of it; the more eminent and divine ray of understanding and will; the mind of the mind and the soul of the soul. If there be any part better than other, to be still better in that; not only in the body, but so much the more in the soul; and not only in the soul and mind, but so much the rather in the spirit of it, which is the bent and bias of the mind, the vigour and activity of it, he would be best in that. Now, accordingly, we should ourselves endeavour hereunto likewise. There are none which are so wicked as those which are spiritually wicked; nor none which are so good as those which are spiritually good. Look by how much grace and holiness does at any time take hold on our spirits, so much the better still we are. 2. The second is what is meant by "right." (1) In this expression David desires an even carriage of heart, that is, a right spirit, neither turning to the right hand nor to the left, but equally poised and ballasted in him: and so he does hereby show us what is likewise desirable of ourselves, even integrity and uprightness of spirit. (2) A firmness of purpose; our heart settled and resolved. This is very requisite and necessary for us in these regards. (a) In regard of the excellency of the things themselves which are here commended to us: the better anything is, the more cause have we to be resolved upon it, and constant to it. (b) In regard of the natural inconstancy of our own hearts: the more uncertain we are of ourselves, the greater need have we to make ourselves sure by a fixedness and constancy of resolution, and thereby as it were to bind ourselves up. (c) In regard of the manifold temptations and attempts which are upon us to take us off. There are so many baits laid to unsettle us, that unless we peremptorily determine ourselves, we shall never be sure; we have many assaults upon us to shake us, and to make us let go our hold, for which cause we have need to endeavour after this constant spirit. (Thomas Horton, D.D.)

Ver. 11. *Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.*—A most needful prayer concerning the Holy Spirit:—This psalm is, beyond all others, a photograph of penitent David. You may have seen that interesting slab of stone which bears on its surface indications of the fall of rain-drops in a primeval shower; this psalm preserves the mark of David's tear-drops, for the inspection and instruction of succeeding generations. Take our text—I. AS THE CRY OF A PENITENT CHILD OF GOD. This is its largest, widest and most primitive sense. It is certainly fit language for any child of God who has fallen into gross sin. Backslider, you may yet return; there are pardons for sins of deepest dye. But more, probably, will equally need this prayer on account of



gradual backsliding. One great sin startles the soul into repentance, but a continuation of sin will be found to be even more dangerous. White ants will devour a carcase as surely and as speedily as a lion. Many threads of silk twisted together may hold a man as fast as one band of iron. But the soul that can thus pray has still true spiritual life struggling within. An ungodly man would not care at all, but here is life which sighs after God. How many are the reasons for such a prayer as this! God's presence is our comfort amid affliction. It was the Holy Spirit who regenerated us, and into His name we were baptized. And He is the Spirit of adoption. Let anything come between us and our distinct recognition of our sonship towards God, and we are undone. Further, it is by the Holy Spirit that we have access to God. Praying in the Holy Spirit is the only true praying. And He is our great instructor; He leads us into all truth. And we need His aid as our Comforter and Sanctifier, and as our power for practical service. And remember, too, that when a man has sinned as David had, he cannot always pray in language which would be precisely suitable for a well-assured saint. When assurance is gone, and faith is weak, it is a great comfort that we may pray a sinner's prayer.

II. AS THE VOICE OF AN ANXIOUS CHURCH. Remember, there have been Churches from which God has removed His Spirit. The Churches of Asia, and many more recent instances. Therefore remember that the power of a Church does not consist in her organizations; nor her gifts; nor her wealth; nor her doctrines. I know not that Laodicea held false doctrines, yet she was nauseous to the Lord. Nor is a Church's strength her numbers. What is a large Church without the Lord's presence, but a mass of chaff to be scattered by the wind! And the fall of such Church may be sudden. Therefore how needful for all Churches is this prayer. Take it—

III. AS THE CRY OF AN AWAKENED SINNER. Not accurately, but still instinctively we may thus use it. Oh, unconverted man! if thou art anxious about thy soul, pray this prayer. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Deprecation of God's judgments*.—The people of God they understand the nature of spiritual judgments, that they are the greatest and saddest of any; which they are in a twofold respect; first, as considered in themselves, and that mischief which is contained in them; and, secondly, in regard of their influence and extent. First, as for themselves, they are the greatest, as depriving of the greatest good, and carrying the greatest smart with them. Every one prizes any loss according as he is in any way sensible of the gain which is lost by it. What is the reason that worldly men make so much of worldly losses, of friends, and honours, and estates, and such things as these? It is because they understand what they mean. Why now thus it is also in spirituals: God's children, because they know what it is to enjoy God's presence, therefore they are so afraid of being deprived of it. And then in regard of their influence; they know that such judgments as these have other judgments attending upon them; and so they have: first, as to temporal judgments, they are oftentimes forerunners of them: as the Gospel comes not alone, so it goes not alone, nor the comforts which belong unto it. When God afflicts men with spiritual judgments, which it may be they do not regard, He has other judgments for them, following of them, which they are more sensible of; when David was cast out of God's presence, he was in danger of somewhat else with it; and so are others with him. And then especially as to judgment to come. Spiritual judgments, where they are not prevented, end in eternal judgments, and in their own nature tend unto them. Temporary casting out of God's presence tends to final and absolute rejection: and the loss of God's Spirit for a time tends to the loss of it for ever: this it does in its own nature, however through the goodness of God it does not always take effect; as the firing but of one room in a house speaks the firing of the whole building; and the firing of but one house in particular the destruction of the whole city, though God does graciously come between. Now the children of God they consider things in themselves, and the nature and tendency of them, as it becomes wise men to do, and accordingly judge of them; and hence are so much afraid of spiritual judgments. (Thomas Horton, D.D.)

**And take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.**—*The withdrawal of God's Spirit deprecated as the worst of evils*.—1. The best of saints may fall into the worst of sins. 2. As the best of saints cannot keep themselves from falling, so neither can they raise themselves up again when they are fallen (Ps. xxiii. 3). 3. Where repentance is sincere, a believer matters not what shame he takes, provided by his confession glory may redound to God. I. WHAT IT IS FOR GOD TO TAKE AWAY HIS HOLY SPIRIT. For God to take away His Holy Spirit is for Him to withdraw His sensible gracious influences from the soul. II. FOR WHAT REASONS,

OR ON WHAT ACCOUNTS IT IS, THAT GOD ACTS THUS TOWARDS HIS OWN PEOPLE.

1. Pride and self-confidence in the performance of any duty. The apostle seems to be most afraid of that little boasting pronoun *I* (1 Cor. xv. 1). Grace prepared him for service, grace assisted him in it, grace gave success to it, grace therefore has all the praise. 2. Another reason why God withdraws His Spirit is negligence and sloth in the discharge of duty (Cant. v. 2). Oh! those formal, lukewarm frames of spirit, our beloved loathes them. Give Christ your whole heart, or give Him nothing. 3. Unimproved mercies is another cause of the removal of God's Spirit (1 Kings xi. 9). 4. Present sins are another cause of God's withdrawing of His Spirit: Samson and David both failed here. III. WHY GRACIOUS SOULS CANNOT BEAR THE LOSS OF GOD'S SPIRIT WITHOUT PUTTING IN THEIR PLEA AGAINST IT. 1. Because He is the Spirit of truth, and without His gracious teachings all the knowledge that we have of God and of Christ will do us no real good. Light in the head will be of little efficacy if there be not life and heat in the heart. 2. He is the Spirit of grace and of supplication, and without His aid we shall be indifferent to duty, and lifeless in it (Zech. xii. 10). 3. The Spirit is a Spirit of holiness, and without His presence all our endeavours after sanctification in heart and life are fruitless, and in vain. 4. The Spirit is the author of all consolation and joy, and without His gracious influences the believer will be ever sorrowing and cast down (John xvi. 7). USES. 1. If the loss of God's presence here be so dreadful, how sad is it ever to be separated from it in the other world? (Ps. xc. 11). 2. God has other ways to punish His own people for sin, than casting them into hell for it (Ps. xcix. 8). 3. Have a care how you grieve the Spirit (Eph. iv. 30). Do not that which is contrary to His nature and will. Embrace His counsels; submit to His government; walk in all the ways of His appointment. (*J. Hill.*) *Withdrawal of the Holy Spirit from the soul:*—There came upon David's soul, like a veritable horror, the consciousness that it was possible to go from bad to worse; that, unless God interposed, this might last for ever—this momentary withdrawal of the spiritual power might be permanent. So he seems to say with an awful pathos in his voice, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." As I thought of this I wondered whether there rose before the eyes of David the memory of what he himself had seen in the years that were gone. There was his predecessor on the throne—Saul—a man on whom the Spirit of God rested for a while, but who was bereft of the Spirit. When the Spirit had left him, what an awful condition he got into! David seems to say within himself, "O God, have mercy upon me. Do not let me become a Saul, lest I forget Thy judgments and disobey Thy statutes; lest in my hot anger I raise my hand against a just man, and seek to pin him to the wall with my javelin, as Saul did even unto me." (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 12. *Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.*—*The fallen Christian praying for spiritual joy:*—He asks that God would clear away his sorrows as well as his sins, make once again a happy man of him; so that he may not only rise up from the ground on which he has fallen and go on his heavenly way, but, like the Ethiopian convert in the desert, go "on his way rejoicing." "Make me to hear joy and gladness," he says in verse 8, and here he prays, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." "Pardon," we should have said to David at this time, "is all that you must now dare to ask, pardon and renewed sanctification." "No," says David, "there is healing in my God for sinners such as I am, as well as pardon; there is comfort in Him for even men like me. I see them in Him, and I will ask them of Him. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." I. THE JOY OF GOD'S SALVATION. "I do not care how I am made happy," a man of the world would say, "so that I am happy." He has no definite idea of happiness. "Who will show me any good?" is his language; "any good"—he cares not what. "But I can be made happy only in one way," the really Christian man says; "I must be happy in my God, and I can be happy in him only as God my Saviour, the God of my salvation." And if anything can make a sinful creature happy, it is this joy of which we speak. It is the "joy unspeakable and full of glory," the only joy that can be truly called Christian joy, or that can meet the desires of the regenerated soul. II. THE POSSESSION OR EXPERIENCE OF THIS JOY. Though now without it, David once partook of it. "Do all the people of God, then," you may ask, "experience this joy?" You might as well inquire whether all who dwell on the face of the earth behold the sun's light. That sun always exists and is always pouring forth its beams, but men may be shut up within walls, or be turned on

the revolving earth away from the sun, or have their organs of vision impaired or closed, and thus have the sun as to them shining in vain. So with the salvation or gospel of God—joy and gladness it is ever capable of giving, and is ever actually giving to multitudes of happy souls who understand and believe it, but not at all times to all who understand and believe it, for the spiritual perceptions of some of them are weak. But let this pass. The point I am now aiming to establish is this—that as there is a spiritual sorrow in the Christian's inward experience, begotten in him by the Gospel of God, so there is commonly a joy in his experience, begotten in him also by the salvation of God. III. THE LOSS OF THIS JOY. This is a mournful loss. There are varied causes for the instability and changeableness of our minds, but the grand destroyer of our spiritual happiness, the one great extinguisher and demolisher of our joy, is sin—sin indulged; not sin struggled with and kept at bay, but sin yielded to, mentally if not practically committed; sin let into our imaginations and hearts, if not into our houses and lives, and fostered and cherished and fed on there. In David's case it was heinous, enormous, complicated sin which laid his joy low; but common, decent sins will do the work as effectually though not as suddenly. IV. THE RESTORATION OF SPIRITUAL JOY, its recovery when lost. This the text describes as both desirable and attainable. 1. Desirable it was to David's soul, or he would not have repeatedly and so earnestly prayed for it. And of this we may be sure, that a man who has once tasted of this joy, who has really felt within his own soul its power and sweetness, will never be content to live long without it. 2. But is this desirable thing attainable? We may safely infer from this text that it is. David is not praying here for an impossibility. He is evidently praying under the Spirit's teaching. Such a recovery, however, is not in any case, to say nothing of a case like David's, that easy thing which some of us think it. We imagine that when our souls, through some long-continued worldly-mindedness or some sinful indulgence, are comfortless, it is only to hear some cheering sermon, or turn again to God a little more earnestly than usual, and our former peace will revive; but not so. It is not easy to get indulged worldly-mindedness or indulged sin of any kind subdued in the soul and cast out of it; it is still less easy to get rid of the withering and depressing effects of worldliness and sin. The Lord does not hastily heal the wounds that sin makes in the souls of His people, for He wishes them for their good to feel the smart of those wounds; but He has in His covenant health and a cure for them. But the Lord works by means. There is no restoration of joy through those things which the Lord has ordained shall precede joy and, by His Spirit, produce it. And these things are deep humiliation and sorrow on account of sin, and a turning again to God through Christ precisely as we came to Him years ago, to be washed, cleansed, comforted, saved entirely by Him, by His Spirit, righteousness and blood. I know of no other way to the recovery of spiritual peace than this, nor do you. If sin has overtaken and ensnared you, and is at this moment holding you captive, robbing you of every spiritual consolation you once enjoyed, and filling your souls with gloom and wretchedness, be thankful for that gloom and wretchedness while it lasts. God works it in you or causes sin to work it in you, to lead you to a real repentance and so to a real salvation. (C. Bradley, M.A.) *Difficulty of recovering joy after sin*:—Those which have ventured upon presumptuous courses, as they do not easily procure sin to be pardoned and forgiven unto them, nor they do not easily procure sin to be mortified and subdued in them, so they do not easily neither recover their former joy. Nay, this latter is more difficult than all the rest; sin may sometimes be pardoned, and also in some manner subdued, when yet the joy which has been driven away by it is not so easily restored again, at least to that degree and measure which it was in before sin was committed and ventured upon by them. These sins of David cost him very dear. But yet we still add that there is a possibility of restoring it, at least in some competent measure, that Satan may not therein prevail against God's servants by temptations to despair from trusting in God. Well, but how may it be so? and what is the readiest way hereunto? First, this course which David here takes by solemn and serious humiliation of the soul before God; that's the way to get into favour again. Godly sorrow is the only way to spiritual joy. When we bewail our sins before God, and acknowledge both the foulness of our iniquities and the justice and equity of our corrections, this procures both pardon and assurance. Secondly, lying at God's foot, and acknowledging His free grace in Christ; as Christ must procure us our pardon, so also our joy. God is always well pleased with Him, and so consequently with all His members in Him and for Him; the more, then, we

cleave to Christ, and hang upon God's goodness in Him, the better it will be for us; urge God that it was His free grace that gave thee joy at first, and let the same free grace move him still. Thirdly, do thy first works; spiritual joy is recovered in the contrary way to that in which it is lost. Therefore, consider what it is whereby thou provokest God to remove it, and by the doing of that which is most opposite to it, thou mayest persuade Him again to restore it, by crucifying those lusts more especially which before thou hadst prevailing in thee, and by performing of those duties more vigorously which before were omitted by thee. Fourthly, attend upon the ordinances, the word and sacraments, and the communion of saints; these are means to recover our joy. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) *The joy of salvation.*—I. THE JOY OF SALVATION. 1. Joy in the retrospect of the past, for salvation is a past blessing. It is something that has taken place already. 2. The joy of present possession, for salvation is a present blessing—the deliverance from pollution a present continuous thing. Perfection is not reached at one stride. 3. The joy of future prospect—for salvation is a future blessing, a something we expect, long for. Views from the sunny heights of Pisgah. II. THE JOY OF SALVATION LOST. 1. Through the practice of sin. David, Peter. Many have grievously fallen. Their history are beacon lights to warn us. 2. Through presumption and carelessness. How we watch our outward actions which men see, and neglect to watch our inmost desires which God sees. 3. Through indolence. The laziest man is the most miserable and the most easily tempted. Work is healthy. The most faithful Christians are the most joyful. Work imparts joy, and joy gives strength for work. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." III. THE JOY OF SALVATION RESTORED. This implies—1. Entire dependence upon God. He alone can rekindle the flame. 2. Deep and sincere penitence. Our sins the clouds between us and God. 3. Belief in the power of prayer. God will hear. In heaven the joy will be uninterrupted and eternal. (*E. Owen, M.A.*) *Joy in God's salvation.*—I. THERE IS A JOY IN GOD'S SALVATION. Salvation itself, so far as it consists in a state of safety and acceptance, is equal in all believers; the joyful persuasion of it is not equal in all, being dealt out in various degrees by the free Spirit of God, and, on some occasions, even entirely taken away for a time. It is specially His work, who applies unto men this salvation, to produce in them also an assurance of it; and this He does by "taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto them" so vividly, that they can see in His work a sufficient satisfaction to the Father's justice for their sins, and can exercise on it consequently such a degree of reliance as brings their souls repose and peace; by "shedding abroad the love of God in their hearts," the sure pledge of reconciliation; and by leading them to delight in His service and fellowship. II. THIS JOY MAY BE LOST. 1. It is not every degree of sin remaining in a believer that will have this effect. The joy of God's salvation is compatible, in some good measure, with those remaining sins which still cleave to the flesh, though these do unquestionably impair it, and that they who walk, on the whole, humbly with God, and in reliance on His grace, ought not to shut themselves out from the comfort of the Gospel; for it is just to such humbled, convinced, believing souls who mourn for sin, and conflict with it, that all the promises of pardon, perseverance and eternal life are made. 2. We may lose the joy of God's salvation without sinning so deeply as David did. It would be extremely dangerous in one to calculate how far he may go in sin without forfeiting his peace. The truth is, he cannot go far. The peace of the Gospel is easily lost, but not easily regained; and even when not entirely lost, it may be more or less diminished, and, in fact, will ever be in proportion to one's spirituality of mind. It may be diminishing even when the person is not aware of it. For the most part, the first deviations from holiness may be so gradual as to be scarcely perceptible, and the peace of mind, consequently, little disturbed; yet these inroads on his spirituality and comfort may, and will proceed, unless checked by Divine grace, till they utterly strip him of both. III. THE JOY OF GOD'S SALVATION MAY BE RESTORED. God has an end in view in removing it. It is to punish His people, and when they are punished in such measure as is necessary for bringing them to a just sense and acknowledgment of their sin, it will be restored. He, therefore, in furtherance of His gracious designs toward His people, by a new communication of reviving grace, brings them to a sense of their sin—for sin deadens the soul, so that the first motions of repentance must be from God. Their affections, after this temporary ostrangement, return with greater force to Him, whose lovingkindness they have, in their bitter experience, found to be better than life; and He, who knows the heart, and who has Himself wrought all this in them, satisfied with the

depth of their repentance, forgets and forgives their ingratitude, and restores unto them the joy of His salvation. With a compassion truly astonishing and generous, He observes, He cherishes the first motion of the heart towards Himself. He sees His once prodigal but now returning child a "great way off," and has compassion, and runs and embraces him. (*A. L. R. Foote, D.D.*) *The joy of salvation*:—I. **DAVID'S PRAYER.** It implies—1. That David had lost the joy of salvation—no uncommon experience. May be caused by—(1) Open sin. (2) Worldliness. (3) Neglect of duty. 2. The desire to have the joy of salvation restored. 3. The desire to maintain a worthy character. David prayed that he might be kept in a state of mind in which he would willingly, spontaneously, promptly obey God. II. **DAVID'S PROMISE.** 1. To teach others. Saved sinners are best fitted to tell of the Saviour of sinners. 2. He promises to teach even the worst men—"transgressors," those who are rebels against God and apostates from truth: "The worst men need the best teachers," the worst diseases the most experienced physicians. 3. David promises to teach the worst people the best truths—"Thy ways." This is a marvellous subject. It includes all history and experience. It includes all time and space, all science and art, all truth wherever found. Wonderful theme! It may well fill the mouth of preachers the world over. It will be our song and glory in eternity. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Tell of the ways of God. III. **DAVID'S PERSUASION.** I. He was persuaded that his teaching would reach sinners. They would see the evil of transgression; they would be convinced that mercy could be found. The Gospel is mighty; an uplifted Christ is the mightiest magnet the world has ever known. Believe this truth; preach it. 2. He was persuaded that they would be moved to action. This is not a passive verb, "shall be converted." It is an active verb. They shall turn or return. This is its meaning. This is the end to be sought. Men have wandered from God; they must return. 3. David was persuaded that their return would be complete. They would return "unto Thee." Not converted to certain church rites, but to Jesus Christ. Christ first; other things will follow. (*R. S. MacArthur, D.D.*) *Salvation*:—I. **THE THEME—SALVATION.** Deliverance, restoration, preservation. II. **A SALVATION IMPARTING JOY.** III. **A SAD EXPERIENCE.** He had lost this salvation, and felt like Tamar—"And I, whither shall I hide my shame?" It was a manifold loss—the salvation of his God and the serenity of his soul, the fealty of his heart and the favour of his God—contamination entered, communion fled, sin tasted, joy gone. It was the result of his settled, yet stupid, choice; the perfect liberty he coveted he finds galling vassalage. IV. **THE WAY TO REGAIN IT.** V. **THE WAY TO RETAIN IT.** Cry to God for strength. "Uphold me with Thy free Spirit." The Spirit must not only attest our acceptance, but keep us by guiding our feet into the way of peace, by a complete transformation of the faculties of the soul, so that they can only delight in spiritual objects; by giving it such refined tastes that all sinful food will nauseate. VI. **THE WAY TO REJOICE IN IT.** "Then will I trust," etc. The best way to strengthen our graces is to exercise and utilize them. VII. **THE TIME.** "Then," and not till then. Conversion is one of those things we must experience before we are qualified to speak about it. VIII. **THE EFFECT.** "Sinners shall be converted unto Thee." "Hercin is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." (*W. Hassall.*) *The Christian's joys restored*:—I. **SALVATION HAS JOYS**—the Christian's duty and privilege to possess them. 1. In so changing our relations as to put us in harmony with God. (1) Once rebels, now obedient subjects. (2) Once lost and condemned, now saved and pardoned. (3) Once strangers, now children. 2. In enlarging our field of usefulness. No man is prepared to live till he is born again. II. **THESE JOYS MAY BE LOST.** This accords with the sad experience of God's most faithful servants. 1. One cause of the joyless life of many professed Christians is the want of salvation. How can they expect an effect without a cause? 2. Another source is the neglect of known duties. (1) Prayer. (2) Reading the Bible. (3) Assembling themselves together. 3. Retaining sin in the heart. 4. Being wise above what is revealed. 5. Giving more time and care to our secular interests than to the service of God and the cultivation of the heart. III. **THESE LOST JOYS MAY BE RESTORED.** How indulgent, patient and kind is the backslider's God! 1. They will be restored. (1) Entirely. (2) Willingly. (3) Immediately. 2. The Christian's happiness and usefulness are complete when he is in the full enjoyment of salvation. (*E. A. Taylor.*) *A restoration to joy desired*:—I. **IN THE CHILD OF GOD THERE ARE ALL THE SEEDS OF DEPARTURE FROM GOD.** When he rises in the morning there is need to have this perpetually brought before him—"This day, as yesterday, I possess the

seeds of all departure from God; so that I have need to be held up; I have need to be kept in; I have need to be kept from presumptuous sins." What departure there may be in a look; in a word; in a tone of voice; in a thought—actual departure from God! Oh! I believe there are periods in which the Lord takes off His check, and reproves sin by sin. And then what is the effect? Why, the outside goes on, but what becomes of internal religion? There are the prayers, but where is the secret dealing with God? There is no absolute neglect of outward duties, but how little of God is there in all! II. WHEREVER THERE IS DEPARTURE FROM GOD, IN DIRECT PROPORTION AS IT PREVAILS, THERE IS A TENDENCY TO LESSEN THE BELIEVER'S JOY. The Word is not what it once was to you; sermons are not what they once were to you; intercourse with the people of God is not what it once was to you. You have secret prayer, but it is not what it once was to you. There is a want of sweetness, there is a want of substance, there is a want of fruitfulness, there is a want of realization in your religion. Look well to it, for there must be a cause—some sin, some neglected duty, some worldly conformity.

III. POWER TO RESTORE IS HERE ATTRIBUTED TO GOD HIMSELF. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *Restoration to spiritual joy*.—I. THAT WHICH IS LOST—spiritual joy. It can be lost—1. By lack of cultivation. You may sow a seed or plant a tree, but unless these are watered and cultivated they will die. Christian joy must be cultivated by prayer, praise, and growth in grace. 2. By indulgence in sin. He will withdraw from the sinner, and then the sunshine ceases. 3. By want of faith. We often blame circumstances, etc., as we fall into the slough, when it is our own doubts that are shutting out the light. No one can rejoice who does not trust. Confidence is the root of peace and doubt the handmaid of torment. II. THAT WHICH IS SOUGHT—a restoration of that which has been lost. Not anything new. And this desire is natural. For—1. The soul has experienced its preciousness. 2. The soul recognized that its loss involves the displeasure of God. Hence the petition so earnestly urged. It is the Divine anger that takes away the joy. This is a greater sorrow to the Christian than his own loss. No wonder that he seeks for restoration.

(*Homilist.*) *Joy in salvation*.—I. SALVATION, AND THE JOY OF SALVATION, ARE SEPARABLE THINGS. II. SALVATION HAS A JOY WITH WHICH IT MAY, AND SHOULD, BE CONNECTED. 1. Joy is the natural fruit of salvation possessed and experienced. 2. All the proper exercises of religion are in themselves joyous—love, faith, hope. 3. The command of God is, "Rejoice evermore." 4. The fruit of the Spirit is—"joy." 5. The language of the Psalms is, to a great extent, the language of joy.

III. THE JOY OF SALVATION, AFTER BEING OBTAINED, IS OFTEN LOST. 1. This was exemplified in the case of David—strikingly in that of Job. 2. Joy depends on a conscience void of offence. 3. Joy depends on having a heart right with God. 4. Joy depends on seeing the evidences of our discipleship to Christ. 5. Joy depends on the measure of our faith. 6. Joy depends on realizing the presence, and seeing the excellency of God. 7. Joy depends on God, in His sovereignty.

IV. SPIRITUAL JOY IS SOMETHING TO BE GREATLY DESIRED. 1. David felt it to be so—he longed for it. 2. Each believer feels it to be so—if he cannot rejoice in God, he can rejoice in nothing. 3. It is a foretaste of heaven (1 Peter i. 8). 4. It is the spirit of praise (Isa. xxxv. 10). 5. It is a support under affliction (Hab. iii. 17, 18). 6. It fits for duty. "Then will I teach," etc. He who has not a sense of God's favour and presence is a coward. 7. It is obedience to God's requirements. V. JOY IS TO BE SOUGHT ONLY AS THE FRUIT OF SALVATION. 1. David sought only for this kind of joy—he had earthly pleasures in abundance. 2. The joys of salvation are the purest, and greatest, and most enduring. 3. Without these, the others are not accessible to the believer. 4. The great effort of man is to be happy independently of these joys. (1) He fails in time. (2) In eternity. (3) God the source of joy, and of pain. 5. You can reach these joys only through salvation.

VI. A RESTORATION TO SPIRITUAL JOY IS TO BE SOUGHT FOR IN PRAYER. 1. God is its source. 2. God is its Author. "Thy salvation." 8. By prayer for it—(1) His sovereignty must be acknowledged. (2) His commands must be obeyed. (3) The law by which He dispenses His blessings must be conformed to—"Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." (*J. Stewart.*) *The joy of salvation*.—

I. DESCRIBE IT. I find that the gladdest moments of my life were not to be mentioned in the same breath with the bliss of believing in Jesus Christ. Yet are they the best comparisons that I can offer you of the greater joy which I trust we have all experienced. 1. I compare it first to the finding of a long-lost treasure. Something like that, though infinitely beyond it, was the joy of finding God's salvation. Some of us searched long for it. 2. I compare this joy of salvation, next, to

escape from a terrible predicament, and to deliverance from a threatened danger. Such, but infinitely more delightful, is the joy of God's salvation, when the storm of a troubled conscience is hushed to rest, when the thunders and lightnings of an outraged law cease to alarm. 3. I wonder if it has ever been your lot to know the joy that comes of the removal of the displeasure of some friend who has been grieved; in a word, the joy of reconciliation. When mistakes have been explained, or faults forgiven, the joy of the handshake, as in the days of yore, and the heart warming as in the times that are gone—such is the joy of God's reconciled countenance, and of His smile and favour. 4. Entrance into a new and blissful state is an emblem, too, of the joy of God's salvation. You have been sick, sick almost unto death, and God has raised you up again. Can you forget how the pulse beat in your veins as it revealed to you the fact that you had turned the corner and were going to pull through? But oh, when you felt that the sickness of sin was at an end, when you knew that the healing touch had been given, when you felt the virtue come out of Jesus into you, what joy it was! 5. Further, there is the joy of finding a faithful friend. When loneliness is at an end, when love finds its affinity, when the hopes, perhaps of many years, are at last fulfilled, and the joy-bells ring, maybe in the marriage peal, what delight is in the heart. Such was your joy when you discovered that Jesus was your Fellow-friend, your Brother, your Lover, your Husband. 6. It is also like the joy of coming home after long absence.

II. THIS JOY CAN BE LOST. 1. Sin grieves God, and causes Him to hide His face; it produces an eclipse of the sun. 2. Sin may well cause us to question our standing in Christ Jesus. 3. Sin blinds our eyes to the promises and to the power of God. He may well be miserable who has found out His sinfulness, for he has sinned against light and knowledge, against grace and love. 4. Moreover, it makes the conscience smart and throb. The unhappiest man beneath God's sun is surely he who, having known the joy of salvation, is now a backslider, with hardened heart and tearless eye. How can he rejoice as once he did? III. IT MAY BE RECOVERED. "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." 1. God only can restore it. It came from Him at first, and He must revive and quicken it; it will be through His mercy and His mercy only. Thus the psalmist pleads in forma pauperis, praying only for God's lovingkindness and tender mercy. 2. There can be no restoration of the joy of God's salvation apart from cleansing. Think not to regain thy gladness till thou hast made a full confession, and more than that, till thou hast heard that heavenly whisper saying, "Thy sins which are many, are all forgiven." IV. THIS JOY OF SALVATION MAY BE RETAINED. "Uphold me with Thy free Spirit." You will retain the joy if the Holy Spirit maintains His hold of you, and if you retain your hold of Him. You will not cease to be happy unless you cease to be healthy, but so long as this prayer is in your lips you will not fail to be healthy. Forget not that upholding work is the work of the Holy Ghost. The best of us, the strongest, the most experienced, will fall unless the Spirit holds us up. "Uphold me with Thy free Spirit." I like that name for the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of liberty and truth, the Spirit which, like the wind, blows where it lists, and does its work mysteriously and mightily. The R.V. renders this, "Uphold me with a free spirit"; evidently under the impression that the reference is to the spirit or disposition which the upholding God produces in the heart of the man who is thus restored. He becomes possessed of a free spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty," and the man who has fallen and has been thus restored, and is thus upheld, serves God with a willing mind. He has been in a hard school, but he has learned the lesson well, and now all he does is done from very love of Him who not only saved him as a sinner, but restored him as a backslider. (T. Spurgeon.) *The joy of salvation*.—The sentiment to which the psalmist was led to give utterance is weighty, and deserves to be pondered. A clean conscience and a lively enjoyment of religion are necessary to extensive usefulness and influence in the cause of God, and in winning souls to Him. This will appear from three reasons, embracing the elements on which a successful result depends—Experience, confidence and joy. I. ONLY AN EXPERIMENTAL ACQUAINTANCE WITH RELIGION CAN QUALIFY ANY ONE TO SPEAK OF IT TO EDIFICATION. 1. A blind man has been known to lecture on colours; but a blind man could not teach the art of painting. In like manner, religion is not a mere theory, but a practice also. Its vitality and excellence consist in action. It is a life and a power. Hence the apostle speaks of the power of godliness, and distinguishes between the power and the form. Without the former, the latter is but an empty shell. It is no better than sounding brass or tinkling cymbal. 2. People have a wonderful instinct and

sagacity in determining who is likely to benefit them. As the Babylonians brought their sick to the market-place, and asked such of the passers-by as had had the same disease to tell the remedy that cured them, so the conscience-stricken will turn away from the learned and profound preacher, who is deficient in a wide experience, to hang with breathless eagerness upon the lips of him who can say, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." Men want those that have suffered and sorrowed like themselves to show the way of relief for their burdened hearts. II. WITHOUT CONFIDENCE WE CANNOT UNDERTAKE TO GUIDE OTHERS. A guide must have the confidence of those who follow him; and, in order to command it, he must have confidence in himself. But how can a man have satisfaction in his own mind, and confidence in his own judgment, when he is disturbed by doubts and fears? Fear is the natural concomitant of a guilty conscience. Wretched, most wretched is the condition of the sinner labouring under poignant convictions. If his guilt has been detected and exposed to the world, the consciousness of that exposure, and the dread of scorn's slow-moving finger, weigh him down. And even if he feels secure against detection, he knows that God is privy to it, and has "set all his sins before him, his secret sins in the light of His countenance." How cutting his self-upbraidings! how prompt his remorse! how bitter his loathing of himself! No position seems too humble for him to take, no penance too heavy to undergo. Can such a one, destitute of all satisfaction in his own soul; an utter stranger to the peace of God which passeth understanding; devoid of confidence in God, in himself, in the truth and efficacy of religion; can such a one invite sinners to Zion, or teach transgressors the ways of God? He may be a beacon to warn, but never a clarion to rouse to victory. III. IN ORDER TO WIN SOULS TO GOD, IT IS DESIRABLE THAT WE HAVE A LIVELY ENJOYMENT OF RELIGION. "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free Spirit! Then," adds the psalmist, "then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and," through my zeal and fidelity, "sinners shall be converted unto Thee." The connection between these two things, the condition and the result, could not be more plainly pointed out. Enthusiasm begets enthusiasm. He who would make others feel, must feel himself. He who would unlock the fount of tears, must be the first to weep. He that would enkindle and carry away his auditors, must have his own soul on fire. IV. PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS. 1. How desirable and precious the joy of salvation! Thrice happy the soul which holds communion with Jesus, which has the freedom of the city of God, and feeds on the heavenly manna! 2. If we find torpor and inactivity benumbing us in the service of God, it is not difficult to conjecture the cause. "Sin lieth at the door." 3. The way of return is equally obvious. Retrace your steps. Begin at the beginning. Relay the foundation. 4. We may infer that ordinarily a deep experience is necessary to great usefulness. Paul was such an instance. He was arrested in the midst of his persecution and rancour, and "obtained mercy, that in him first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering," etc. 5. We see the secret under God of revivals of religion. When religion is in a lively state in the heart, it is easy to talk about it. The heart is engaged. (*R. Davidson.*) *The restoration of the fallen:—*I. DAVID'S RESTORATION BEGINS IN THE RECOLLECTION OF A BY-GONE BLESSEDNESS. There is a looking back to something lost and departed. He sorrows over a vanished happiness. II. THE RESTORATION DAVID DESIRES IS WHOLLY RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL. His prayer is free from any admixture of selfish and worldly feeling. David does not cry, as Saul cried to Samuel, "Honour me now, I pray thee, before the people," but, "Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation." David, after his great sin, sin that had done its worst, asks for joy. Was this possible? Persons convicted of some great wrong, that brought shame and misery on others as well as on themselves, have been heard to say, humbly and penitently, "I believe God has forgiven me. I am not afraid of the future, but I can never be happy again." "A true penitent never forgives himself." It seems reasonable that David, after such crimes, should have rejected the idea of joy. Yet God gave him joy; the joy of not having become wholly vile and reprobate, the joy of not having been cut off with his guilt red upon him, the joy of God's forgiveness and salvation. Our refusal to admit the possibility of joy after our great sin and fall is a sort of solace to our wounded pride, a self-inflicted penance, a reparation, we think, for the wrong. III. THE RESTORATION DAVID SEEKS IS TO BE A PERMANENT ONE: PERMANENT THROUGH THE ABIDING POWER OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD. Men sometimes speak as though sin were to be the remedy for sin. Satan is to cast out Satan. They have fallen once, but are



never to fall again. Past sin is to prevent sin in the future. "It shall never occur again. It is a lesson to me for life." The serpent's fangs once deeply felt will, it is thought, scare the man away in future. David, so far from feeling that his sin would work its own cure, is more fearful of himself and of future falls, and cries, "Uphold me," etc. The power David implores is inward power. He asks for a Spirit, deep as his own spirit, that shall act with healing, strengthening power at the core and centre of his life. "Thy free Spirit." He must know the joy of God's salvation; he must be able freely to renounce the evil, and to choose the good. "Thy free Spirit," who shall burst all the shackles of the soul, so that the man may "walk at liberty and have respect unto all Thy commandments." (A. Warrack, M.A.) *David's repentance and restoration*:—In these words we have—I. AN ACT: "Restore." II. AN AGENT—God: "Restore Thou." III. THE PERSON SINGING—David: "Unto me." IV. THE BLESSING SUED FOR—the joy of God's salvation: "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." Come, Christian; look upon the tree. In the winter it is stripped of its fruit and leaves, nipped by the frost, covered with snow, so that it seems to be withered and dead, and fit only to be cast into the fire. Say, then; may not faith be where sin and the filth of the flesh hath oppressed it? (A. Farinden, B.D.) *The joy of salvation*:—It is connected inseparably with obedience, constant and prompt. David had failed, oh, how terribly! and so he had lost this joy. Let us think a while—

I. OF THE JOY OF SALVATION. It consists—1. Of the joy of pardon. How blessed this, to know and feel that my sins are all forgiven. 2. The joy of rescue—from the power of one great enemy, and that when he seemed to have final possession of us. 3. The joy of power—to overcome the wicked one and temptation and sin. How glorious this. Would that it were more common. It is to have the world beneath your feet. II. THE LOSS OF THIS TREASURE. Some cannot lose it because they have never possessed it. But others can, and do, by backsliding, by the power of sudden temptation, as Peter. And especially by the power of besetting sin, as Demas. And by indolence. Men are not diligent in religious duties as they should be. See Samson. What a fall was his. III. ITS RESTORATION. The soul that has once known this joy can never be happy without it. No earthly prosperity can compensate for it. But the soul's anguish at its loss is God's call to it to return. And let none despair. This restoration is in Christ's hands. (Luke Wiseman.) *The joys of salvation*:—I. THE JOY OF A SUFFICIENT AND FINAL ANSWER TO THE SELF-UPBRAIDING OF A GUILTY SOUL. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord," etc. (Rom. vii. 25; viii. 1-4, 33-39). The burden falls off; the darkness is chased by dawn. II. THE JOY OF A PORTION WHICH SATISFIES THE HEART'S LARGEST CONCEPTIONS AND DESIRES. III. THE JOY OF AN ANSWER TO ALL THE DIFFICULTIES AND PERPLEXITIES WHICH BESET THE SPIRIT AND THE INTELLECT IN THEIR PROGRESS. "I know whom I have believed." IV. THE JOY OF HAVING THE KEY TO ALL THE MYSTERIOUS WAYS OF PROVIDENCE IN THE WORLD. V. THE JOY OF VICTORY OVER DEATH. VI. THE JOY OF LIVING UNION WITH GOD, WITH CHRIST, WITH ALL LIVING AND BLESSED BEINGS, ETERNALLY. (J. B. Brown, B.A.) *Pleasure in sin taketh away our joy in God*:—Nothing spoileth us of this joy and pleasure that we have in God, but only sin. For once delighting in sin, we can have no pleasure in God's service; for these two can never stand together. Therefore we must loathe sin, that we may rejoice in God. (A. Symson.) *Christians have joy and sorrow intermingled*:—The estate of a Christian is not always one; joy and sorrow are intermingled; he hath a summer of joys and a winter of griefs. St. Paul had the messenger of Satan to buffet him, that he should not be exalted above measure with his great revelations. After a Christian hath mourned, he will rejoice. (Ibid.) *How the joy of God's salvation is lost*:—The moon one day said to the sun, "Oh, Sun, why hast thou ceased to shine on me? I used to speed along in thy light; why now this darkness?" And the sun answered, "Oh, Moon, I have never ceased to shine; I am pouring out my light as full as ever." The moon thought for a moment, and answered, "Then, depend upon it, the earth has come between us." Yes, she was suffering from an eclipse. This is equally true of our life. If we allow the world or sinful indulgence to come between the soul and the Sun of Righteousness, we plunge ourselves into deep darkness and lose all our spiritual comforts. *The joy of restoration*:—I have never told in public, scarce ever in private, of a great sorrow that afflicted me once when I was first in Australia. Whether it was the tongue of slander in the old land, or some misinformation or mistake, I do not know, but there came to my dear father's ears a story which did not reflect credit upon his absent son. It

came in such a form that he was almost bound to believe it. I remember the grief that tore my heart when I received a letter from him kindly chiding me for this supposed wrong-doing. I knew before God that I was innocent; but, despite that conviction, there was some pain, of course, and there had to be a delay of many months ere my contradiction of the damaging tale could reach him. I left the matter with God, and He espoused my cause. In a few days' time I received a cablegram—and telegraphing was expensive in those days—which read thus: "Disregard my letter; was misinformed." I cannot tell you the thrill of joy that filled my heart to feel that I was restored to my father's approbation and confidence; I will not say to his love, for I had surely never fallen from that. It was many months ere I could come into possession of particulars, but to know that he had found out his mistake, and that confidence was restored—why, it was almost worth while having been in the sorrow to experience the delicious thrill. (Thomas Spurgeon.)

Ver. 13. **Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.**—*The Christian's great business*.—Sinners are all around us living in their sins. Some of these wandering ones are in great misery every day, as the result of their sins; and all, whether suffering or not, are robbing God of glory, and Christ of reward. Moreover, sinners are dying; every hour hurries a company of them into eternity. **I. WHO ARE TO TEACH TRANSGRESSORS THAT THEY MAY BE CONVERTED UNTO GOD?** The reply is easy. 1. Pardon sinners, go and publish the story of what God's grace has done for you. You are the men, and none others in the world, who can tell it to advantage. Tell it with the hope that your fellow-men will hear it and live. 2. While, however, all pardoned sinners ought to do this, we should remember that we are fittest for the doing of it when we are full of the joy of God's salvation. Notice the prayer—"Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation. Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways." While we believe in the joy of the Lord we shall not come to sinners with "ifs" and "buts," but with a faith which will, by God's grace, help them also to believe. 3. To prepare us to win souls, we must have the Holy Spirit resting upon us, for the text says, "Uphold me with Thy free Spirit." O, pray for a revival in your own souls. Beseech the Holy Spirit to come upon you. 4. If we would bear good testimony for God to the conversion of souls, we must by the Spirit of God be upheld in consistency of life, "Uphold me with Thy free Spirit." If you are inconsistent in your own daily lives, how can you hope to be useful to others? "Actions speak louder than words." If we speak to men upon the evil of sin, and yet indulge in it, what can they infer from our conduct? **II. WHAT THE BELIEVER OUGHT TO AIM AT IN HIS WORK WITH SOULS.** 1. Our great aim is conversion—the conversion of transgressors. Their conversion; not reformation merely. It is a good thing to improve a man by reforming him; he is all the better for being sober, honest and industrious. Let us help them if we can, but it is a side issue; our business is a more radical one, the laying of the axe to the root of the tree by the change of the nature. Our object is more lasting; we have to do with immortal souls and their eternal future. Be content with nothing short of the conversion of men. But it must be their conversion to God. "Sinners shall be converted unto Thee." 2. This work is to be accomplished by teaching. "Then will I teach," etc. All the earnestness possible should go with the teaching, but there must be sound doctrine, real instruction, solemn truth made known; for it is by such means that sinners will be converted to God. 3. The most important teaching is that which dwells upon the Lord's ways—God's way of punishing sin, God's way of forgiving sin, God's way of mercy through a sacrifice, God's way of pardon through faith in Jesus; God's ways of wounding, and healing; God's ways of sending forth the Eternal Spirit, and working as He wills among the sons of men, neither waiting for man nor tarrying for the sons of men. **III. WHY WE SHOULD SEEK THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS.** 1. Because it will save us from many ills. I believe that the not seeking to win souls brings many spiritual maladies upon Christians. For our own sakes, lest the canker get into our gold, and the rust into our silver, use it for doing good; yea, by all means, seek the souls of men for God. Some evil will befall you if you keep the Gospel to yourselves. 2. It will greatly add to your joy. Who does not like to be the bearer of good news? The pleasant tale of redeeming grace and dying love, the pleasant story of a Saviour who came from heaven to earth, to lift us up from earth to heaven, the story of our own conversion, the story of God's good-

ness since our conversion—why, it must be delightful to tell it. And when you have spoken for Jesus, if you succeed in converting a sinner to God, then comes the pleasure. We will get out of these selfish motives into something higher.

3. Unless you tell abroad the Gospel, how will you prove the sincerity of your prayers? "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." How can it be, if you never try to speak a word for Jesus, and never seek to bring new subjects into His kingdom? Your prayers—what can they be but hypocritical, if they are not supported by your actions? 4. Again, what proof is there of the sincerity of your love to Christ? "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" Do you answer, "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee"? Here, then, is the proof which He demands—"Feed My sheep. Feed My lambs. Distribute unto others the heavenly food which you receive from Me. What I tell you in the ear that speak ye upon the housetops." Abundantly yield to your Lord this proof of your affection.

IV. HOW, THEN, ARE WE TO TEACH TRANSGRESSORS GOD'S WAYS, that sinners may be converted unto God? I would say to you, "Wait upon the Lord, for direction." But one of the directions you need not wait for is this, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Some of you who could not speak, at least not to many, can assist those who do. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

*The true teacher:*—I. THE QUALIFICATIONS for a true teacher. Recalling to what the "then" refers, we find that a true teacher must be a man marked by—

1. Penitence and loathing for sin.
2. Purity of heart.
3. Fellowship with God.

II. THE PEOPLE a true teacher seeks to bless. "Transgressors," men who have broken the Divine law. "Sinners," a wider name describing all who neglect, as well as all who violate that law. What a school! Such was His who came "not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." The lost.

III. THE THEME a true teacher unfolds. "Thy ways." This may mean, as it continually does—

1. God's commandments, i. e. His ways for man to take; or—
2. God's habits of grace, justice, mercy. "My ways are not your ways," etc.

IV. THE METHOD a true teacher employs. Teaching is the noblest occupation, the highest art, the strongest agency of man. "We persuade men." V. THE RESULT the true teacher seeks. "Converted to Thee." Turned back from evil; turned in thought, mind, will, character, towards God. (U. R. Thomas.) *The life of restored usefulness:*—In these verses (13–17) the psalm seems to take now a brighter turn. There is a mention of teaching, of a service of praise, of a sacrifice, as if the poor, crushed spiritual life were gaining strength again. Just as when a man is recovering from a serious illness, the very fact of his becoming impatient is a good sign. So here David is becoming impatient, as it were, of his low condition; he is thinking of work, he is making plans. David's pardon, David's restoration, shall be the great ground of hope and conversion for generations of penitents. It is a grand idea to utilize faults. God can do it. We have read of the painter who, in his rage and disappointment at not being able to represent the foam on the mouth of a Fury, threw his sponge at the picture, and so produced without design the effect for which he had laboured. But God can take our very faults and beautify them, as an architect seizes upon an uneven site as the opportunity for fresh picturesqueness of detail to his building. So that it has been said, the three great doctors of the Catholic Church are David the murderer, St. Peter the denier, and St. Paul the persecutor.

I. WE ALL HOPE TO DO SOMETHING MORE THAN SAVE OUR OWN SOULS. We are here for this very purpose, to train ourselves that we may help others. It is a great fact that the key which unlocks the mysteries of God is, in many senses, a moral one (John vii. 17). It is only too possible to wish some doctrines not to be true; it is perfectly impossible to understand many of them from the outside. And, therefore, let this Lent be, for all of us, the very foundation of our teaching power. "Then shall I teach." It is thus we learn sympathy. Ah, here is a poor soul going through all which I have gone through. "I, too, was a stranger in the land of Egypt." It is thus we acquire tenderness (Titus iii. 3). It is thus that we acquire spiritual might (1 John iv. 7). Do we yet know how God loves us?

II. PENITENCE IS OUR PREPARATION FOR THE LIFE OF SERVICE IN THE SANCTUARY. Our people do not come to church; or, they are cold and indifferent spectators if they do come. Why is it? Sometimes, if we must speak the truth, services are terribly perfunctory, cold and slovenly. We clergy are in constant danger of deterioration. What a call upon us there is to live always in an atmosphere of prayer, if we know that we may be summoned at any moment to a death-bed, there to come close to the very opening gates of Paradise, or to administer the Viaticum to the traveller now

almost departing. Is not all this something to be prepared for? III. AFTER ALL, THERE IS NOTHING MORE POWERFUL THAN THE LIFE OF SACRIFICE. Just the troubled spirit, ruffled, freshened as it were every day by the breath from on high. Where the heart is sensitive to every heavenly influence; where the broken heart is full of affection towards God, while it always remembers the past; where the contrite heart is softened, bruised, pulverized into good receptive soil. May we not learn here, too, to offer a sacrifice like this? Have we learned yet to sacrifice inclination? It takes a long time to do this. Père Lacordaire tells us how, in spite of all his austerities, practised with a view of subduing the will, he took a long time before he could overcome his irritation at such a simple thing as being interrupted. Can we give up inclination deliberately? (*Canon Newbolt.*) *Joy of salvation necessary for teachers*:—A man must not only have salvation, but also the joy of it, before he can effectually teach transgressors the ways of God. Your acts, your looks, the tones of your voice, teach as much as your words, perhaps much more. A man going forth with gloom and sorrow in his heart, is not fit to teach others the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. (*T. Alexander, M.A.*) *The ways of God*:—1. First, God's ways to us; they are His ways, as the subject of them, the ways in which Himself walks: David would teach these. There are some ways of God which are unsearchable, and past finding out; His way in the sea, and His paths in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known (*Ps. lxxvii. 19*). But the ways which are here spoken of are more especially His carriage and behaviour towards Christians, both as to their sins and repentance, in their falls and in their rising again. David did now take upon him to teach transgressors these ways, how severe God was against sin, and more especially in His own servants; how He would lay it more particularly upon their consciences above any others, and call them to an account for it; this David would now teach. And so again, how gracious He was also to all those who, by repentance, turned unto Him, so as to hide His face from their sins, and to cast a comfortable eye upon them, and to restore them to favour again. Both these ways of God, both in His justice and also in His mercy, would David communicate to transgressors. 2. Secondly, ours also to Him, which are His ways likewise; the ways which He has commanded us that we should walk in them; they are in Scripture-language called the ways of God, the ways of duty, and obedience and thankfulness. What is to be done by us answerably to God's dealing with us, this was the matter of David's teaching in his converse with others. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) "*Then shall I teach*":—That means infinitely more than giving a lesson through the medium of speech. Our best teachers have sometimes been dumb. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, for Thou didst it." What lessons we have learned from dumb beauty, from loving patience, from quiet, bright heroism, from the uncomplaining temper, from the abounding willingness, from a man's calm, strong grappling with stupendous difficulty! "*Then shall I teach.*" He will teach, not by one way only, but by many. He will become a minister, an influence, a power of grace. Now, mark the ascent of the teaching. Related to Christ! Instructed! Disciplined! A teacher! And of such a one it will be said by his fellow-men, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these things that thou doest, except God be with him." (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) **And sinners shall be converted unto Thee.**—*The converted will labour to convert others*:—David, as he could not choose but promise thankfulness to God, upon the restoring of him to his ancient state; so, because he knew that his goodness could not reach to the person of God, therefore he could not conceive wherein better to discover it, than in labouring to do others good, by endeavouring their conversion. The talent of mercy which he hoped to receive, he vowed to employ to others' edifying. The Scripture confirms the being of this disposition in all whom God hath truly turned by variety of examples. When Andrew had found Christ he had no rest until he had called Simon. Neither could Philip forbear until he had brought Nathaniel. What haste did the woman of Samaria make to run into the town to call her neighbours! How earnestly did Paul wish that others were in religion, in the knowledge and obedience thereof, like unto him! The jailor's joy was not full till he perceived that his household as well as himself believed upon Christ. When Christ had called Matthew, he invited Christ to his house, and there were a great company of publicans and of others. Can we think they came into Matthew's house without his leave, or that Matthew invited them with any other intent, than that they might get that good by Christ which his soul reaped? This was prophesied of old, that it should be the disposition of those which should be gathered

in by the Gospel to the Christian Church; one should provoke and call upon another, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, etc. They which dwell in one city, shall go to another, saying, Up, let us go and pray before the Lord of Hosts. Christ laid it as a task upon Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Indeed, God gives no man any spiritual good for his own private benefit alone, but that he might be a good disposer and steward of the grace of God for others' good. Like as the apostle saith, that God comforted him, that he might comfort others with the same comfort which himself had received. Wheresoever there is true conversion, there is true faith; for, how shall we suppose a man converted in the state of grace who hath no faith? And faith worketh by love; and how can love (which is said to be bountiful) be barren and unfruitful in this special evidence of love, the saving of a soul from death? We would reckon it a barbarous and a cruel act (and well we might) if two men in their travel by the way should fall into a pit, and the other, being by some means rescued thence, should go his way without respect to him that was in the same danger. Is it possible, think ye, that there should be such an heart in a man, in whom God hath wrought a work of grace, that being himself recovered from that pit of destruction, into which we are all plunged by Adam's disobedience, he should not care what became of others that are enwrapped in the same misery? God's children are no niggards, nay, it grieveth them to eat their spiritual morsels alone; when they have received any mercy from God, they are as the vessel whereto Elihu compared himself, which must needs have vent. Come, hearken, said David, and I will tell you what God hath done to my soul. (*S. Hieron.*)

**Ver. 14. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.—Soul murder—who is guilty?**—Some may question whether such a text as this should be chosen for an ordinary congregation. No one here is guilty of blood. But there are more ways than one of incurring this guilt. And one chief way is in the destroying of souls. **I. A STARTLING CRIME.** We are all guilty of such crime in the death of our Lord; in anger without cause; by youthful transgressions which have led others into sin; by false teaching, insinuating doubts, and causing men to err from the truth and perish. It is a dastardly thing to poison the wells of a city, but what is it to poison the well of truth and make soul-thirst the medium of soul-ruin? Others actually trade in luring men to sin; by this craft they get their wealth. And these are those who delight to lead others astray. Ill example; neglect of religion at home; indifference as to saving souls general want of earnestness—all these bring us under the guilt here told of. **II. Let us make EARNEST CONFESSION of our sin and pray for deliverance from it.** **III. A COMMENDABLE VOW.** David says if God will deliver him he will sing aloud, etc. Oh, to be clear of others' blood. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Blood-guiltiness:—I. WHO ARE GUILTY OF IT?** 1. Those who neglect the atonement of Christ, and continue obstinately to persevere in sin until they lose their own souls. 2. Those who teach principles that lead others to trample upon the blood of Christ. 3. Those who set an example that leads others to disregard religion and die in their sins. 4. Those who neglect to do for others what might promote their salvation. 5. Those who hold their peace when they see prevailing any iniquities that are destroying the souls of men. **II. WHAT IT INVOLVES.** 1. It stains deep. 2. It corrodes fearfully. 3. Oh, what a view this subject gives us of this world's guilty population! We walk the streets of our city with a multitude of murderers, who will have all this train of blood-guiltiness upon them in the last day. 4. Why, then, are we so surprised that so few are saved, and so many destroyed? (*D. A. Clark.*) **Blood-guiltiness:—**Like enough that David at first beguiled himself with this, that inasmuch as Uriah was slain in the field, therefore he was clear; but now he saw this was but a poor shift; God, who was greater than his heart, had now raised up his heart to be a witness against him, and to charge him not only with desiring Uriah's death, but with devising which way closely to bring him to his end. And thus he was guilty of blood who shed no blood; and so may this be found true in many others. A magistrate may be guilty of the sins of the people by not punishing, or by too slight and easy punishing; a man of rule and reckoning in the world may be chargeable with the evils of his inferiors, because his example hath emboldened them. A minister may make himself a party in the enormities of his parish by not preaching against them, or by being too sparing, or too covert, or too gentle in reproving them. It may be I persuade not my people to be ignorant, to be

superstitious, to be profaners of the Sabbath; yet, inasmuch as I labour not against those evils in them, my silence, my slighting over of these things, strengtheneth their hands and their hearts to a continuance therein; by this I become guilty before God. Men of ability may be guilty of others perishing, albeit they do to them no kind of actual violence; as by not inquiring into the necessities of those that want, by not making them partakers of their plenty. (*S. Hieron.*) **Thou God of my salvation.**—*God is the God of our salvation:*—David now comes to God to free him from the guilt of a particular sin, which was his blood-guiltiness; and how, now, does he both persuade God and also satisfy and comfort himself in this particular? Namely, from this consideration, that he was the God of his salvation in the latitude and full extent of it. As if he had said, Thou which wilt save me from all other sins besides, save me also from this. And Thou which hast been my help and Saviour in times past, be Thou now also so unto me. That which we may observe from it is this, that the way to have particular help from God is to have a general interest in Him; He must be our God and the God of our salvation before we can expect that He should actually and particularly save us. God does not do anything to His servant in this kind for a mere fit, but upon a more general principle. All God's goodness to His servants in the particular dispensation of mercy is founded in His relations to them, and theirs to Him, and the particular flows from the general. And so, if we would have any comfort from Him at any time to this purpose, we must first of all be sure to lay this for a ground and foundation of it. The consideration of this point shows the misery and unhappiness of such persons as are in a state of strangeness to God, and have not as yet made their peace with Him, why they can expect nothing comfortably from Him while they are in that condition, neither pardon of sin, nor power against it, nor at last eternal salvation itself. Why? Because God is not yet theirs, which relation is the ground of all comfort. What! do we think that God saves a man at the very first of His dealings with him? No such matter, but there is somewhat else which goes before it; God makes us sons before He gives us the inheritance; and He plucks us out of the state of nature before he brings us into the condition of glory; and he is the God of our salvation before He saves in such a particular. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) **My tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.**—*David's promise to sing of God's righteousness:*—I. WHOSE RECEIVES OR EXPECTS ANY MERCY OR FAVOUR FROM GOD MUST KNOW HIMSELF BOUND TO RETURN SOMEWHAT BACK BY WAY OF THANKFULNESS UNTO GOD. II. THE EXERCISE AND ACT OF SINGING IS A DUTY WELL BECOMING GOD'S PEOPLE, FOR THE DECLARATION OF THEIR DUE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD'S KINDNESS. And that we might not conceive of this duty as of a service ceremonial, and so ceasing in Christ, who is the body of all ancient types; St. Paul commended it to the practice of Christians in the New Testament; persuading them to psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs; and it is St. James's rule, that if any man have a disposition to discover the inward rejoicing of his heart in the feeling of God's mercies, he should sing. It is an excellent means to quicken and enliven the dulness of man's spirits. It is very effectual both to discover and stir up joy. III. THE TONGUE AND VOICE OF MAN OUGHT TO BE USED BY HIM FOR THE DECLARING OF GOD'S PRAISE. It is called a man's glory, both because it is one of the excellencies and prerogatives of man over other creatures, that he is enabled to use his tongue to the expressing of his hand; and because it is the instrument ordained to the setting forth of God's glory, in the advancement whereof the glory of man as God's principal creature doth consist. The special matter of praising God is conveyed unto us by the tongue. The knowledge of salvation through Christ is the main ground of glorifying God. And is it not the tongue of man, which God hath consecrated to the begetting of it within us? Now, as God, by the tongues of those whom He hath appointed to be vessels of hearing His name to the world, conveyeth the matter of His praise into our hearts, so by our tongues He requires a testification thereof. By the tongue we receive good, by the tongue we ought to manifest that good we have received; neither can there be a more fitting means for us to be instruments of good to others, than the well-using of our tongues; those duties of admonition, exhortation, comfort, whereby one Christian is bound to further the salvation of another, how shall they be so well performed as by the tongue? That law of grace, which is in the tongue of God's children, is that which must minister grace unto those which hear us, according to the apostle's rule. There is a certain holy salt in the tongue of a godly man, by which others may be seasoned; whereupon it is said, that the lips of a righteous man do feed many; many do receive refresh-

ing and comfort by his talk. Then again, whether it is not a matter of equity that the tongue should be employed for His honour, by whom it is endued with that faculty with which it is accomplished? (*S. Hieron.*)

Ver. 15. **O Lord, open Thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.**—*The lips Divinely opened*:—I. A HUMILIATING FACT IMPLIED. Sin seals the lips. 1. In our approaches to God, sin is a barrier to all spiritual freedom. When overwhelmed with guilt and shame, the soul is ready to exclaim with David (*Ps. lxxvii. 4; lxxxviii. 8*). 2. Sin prevents us speaking for God as well as to God. When our conduct is consistent we say with Paul (*2 Cor. vi. 11*), and with David (*Ps. lxxvi. 16*). But when our conduct gives a lie to our profession, our admonitions will be retorted upon us, "Physician, heal thyself." When a man sins thus he has but little to say for God. II. AN IMPORTANT REQUEST MADE. "O Lord, open Thou," etc. 1. To whom was this prayer offered? To God. He only can unloose our tongues. 2. By whom was this request made? A convinced sinner. His heart was humbled. 3. The request itself. "Open," etc. He knew the cause must be removed. Sins must be pardoned. Guilt cancelled. The Spirit must be imparted before there is an ability to praise God (*vers. 1, 4, 7, 15*). III. DELIGHTFUL SERVICE PLEDGED. "My lips shall praise Thee." 1. A deep conviction of God's mercy. 2. A sensibility of personal obligation. 3. A fixed determination. "My lips shall," etc. Here observe—(1) Praise is the least return we can make for so great a blessing. When overwhelmed with guilt, we were ready to say (*Micah vi. 6, 7*), God does not require this (*ver. 16*). Surely we ought to praise Him. (2) Praise is due to God alone. He has done the work, and the glory should be His (*Ps. xxxiv. 1-4; 1 Peter ii. 9*). (3) More praise is due for pardoning mercy than for all the blessings of this life. This comprehends all (*Rom. viii. 32*). (4) A sense of forgiving love enlarges and fits the soul for acts of praise (*Ps. cxxvi. 1, 2; Isa. xxxviii. 17-29*). (5) Forgiveness of sins furnishes matter for praise (*Ps. xl. 1-3; ciii. 1-4*). (*H. Woodcock.*) *The right use of speech*:—I. THE FACULTY OF SPEECH, AND THE POWER OF EMPLOYING IT TO ITS RIGHT END, ARE THE GIFTS OF GOD. Is there anything among the abounding proofs of the fallen state of man more conclusive than the virtual declaration of practical infidelity everywhere to be heard—"Our lips are our own, who is Lord over us"? What is the general tenor of conversation among those who bear the Christian name, and who, in church, offer with their lips the psalmist's prayer—"O Lord, open Thou my lips"? "Is it in unison with the prayer they use; or rather, does it not discover a state of the affections diametrically opposed to the spiritual desires and devout aspirations breathed in the Liturgy in which they orally join?" II. THE POWER OF EMPLOYING THE FACULTY OF SPEECH TO ITS RIGHT END, IS LOST TO FALLEN CREATURES, AND GOD ONLY CAN RENEW IT. The torpor, the pride, and the enmity of the human heart, in its unregenerated state, preclude the possibility of that devotion of the lips to the service of God, the restoration of which the penitent suppliant implored in the words of our text. But there is also a cause of sinful silence which continues to be operative after that the torpor of indifference has given place to spiritual sensibility. This cause is guilt—a consciousness of native and actual sin. The employment of the lips in praise must depend, therefore, on our apprehension of that atonement which alone can remove guilt from the conscience. "The Ephphatha" of a revealed Saviour is essential to the utterance of praise. Conviction of sin, and conversion to God, are the work of His Spirit; and these are necessary to the production of a grateful heart and its utterance in the new song of praise. III. THE RENEWAL OF THIS POWER OUGHT TO BE THE SUBJECT OF EARNEST PRAYER TO EVERY FALLEN CREATURE, AND IS SO TO EVERY PENITENT SINNER. Whatever may be the advancement made in knowledge and grace, all believers feel a remaining impediment in the spiritual faculty of speech, and long and wait for its removal. Our hearts are often dull and stupid, and never so grateful as we know they ought, and as we wish them to be. Sometimes a worldly spirit, and sometimes a sense of guilt, disqualifies us for the celebration of the praise which is due to our redeeming God. Our lips are too often closed again, after they have been once opened; and a repetition of the miracle of touching our tongue afresh with the finger of almighty love is as necessary as it was at first. The live coal, taken from the altar, must be continually laid on the mouth, in order that the lips may show forth the praise of Him who is the Lord of Hosts, the King of Glory. (*T. Biddulph, M.A.*) *Praise dependent on God's assistance*:—1. When we say that without God's assistance

none can be able to praise Him, we must take it with two qualifications. (1) Cannot do it commendably, in a holy and spiritual manner, as it becomes Christians to do it. (a) There is a general aversion in our natures to any good work in a spiritual manner to be performed; there is no work of grace whatsoever but of ourselves we are indisposed much unto it; and without Christ we can do nothing at all (John xv. 5). (b) There is a more special averseness in our natures to this good works of thanksgiving in particular. Sometimes out of pride, because we will not acknowledge our dependence, which in thanksgiving is emphatically done; sometimes out of discontent and repining, as not thinking we have so much given us as we could expect or desire to have; and sometimes also out of a natural dulness, and sluggishness, and stupidity upon us; these things make the work averse unto us; and because they do so, they therefore convince us that without the help and assistance of God Himself, they cannot do it. Cannot do it, *i. e.* do it commendably, in an holy spiritual manner, as becometh Christians. (2) Cannot do it acceptably, so as God Himself may be well-pleased with us in the doing of it. Those whose lips God Himself does not open, they cannot utter His praise so as He may accept of it, and take it well at their hands. All kind of praising of God, and from all persons, is not acceptable to Him (Prov. xv. 8; Isa. i. 11; Ps. l. 16). Therefore Scripture, when it speaks of giving thanks, and showing forth praise, it still makes Christ to be the only medium and conveyance of it (Eph. v. 20; Col. iii. 17; Heb. xiii. 15). Those that give thanks, and not in Christ, they cannot give thanks acceptably, which is consequently the condition of those whose lips God will not open for it; so as none partake of the Spirit of Christ, but those who are indeed the servants of Christ. 2. We see here, then, what great cause we have in all our undertakings of this service, to go to God Himself for it, and to desire Him to help us herein, and not to go about such a duty as this is in our own strength. 3. There is a double qualification considerable as to the performing of the work of praise among other good works. First, a general qualification of the person, sanctifying his lips and mouth for such a service at large. And, secondly, a particular qualification of the person, as enabling him to this particular performance and service which he is now undertaking; and this latter is that which David refers to in this particular place; God had opened his lips in general before, in his first conversion, when He had framed him according to His heart, and so fitted him for all the duties of religion to be performed by him, and this duty of praise amongst the rest. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) *Man's inability to praise without God's help*:—There is naturally a kind of pollutedness in the lips of man, whereof Esau complained, a certain uncircumcisedness which, until it is reformed and taken away, no such thing can come through them by which God may be glorified. "We are not sufficient of ourselves, to think anything as of ourselves," saith the apostle; and, "Without Me ye can do nothing," saith our Saviour. The apprehension of this native unbleness made David to commend unto God this request; and then there was another, a more particular reason, which moved David to say thus; and that was the effect which he felt in himself of his great sin. We have had often occasion in this psalm to note the havoc of the graces of God in him made by this noisome trespass. He felt himself much disabled by it every way. Never, indeed, can a man praise God aright until he hath matter for it ministered to him out of his own experience; when his soul is satisfied with marrow and fatness, which proceedeth from the love of God shed abroad into the heart; then shall his mouth sound out praise with joyful lips. It is but a cold, barren and superficial service, whatsoever a man doth herein, if he be not furnished with matter for it, out of the store-house of his own heart. If one have not within that joy which David terms joy of heart, and Paul joy in the Holy Ghost, he can never show forth the praise of God to any purpose. It is the inward feeling which must give life and being to this business. Thus there is a double reason by which this point is proved, that no man can be an utterer of God's praise unless God enable him; the first reason is drawn from the consideration of the general insufficiency which is naturally in man for good performances; the second, from the nature of this act of praising God; which is such as can never be well discharged, unless a man's spirit within do rejoice in God, and have sweet peace sealed up unto it in the assurance of God's favour. Now, this is natural to no man, it is God's only free and gracious gift, and until the Lord be pleased to afford comfort to a man's soul, by some good testimony to him that his sins are pardoned, all his attempts and undertakings to be a praiser of God are utterly in vain. (*S. Hieron.*)



Ver. 16. **For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it; Thou delightest not in burnt-offering.**—*The service which David would not render:*—1. He declines a superfluous and unnecessary service; he will not give that; this is one thing which he resolves on, and it is a good resolution in him. In the worship of God, whatever is more than needful, it may very well be spared; we cannot supererogate with Him; those that think to do so exceedingly deceive themselves, yea, and wrong themselves also, while they draw out the strength of their spirits upon that which might be better bestowed. 2. He declines an arbitrary service. He will not serve God in any other way than as Himself shall allow of and prescribe. Because God does not desire sacrifice, therefore he will not give sacrifice to Him; this is the rule which he holds to in God's worship, to do no more than Himself has commanded. And this is that which the Scripture does continually press upon us, the declining of all will-worship in the service of God as that which is abominable with Him. 3. He declines an unacceptable service; he will not do more in God's service than shall be well received. This is the main thing which God's people look after in their services which they present unto Him; to wit, His acceptance of them in those services; all without this, it is nothing worth. This is that which David says here; because he thinks that God delights not in burnt-offerings, therefore He shall not have them. God's complacency is all in all. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) *What we bring to God must be such as God requires:*—There are some soldiers here to-night. Now, suppose one of these received orders from the commanding officer to keep guard at such and such a door. All of a sudden he thinks to himself, "I am very fond of our commander, and I should like to do something for him." He puts his musket against the wall, and starts out to find a shop where he can buy a bunch of flowers. He is away from his post all the while, of course, and when he comes back he is discovered to have been away from his post of duty. He says, "Here is the bunch of flowers I went to get." But I hear his officer say, "We cannot allow you—military discipline would not permit it—to run off at every whim and wish of yours and neglect your duty; for who knows what mischief must ensue." It is a holier and better thing to do one's duty than to make duties for oneself. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 17. **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.**—*A broken and a contrite heart:*—What is a broken heart? We use the expression to set forth the effects of heavy affliction and sorrow. And so here, the broken heart tells of deep sorrow on account of our sin. Before, it had hope for itself; now it has none, and, thus broken, it is offered with shame and grief. Before, it could listen to the truths of the Gospel unmoved, but now it quivers with emotion. The same wind which moves violently the waters of the lake of Gennesaret is said to leave unruffled those of the Dead Sea. So the man may have been at one time insensible, but he is far from that now. I. **SUCH BROKEN AND CONTRITE HEART IS A SACRIFICE OF GOD.** Men think it is the price which they pay for forgiveness, and they do not see why it is necessary that Christ should die. But debts cannot be cancelled by mere regret, and the sacrifice of the broken heart always follows, never precedes, the application to the heart of the sacrifice of Christ's blood. Whenever Christ saves a sinner He invariably breaks his heart. The same cross which sets him free from the penalty of the law, sets him free also from the obduracy of his own nature; and these two deliverances always go together, and we can never be sure that we have the one unless we have the other. II. **IT IS AN OFFERING WHICH GOD DOES NOT DESPISE.** He might have done so, and it is a wonder that He does not. Text implies this, and thankfulness and confidence. III. **BUT UNGODLY MEN DESPISE IT.** Let them not think they will always feel as they do now. They would rather be detected in crime than in sorrow for it. But God can break their heart. At times He does so, by His word, mightily applied, or by terrible sorrow; and certainly by death. The only gift of God to a lost sinner is the gift of an insensibility unknown before. (*J. A. Alexander, D.D.*) *Wherein the real sacrifice and service of God consists:*—David and other Old Testament saints knew well that it was not in ceremonial observances, but in spiritual service. I. **GOD'S DESIRE AND SEARCH IS AFTER THE HEART,** the soul of man. Our human parental heart teaches us this. Do we not desire our children's hearts? And so with God; He wants His children back, and hence He so values the first returning relenting thought. II. **WHEREFORE THIS IS SO.** All men are sinners, not in the same form, but in the possession of the heart of evil. But see the great change which is wrought when the soul

is turned to God. God is revealed to the soul. Conviction of sin follows. We see our sin in the light of God's goodness, and the vision of that goodness now waiting to be gracious, still further subdues the heart. III. THIS NEW STATE OF HEART WILL BE PERMANENT, and will be seen in trust, in humility, in thankfulness, in consecration. (*Watson Smith.*) *Brokenness of heart:*—I. WHAT IT MEANS. 1. It consists in a quickness of sense and apprehensiveness. A broken spirit is a sensible spirit; it presently discerns what is amiss, either in it, or towards it. As a broken bone or joint, it presently feels the least annoyance that is; even so likewise does a broken heart. That heart which is truly contrite and broken, it is sensible of the least grievance that may be; and this whether in regard of sin, or in regard of punishment. (1) In regard of sin first, it is very quick and sensible here; those whose hearts are hardened and obdurate, they can commit one sin upon another, and yet never be affected with it, or lay it to heart; but those which are broken, and so tender-spirited, the least miscarriage that troubles them, and goes to their souls, they are humbled, not only for grosser sins, but also for smaller infirmities; and not only for more notorious practices, but likewise for failings in duties themselves; and not only for outward and notorious miscarriages, which come into all men's view, but even also for the secretest obliquities and deflections of the inward man. (2) So in regard of punishment also. Broken hearts and contrite spirits tremble at the very shakings of the rod. A wise man, that is, one spiritually wise, which has true grace and godliness in him, and has a principle of spiritual life, such an one is very sensible of judgment. 2. It consists in a pliability and fashionableness of heart and spirit; a hard heart is capable of no impression; ye cannot work it, or frame it to anything; but a broken heart ye may mould it in any way, and turn it whithersoever ye please. And this is another thing which is considerable in it: it is such a heart as yields to all God's dealings and workings with it, to His Word, and to His Providence, and that in the several dispensations of it, it is pliable to everything. II. THE REASON WHY THE SCRIPTURE DOES SO MUCH PRESS THIS UPON US AS THAT SACRIFICE WHICH IS MOST ACCEPTABLE TO GOD. 1. It signifies the person in whom it is to be subjected to God, and brought in obedience to Him. A man may offer bodily sacrifice, and perform outward duties to God, and yet stand aloof from Him, and have his heart still reserved to himself; but now, when it is once broken and contrite, it then stoops and gives itself up to God's disposing; and this is that which God does mainly look after in those that come to Him, He desires still to have the better of them, and to have their spirits brought in order to Him, which is all in all in them; this is that which God calls for (*Prov. xxiii. 16*). Now, this is never done by us till it be in some manner broken and bruised in us; because till then, we shall be apt to rest upon our own bottom, and to subsist wholly in ourselves, and some worth of our own. 2. It is that which makes the best amends for all the sins which are committed by us. The breaking of our hearts, it best satisfies for the breaking of God's laws; not as if thereby we did indeed make satisfaction to God's justice (which is only done by the blood of Christ), but it is that which does carry the best shadow of compensation with it. 3. A broken heart is most desired, as that which makes the best improvement of all God's providences and dispensations, etc. This makes us more thankful for mercies, and this makes us more corrigible under afflictions. (*Thomas Horton, D.D.*) *What does God require?*—Consider the text—I. AS SETTING BEFORE US MOST IMPORTANT TRUTH—that God delights not in sacrifice or burnt-offering, but in the principles and feelings of sincere and heartfelt piety. 1. It is established by every correct view of the Divine character. (1) God is a Spirit. Nothing can be acceptable to Him, as such, but spiritual service, the worship of the soul. (2) God is Lord of all. He made, preserves, and governs all; and whatever we present is first His own. (3) He is a God of love. He delighteth not to impoverish but to enrich His creatures. 2. It is illustrated by the great facts of revelation, and reflects on them, in return, a correspondent illustration and beauty. (1) Sacrifices were designed not to relieve the offender from the compunction and penitence naturally arising from the remembrance of his faults, by the easy substitution of a trifling mulct instead of a deep and heartfelt contrition, but to render that compunction and penitence more solemn and more lively; to impress those feelings of contrition more awfully upon the soul by a most vivid and affecting exhibition of the just desert of sin. When he beheld the dying victim whom he had made his substitute, he was there to discern the fearful extent of that condemnation he had merited, and thus, humbled and sorrowful, was to acknowledge and bewail his misery, as

exposed to the righteous indignation of a just and holy God. (2) If in the sacrifices under the law it was not the mere pangs or death of the victim, but the moral dispositions with which it was presented, that God delighted in; if it was not in the mere punishment of sin, but its effect upon the conscience and the heart, that God took pleasure; then, in the sacrifice of Christ, we conceive this grand principle more abundantly established. And, oh, how full of a humbling and holy joy is the doctrine we have now endeavoured to explain, when we behold the necessity of our punishment for sin thus awfully manifested, and yet the fear of its endurance done away for ever by the offering of the Lamb of God! II. AS EXHIBITING THE PROPER INFLUENCE OF THIS GREAT TRUTH UPON THE FEELINGS OF A HUMBLE AND PENITENT MIND. 1. How forcibly does this language express that exalted estimate of the worth of pardon, which will ever be cherished by those who sincerely repent! 2. How strikingly it exhibits the penitent's humble sense of utter helplessness and incapacity for any service or offering of his own to procure the invaluable blessing! 3. How beautifully does the text describe a simple and grateful reliance upon the freeness of Divine mercy! Where is the man that weeps when no eye sees him, for the defilement of his degenerate nature? Let him not despair. Let him return unto the Lord. Let him lay his hand upon the great propitiation, and believe, and live for ever! (R. S. McAll, LL.D.) *Repentance after conversion*.—I. LET US CONSIDER WHAT THIS SACRIFICE IS. It is a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. 1. If you and I have a broken spirit, all idea of our own importance is gone. What is the use of a broken heart? Why, much the same as the use of a broken pot, or a broken jug, or a broken bottle! Men throw it on the dunghill. Hence David says, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise," as if he felt that everybody else would despise it. Now, do you feel that you are of no importance? Admire the grace of God to you, and marvel at it in deep humiliation of spirit. That is a part of the sacrifice that God will not despise. 2. Next, if you and I have a broken and a contrite heart, it means that frivolity and trifling have gone from us. A broken spirit is serious, and solemn, and in earnest. 3. A broken spirit is one out of which hypocrisy has gone. Reveal yourselves unto yourselves, and so reveal yourselves unto your God. 4. A broken spirit signifies that now all the secrets and essences of the spirit have flowed out. There is much of religion, now-a-days, that is very superficial, it is all on the surface; a very small quantity of gospel paint, with just a little varnish of profession, will go a very long way, and look very bright. But broken hearts are not like that; with broken hearts the hymn is a real hymn, the prayer is a real prayer, the hearing of sermons is earnest work, and the preaching of them is the hardest work of all. Oh, what a mercy it would be if some of you were broken all to pieces! There are many flowers that will never yield their perfume till they are bruised. Even the generous grape lets not its juice flow forth till it is trodden under foot of men. II. LET US OFFER THE SACRIFICE. Come, let us mourn a while on account of our past sin; we will do so from several points of view. 1. First, let us deeply regret that we have sinned against so good a God. Shall we not feel within our hearts a burning indignation against sin, because it is committed against so holy, so good, so glorious a being as the infinitely-blessed God? 2. Let us mourn to think that we have offended against so excellent and admirable a law. 3. Let us grieve that we have sinned against a Saviour's love. Those hands, those feet, have saved me, yet I nailed them there. That opened side is the refuge of my guilty spirit, yet I made that fearful gash by my sin. 4. Think of our sins against the Holy Spirit. O my soul, how couldst thou ever grieve Him? How couldst thou ever have resisted that best and tenderest Friend? I do not ask you to torture yourselves, but I do invite you now to indulge the joyful grief of sweet heavenly penitence as you remember the love of the Spirit. 5. Let us set our sin in the light of God's countenance. 6. I want you to set sin in the light of your marvellous experiences. Wonders of grace have been ours! 7. Think of the injury you have done to others by your example. Whatever any of us do, we are sure to have some who will copy us; it cannot be avoided. This thought has a sharp sting in it for any who, by word or by example, have taught others to do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord. 8. Think of all the opportunities that we lose whenever we fall into sin. I do repent of sin unfeignedly because it has hindered my progress. What a preacher I might have been! Oh, what winners of souls you might have become by this time! (C. H. Spurgeon.) *To the broken-hearted*.—I. THE BROKEN HEART. 1. Renounces all idea of merit, and seeks alone for mercy (ver. 1). 2. Will always feel its sins to be peculiarly its own (ver. 2).

8. Will make full confession of sin (ver. 3). (1) Without excuse. (2) In the plainest language possible. 4. Mourns most over the Godward aspect of sin (ver. 4). 5. Will never cavil with God about the deserved punishment (ver. 4). 6. Will mourn its general depravity (ver. 5). 7. Will always be as anxious for purity as for pardon (ver. 7). 8. Is not a despairing heart (ver. 9). 9. Is an agonized heart (ver. 8). II. A BROKEN HEART IS NOT DESPISED BY GOD. We have His royal word for it (Isa. lxvi. 2). I know that Christ will never despise it, and that for a very good reason. He has suffered from it Himself. You say, "Ah, but mine is broken on account of sin: His was not." Was it not? It was broken by the unutterable horror of having sin imputed to Him, and occupying the sinner's place. Thy pangs, thy sorrows, thy griefs, thine unutterable longings for the light of the Father's face—all these are known unto thy Saviour. He will not despise thee. I am sure He will not, because it was He who broke thy heart. It would be despising His own handiwork were He to reject a contrite spirit. It would be casting on one side that which He hath Himself made. (*A. G. Brown.*) *The broken heart*:—I. IN WHAT A BROKEN HEART CONSISTS. It is in itself a state where the mind is rendered susceptible of deep spiritual feeling—that feeling being mainly grief and sorrow. II. HOW A BROKEN HEART IS PRODUCED. 1. The Agent. You must remember that the state we are describing never can be supposed to originate in any human or finite power whatever. It is not, for example, produced by the force of instruction, whether administered in juvenile or in riper years. It is not produced by processes of personal reflection; and it is not produced by movements of the natural conscience. We do not deny that they do sometimes appear to possess influences very similar to the influences of religion; and we are aware how conscience, especially under particular circumstances, occasionally becomes lashed and roused into such a state of alarm and accusing energy, that its awakenings are not at all distinguishable from the impulses of veritable and substantial piety. But yet, after all, the appearances are deceitful, and the results are impotent. The "heart of stone," if we may use such a figure, is, as it were, only shifted in its position—that change of position rendering the moral frame uneasy and disturbed. The substance of the heart itself yet remains unpenetrated and untransmuted, and the truth remains, that were man left to himself, and to beings like himself, never would he know and feel what real contrition is. After this limitation of human agency, we are prepared to determine that the production of this state is to be ascribed exclusively to the supreme power of the Divine Spirit. 2. This, then, is the Agent in the production of the state we have noticed. We must also observe the instrumentality which the Agent employs. And the Divine Spirit always operates upon the mind of man by an instrumentality which is precisely adapted to its nature; we mean the Word of truth, as it reveals the character, the claims, and the procedure of God, along with the character, the duties, and the prospects and destinies of man. And especially as it sets forth the love of the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of sinners. This prominence will be found distinctly ascribed to it by the manner in which it constituted the one grand topic of inspired and apostolic ministry in primitive times. III. WHY A BROKEN HEART IS COMMENDED. We are to commend as precious and valuable the "broken heart." 1. Because it is the state by which alone man can be saved from everlasting ruin. 2. It introduces to the enjoyment of all spiritual blessings. (*James Parsons.*) *The true oblation*:—In the temple of Israel there were two altars: the first, the great "altars of burnt-offering." It was the altar of atonement, the only one in all the world on which God looked down with approval. At its base flowed the blood of every victim that was slain. On its broad bosom it received, and with its fiery breath it consumed, the holocausts and hecatombs of the thousands of Judah. But within the holy place was another altar; it was the altar of incense, fit representative of an order of sacrifices that were not expiatory, but oblations. They were not for the purpose of making atonement and seeking reconciliation, but for expressing the consecration to God of the redeemed soul. And the acceptableness of such oblation was expressed by the offering of the fragrant incense that was burnt upon that altar. Now, it is of this second class of sacrifices that the psalmist is speaking in our text. He is referring not to the sacrifices of expiation, but of oblation. The sinner is already pardoned, the atoning sacrifice has already been accepted, and he approaches the golden altar, not to deprecate worth or to plead for pardon, but as a forgiven sinner to offer on this altar the oblation of his gratitude and devotion, the love which wells up with overflowing fulness in a heart redeemed from sin. Now, looking at this sacrifice, we note—I. THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE SERVICE WHICH GOD

REQUIRES. That which is to be laid upon His altar is not some material gift, however costly, but an offering of the spirit. II. IN THE SACRIFICES OF GOD THE HEART CONSTITUTES ITS VERY ESSENCE. God's religion is pre-eminently one of love. Hence, the true oblation can only be of love, the only true sacrifice that of the heart. Contrast the sacrifices on the great brazen altar and those on the altar of incense. That holy place was the sanctuary of forgiven hearts, the retreat of those whose sins had been put away by the expiation offered on the altar without. Then are we taught that it is the heart which God demands as an oblation upon His altar. Only love will satisfy love. III. BUT THE HEART MUST BE BROKEN AND CONTRITE. This is one reason why the way to the altar of incense is by that of expiation, that men may learn the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and look upon Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for their sin. This it is which makes it so hard for man to lay upon this altar the acceptable sacrifice. If there were no demand for repentance and confession, no need for such self-humbling as in the dust, man would readily come. But only the broken and contrite heart will God accept, or ought He to accept. For such should be our posture before God. Not that of pride, but of deep humility. (*T. D. Witherspoon, D.D.*)

Ver. 18. **Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion.**—*Prayer for Zion*:—I. THE PLACE PRAYED FOR. Under the name "Zion" David here prays for the whole Church, whose practice is herein considerable for our example. 1. Considered as a godly man, he prays for it so; whereby he shows us the nature and disposition of every good Christian besides, as also the duty of every one that pretends to an interest in the Church. This may be made out unto us upon this ground and consideration; because, namely, of that near relation which they bear unto it, and benefit which they receive by it. There is not a greater nearness of the members of a natural body one to another, than there is in the members of the mystical. And yet, if we well consider it, how few are there which lay this to heart, which take care of the prosperity of Zion, and which are affected with good-will to it? Most men seek their own advantage, the enlarging and settling of themselves, but they are but few which do lay out their thoughts and endeavours for the good of the Church. Nay, it were well if some now and then were not employed in that which is contrary, which are haters and ill-willers to it (Ps. cxxix. 5). 2. As a guilty man, David now reflected on the mischief he had done to the Church of God by his sin; and now, therefore, to make it some amends, he puts it into his prayer, that God would do good unto it, as that which was the only recompense and satisfaction which he was able to make it. We may hence judge of the work of repentance and conversion what is in us. He who truly repents of his sin, will endeavour to do good answerably to the evil which has been done by him. II. THE THING PRAYED FOR ABOUT IT; viz. that it have good done unto it. We must take it in the latitude, and full extent, which is of good in all kinds, but more especially of such good as is proper and peculiar to the Church, considered as such, within its own circle and compass, which is spiritual and eternal good. Where, for the ordering of our prayers aright upon such occasions, we may take notice of these particulars. 1. The free enjoyment of the ordinances and means of grace. These make up a great part of the good of Zion, and we should be instant with God for His Church in this regard, that He would vouchsafe, and uphold, and maintain the ministry of it. 2. The extirpation of errors and heresies, and the promoters of them, this is likewise conducing to the good. It can never be well with the Church, any further than as God is pleased to convert it by His overruling power. Therefore, as ever we desire the welfare of it, we must bend our prayers to this particular. 3. The multiplication of converts, that's another thing pertinent hereunto. The welfare of Zion lies much in the number of those which belong unto it. 4. The concord and agreement of believers amongst themselves; this is another thing of the same nature with it; it was well with Zion in those days when they were all of one accord in one place (Acts ii. 1). This is as much for the good of the Church as anything else, and does as much need and require our prayers and petitions for it. III. THE MODIFICATION OF THE REQUEST. "In Thy good pleasure." 1. It is a word of special influence, and does denote unto us the rise and spring of all good to be expected to the Church, which is the love and good-will of God. David does not now come to God for his Church upon terms of merit or desert, but only upon terms of favour and free grace, "Do good in Thy good pleasure." And this is that which all must still do, even the best that are; they must thus make their addresses to God even in the behalf of the Church

itself. And the reason of it is this, because we are all debtors to God, and stand obnoxious to Him; we deserve no good from Him; and that good which already we have, we have in a manner forfeited by our miscarriages; therefore it must be free grace and favour that must set us right, there's nothing else which will be helpful to us. 2. It is a word of limitation; a limitation not of God, but indeed of His own prayer and request. As if he had said, Lord, I do very earnestly beg of Thee that Thou wouldst do good to Thy Church; but I do not herein go about to limit Thee, or confine Thee, or prescribe Thee, but I leave it wholly to Thyself; "Do good in Thy good pleasure," that is, as shall seem good and best in Thine own eyes to do. 3. It is a word of insinuation, as it seems to carry the force of an argument in it, and that thus, Lord, Thou bearest a special love and affection to Zion, which is Thy Church above all others besides. Now, therefore, according to this affection which is in Thee towards it, be pleased to do good to it; as the sister of Lazarus to Christ (John xi. 8), whereby she would persuade Him to be active for his recovery. So does David here now to God in behalf of the Church, "Do good of Thy good pleasure to Zion"; that is, according to Thy wonted favour and lovingkindness towards her. It is a great encouragement in our addresses to God at any time for His poor Church to have the advantage of His own affections to it, which will prevail with Him so much the easier to goodness upon it. The reason of it is this, because God delights to be like Himself; He is good, and doeth good; and He is yesterday, and to-day, the same for ever. Therefore those bowels which persuade Him to do good to the Church at first, persuade Him still to the continuance of it. (Thomas Horton, D.D.) "Do good unto Zion":—Though a popular and prevalent, it is a false or at least very defective form of Christianity, which, if personal salvation is attained, or supposed to be attained, is indifferent to the interests of truth, the welfare of the Church, and the public cause of Christ. The more profoundly we are interested in, and the more sensibly we are assured of our own salvation, the better fitted are we for being, and the more likely are we to be "valiant for the truth upon the earth." We should seek that God would do good unto Zion—I. IN THE WAY OF INCREASING THE NUMBER OF HER GENUINE CONVERTS. It is not in the number, or wealth, or worldly influence of her nominal members, but in the number of true believers, "called and chosen and faithful," loving the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, who are found within her pale, that her strength and stability and beauty consist. In proportion as she is destitute of these latter, may Ichabod—the glory is departed—be written on her brow. It is they alone, of all her members, who show forth the transforming power of Divine grace, and the condescension of Divine love, and who reflect the purity of her glorious Head. II. IN THE WAY OF CAUSING THE GRACES OF THE SPIRIT TO FLOURISH IN HER TRUE MEMBERS. It would be a token for good were believers generally constrained to long for the reviving influences of the Spirit, as the chased roe pants for the cooling stream, or as the parched ground thirsts for the refreshing shower—were they in the same frame of mind as the Spouse in Canticles when she cried, "Awake, O north wind, and come thou south: blow upon my garden that the spices may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits." III. IN THE WAY OF ENABLING HER TO BE FAITHFUL TO HER LORD. And this faithfulness we shall only notice here as it bears upon her testifying for His truths, preserving the purity of His ordinances, and enforcing the laws of His house. According as she fulfils or fails in fulfilling these functions, does she prove faithful or faithless to her high mission as "the pillar and ground of the truth," and as a witness for God in the world. IV. IN THE WAY OF HEALING HER DIVISIONS. These are her weakness, her shame, her sin. The armies of Israel are spending in intestine conflict that strength which is needed against, and which would powerfully tell upon, their common foes. V. BY EXTENDING HER BOUNDARIES. There are still many "dark places of the earth," which are "full of the habitations of horrid cruelty." There are hundreds of millions of our race sitting in the shadow of moral and spiritual darkness and death, athwart which a beam from the Sun of Righteousness has never shone. They are perishing for lack of knowledge. In darkness they live, in darkness they die, and to the blackness of darkness at death they descend. So long, however, as this is the case, the promise of the Divine Father to His Son shall not be fully performed, "I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession"—numerous predictions of Scripture shall remain unfulfilled—and the Church shall not have attained her destined and promised position of glory in our world. But all those events shall yet take place, however impossible they may now appear to the eye of sense.

Every obstacle to this—physical, political, ecclesiastical, or moral—shall be removed. In asking these blessings from God for Zion, we should do so in a spirit of entire dependence upon Him for their bestowal; under a sense of personal unworthiness; in a spirit of resignation to the Divine will; from a supreme desire for the Divine glory; and under a deep sense of personal obligation to active exertion on our part, in order to their being obtained. (*Original Secession Magazine*.)

*A prayer for the welfare of Zion:*—I. THE MATTER OF THE PRAYER. 1. The first petition hath an obvious reference to the tribes of Israel, considered in their spiritual state, as a religious community, or the true Church of God. 2. The other petition hath a reference to the civil state of the Jews as a commonwealth or kingdom, and is a prayer for their national safety and prosperity. II. THE ORDER IN WHICH THE PETITIONS ARE PLACED. He begins with praying for the good of Zion, and then offers his supplication in behalf of Jerusalem. Nor is this an accidental or arbitrary arrangement. The same subordination of temporal to spiritual blessings is uniformly observed through the whole of the sacred record, both in the promises of God, and in the accepted prayer of His people. III. THE TEMPER OF MIND with which they appear to have been accompanied. 1. David had a just impression of his absolute dependence on God, and did not trust in the arm of flesh, but looked for help from God alone. 2. The form of his address likewise discovers the deep conviction he had of his own unworthiness. (*R. Walker*.)

*Intercession for Zion:*—"Zion," in this verse, means the hill on which the temple stood, and is therefore taken for the temple itself; and the temple, again, means God's worshipping Church, with God Himself dwelling in the midst of it. He prays for good to this worshipping assembly of God's people, under the designation first of Zion, second of Jerusalem. In the second aspect the Church is figured by a city, a metropolitan city, a walled city. The Church is brought before us as a city, and her members as citizens. They are members of the heavenly polity. Jerusalem stands for the gathered assembly of God's people worshipping and dwelling secure in their quiet habitations (Heb. xii. 22). It is the rich grace of God, and His free love and unchangeable good-will to His people, that are the sole causes of the welfare of His Church. God alone can do good unto Zion; He alone can build up the walls of Jerusalem. But to this work God has a good-will. Zion lies near His heart. When we are seeking this, when we are labouring for this, we are sure to find favour with God. God alone can do it; still our duty is to labour, to teach transgressors God's ways, that sinners may be converted unto Him. All that befalls the Church is according to the good pleasure of God's will. This is the ground of our calling, election, justification, glorification. Whatever we seek must ever be sought under this restriction, "Thy good pleasure." Build Thou; but do it in Thine own wise time, in Thine own good way. Build Thou the walls of separation, that divide the Church from the world; let them be in it, not of it: keep them from its evil. (*T. Alexander, M.A.*)

Ver. 19. **Then shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering.**—*Sacrifices of righteousness:*—They are called the sacrifices of righteousness, which are offered rightly, and according to the true intent and meaning, and order of God's law. The law of God is the rule of righteousness, they are the sacrifices of righteousness which are presented to God according to this rule. And this interpretation doth easily reconcile the difference, which may seem to be betwixt this verse and the sixteenth. There David said, God desired no sacrifice; here he saith, God shall accept burnt-offering and oblation; when these services may be truly called the sacrifices of righteousness, then God likes of them, and approves them; for that which is rightly performed according to His own prescript, He cannot but approve; but when this righteousness wants, and they are nothing but matters of form and compliment, He cannot endure them. I. IT IS A GREAT BLESSING WHEN THE SERVICES WHICH MEN PRESENT AND TENDER UNTO GOD DO FIND ACCEPTANCE WITH HIM, AND ARE APPROVED BY HIM. 1. Touching the state of the person, he must be one who is himself in favour with God. A man's person must be first accepted before his gift can please. If there be any one thing which thou knowest to be an evil; nay, if there be any one particular in thy practice, which thou art not sure is lawful in God's sight, surely God loathes thy person, and He cannot but even abhor all the devotions. 2. Concerning the substance of that which is offered unto God, and what He requireth of thee. This rule may well put the greatest part out of all hope of acceptance with God. There are two branches of will-worship,

of one of which the greatest part be guilty. First is, when that which is used in worshipping God is grounded only upon man's invention, and cannot at all be proved out of God's Word to be of his ordaining. Secondly, when though it may be that which is done, is in itself simply of God's appointing; yet that it is so is more than he knows, or cares to know, that useth it. 3. The third is for the manner of using. For that is as necessary as the two former. That which is in itself good may yet be spoiled and made distasteful to God by the usage thereof. There were of the Israelites many, who were baptized under Moses in the cloud and in the sea, did eat of the same spiritual meat, and drink of the same spiritual drink, yet with them God was not pleased. Now, the special matter in the manner of using God's ordinances is that spoken of by David, In Thy fear will I worship towards Thine holy temple. Let us have grace whereby we may serve God, pleasing Him with reverence and fear. Now, this fear moveth a man to two things. One in respect of his carriage before he cometh into the presence of God; the other in respect of his behaviour there. Before he comes, this fear causeth him to consider with himself into whose presence he is going, and who it is with whom he must have to do, and what a weighty business it is which he must discharge. Then, when a man is in, and now the action is begun, that fear which moved him to prepare, continueth still with him, and causeth him to do reverence before God; that is, to demean himself with a kind of diligent watchfulness over his own thoughts, that he may keep them together, and may prevent those roving and unfitting imaginations, which are wont to fall in most, when a man is best employed, and are like the fowls which fell on the sacrifices which Abraham offered to God, and were driven away by him. It is fit to this purpose that which we find (Mal. iii. 16).

II. IT IS A GREAT MERCY OF GOD, WHEN THERE IS A GENERAL FREEDOM AND FORWARDNESS IN THE PEOPLE, IN RESPECT OF THE PUBLIC ACTS AND EXERCISES OF DEVOTION. We must thus, for the declaring of this doctrine, conceive of this place; that David reckoneth up here a twofold good, which shall follow that twofold blessing, for which he was a suitor in the former verse. If God should please to receive Zion into favour, and to forgive that sin by which the prosperity of the Church was now endangered, then it could not be, but the sacrifices which were offered by the children of Zion should find grace; and then, withal, if He should vouchsafe to continue and establish the peace of the state, then they, being encouraged by so many evidences of God's favour, and enjoying such sweet quiet, should be frequent in public duties, and keep the altar of the Lord in continual use by multitudes of sacrifices. This teacheth us, first, at what a high rate we ought to value this freedom and liberty of serving God publicly in peace, which David here conceived as one of the blessings which would ensue his prayer, and therefore, no doubt, was a matter principally aimed at by him in his request. And in the second place let us learn, as of David, to be glad of his freedom, so of the people here touching whom he speaks, to make use of this freedom; while we have the light let us walk in the light; while the way lieth open to the Lord's altars, let us beat the path that leadeth to them. Remember ever the good use which the Churches of old made of their peace (Acts ix. 31). (*S. Hieron.*) *The sacrifice of righteousness*:—The first impulse of a generous soul, when he sees the ruin, the desolation, the broken wall, and the gaps of sin, is to offer reparation, to make restitution, to restore, to do something to make good the desolating ravages of sin. Alas! this is not always possible. Mummus, the Roman general, to whose lot it fell to sack Corinth, with all its treasures of art and monuments of antiquity, is said to have told his rough soldiers that if they broke any of these works of art they would have to replace them. Perhaps his is not a less ludicrous conception who thinks to repair the ravages of sin. It is just here that David seems to look forward, not only to a more perfect contrition, a more prevailing confession, but also to a more acceptable satisfaction for sin. The sacrifice of Calvary, in the Zion of the Church, in the Jerusalem above,—in this, and by this alone will it be possible to repair, to restore, to make God again well-pleased, by virtue of the atonement of His dear Son. It has that wonderful power, as we have seen, of weaving all our life together. All the different failures, incongruities, half-beginnings, impulses, longings of our life, are brought together, in some marvellous way, by His master hand; our very sins have been seized upon, to strengthen or beautify, or even tone down, our life. "In heaven I shall be myself." Tenderness, gentleness, self-distrust, and many delicate virtues like them, have been brought into our lives, in places where once were ruinous gaps. Truly God is very merciful! Who but He could ever have made life righteous? The prayer of the generous heart in all ages is to be



"made conformable unto His death"; to reproduce, however faintly, the pangs, the afflictions, the generous self-sacrifice, the agony of Gethsemane, the shame of Calvary; to offer in person to God a sacrifice of righteousness, righteous because in union with Him, righteous because sprinkled with His blood, righteous because it is the best which we can offer. And it is here described. I. **THE BURNT-OFFERING.** You know what that means. It is that sacrifice where all is burned and consumed—a type of the complete exhaustion of wrath against sin. It must be taken from the herd and from the flock, things ready to hand, just round about the home, and be killed, flayed, cut into pieces, and burnt. Is not this the sacrifice which we fain would offer, the vengeance on ourselves, the sorrow after a godly sort, with its carefulness, its clearing of ourselves, etc.? (2 Cor. viii. 11). Are we dead to the old temptation, are we mortified? II. **THE OBLATION, the peace-offering**—that offering which the soul can make when it is at peace with God. Ours is to be the life of oblation, the life in which there is the perpetual offering up of self. This, too, is a lesson to learn on Calvary, to offer ourselves to God, and to whatever work He may give us to do. III. But he goes higher still. **YOUNG BULLOCKS** will be offered on the altar. This means the best and the costliest offering. It is the sacrifice of a life which God demands from the priest. It is the sacrifice of a life which God asks us to contemplate on Calvary. "Be ye therefore perfect." Is this an idle dream? He was perfect. "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" He asks, without fear of the answer. Can we be perfect too? At least, we are bound to try. We can make a resolution never to put up with that which is imperfect, whether it be something which we shrink back from, beaten and hopeless, saying, "I cannot attain unto it"; whether it be some disposition or some habit, whose attainment ever eludes it; whether it be those little traits of Christianity, which more than anything else give the likeness to the ideal, which we are seeking to reproduce. (*Canon Newbolt.*)

### PSALM LII.

**VERS. 1-9. Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man?—A social betrayer:**—This psalm may be regarded as presenting to us a social betrayer in a variety of aspects. Doeg was an "informer," one whom Webster defines as "a man who informs against others from base or unworthy motives." I. **The social betrayer DEPICTED.** 1. **Pride** (ver. 1). Proud of the secret he holds. He feels he has the reputation and destiny of some one entrusted to him. 2. **Malice** (ver. 2). 3. **Craft** (ver. 2). He is a moral assassin; moves in the dark, and carries his javelin under the costume of deception. 4. **Dishonesty** (ver. 3). He runs more readily with the false than with the true; with the wrong than with the right; with the cruel than with the kind. The base man, what careth he whom he betrays, how he betrays, or what sufferings he entails upon the innocent and even the holy, in order to advance his own personal and selfish ends? II. **The social betrayer DOOMED** (ver. 5). What is his punishment? Destruction. Not annihilation; but—1. **A removal**: "He shall take thee away." Hengstenberg renders it, "take thee away as a coal." Fling thee away as an intolerable brand. He has been as fire in society, inflaming others with bad passions, devouring the true, the good, and the happy. God will fling him away as a hissing coal. "Pluck thee out of thy dwelling-place" (or tent). His present dwelling-place is a scene of discipline, grace, redemption: hope is taken from him, he is taken from it for ever. 2. **An uprootal**. "And root thee out of the land of the living." The roots of a wicked man's life are in this world, they don't strike into the spiritual and the eternal; the present and the palpable are everything to him: their roots shall be destroyed. All these are figures, but they mean something terrible; and reason, analogy, conscience, and the Bible tell us that something terrible is before such a man as this. III. **The social betrayer DERIDED** (vers. 6, 7). "There is a twofold laughter," says Arndt. "One, when a man out of an evil spirit of revenge laughs at his enemy. This no Christian, virtuous mind does, but exercises compassion towards an enemy. But the other sort of laughing arises from a consideration of the wonderful judgment and righteousness of God, as when a man says, like Pharaoh,

"I ask nothing after the Lord, nor will I let Israel go," and soon thereafter is made to sink in the Red Sea. This is for just derision. Is it not a matter of ridicule for a man to fight against God? IV. The social betrayer DEFEATED. Doeg, by his betrayal, considered perhaps that he had ruined David; but instead of this, whilst he himself got destroyed, uprooted from the land of the living, his victim was like "a green olive-tree." David here indicates that his own life was—1. A growing life. "A green olive-tree." Well nourished and well protected. 2. A trusting life. "I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever." God's goodness is a tide that must bear everything before it and will outlive the universe itself. Therefore it is wise to trust in it. 3. A thankful life: "I will praise Thee for ever." Divine praise is the heaven of the soul. It employs all its faculties harmoniously, and gratifies all its moral cravings fully and for ever. 4. An obedient life. "I will wait on Thy name." This is the highest attitude of an intelligent creature; it is the attitude of the greatest angel. (*Homilist.*) On the character of Doeg:—I. DOEG MADE NOT GOD HIS STRENGTH. To make God our strength implies that we regard the Almighty as the author of all our blessings; that we repose an implicit trust in Him in every situation; that we own our dependence on Him for everything which we enjoy; and that we live under the habitual influence of these convictions. The conduct of Doeg was the very reverse of this. II. HE TRUSTED IN THE ABUNDANCE OF HIS RICHES. The only true felicity of man is in God; but the love of the world seduces the heart from God, and leads it, like Doeg, to trust in the abundance of riches, instead of making God its strength. When the love of riches becomes thus predominant, how baneful must be its influence to the principles and affections of the soul! It darkens the understanding; it deadens the conscience; it chills and hardens the heart. But why should men trust to their wealth, when its influence is so baneful and destructive? The accumulated treasures of the world cannot arrest the arm of death, or purchase from him a moment's reprieve. Are riches necessary to the enjoyment of life? This depends on health of body and contentment of mind, and neither of these can wealth bestow. III. HE STRENGTHENED HIMSELF IN HIS WICKEDNESS. The first resource of an abandoned sinner is debauchery; and to it he betakes himself, not so much to gratify sensual appetite and licentious desire, as to drown thought, to bury reflection, to lull the conscience. His only joys are intemperance, riot and dissipation. The best principles of his nature are entirely perverted, and his heart is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Having thus succeeded in corrupting or silencing the faithful guardians of innocence and virtue, he triumphs in the imaginary security with which he may now indulge in licentiousness and vice, and strengthens himself still farther in wickedness. IV. THIS CHARACTER IS RECORDED FOR OUR INSTRUCTION. It is intended as a beacon to point out to us the dangerous consequences of sin. It is preserved as a memorial, to all ages of the world, of this important and impressive truth, that sin and misery are most closely united. Would we avoid Doeg's fate, then let us avoid his conduct. With this view, let us guard most anxiously against the first deviations from piety and virtue. (*G. Goldie.*) A challenge to the mighty sinner:—This psalm is a bold and outspoken challenge to a big sinner—a proud personage who "trusted in the abundance of his riches"; and, as often happens to men—and to women, too—luxury had made him slanderous and foul-mouthed, and brutal and monstrous: "he strengthened himself in his wickedness." The psalm challenges the "big man": "Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty-man?" but it tries also to convert him: "The goodness of God is from day to day." What is the connection between these two clauses of verse 1? The big sinner, wicked and proud, is shut up, as it were, in a close and ill-smelling room—shut up with his ugly thoughts, shut up with his own evil, selfish self. Let him come out, says the psalmist, out into the sunshine of God's mercies, out into the open where the winds blow fresh o'er the world; let him think of God's goodness, and may it lead him to repentance. Old Testament piety hunts the open air for its images (ver. 8). We of to-day may not be big men, and have psalms written about us, but we need the same teaching. Let a man be over-reached in business, let him come home and brood over it, and how soon will arise the thought and plan of revenge! Let another come to him with her prattling lips, and how easily does she convince him that he is a hero and a martyr! Why not the rather, reaching a hand for God's Book, remember His goodness, which is from day to day? Young men may not know amassed wealth, but they know how, in act or in fancy, they pass into the house of passion, where the blinds are

drawn and the windows dimmed by heat, and the sounds are pleasing, and sweet desire arises. Young men, come forth—into the open, out from your narrow selves to God, out into His love's free atmosphere. You are not alone (ver. 9). Here are the saints, the heroes, the men of faith; and above the helmets of salvation which they wear, see the Captain, Christ Himself, beckoning you onwards to glory and to God. (*British Weekly*.) **The goodness of God endureth continually.**—*The goodness of God infinite and everlasting*.—There is not so much sin in man as there is goodness in God. There is a vaster proportion between sin and grace than between a spark and an ocean. Who would doubt whether a spark could be quenched in an ocean? Thy thoughts of disobedience towards God have been within the compass of time, but His goodness hath been bubbling up towards thee from all eternity. (*W. Culverwell*.)

**Vers. 2-4. Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.**—*Sins of speech*.—The prominence given to sins of speech is peculiar. We should have expected high-handed violence rather than these. But the psalmist is tracking the deeds to their source; and it is not so much the tyrant's words as his love of a certain kind of words which is adduced as proof of his wickedness. These words have two characteristics in addition to boastfulness. They are false and destructive. They are, according to the forcible literal meaning in verse 4, "words of swallowing." They are, according to the literal meaning of "destructions" in verse 2, "yawning gulfs." Such words lead to acts which make a tyrant. They flow from perverted preference of evil to good. Thus the deeds of oppression are followed up to their den and birthplace. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

**Vers. 6, 7. The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him.**—*The righteous observe the teachings of life*.—The fear which it produces in the "righteous" is reverential awe, not dread lest the same should happen to them. Whether or not history and experience teach evil men that "verily there is a God that judgeth," their lessons are not wasted on devout and righteous souls. But this is the tragedy of life, that its teachings are prized most by those who have already learned them, and that those who need them most consider them least. Other tyrants are glad when a rival is swept off the field, but are not arrested in their own course. It is left to "the righteous" to draw the lesson which all men should have learned. Although they are pictured as laughing at the ruin, that is not the main effect of it. Rather it deepens conviction, and is a "modern instance" witnessing to the continual truth of "an old saw." There is one safe stronghold, and only one. He who conceits himself to be strong in his own evil, and, instead of relying on God, trusts in material resources, will sooner or later be levelled with the ground, dragged, resisting vainly the tremendous grasp, from his tent, and laid prostrate, as melancholy a spectacle as a great tree blown down by tempest, with its roots turned up to the sky and its arms with drooping leaves trailing on the ground. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) **Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength.**—*The folly of not depending on God*.—I. **WHAT IS UNDERSTOOD BY MAKING GOD OUR STRENGTH.** 1. A conviction of our own weakness and danger, and the insufficiency of all created good for our safety and happiness. 2. A strong and lively persuasion of Divine all-sufficiency. 3. A pleasing persuasion of God's gracious willingness to protect and save all those who make Him the object of their trust and dependence. 4. An unreserved surrender of himself, and all that he possesses, into the hands of God. The word we render "strength" sometimes signifies a fort or castle; and, in this view and connection, imports the soul's betaking itself to God in scenes of danger, and reposing its dependence upon Him for protection from invading evil (Ps. lxi. 2, 3; Isa. xxxiii. 16; Prov. xviii. 10). II. **VIEW THE MAN WHO MAKES NOT THE LORD HIS STRENGTH** in some of the most interesting scenes and situations. 1. We will suppose him in the enjoyment of health and prosperity, and in possession of as much of this world as heart can wish. But whatever distinction these circumstances may make in his favour, he is neither secure nor happy. There are desires which earthly objects were never designed to satisfy, and there is a chasm in the soul which all created nature cannot fill. Past disappointments will suggest the possibility of future; and the sad change which hath passed on others, once as prosperous as himself, will awaken some painful suspicion that his mountain stands not so strong as never to be moved. He vainly attempts to flee from conscience; but it attends him like his shadow; or, shall I say, like a barbed arrow. He may change the place

indeed—but the arrow and the wound remain. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." 2. We will suppose him in scenes of temptation. His dignity and glory is lost—the freedom in which he prides himself means nothing worthy of the man—in a country that boasts its liberty he is an abject slave, and in constant subjection to the worst of tyrants. 3. We will suppose him lying under the pressure of bodily affliction. The objects on which his trust and dependence were placed cannot prevent one painful sensation, or bring back to its proper state one single nerve. His body and soul are both afflicted: he hath a painful feeling that his dependence was improperly placed; and he is ashamed and afraid to ask of God that strength which he had refused to accept. 4. We will suppose him with death in immediate prospect. His strength is gone—his pulse beats feebly—a mortal paleness hangs upon his countenance. He would fain hope to live, but cannot: he sees death approaching, and trembles at the sight. What he hath most to dread is coming upon him like an armed man, and he hath no strength to resist. The very thing he wants—what alone could sustain him—he hath taken no pains to secure. 5. We will next suppose him in sight of the Judgment-day, and as standing before the bar of that God, whose favour and strength he never sought. Oh! how does he wish for rocks and mountains to fall upon him, to cover him from the face of the Judge, and from the wrath of the Lamb! And "lo! this is the man who made not God his strength." 6. Suppose this unhappy man, who made not God his strength, removed from the bar of Christ, and shut up in everlasting despair.

III. SOME THOUGHTS DEDUCIBLE FROM THIS SUBJECT. 1. They act a very unwise and dangerous part, whose dependence is not on God. 2. There are those who are no objects of envy, notwithstanding their prosperous circumstances and the great abundance they possess. 3. An interest in the favour and friendship of God, through Christ, in whom is everlasting strength, should be the object of our warmest wish and daily pursuit. (*N. Hill.*) But trusted in the abundance of his riches.—*The folly of trusting in riches*.—I. A GREAT MISTAKE. 1. Because of the uncertainty of the tenure of riches. 2. Because of the limited power of riches. It can buy books, but not intellectual power; paintings, but not appreciative taste; service and sycophancy, but not esteem and affection, etc. It cannot buy pardon, peace, purity, etc. It cannot bribe death, etc. 3. Because of the utter inability of riches to satisfy their possessors. He who has much wealth would fain have more. II. A COMMON MISTAKE. The great race of the age is for the acquisition of wealth. Manhood is sacrificed for money. "How mournfully ironical it is," said Mr. Lance, "and how sad it seems, that death, with all that is pathetic, and solemn, and tender, and sublime about it, should stand associated with that love of money that is the root of all evil! Died worth £50,000! Why, worth, as I understand it, is worthiness, and as I read Heaven's own imperial dictionary, a man is worth only just so much as, and no more than, the good, the true, the imperishable, that stands connected with his name, whether living or dying. I hope that the time may come when it will not seem strange to say that Shakespeare died worth *Hamlet*, and that Milton died worth the *Paradise Lost*, and that Bunyan died worth the *Pilgrim's Progress*." But at present material wealth is the deity of thousands in Christian England.

III. A RUINOUS MISTAKE, IF PERSISTED IN (Luke xii. 15–21). (*W. Jones.*) *Covetousness a misdirected worship*.—The prevalence of error is often to be traced to the latent love of truth, and in sinful excess may not seldom be discerned the aberration of a nature originally designed for good. For just as forged money could never gain currency if men set no value on the genuine coin, and as spurious wares impose on the undiscerning only because of the desire for those things of which they are the worthless imitation, so falsehood and sin would have no attraction but for the deceitful resemblance they bear to the truth and goodness from which we have wandered. Let us, then, provide the true satisfaction for man's deep and universal desires, and he will turn with distaste from that which only pretends to please. I. MONEY IS LIKE, AND BY MANY IS OFTEN UNCONSCIOUSLY MISTAKEN FOR, GOD. Man is made for God, but there are certain superficial similarities between it and God which secretly persuade the heart that that divinity of which it is in search it will find in wealth. If we try to think how money is like God, may it not be said to possess a certain shadowy resemblance of His omnipotence; a strange mimicry of His omnipresence, His boundless beneficence, His providence, His power over the future, His capacity, not only to procure for us an endless variety of blessings, to give us all that our hearts can desire, but also to become in and for Himself, apart from all that He can give

us, an object of independent delight; so that it is happiness to know and feel that He is ours? Now, money seems able to do and be all this, and nothing but the true love of God can drive it out of our minds. II. BUT IT IS A PRETENCE AFTER ALL. For the soul cannot rest in the material and the outward; nor in the limited and perishable and that which abideth not. But all this is true of wealth, and therefore it can only be a false god at the best. God, and God alone, is sufficient for the happiness of the soul which, in His own image, He hath made. (*John Caird, D.D.*) *More money than we can use*:—An anonymous writer, generally supposed to be the Rev. Ward Beecher, after describing how, when a boy, he stole a cannon-ball from a navy-yard, and with much trepidation carried it away in his hat, winds up with the following reflections: "When I reached home I had nothing to do with my shot; I did not dare show it in the house, or tell where I got it; and after one or two solitary rolls I gave it away on the same day. But, after all, that six-pounder rolled a good deal of sense into my skull. It gave me a notion of the folly of coveting more than you can enjoy, which has made my whole life happier. But I see men doing the same thing as I did, gathering up wealth which will, when got, roll around their heads like a ball. I have seen young men enrich themselves by pleasure in the same way, sparing no pains and sacrificing any principle for the sake of at last carrying a burden which no man can bear. All the world is busy in striving for things that give little pleasure and bring much care."

Ver. 8. **I am like a green olive-tree in the house of God.**—*Life like a green olive-tree*:—The olive-tree loves fat soil. It attains to finest fruitfulness when its bed is rich in nutriment. Starve its soil, the tree remains dwarfed and impoverished. A recent traveller, describing the olive-yards of Palestine, says that the soil in which the finest olives grow is "rich as a bride-cake." Now I think it is to this characteristic of a splendid olive-tree that the psalmist refers. He himself is like an olive-tree in the richness of his rootage. God is the soil of his life, and he exults in the wealth of his resources. Here is the possibility of every man: he may become rooted in God. But how little use we make of our resources! A little while ago I got a load of soil for the purposes of a small kitchen-garden, and the man who keeps my garden in order saw the soil and exclaimed, "That's a splendid bit of earth, it's fit for potting work; you can get far more out of that than vegetables." The phrase at once acquired spiritual suggestiveness. I thought how little I was getting out of God, and how much He wishes me to have. He wants us to be like olive-trees that are rooted in almost inexhaustible resources. It is the apostolic figure; the Apostle Paul speaks of being "rooted in Him." This, I think, is the first suggestion of the psalmist's thought; he is like an olive-tree in the wealth of his resources. But he is also like the olive-tree in the vigour of his life. Currents of strength rise out of his resourceful rootage and endow them with spiritual vim and vitality. It is the purpose of our God that every one of our powers should move with firmness and decision. It is His will that there should be nothing weak about our moral and spiritual equipment. He wants everything not only to be beautiful, but to be strong. When we are "rooted" in Him every branch of the life is pervaded by rivers of sap, and every faculty is urged by Divine energy into manifold fruitfulness. The spiritual sap makes everything it pervades fruit for the King. When we are rooted in God everything is sappy. It may be a letter we are writing. It may be a wish we are expressing. It may be a bit of work we are doing. It may be our ordinary occupation, the drudgery of daily life. If we are rooted in God all the issues of the life are sappy with His Spirit, and we become like green olive-trees. Now let us look at the character in a little more detail. "I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever." What a strong and exquisite word is this word translated "mercy." One element of its wealthy content is the suggestion of kindness, but it means more than this: Let me put it in this way: the word is descriptive in the first place of the attitude of bowing and coming quite near to the person, an immediate approach to a need. It is the act of the Good Samaritan stooping to the wounded, and pouring in oil and wine. It is pity in action, pity at work. But there is a second element in the word which greatly corroborates the first. Mercy is not only kindness, it is loyalty also. It is love that never says die. It remains full, flowing all through the changing seasons, even in the drought of a fierce indifference. It is the "leal love" of the Master Himself. "Having loved His own He loved them unto the end." This is the mercy of God, and in this mercy the

psalmist declares he trusts for ever. Trusts! And there again is a significant word. It means to him for refuge, to take up your home in a thing, to settle down. It is a comfortable nestling in the "leal love" of the Lord. It is to be so sure of Him that worry and fretfulness pass away, and we are like little children, almost careless in our sense of gracious security. "I will give thee thanks for ever." Here is another characteristic of the life that is like an olive-tree; it is a praiseful, thankful life. There is a sentence in one of Jane Austen's novels which I think is very expressive. Describing one of her characters, she says, "He was a very liberal thinker." I think that is very finely descriptive of a rich and welcome character. To be "liberal thinkers" heavenward, as well as toward our fellows, is to receive continual spiritual enlargement. Gratitude makes room for more grace. And surely we have abundant opportunity for gratitude! We only need to open our eyes to have our praise awakened at every turn. Every time we express our thanks we make more room for God. I do not wonder, then, that this man, who was rooted in God like an olive-tree, should find himself instinctively and unceasingly bearing the fruit of gratitude and praise. "And I will wait on Thy name, for it is good, in the presence of Thy saints." What will he wait on? The Lord's name! And what names the Lord has given Himself, and every name a promise and a pledge! He never goes back upon His name. Every name is honoured to the last extremity of its significance. And we can put in richer names than ever the psalmist could. We can insert the name "Saviour," "Comforter," "Counsellor," "Friend." On this name the psalmist says he will "wait." That does not mean that he will sit down and indolently tarry until something turns up. It literally means that he will bind himself around the name of God, that he will decline every other support, that he will be wrapped around the covenant of the Lord's own name. The man who does this will have reason for singing every day. He will find that the support holds, and day by day his experience of security will teach his lips a new song. And he says that he will do this waiting "in the presence of Thy saints." That is to say, he will mingle with other people who are doing the same, he will make a profession of his willing confidence in God, and he will listen to similar professions made by others. In their mutual confidences they will give one another mutual support. Ah! yes, this kind of communion is always "good." It nourishes the life like bread, it refreshes the life like water. "Thou satisfiest my mouth with good things." (J. H. Jowett, M.A.) **I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.**—On trusting in the mercy of God:—I. WHAT MERCY IS. 1. Mercy, as an attribute of God, is not to be confounded with mere goodness. Goodness may demand the exercise of justice; indeed, it often does; but to say that mercy demands the exercise of justice is to use the word without meaning. Mercy asks that justice be set aside. 2. Mercy is a disposition to pardon the guilty. Desert is never the rule by which mercy is guided; while it is precisely the rule of justice. 3. Mercy is exercised only where there is guilt. The penalty of the law must have been previously incurred, else there can be no scope for mercy. 4. Mercy can be exercised no further than one deserves punishment. If great punishment is deserved, great mercy can be shown; if endless punishment is due, there is then scope for infinite mercy to be shown, but not otherwise. II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN TRUSTING IN THE MERCY OF GOD. 1. A conviction of guilt. 2. That we have no hope on the score of justice. If we had anything to expect from justice, we should not look to mercy. 3. A just apprehension of what mercy is—pardon for the crimes of the guilty. 4. A belief that He is merciful. We could not trust Him if we had no such belief. 5. A conviction of deserving endless punishment. 6. A cessation from all excuses and excuse-making. III. THE CONDITIONS UPON WHICH WE MAY CONFIDENTLY AND SECURELY TRUST IN THE MERCY OF GOD FOR EVER. 1. Public justice must be appeased. Its demands must be satisfied. However much disposed God may be to pardon, yet He is too good to exercise mercy on any such conditions or under any such circumstances as will impair the dignity of His law, throw out a licence to sin, and open the very floodgates of iniquity. Jehovah never can do this. 2. We must repent. 3. We must confess our sins. 4. We must really make restitution, so far as lies in our power. 5. Another condition is that you really reform. 6. You must go the whole length in justifying the law and its penalty. 7. No sinner can be a proper object of mercy who is not entirely submissive to all those measures of the government that have brought him to conviction. 8. You must close in most cordially with the plan of salvation. IV. SOME MISTAKES INTO WHICH MANY FALL. 1. Many really trust in justice, and not in mercy. This is a

fatal rock. The sinner who can do this calmly has never seen God's law and his own heart. 2. Many trust professedly in the mercy of God without fulfilling the conditions on which only mercy can be shown. They may hold on in such trusting till they die—but no longer. 3. Sinners do not consider that God cannot dispense with their fulfilling these conditions. He has no right to do so. They spring out of the very constitution of His government, from His very nature, and must therefore be strictly fulfilled. 4. Many are defeating their own salvation by self-justification. Pleas that excuse self and cavils that arraign God, stand alike and fatally in the way of a pardon. Since the world began it has not been known that a sinner has found mercy in this state. 5. Many pretend to trust in mercy who yet profess to be punished for their sins as they go along. They hope for salvation through mercy, and yet they are punished for all their sins in this life. Two more absurd and self-contradictory things were never put together. 6. Persons who in the letter plead for mercy, often rely really upon justice. The deep conviction of sin and ill-desert does not sink into their soul till they realize what mercy is, and feel that they can rely on nothing else. 7. Some are covering up their sins, yet dream of going to heaven. Do they think they can hide those sins from the Omniscient Eye? Do they think to cover their sins and yet "prosper," despite of God's awful Word? 8. We cannot reasonably ask for mercy beyond our acknowledged and felt guilt; and they mistake fatally who suppose that they can. (C. G. Finney.)

Ver. 9. **I will praise Thee for ever, because Thou hast done it.**—He closeth the psalm comfortably, with resolution to praise God, and to depend upon Him. Whence learn—1. Victory over temptations obtained by faith is very glorious; for faith doth make a man as sure of what is to come as if it were perfected, and filleth him with praise for the certain hope of the performance of promises; "I will praise Thee for ever, because Thou hast done it." 2. Faith being solidly fixed, bringeth forth hope and quiet expectation of what is promised, "I will wait on Thy name." 3. As the Christian patience of one of the saints is a matter of good example and great encouragement unto all the rest that behold it: so the consideration of the good which may redound to others, who shall be witnesses of our patient attending upon God, should stir us up to this duty of patient hope in God, "I will wait on Thee, for it is good before Thy saints." (D. Dickson.)

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### PSALM LIII.

VERS. 1-3. **The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.**—*The folly of unbelief*:—There were Atheists in David's days, practical Atheists at least, as there have been in all days, and probably ever will be, and the general bearing of this psalm teaches us pretty clearly the judgment which David formed of them. David at once goes off into a description of the abominably wicked lives of those who said so; the man who says there is no God is declared by David to be a fool, a man wanting in judgment, in clearness of head, in powers of reasoning; this is an imputation upon his mind, his intellect: but the matter does not rest there, for David does not proceed to deplore the weakness of the Atheist's faculties, but the rottenness of the Atheist's heart; he says they are corrupt, altogether become abominable. He clearly sees the cause of the man's infidelity in his wicked course of life. He would not leave off sinning, that were too great a sacrifice, but at length a light opens upon his mind, but it is a light such as in swampy places sometimes tempts a traveller from the right way—no light of the sun, no guiding star. And what is the light? It is this, that after all perhaps all this about God is a cunning fable, an invention of priests, a mere bugbear to frighten children. And to a man who is determined to sin this is right comfortable doctrine. It is easy to believe true what we wish to be true. And what could a man who has become corrupt and abominable wish to be truer than that there should be no God? This is evidently David's judgment upon the matter. But the man is a fool who says there is no God! His wickedness is lost in his folly. For what folly is his who says there is no God! There is the argument unanswerable,

"Who hath made all these things?" "The heavens declare the glory of God," etc. And equally unreasonable is the denial of God's moral government. A kind of denial this which is alluded to in the psalm, "and yet they say, Tush, God shall not see it." Yet this view also may, I think, without much difficulty, be convicted of folly; for let us consider, is it possible to think of God as being otherwise than perfect? Surely not—an imperfect God is no God at all; if perfect, then He must be perfect in goodness, in holiness and truth. Can He smile equally on the false and the true, the murderer and the saint? is it conceivable that St. John and Judas Iscariot should be equally pleasing to their Maker, differing from each other merely as two stones of different colour differ? Surely all this is monstrous; it is not merely contrary to the Bible, or to the inventions of priests, but it is utterly opposed to the plainest dictates of reason. Therefore I find no difficulty in agreeing with the expression of the text that he who in this way denies God by making Him only the Creator and Preserver, and not the righteous Ruler and Judge, gives evidence thereby of his folly. There is, however, one other manner in which a man may deny God. He may allow all that I have contended for hitherto, and may agree with me that it is contrary to sound reason to deny it; but he may still refuse homage to that God whom we worship as revealed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that there are such persons, that there always have been such; and we know that the leaders of such a party have accounted themselves as clear-sighted beyond others, men of great freedom of thought, not slaves to vulgar prejudices, but rather men who have risen above all vulgar prejudices into an atmosphere of their own. Well, men may be wise in their own conceits without being really wise, and it seems very possible that these infidels may after all be of the class of David's fool. If this be so, it will not take long to show it. For—1. The holiest and wisest men have found in the revelation of God in Christ the satisfaction of all their spiritual wants. 2. Then in estimating the reality of the revelation which God has made to us in Jesus Christ, it is necessary to observe the wonderful power that the revelation has had; how it has broken up kingdoms and formed others, how it has reduced whole nations to its dominion and then civilized and informed them; how it has unquestionably been the mainspring, the chief mover of all the history of the world since the time that Christ came. Once more, it is to be noted that if Christ be not "the way, the truth, and the life," at least there is no other; either God has revealed Himself in Christ, or He has not revealed Himself at all; for there is no other religion in this world which any one will pretend to substitute. David, as I have already observed, passes abruptly from the speech of the fool's heart to the state of his heart: "corrupt are they, and become abominable in their wickedness." What are we to learn from this part of the text? Surely this most true and valuable lesson, that the denial of God generally proceeds from the heart more than from the intellect. I do not say that this is so in all cases; for when systematic attempts are made to destroy the faith of mankind, it is not to be wondered at if in some instances the belief of simple men should be disturbed; but depend upon it, the fear of a future judgment, and the wish to get free from the thought of it, is the root of much unbelief. And yet doubts and fears do sometimes trouble the mind; the best of men have sometimes felt them; it may be that to experience them is part of our appointed discipline in this world: if, then, any person should be so tempted and tried, I should remind him of our blessed Lord's promise, "He that will do the will of God shall know of My doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of Myself." You see that our Lord gives an essentially practical rule for strengthening our faith; He does not say, shut yourself up in your study and go carefully through all the evidences and weigh them with an unbiassed mind—but go and do God's will. And so when He heard the Pharisees disbelieving, He did not say, how can ye believe who will not look into evidences, but, "how can ye believe which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?" Here was the defect: the Pharisees were well read in the law, men of acute minds, cultivated intellects: if Christ were the Messiah, why could not they, who were actually looking for Him, recognize His true character? because they were seeking their own glory, seeking honour one of another, and not that which comes of God. What a strange reproof was this to those who piqued themselves upon their wisdom! Christian brethren, let us do God's will, and then we shall know of the doctrine that is of God. (*Bishop Harvey Goodwin.*) *Cause of infidelity*:—In Scripture the fool and the sinner often mean the same person, and infidelity is therefore usually found connected with



great depravity. Its progress is gradual; it begins by opposing those doctrines that impose restraint upon a man's favourite vices, and from denying these it proceeds to deny others, and, finally, all the rest. This subject is very important to the age in which we live, Europe being deluged with impiety. What, then, are the causes of infidelity? And we name—1. Vice. It is not the difficulties of Scripture, but its forbidding of their sin that men dislike. All experience proves this. At first conscience remonstrates, but, unable to secure obedience, conscience is soon silenced, and the sinner seeks to justify those propensities which he declares himself unable to subdue. For it is necessary that men should reconcile their conduct to their opinions, or else there will be continual misery through self-reproach. And they soon succeed in the endeavour, for when a man studies to deceive himself he always can do so. His wishes, not his reason, decide upon the truth. The libertine hates the purity of religion; the dissolute, its temperance; the proud, its meekness; the gay worldling, its piety. But if they cannot get rid of the authority of religion, the thought of the future will make them tremble. Hence they labour to destroy that authority, so that conscience may have no more ground for her reproaches. They represent death as an eternal sleep, and, that men may indulge unrestrainedly the passions of brutes, they labour to show that his end is as theirs. Another proof that infidelity springs from vice is that it usually keeps pace with the passions. When these are strong it is strong. It flourishes in prosperity, but loses its confidence in adversity. Many instances might be adduced in proof that to the infidel the approach of death is terrible. Such is one chief source of infidelity. (S. Smith, D.D.) *Theoretical Atheism*:—We cannot converse with any human being without instinctively judging of his intellectual capacity. We cannot help assigning him a place either amongst those superior or inferior in intellect. But sometimes we meet with those who will believe what, to all others, is absurd; or disbelieve what, to all others, is evident. Such a man we designate as a fool. And they, also, deserve to be so regarded who, when convinced of the truth of a physical or moral law, yet act as if they knew that which they believe to be certainly false. They will learn wisdom neither from observation or experience. The profligate, the inebriate, the frivolous, are of these fools. The former class may be termed theoretical, the latter, practical fools. In proportion to our respect and reverence for a powerful understanding is our contempt for him who says "there is no God." Now, such denial of the existence of God may be either theoretical or practical. It is theoretical when we affirm that no such being exists, but practical when, admitting His existence, we act, in all respects, as though we believed that He did not exist. Let us speak, at present, of the first of these errors—the theoretical. It may show itself in either of two forms. I. **That of Absurd Credulity.** For surely it is such credulity to believe an assertion when no evidence is brought forward to sustain it, and especially when, from the necessity of the case, the evidence, if it did exist, is beyond the reach of the human understanding. Now the Atheist declares to us that there is no God. What is the proof of his assertion? There is none. It is no proof to say that nothing exists but what manifests itself either to the senses or to consciousness. How does he know but that, among the truths which have thus far escaped his notice, one may be the existence of God? See this argument drawn out at length in Foster's Essays. II. **Absurd Incredulity.** Its unbelief is as unreasonable as its belief. For—1. The idea of power, of cause and effect, is the universal and spontaneous suggestion of the human intelligence. We cannot imagine an effect without a cause. And that the Creator, shown to be infinite in power and wisdom, is also a holy God. We have ample proof that He loves virtue and hates vice. Socrates, from an observation of the works of creation and Providence, arrived at very nearly this conception of the Divine character. Now, the Atheist, in the face of all this evidence, affirms that there is no God. But this is to deny the existence of the elementary principles of human intelligence. And this Atheistic belief is absurd because it wholly fails in the purpose for which it is intended. He would seek to get rid of the idea of immortality and of future moral retribution. But we do exist, whether there be a God or not: why, then, may we not continue to exist? And there is a moral government, with its penalties and rewards, now: why may it not continue to be? Even if there be no God, that government is; why, then, may it not be carried on through eternity? Such is the absurdity of Atheism. It asserts that which cannot be known by any finite intelligence, and it denies that which cannot be disbelieved without denying the essential laws of human thought, and this for a

reason which would remain unaffected whether Atheism be true or false. (*F. Naylorland.*) *Practical Atheism*.—We may not be theoretical Atheists, but yet we may be such in practice. Now, many are so. They admit the existence of God, but they live as if they denied it, and thus they are guilty of practical Atheism. To show this, let us—I. UNFOLD THE CONCEPTION WE HAVE FORMED OF GOD. We all conceive of Him—1. As a person. We cannot have the idea of qualities as existing without a subject in which they exist. 2. And to God we ascribe self-existence. He must be the cause of causes, or else there must be an infinite succession of causes, which is absurd. 3. To this conception we add on the idea of eternity, both in the past and in the future. 4. And also infinite and absolute power. 5. Omniscient wisdom, as contrasted with the limited wisdom of even the greatest of men. 6. And every moral attribute in infinite perfection. "He is a rock, His way is perfect: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." 7. And He is not only the Judge, but the Father of us all. This shown not only in His providence, but yet more in our redemption. II. HOW IMPORTANT TO US, THEN, MUST BE THE FACT OF HIS EXISTENCE. No other fact is comparable to it. It is by far the most practical truth that we can conceive. And what must be the condition of the man who believes in the existence of such a God, and yet suffers not this belief to exert any practical influence upon his conduct? What folly can be compared with his? And yet, are not many of you chargeable with it? Some pass whole months without even thinking, in any devout way, of God. Others, under the influence of passion, or fear of being thought precise, will knowingly disobey God. The reason of all such practical Atheism is that they did not like to retain God in their knowledge. Hence are they given over to their evil ways. Think what must be the end of this. But God, in the Gospel of His Son, is offering to us reconciliation. "I will," saith He, "take from you the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh." Give Him now your hearts. (*Ibid.*) *Unkindness of scepticism*.—The *Philadelphia Inquirer* tells this story of the late Washington McLean: One terribly snowy, sleety day in Washington, he was sitting in the Riggs House reading-room, looking out upon the dreary scene on Pennsylvania Avenue. Presently, in came Colonel Bob Ingersoll, the great agnostic. As he entered the apartment he held out his hand, saying, "Hello, Wash., how do you do?" Mr. McLean took his hand, and, as he did so, said, "Bob, I wish you could have been here a little while ago. I saw a scene out there that made me wish I was twenty years younger. A poor, old, crippled soldier was limping across the Avenue, when a young, lusty fellow ran by him, and, as he did so, kicked the crutch from him, and tumbled him down into the slush." "The villain," said Ingersoll, "he should have been sent to the penitentiary." "Do you really think so?" said McLean. "Why, certainly!" replied the colonel. "What else could I think?" "And yet, Bob," said McLean, "that is what you are doing every week in the year. Here are poor, old, infirm Christians, with nothing to aid or support them but their belief in religion, nothing to keep them out of the mire of despair but faith, and yet you go about kicking the crutch from under them worse than even this fictitious fellow did to this fictitious soldier." Very true, with the one exception that our faith is a living thing, and can never be knocked away. (*Sword and Trowel.*)

Vers. 2, 8. God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God.—*Universal corruption of mankind*.—This is a description of human nature at all times (Rom. iii. 10–12). I. SEEKING THE LORD IS HERE SUPPOSED TO BE THE CRITERION OF A GOOD UNDERSTANDING. It includes—1. Our choosing the best good for our portion. God's service is its own reward. 2. Repentance for sin. 3. The sacrifice of every earthly good for His sake, and accounting His favour to be better than life. 4. Resting all our hopes of salvation upon the promises of His Word. There is no other door of hope, no other way of acceptance, but what is provided in the promises of the Gospel. II. ALL MEN BY NATURE ARE CORRUPT, AND UTTERLY DESTITUTE OF THIS UNDERSTANDING. 1. The loss of the Divine favour is the greatest of all evils, and yet no one lays it to heart, or is careful to seek after it. To be contented in such a state, and indifferent about the favour of God, is truly dreadful: yet such is the case with all men by nature. 2. God visits men with such afflictions, and brings them into such circumstances, as are directly adapted to make them feel their need of Him: and yet God is not in all their thoughts (Job. xxxiii. 15). 3. By nature we have no love to God, and therefore do not seek Him. 4. Men are full of

pride and self-sufficiency, and hence they do not seek after God (Ps. x. 4). Religion is too mean for their notice, and fit only for the attention of the vulgar. Many say in their hearts with Pharaoh, Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?

**III. THE LORD KEEPS A STRICT EYE UPON THE CONDUCT OF MEN TOWARDS HIM.** 1. Though "every one of them is gone back, and they are altogether become filthy," yet some are distinguished by grace, and there is a generation of them that seek Thy face, O God of Jacob (Ps. xxiv. 8). His eye is upon all such, and He will be found of them in truth; they shall never seek His face in vain (Isa. xlv. 9). 2. The Lord also notices those who do not seek Him, and His eye is upon all their ways. Awful thought, to be under His inspection while utterly regardless of His presence, and sinning against heaven and before Him. (*Theological Sketch-book.*) *God inspecting man:*—I. GOD'S PROFOUND INTEREST IN HUMANITY. He bows Himself forward; and with zeal and concern examines man's moral state. Why is He so interested? 1. Because of the dignity of man's nature (Gen. i. 27). 2. Because of the peculiarity of man's moral condition. By disobedience man entered into the dread knowledge of evil. Unfallen angels are entirely holy. Fallen angels are utterly depraved. In human nature the battle between good and evil is being waged. 3. Because of the capabilities of man's being. Man is capable of rising to the highest, or sinking to the lowest, position in the universe of God. II. GOD'S SEARCHING SCRUTINY OF HUMANITY. His is the scrutiny of—1. An all-seeing Being (Ps. cxlxxx. 11-16; Ezek. xi. 5; Heb. iv. 13). 2. An infinitely holy Being. His dwelling, His ways, His works, His essential nature are all holy (Isa. lvii. 15; Hab. i. 12, 13; 1 John i. 5; Rev. iv. 8). 3. An infinitely merciful Being. If there be in us any sincere efforts after truth and righteousness, He sees and approves them. III. THE SUPREME CONCERN OF HUMANITY. Why does God so earnestly examine man? "To see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God." We should seek—1. Moral intelligence. "Understand," or act prudently—the antithesis of "the fool" in verse 1. Not intellectual attainment, but practical wisdom. 2. Divine aspiration. Where there is any true wisdom, or any spiritual life, it will manifest itself in seeking fellowship and union with God. Only through the mediation of Jesus Christ can this union be obtained. **CONCLUSION.**—1. He who now scrutinizes will one day judge man. 2. His judgment of man is infallible. He deliberately, patiently, and thoroughly examines into every case before pronouncing judgment. 3. He is also the merciful Saviour of men. 4. Our supreme interest is to seek to know Him as our Saviour. (*W. Jones.*)

**Ver. 5. Then were they in great fear where no fear was.—Idle fears:**—Every one must have heard of borrowing trouble. It is generally done by persons who have little real trouble of their own. Now, this habit of making oneself uneasy about little or nothing, of groping among dark and painful subjects, which might have been avoided, is, in part, constitutional; it may rise from the physical habit, or from temporary physical causes: and in that case the preacher has nothing to say about it in his official relation to the self-tormentor. But there are many instances in which the thing is not constitutional, or at least only so in part; cases in which it is clearly one's own fault that he vexes himself in the fashion which we have described, and must be held responsible, in great measure, for his own discomfort. Let us limit ourselves, now, to one special topic under the general head, and think of the case of those who borrow trouble by permitting themselves to be the victims of their fears. Of such persons the number is, unfortunately, great, and as for the causes of their alarm and anxiety, their name is Legion. What deserves special attention is this: that in a large number of cases there is really no ground at all for the anxieties into which they fall; and that many have found, after giving themselves no end of distress, that they had been afraid where no fear was; that the distress was the result of their imagination; that the evils they dreaded never came to pass; that, while they were shivering and shaking, all was going forward well. This is the special case to which your attention is called; the very case described by the psalmist; and it may be useful to consider wherein lies the sinfulness of this thing, and by what means the fault may be cured. I spoke of this habit as a sin. There is a great difference in the quality and degree of sins; some are graver than others, some are positive and some negative. This is a sin of thoughtlessness and carelessness; the sin of one who overlooks what he might have observed, and ought, by all means, to have heeded. When there is real danger, a certain kind of fear is in order: not to

have it would be foolhardiness; but as to the habit of being always nervously apprehensive, and never passing a day without dreading one knows not exactly what, or dreading what we have no sound reason for judging to be imminent; this certainly shows a culpable forgetfulness of certain truths which form the basis of a peaceful life. Such an exhibition of weakness is what God's servants ought never to make: if they suffer in that fashion, they put themselves in the place of the unjust. From panic and foolish dismay, their faith, their love, their trust, should save them; and when it is not so, we infer that in faith, love, and trust they must be far below the mark. Let us proceed to point out a cure for the habit thus hastily analyzed. First, then, we say to the timid, Keep God in mind. What should you fear, if you know that He is overhead? And next turn your minds steadily away from dark views of things. As Charles Kingsley puts it, "Never begin to look darkly at a subject, without checking yourself and saying, Is there not a bright side to this? Has not God promised the bright side to me? Is not my happiness in my own power? Do not I know that I am ruining my mind, and endangering the happiness of those dear to me by looking at the wrong side? There are two ways of looking at every occurrence—a bright and a dark side. Two modes of action—which is most worthy of a rational being, a Christian, and a friend? It is absurd as a rational being to torture oneself unnecessarily. It is inconsistent in a Christian to see God's wrath, rather than His mercy, in everything." And, next, there is a remedy against unreal fears, which, with any intelligent man or woman, ought to have great force. It lies in considering how, in real trouble, real, positive, and terrible distress, God in His providence has brought good out of evil. Even real disasters end in blessing, and light comes gloriously out of darkness. What then of your fears? There may be no foundation for them whatever, and in that case you ought to be ashamed of them. But even grant the worst, and suppose that they may be realized: what then? Cannot the same power turn them to good? May not what you dread become to you the very thing you need to complete your development? Either way, fear not. If your fears are vain, it is mere self-torment; if there be ground for them, trust the Lord in this thing, and you may yet rejoice that the evil did not fail to come. In conclusion: if any ask how to do what is necessary to render himself independent of idle fears, or how to learn to bear the real troubles of this world, our answer must be, that the way is—first, to pray; and, secondly, to practise. Ask for the grace that you need; ask it day by day; such prayers cannot be vain. And, again, practise, by forcing your mind off from morbid, gloomy thoughts, by denying it the luxury of sentimental revelry, by insisting that it shall think of God's love and goodness, by telling it that it shall look out of the windows into the sunlight, and not inside into the gloom and shadow. And as life passes on, you will find comfort and courage in your soul, where timidity and distress used to be, and, with the ending of this world, there shall come a large experience such as many of us must have had in our own little lives. (*Morgan Dix, D.D.*) *Fear, without danger*:—I may say to every believer in Jesus, that his condition is very like that of the landsman on board ship when the sea was rather rough, and he said, "Captain, we are in great danger, are we not?" As an answer did not come, he said, "Captain, don't you see great fear?" Then the old seaman gruffly replied, "Yes, I see plenty of fear, but not a bit of danger." It is often so with us; when the winds are out and the storms are raging there is plenty of fear, but there is no danger. We may be much tossed, but we are quite safe, for we have an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, which will not start. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

**Ver. 6. Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion.**—*The salvation of the Church, and the destruction of her enemies*:—I. **THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WICKED** (ver. 5). 1. Utter and irreversible. 2. Effected by God. 3. Overtaking them when they regarded themselves as quite secure. 4. Inflicted because of their hostility to the people of God. (1) He is in covenant relation with His people, and is pledged to help them. (2) He is profoundly and tenderly interested in His people (Isa. xlix. 14–16; Matt. xviii. 5, 6; xxv. 40, 45; Acts ix. 4). An inspiring and strengthening consideration for the people of God. Motive and encouragement to those who would aid them. Warning to those who would injure them. II. **THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WICKED** IN FORMER TIMES AS AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE GOOD TO EXPECT SALVATION FROM PRESENT DANGERS. This we take to be the connecting link between verses 5 and 6. 1. The poetic view of salvation. It is here repre-

sented as deliverance from captivity. 2. The grand source of salvation. "Out of Zion." 3. The earnest desire of salvation. 4. The encouragement to expect salvation. God is unchangeable. What He has done in the past He is able to do in the present. He is faithful. What He has promised that will He perform. (W. Jones.)

### PSALM LIV.

**VERS. 1-7. Save me, O God, by Thy name, and judge me by Thy strength.—Phases of piety:—I. PIETY PRAYING.** The prayer has respect to—1. The character of God (ver. 1). 2. The entreatability of God (ver. 2). 3. The necessity for God (ver. 3). II. **PIETY TRUSTING.** He had confidence in God—1. As a Deliverer from his enemies. 2. As the Chastiser of his enemies. III. **PIETY WORSHIPPING.** 1. Worship is voluntary sacrifice. The offering of self is essential to give virtue and worth to all other offerings. 2. Worship is praise to God. (1) On account of what He is in Himself. (2) On account of what He is to us (Ver. 7). (Homilist.)

**Vers. 4-7. Behold, God is mine helper; the Lord is with them that uphold my soul.—God our Helper:—I. WHEN GOD IS THE HELPER OF HIS PEOPLE.** 1. In the great crisis of their conversion. He raiseth from the pit, delivers, saves, etc. 2. In the troubles and afflictions of life. These are many, varied, sometimes severe, etc. Job, the apostles (2 Cor. i. 8-10). 3. In the perils and conflicts of their warfare (Ps. xxxvii. 14, 15; lx. 11, 12; clxvi. 5). 4. In their labours and toils in His kingdom (Ps. cxxi. 1, 2). 5. In weakness, sickness and death (Ps. xxiii. 4; cxvii. 1-9). II. **WHAT KIND OF A HELPER IS GOD.** 1. Always near at hand. 2. Always efficient and sufficient. 3. Perpetual and everlasting. III. **THE CONCLUSIONS TO WHICH THE SUBJECT SHOULD LEAD US.** 1. Personal knowledge and reliance on God. 2. Unwavering faith and hope. 3. Constant prayer and supplication. He will be sought and inquired of. 4. Acknowledgment and praise. "Bless the Lord at all times," etc. (J. Burns, D.D.)

**Vers. 6, 7. I will freely sacrifice unto Thee: I will praise Thy name, O Lord, for it is good.—Thank-offerings:—**The closing verses of this simple little psalm touch very familiar notes. The faith which has prayed has grown so sure of answer that it already begins to think of the thank-offerings. This is not like the superstitious vow, "I will give so-and-so if Jupiter"—or the Virgin—"will hear me." This praying man knows that he is heard, and is not so much vowing as joyfully anticipating his glad sacrifice. The same incipient personification of the name as in verse 1 is very prominent in the closing strains. Thank-offerings—not merely statutory and obligatory, but brought by free, uncommanded impulse—are to be offered to "Thy name," because that name is good. Verse 7 probably should be taken as going even further in the same direction of personification, for "Thy name" is probably to be taken as the subject of "hath delivered." The tenses of the verbs in verse 7 are perfects. They contemplate the deliverance as already accomplished. Faith sees the future as present. This psalmist, surrounded by strangers seeking his life, can quietly stretch out a hand of faith, and bring near to himself the to-morrow when he will look back on scattered enemies and present, glad sacrifices! That power of drawing a brighter future into a dark present belongs not to those who build anticipations on wishes, but to those who found their forecasts on God's known purposes and character. The name is a firm foundation for hope. There is no other. (A. Maclaren, D.D.)

### PSALM LV.

**VERS. 1-23. Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not Thyself from my supplication.—The compassionate, the commendable, and the censurable in life:—I. THE**

COMPASSIONABLE. David appears here an object for pity and compassion, as the victim of—1. Malignant oppression. 2. Overwhelming terror. 3. Foul treachery. II. THE COMMENDABLE. 1. He lays all his troubles before Him who alone could help him. The fact that men in great trouble and danger, whatever be their theoretical beliefs, instinctively appeal to God for help, argues man's intuitive belief—(1) In the existence of a personal God; (2) In the accessibility of a personal God; (3) In the compassion of a personal God. 2. Under all his troubles he strives to maintain his confidence in God. (1) Men have burdens. What anxieties press upon the human soul, making the very frame to stoop, and the heart to break. (2) Men's burdens may be transferred to God. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." How? By an unbounded confidence in His character and procedure. (3) Those who transfer their burdens on the Lord will be sustained. "He shall sustain thee." God gives men power to bear their burden, and will ultimately remove their burden from them. III. THE CENSURABLE—HIS IMPRECATIONS. Revenge is a moral wrong; and what is morally wrong in the individual can never be right in any relationship or office that the individual may assume, or in any combination into which he may enter. (*Homilist.*) *The outcry of a soul in distress*:—I. THE VIVID COMPLAINT (vers. 1–11). The singer's case is a sad one. His mind is restlessly tossed to and fro. Full of cares and anxieties he nowhere finds solid foothold, but continues distracted, and hence he must pour out his heart in groans and complaints. The reason is the voice of the enemy, that is, the reproaches and calumnies to which he is subjected. But word is accompanied by deed, for there is persecution as well as slander. Overwhelmed with horror, the one thought of the sufferer is escape. He longs for the pinions of a dove—itsself the emblem of peace and quiet—that he may fly away and find repose. II. THE TREACHEROUS FRIEND (vers. 12–15). The slanders of an avowed antagonist are seldom so mean and cutting as those of a false friend, and the absence of the elements of ingratitude and treachery renders them less hard to bear. "We can bear from Shimei what we cannot endure from Ahithophel." So, too, we can escape from open foes, but where can one find a hiding-place from treachery? Hence the faithlessness of a professed friend is a form of sin for which there is not even the pretence of excuse. No one defends it or apologizes for it. Yet it occurs, and sometimes, like the case in the psalm, under the sanctions of a religious profession, so that the very altar of God is defiled with hypocrisy. It is right, therefore, that such atrocious wickedness should receive its appropriate recompense. III. THE ANTICIPATED RESULT (vers. 16–23). By a fine antithesis the speaker turns to describe his own course in opposition to that of others. They pursue wickedness and reach its fearful end. He, on the contrary, calls upon God, who is his one refuge in times of distress and anxiety. He lives in an atmosphere of prayer, which is expressed by his mention of the three principal divisions of the natural day. "Complain" and "moan" are the same words that occur in verse 2; only here they are accompanied by the assurance of being heard. God will assuredly redeem him from the heat of the conflict; and the interposition of His arm will be needed, for his adversaries are not few but many, too many for him to deal with alone. God therefore will hear and answer them just as He does to His own servant, but with a serious difference. His own He regards in mercy, others in judgment. God Himself so orders His providence that they are overtaken in their evil ways and plunged into the abyss. On the other hand, the sacred poet closes his lyric with a renewed asseveration of the only ground of his hope. As for me, whatever others may say or think, as for me, I trust in Thee. (*T. W. Chambers, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. *The terrors of death are fallen upon me.—On the fear of death*:—I. THE NATURE OF THE FEAR OF DEATH. It appears to arise from an instinct of nature, which is increased and strengthened by observation, reflection, and conscience. A feeling which springs from such sources, however unpleasant or painful it may be, cannot have been implanted in vain in the human breast, and should be treated with seriousness and respect. II. THE USES OF THE FEAR OF DEATH. When God first made known the doctrines and duties of religion, He urged and supported them by the fear of death (*Gen. ii. 15*). In every successive dispensation of religion, its belief and practice have been enforced by the same principle (*Deut. xxx. 19; Ezek. xviii. 31; Rom. viii. 13, etc.*). Often has the fear of death led to religious inquiry, to repentance, to conversion, to faith unfeigned, to peace, to hope, to Christ and to God. Often has it awakened men out of spiritual sleep, to trim their lamps, to gird their loins, to be sober, and to hope to the end for the grace

which is to be brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ. III. THE ABUSES OF THE FEAR OF DEATH. It was intended, as we have seen, to stimulate and restrain men, as circumstances may require; but it never was intended to enslave them. The Scriptures, however, speak of some, "who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Such characters exist, and are examples of the corruption and abuse of this principle. Urged by this principle, some have doubted, and others have denied, the facts of religion; they have corrupted its doctrines, neglected its duties, misapplied its promises, and made of no effect its threatenings. IV. THE MEANS OF REMOVING THE FEAR OF DEATH. That the fear of death is not at all times necessary for the purposes which have just been stated is evident from the doctrines of religion (John x. 14; Heb. viii. 6; ii. 14, 15; Rom. viii. 2; Luke x. 17; 1 John iv. 18). St. Paul affirms, that "the sting of death is sin"; that is, it is sin which gives death all its horrors; "Death is the wages or punishment of sin." Whatsoever, then, can remove the sense of guilt from the conscience, and the dread of punishment from the mind, will necessarily remove the fear of death; and if it can farther be made evident that death itself is beneficial, and that it is in reality the commencement of everything that is desirable, then its fear will not only be removed, but will be completely destroyed. All this may be effected by the knowledge and belief of the Gospel (2 Tim. i. 10; Matt. xviii. 11; xx. 28; 1 Pet. iii. 18; 2 Cor. v. 19; Heb. ix. 14; John iii. 16; 2 Cor. v. 8; 1 Cor. xiv. 54, 57). V. IMPROVEMENT. 1. Remember that God, in His moral government of the world, can bring good out of evil. 2. Consider the caution which should be employed in removing the fear of death. The fear of death is employed as a means to support life, order, and religion; and, therefore, were it prematurely taken away, it might remove the barriers opposed to rashness, profligacy, and death itself. 3. Beware of the slavish fear of death. 4. Use diligently the means of rising superior to the fear of death. Study, then, the Gospel; yield to the conviction of its truth; live under its influence; cultivate its grace; and you will be enabled to say (Rom. viii. 38, 39). (T. S. Jones, D.D.) *The fear of death*.—Who is it that doth not fear death? We begin it from our earliest years. From his very infancy the child begins to understand that there are other things besides mere bodily pain—a strange, inexplicable feeling comes upon him, which, sooner or later, becomes the explicit fear of death. Whatever may be our position in life, whether we are religious persons, striving, as well as we can, to prepare ourselves for that awful moment, whether we are giddy and worldly, it is impossible to shake off that awful feeling when we think of the moment when the soul passes into the unseen. No man has ever returned from that unseen world, and therefore it is that we are filled with inexplicable dread which makes us shrink from it with a horror we cannot describe. It is true there are certain exceptions to the rule, but they are exceptions more in appearance than in reality, and they do not go any way to prove that the fear of death has not fallen upon all mankind. For instance, there is a peculiar dullness and deadness of feeling which comes upon many persons at the end of a very long illness. It is the same also with persons who live to a considerable old age. It occurs at different times with different persons—sometimes at sixty, seventy, or later. A certain deadness of feeling creeps over all the affections. As the body weakens so does the intelligence lose its power, and so do the feelings lose their exquisite sensibility. Then, again, there are those to whom life is one long, terrible misery. It drives, as we know, some few persons to suicide, for it drives them, as it were, mad. They cannot control themselves. Then there are violent excitements which make persons for the moment utterly disregard death, such as the excitement which many, indeed nearly all, feel on the field of battle. They are afraid in one sense; it is their courage which conquers their distress, and they live and they die like men. It is the same in any other great excitement. Take, for instance, the efforts which may be made for the rescuing of persons from great suffering, or from some horrible death. Imagine the feelings of the men who rush into the flames to save their fellow-creatures. Death is forgotten for the moment; they do not think of it; their earnestness, their passionate desire to save their fellow-creatures from this same hideous death overpowers the dread which is in their own hearts. It is the same at sea. We continually read accounts of persons saving others in the midst of a shipwreck. Here, again, it is courage that conquers fear. They do not fear death for themselves, but they fear it for those whom they are going to save, and thus they give themselves to death without a single beat in their lowly hearts. When we consider what is the state of those persons who die quietly in their beds

from some sort of sickness, who themselves are fully possessed with a belief in the truth of religion, who have long confided in God's providence, and entertain not the slightest doubt in their own minds that they are going to pass from a world of sin and misery to a life of holiness and blessedness—how is it with them? We find that even with them, notwithstanding all their faith, that death is nothing to be afraid of, still their courage wants keeping up to the point by incessant prayers and texts from the Bible, and all kinds of encouraging influences which may stimulate and help them. This shows that whatever may be our state, whatever our confidence in God, and our trust in the promises, still there is this dread of passing into the dark beyond. And it is not really difficult to understand the practical gain which comes to us all from the presence in our mind of this indescribable fear. First of all, where would the world be if we had not this terror? How many of us would bear to live through the troubles which encompass nearly all the creatures in this world? But, far more than this, the existence of this dread is absolutely necessary to implant in us that conviction of the vast importance of the moment of death, which we find it so difficult to realize. How shall it be to us, not only easy, but natural, to turn with our whole hearts to God at the last moment, when we seem, perhaps, insensible to those who are watching and weeping around us—how shall we, in those last moments, turn our thoughts to God and say, "My Lord, Thou art my God"? Surely it must be by cultivating that continual sense of His presence, and of His goodness, and of His power, which alone can conquer death and make us die in perfect peace. The remedy against death is God; He caused us to live; He implanted in our hearts this mysterious terror; but why did He? He did it that we might learn the more to trust Him as being ever present with us, as being around us, enshrining us, taking us, as it were, in His arms, in the arms of a loving Father. (*J. M. Capes.*)

**Ver. 5. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me.**—*The nervous temperament*:—We are to meditate now on the nervous temperament, and to study especially the relation which the Gospel occupies in relation to it. There may be other anodynes of consolation, physical and mental; but my argument will be this—that the religion of Christ stands in special relationship of succour to those who feel with the psalmist, "I am feeble and sore broken, because of the disquietness of my heart." **I. THE TRUE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE IS LIFE IN CHRIST.** We must go out of ourselves, and of our "moods" and "feelings," that we may look unto Christ and be saved! Christ is a perfect Brother as well as a perfect Saviour. Redemption is His. Yes! and so is common home-life; so is the gift of daily bread. The great realm of providence is under His sceptre. All things are given into His hands, and He is Lord of all. Be wise. Act with prudence. Resolve with promptitude. Persevere with energy. Rise early with alacrity for the service of the day, but cast all anxious thoughts of to-morrow on your Elder Brother. This will be your most perfect anodyne. Other things will help. The bracing air, the oxygen and ozone of the sea coast, may tone your nerves, but it cannot create new ones. The Gospel can do the most, but even that cannot reorganize the physical frame, so fearfully and wonderfully made; but its atmosphere is the best one for bracing the heart and soothing the fretted, irritated nerve. **II. THERE ARE SPECIAL ADVENT-HOURS OF TROUBLE.** Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me. We none of us know how frail we are till trial comes. Advent-hours of trouble do come. Even sin in its first consciousness overwhelms some with fear and trembling. A great horror overwhelms them. The old cry is heard. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." How terrible, then, if such souls fall into the hands, not of wise physicians, but of unwise irritators of the evil. At once the anxious soul should be led to Him who says, "Daughter, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." And there are seasons when unforeseen calamity comes. No fleecy cloud presages the coming storm, no floating seaweed tells how near the vessel is to the rocks, but is swift as the "bore" that rushes up the waters of the Hooghly from the Ganges, sweeps in with a swell, and engulfs the precious freights of unanchored vessels in its broadening wave. There are seasons when the nerves are made intensively sensitive. The heart is pierced by the coldness and neglect of some familiar friend. The spirit droops. Ingratitude has wounded, neglect has chilled, cruelty has crushed, and enmity has tried to slay reputation and renown. Surely at such times it is heart-rest to know the Brother born for adversity, the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother; then is the hour to feel the warm radiance of the love of Christ. **III. THERE MAY BE MINISTRATIONS**



THAT ARE HUMAN AS WELL AS DIVINE. We can perform miracles of healing, not in the old sense, but wonders of restorative power are within our reach. Is it a child that is nervous and sensitive? See to it that you early discern the difference between that little trembling spirit and the stronger brother. Is it a life-companion? See that you do not treat this sensitiveness as a mere weakness to be cured by physical agencies alone—the best curative will be a cheerful mind within working outwards. We have to live and teach the Cross, in its spirit as well as in its doctrine; in its beautiful revelation that He, the Highest and Strongest of all, suffered for us; that He was despised and rejected of men for us; that He gave Himself for us. Remember, then, that you stand in Christian relationship to the timorous, the sensitive, and the nervous, and ever seek to manifest the spirit of Him who would not break the bruised reed. IV. THERE MUST BE A STUDY OF THE DISEASE TO UNDERSTAND THE REMEDIES. We are fearfully as well as wonderfully made; then let us remember how easily nervousness is promoted by self-indulgence and sloth, by morbid books, by strange tales told in childhood, by companionship with those who take foreboding view of life, and by the domination of "fixed ideas" so difficult to shake off. And all cannot afford change of scene and change of clime. It is not in medicine to cure all this. It may alleviate, but it cannot recreate. Earthly appliances are wise in their own way; but if I am right the Gospel of Christ is the relieving power—that alone brings out fully the blessed revelation of the Fatherhood of God. (W. M. Statham, M.A.)

Vers. 6-8. **And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and beat rest.**—*Dissatisfaction the law of life:*—I. IT IMPELS TO ALL EARTHLY AND MORAL PROGRESS. Arts, sciences, literature, commerce, civilization, are obviously the results of that dissatisfaction with things present and possessed, which urges the soul abroad to discover new fields of thought, new prizes of ambition. We call it disappointment; but it is only the loosing of the dry husk from the swelling germ of life; only the fading of the flower-leaf around the forming fruit-bud; only the breaking of the shell from the stir of glorious wings. Without it man might be sportive as the lamb amid the green fields of earth, but could not soar as the eagle through the firmament of heaven; and therefore everything elevating society above the lowest level of uninspiring savage life—these great cities on the land, those rich argosies on the sea, these homes of peace, these treasures of plenty, these libraries of literature, these galleries of art are all, all only the blossoms and fruit of the bitter root of discontent, the achievements of the restless soul going forth to the battle and keeping step to the music of this plaintive psalm of life, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." II. AN INTIMATION, AN INCITANT IN REGARD OF THE IMMORTAL. The beauties and glories for which man strives in the race and battle are delusions. The glittering rainbow which, to a child, seems a very out-cropping along a black mountain side of metalliferous veins of treasure, is at best but the false show of cold vapour exhaled from some stagnant marsh, and he reaches at it only to grasp chilling and mocking rain-drops. And thus is it with all the fair, bright objects of earth's love and labour. They do not only disappoint, they deceive us. Visions of ravishing beauty rise before our affections, and the heart presses on to them, and bows to them in adoration, delighting to break alabaster vases and scatter costliest incense; but presently all their charm, and beauty, and glory fade away, and we find that our lot on earth is ever "only to make idols and to find them clay." And thus every way and in every condition deceived, our outcry is in bitter anguish, "Alas! poor, beguiled, cheated child of immortality, all your earthly flowers fade, all your heavenly rainbows vanish away." And yet in all this, I say, we may see, if we will, a Divine meaning of love unto immortals. This very deception of our senses, our reason, our affections is a beneficent part of our discipline in their development for the higher life. (C. Wadsworth, D.D.) *The sigh of David:*—Let us consider this sigh of David, which is the sigh of many men—sighs natural indeed and excusable indeed, and like the sigh of Jesus, so far as they are innocently human; but which have in them, alas! but too often, little of the Divine. Turn to your Bibles, and reflect upon the varying moods of so many minds, and you will find there the record of a multitude of these sighs of weariness, of discouragement, of self-disgust, of pain. Most ignoble are they when they are prompted by restlessness and peevishness like that of Jonah, wishing himself dead because God had spared Nineveh, and because God's mercy had triumphed over his paltry personal opinion; or by a pessimism like that of the conceited Solomon, which sees nothing in life

except a universal emptiness; or by a black, suicidal despair, like that of Judas Iscariot, walking under the intolerable glare of illumination flung upon conscience by accomplished crime. But even the nobler spirits sometimes succumb for a moment to this merely selfish weakness, and have sighed, not only with the pity of Jesus, but with the impatience and short-sightedness of simple men. Moses had as great and mighty a heart as ever beat in any human breast, yet he exclaims (Num. xi. 11-15). What a sigh is there! There never breathed a more dauntless prophet than Elijah, yet he sat under a juniper tree in the wilderness and requested that he might die (1 Kings xix. 4). What a deep sigh is there! And Job was very patient, yet under the pitiless storm of sin and suffering even Job broke down and cursed the day of his birth. And Jeremiah, although he had a natural diffidence of character, yet when Pashur smote him and put him in the stocks, he burst into a wild cry (Jer. xx. 18). And do not we seem to hear the sigh of the mighty Baptist (Matt. xi. 3). Nay, even Paul, though nothing could wring such sighs from his indomitable heart, yet knows that "to depart and be with Christ is far better." Here, then, you have the weariness and discouragement of the noblest of mankind. It is not generally because of some personal injury, but it is either because the world is very evil (Ps. cxix. 136); or else because life is very full of trials (Gen. xlvii. 9); or, again, because the work is very dreary (Ex. v. 23). Yes; all good men have had to fight with almost impenetrable stupidity, with hard pharisaism, and with religious and irreligious self-conceit; and the Bible is full of sighs. Now, one of the elements in Scripture that makes it so inestimably valuable is that it is so essentially human, so profoundly true to nature, so inartificial, so simple, so passionate, as all true history and all true poetry ought to be. These kings and heroes and prophets were just such men as ourselves, their hearts beating like our hearts, their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears, even such as ours; the same fights of weariness and discouragement to fight that we find in secular history. We find it in literature; we find it in our own hearts—it is a part of our life. We get tired of the daily sameness of life. The rivers flow to the sea, yet the sea is not full. We are tired of the unrelenting past, tired of the dreary present, tired of the uncertain future. We are tired of the weary struggle in our own heart; the to-and-fro conflicting witnesses of impulse and repression; broad, rejoicing, sunlit tides of spiritual emotion, leaving behind them the flat, oozy shores of ebbing enthusiasm. The old historian said that no man had ever lived yet without coming to the day in his life when he cared nothing if he were to see no to-morrow. Again and again we feel inclined to cry at the end of another year, "Eternal, be Thou my refuge!" Bad men feel it. Says one, "I have dragged on to thirty-three. What have all those years left to me? Nothing except three and thirty." A godless experience curdles at once into acrid pessimism. The condition of such is so utterly wretched that total annihilation would be preferable, and they hold that the creation and the existence of the world is a fundamental misfortune. But if this life were everything, many would say the same! We find this hopelessness and dissatisfaction in every rank of life. Now it is Diocletian, deciding that planting cabbages at Salona is better than ruling the world at Byzantium; now it is Severus, saying he has been everything in life, from a common position to that of an emperor, and nothing is of any good; now it is St. Augustine, saying that man's earthly happiness is by the streams of Babylon—let him sit down by them and weep; now it is good Richard Hooker, saying he had lived so long in the world, and found it such, that he had long been preparing to leave it; now it is Luther, crying, "I am weary of life: if this can be called life, there is nothing much worse: I am utterly weary: I pray Thee, O Lord, come forth and carry me hence"; now it is Whitefield, crying, "O Lord! I am not weary of Thy work, but in Thy work; let me speak for Thee once more, then seal Thy truth and let me die." When Montesquieu was on his death-bed a forward, uninvited clergyman thrust himself to his bedside when another clergyman had left him, and said to him in a conversant sort of way, "Sir, are you truly conscious of the greatness of God?" "Yes," said the dying philosopher, "and of the littleness of man;" and so he died; and what a sigh was there! It always seems to me worth while to recognize facts, to bring them out into the full light of consciousness, and then to face them. And this being the fact respecting human life, where is the remedy? The great resource in every perplexity is to look to Christ. If we look to our great Example, we shall see what to do. He, too, though sinless, was forced to sigh for the sad world of sin and death; but notice, the sigh had been scarcely uttered when once more He was engaged in

works of mercy and thoughtful care. To sigh is sometimes natural, but to waste time in sighing, to suffer ourselves to be absorbed in the dark side of life, to exclude ourselves from its many and estimable gladnesses, is unthoughtful and useless. However hard the struggle against ignorance, and against pharisaism, and against stupidity, and against malice, and against robbery, and against wrong, and against oppression, and against sin, no good and great life will ever suffer itself to be crippled by conquerable melancholy. If we sigh for our own weakness and sins, we cannot, indeed, fly to ourselves, but we can fly to the grace of God and amend ourselves. If we sigh for our surroundings, no wings of a dove, indeed, can bear us away from the dwellings of Meshach and the tents of Kedar; but, by God's grace, we may help to make them better and happier places. The lessons of Scripture, the lessons of the life of Christ, the lessons of human experience alike teach us "to labour and to wait." They combine to tell us, to every one of us alike, for sorrow and disaster, for weariness and discouragement, God has given four great and perfect remedies, on which I would say a very few last words. One remedy is action: God taught it to Moses. "Why criest thou unto Me? Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward." While there is anything to be done, the time spent in sorrow is worse than waste. "The wings of a dove!" No, let us rather look for wings that we may fly in the path of God's commandment. Let us, with the ancient rabbi, pray that we may be bold as the leopard, bounding as the stag, brave as the lion, to do the will of our Father in heaven, that we may work on. Said Mendelssohn, "For me, too, the hour of rest will come: do the next thing." Oh! a grand motto was that. And that was a good motto, "Work here, rest elsewhere, wipe thy tears, cease thy sighing, do thy work, the day is short, the work is abundant, the labourers are few, the reward is great." Another remedy is patience. God is patient. He has borne with man's falsehood and littleness and disobedience, for no one knows how many thousand years. Cannot we, too, wait, if we do well and suffer for it? Cannot we take it patiently? Patient continuance in well-doing—there is a grand remedy for idle tears! (Ps. xxxvii. 7). The third remedy is faith. Jesus, as He sighed, looked up to heaven. Two things alone can finally cure the malady of occasional depression, and those two things are God and death; and faith looks forward fearlessly to death. Is our sigh for our own work? "Oh, cast thy burden on the Lord," etc. Is our sigh for the world? We did not make the world, and He who made it will guide. One day, when St. Francis was laying before God his troubles and disquietudes, the answer came to him, "Poor little man, why dost thou trouble thyself? I, who made thee the shephord of My order, knowest thou not that I am its Protector? If those I have called upon go, I will put others in their place, and if none existed, I would cause them to be born." "I cannot mend the world," said Luther. "If I thought I could, I would be the veriest ass living. Thou canst mend it, O my God!" I have mentioned action, patience, faith, and the last remedy is hope. It is a good thing that a man should both hope and patiently wait for the salvation of the Lord. Things are rarely as bad as they look to us. Elijah cries, "I, even I, only am left," and God tells him that he has "seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." A young man is terror-stricken in a besieged city, and Elijah shows him how all round are the protecting chariots of horses and fire. He who cares for His little birds and pastures, His cattle and waters and His flowers, shall He not care for the souls of men? Man's grief is but his grandeur in disguise, and discontent his immortality. To us has been born a Saviour, Christ the Lord. (*Dean Farrar.*) *Should heaven be sought as a distant, or enjoyed as a present good?*—Denizens of the Christian world abound, who, with dissatisfied spirits, not only disregard, but almost despise, the profusion of good which Almighty Love has lavishly spread around and about them, and fix their anxious eyes upon a heaven that lies beyond the grave, and up in the starry regions of space. This state of mind is as objectionable in its nature, and as pernicious in its influence, as it is popular and abounding. The latter state of mind—that embodied in the prayer which Christ gave His disciples—is the more right and wholesome state of mind to be cherished in relation to heaven. **I. THE ONE IS MORE REASONABLE THAN THE OTHER.** The state of mind which seeks to get heaven out of our sphere, activities, and circumstances, here on this green and lovely earth, seems to us far more rational than the state of mind which is constantly looking away for it in the invisible and remote. 1. Man has in an inexhaustible degree all the elements of heaven here. 2. These inexhaustible elements are here and now available. All depends upon the moral state of the heart. In

privations, sufferings, persecutions, sainted men in all ages have felt the transports, and hymned the strains of the upper heavens. Which, then, is the more reasonable state of mind? The one that comparatively overlooks, and but very partially enjoys, the infinite sources of happiness available to us in this life, in sentimental aspirations for foreign and imaginary joys; or the one, that through faith in Christ, so enters into the blessed activities and joys of the present, as to indulge no restless longings for the future? **II. THE ONE IS A MORE USEFUL STATE OF MIND THAN THE OTHER.** 1. The one leads to a more cheerful life than the other. It gives sunshine to the man; his spirit is genial, and his conduct glows with a radiant life. Having a soul full of goodness, he sees good in everything; being harmonious within, he hears music all round him; his "soul delights itself in fatness"; he is "blessed in his deed." Like a man marching to music, he treads the path of life with a joyous step. 2. The one leads to a more practical life than the other. The man who finds his heaven here by having the true love, doing the right work, and living the Christ-like life, is bringing down heaven to the men and women around him. His life is a stream gushing from the fountain of infinite love, and it touches into heavenly life and beauty all within its sphere. His life is a mirror, which reflects on all around the glories of the upper world. **III. THE ONE IS MORE SCRIPTURAL THAN THE OTHER.** 1. Heaven consists in the inner state of the soul and not in external circumstances. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." They are blessed. They see God now. 2. The grand work of man in this world should be to promote this state of soul, both in himself and in his fellow-men. **IV. THE ONE IS MORE CERTAIN OF REALIZATION THAN THE OTHER.** He who seeks happiness as an end, is like a man running to catch his shadow; the faster he runs, the faster runs his shadow. "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall find it." (*Homilist.*) *Mistaken longings:*—There are times when the sicknesses and infirmities of the body oppress us, when we are disquieted by the cares of life, embittered by disappointment, until at last we wish that it were over and that we were well out of it. This mood ignores several great and precious truths. **I. IT IS BASED ON THE MISTAKE THAT REST IS FOUND IN A PLACE, WHEREAS REST IS FOUND IN A STATE.** "Fly away," change the locality, and all will be well. Now, the teaching of revelation is altogether contradictory to this idea of finding peace in a locality. We are to expect peace in perfection of character and life; in purity of heart and conscience, in love, righteousness, and hope. What we cannot find in any place we find in Christ and in what He gives. In His love, power, and purity we realize profound repose, even in a universe of storm. It is perfectly calm at the centre of the whirlwind; Jesus is the centre of the whirlwind of life, and whilst philosophies, fortunes, thrones, stars, and suns are being driven as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, in Christ at the centre is peace. We do not want the "wings of a dove" to fly away, but rather the wings of faith and love to carry us closer to Christ; we want to be more like Him, and then we shall triumph in trouble as the sea-bird rides on the wave. **II. IT OVERLOOKS THE FACT THAT THE DISCIPLINE OF THE STORM IS ESSENTIAL TO US.** We long to nestle in some palm-grove and coo away our life in indolence and ease; but would this be well? We know it would not, for we are here to be made perfect, "perfect through suffering." Storms are necessary to set us right. These terrible buffetings feelingly persuade us what we are. They awaken us from vain dreams, and drive us to the true hiding-place. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy statutes." And storms are necessary to keep us right. The best of men are endangered in a belt of calm. Some precious stones lose their sparkle if they are long exposed to the sun, and the Lord's jewels easily lose their lustre by long-continued sunshine. We like the sun—it is pleasant to scintillate—but the gloom is often necessary to the preservation and increase of our lustre. Out of those sorrows and crosses come "the peaceable fruits of righteousness" and the "eternal weight of glory." **III. IT BREATHES THE SPIRIT OF MISTRUST AND COWARDICE.** "Oh that I had wings." This is the expression of faithlessness. He is ready to assume that God would not, or could not, sustain him, and therefore he wished to run away. But He can sustain us, and He will sustain us; let us therefore claim His help and salvation. Eagle's wings are what we need; mastery of difficulty, joy in difficulty, difficulty conducting to glory. Eagle's wings—it means that we can battle with the storm; it means joy in the storm, for the eagle exults in the very fury of the elements; it means power to rise above the storm; out of darkness into light. All this God can give, and will. **IV. The**

expression in the text is **LACKING IN RIGHT VIEWS OF THE FUTURE**. 1. It lacks a right view of the requirements of the future. It bespeaks discontent with earth, only we may be tired of earth long before we are fit for heaven. "It is enough, let me die," say short-sighted men; but God says it is enough only when He sees that we are fit and ripe for a better world. 2. It lacks a right view of the grandeur of the future. The "wings of a dove." We do not belong to the two-winged order, but to the six-winged (Isa. vi. 2). These are our kinsmen. God would not take infinite pains with us if we were not so great. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *The instinct of repose*:—I. It is **VAIN TO HOPE FOR REST BY SEEKING THE IMPOSSIBLE**. How often is this done! How many cry for that they have not, and covet that which they cannot obtain! They vex themselves in vain. 1. Thus it is sometimes with the doubter. He wants a sign. The evidence he has does not satisfy him. He cannot believe in "Jesus and the Resurrection" without more infallible proofs (Luke xvi. 31). 2. Thus it is also with the convicted sinner. He is anxious. Doubts and fears torment him. Would that he could be sure that God indeed speaks to him. Would that he were called by his name, like Zaccheus; or that a vision of the risen Christ were vouchsafed to him, as to Saul of Tarsus. Thus he speaks to himself. But such wishes are vain (Rom. x. 6-9). 3. So also, not seldom, with sincere Christians. What is truth? What is duty? What is the one and only right thing for me to do? These are hard questions. Often they cause much pain. Then, perhaps, the thought arises, would that I had a teacher that could be wholly trusted; would that I could place myself under the care of some infallible guide, whom it would be always safe to follow. Wordsworth speaks of this as "the universal instinct of repose—the longing for confirmed tranquillity." But this is not God's way of rest. We cannot thus evade our duty, or cast our responsibilities upon others. It is only the truth that commends itself to our own consciences that is truth to us. It is only the duty that we see in the light of the Cross, to be binding upon ourselves, that we can perform with freedom and delight (Gal. vi. 5). II. It is **VAIN TO HOPE FOR REST BY MERE CHANGE OF OUTWARD CONDITION**. We are prone to blame circumstances. We delude ourselves with the belief that if we could only get things ordered better, or obtain a more favourable position, that all would be well. The facts before us we cannot alter, but what might be, we have in our own power, and delight to paint in the brightest colours. The "imagined otherwise" is the practical heaven of multitudes. The sick man racked with pain, craves for change. In the morning he says, "Would God it were even!" and at even, "Would God it were morning" (Deut. xxviii. 67; Job vii. 4). The man oppressed with poverty sighs for riches. He flatters himself with dreams of what he would do if he were rich; how kind he would be to the poor, etc. So the man who is discontented with his lot, whether it be high or low, whether it be in regard to worldly or spiritual things, is always wishing for some outward change. If we only had better advantages, more light, more freedom, more sympathy, more power to carry out our plans; how different would it be. It is so easy to set things all right by an "if." We have a striking example of this spirit in Absalom (2 Sam. xv. 4). Like him, we are too much the slaves of vanity. We have not our true place. We have been slighted. We have been denied the opportunities which others have had. Thus we excuse ourselves for inaction. And yet, all the time, we have abundant proof that what is wanted is not change of place, but change of mind; and the voice of God is ever pealing in our ears, "Whosoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." III. It is **VAIN TO HOPE FOR REST BY FLIGHT FROM THE IMMEDIATE CAUSES OF DISTRESS**. There are times when flight is expedient (Matt. x. 23; 2 Tim. ii. 22). But it can never be right nor good to flee from duty. What we are called to do or to bear may be painful, and almost too hard for flesh and blood. Still it is better to remain than to fly, as it is better to have a good conscience than an evil conscience, and to have God for us, than against us. Besides, flight may prove a vain resource (Amos v. 19). And yet there are many who try this device, contrary to all reason and experience. There are people who, like Herodias, endeavour to quiet their consciences by silencing the voice of the preacher (Mark vi. 18, 19). There are others who, when the Word of God troubles them, would put it out of the way, if possible, like Jehoiakim (Jer. xxxvi. 21-32). Vain. God's Word cannot be destroyed. If one roll is burnt there is another ready to be produced. (*W. Forsyth, M.A.*) *Rest* (ver. 6. with Ps. xxxvii. ver. 7):—These verses utter man's cry for rest, and God's response to it. Man wants to fly away, but that would be of no use. Our rest is in God. The world hopes there will be rest in the grave. But there is rest now. I. **WHAT IS**

REST? 1. It is not mere quiescence and inactivity. The rest of the glorified is perpetual service, and our rest is in the fulfilling of the purposes for which we were created. 2. Nor is it freedom from responsibility, or conflict, or difficulty, or sorrow. 3. But it is rest in the midst of them all. II. AND THIS IS POSSIBLE; for God is the home of the soul. The wicked it is who are like the troubled sea, though many Christians are often troubled enough. But if they have right to be so, then the Scriptures are not true. For they are full of promises of rest. And experience declares such rest possible. Wordsworth's lines, "There are in this loud stunning tide," etc. III. THE SOURCES OF UNREST. These are unbridled passions; unexplained mysteries; unlimited cares; unsatisfied affections. But there is not one of these in which we may not rest in the Lord. IV. THIS REST INVOLVES KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. Submission; trust. (*Charles New.*) *Dove-wings*:—Are these words such as we should appropriate? Our sympathy with the prayer depends much upon our mood of mind and what are our own experiences. Those of the psalmist were such as made his prayer readily comprehensible and excusable. But it is not always so. Therefore, try the prayer—I. BY THE MASTER'S SPIRIT. He never, though so sore beset, prayed such prayer. II. BY THE RELATION WE SUSTAIN TO OTHERS. At almost any time, save in life's eventide, it would seem selfish. I know how beautiful it does appear at times, to talk of the quiet sleep. Presently we shall have done with weariness and weeping. The mill-wheel of duty will stop! We say to ourselves, as we think of death, When that comes, others will know what parents, lovers, brothers, we have tried to be! But immediately the last sleep loses its dream-like beauty when we turn round to think of these others, and of the relation we sustain to them; this no others can fill; none, with humility we think, could serve them so well. Heaven to us would mean not only the grief of absence for them, but the strain of endurance and the hard fight of life for others. It would cast upon them burdens they are ill able to bear, and our rest would be purchased at the cost of a too hard endeavour by those we love. Looked at by itself alone, the heaven-rest may at times be ardently longed for when work and worry go hand in hand—when routine is like a drill-sergeant—when the chariot of duty has to be pulled up-hill; but to the wise man, to the thoughtful woman, it is only a passing vision, and this prayer is unspoken because its fulfilment would be unkind to others. III. BY THE PERMANENT TESTS OF EXPERIENCE. I mean the long experience of life as a whole. Has not that been a gracious experience, a long history of mercy? If there have been times of sorrow, there have been other and more times of joy, and then our prayer was, "O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days." IV. BY THE LIGHT OF THAT AGE. Some critics think "there was no belief in immortality at all amongst the Hebrews." Then why were such words as these spoken? A mind and a heart like David's could never have wished to lie down in full forgetfulness, to claim eternal brotherhood with the valley clouds. Rest? Annihilation is no rest. Such rest wants no wings—the dagger of a Brutus could give it in the briefest moment of time. These psalms would lose their richest beauty and glory if we simply had to read immortality into them. Their charm would be weakened, and their holiest inspiration gone. True, if we had to do with one such expression alone, we might feel it improbable that David referred to the great immortal rest. But it is not so! (Ps. xvii. 15). In reply to the cry, "O that I had wings!" we answer, You have! That is just what you have—wings! to fly up into the very heaven of God. This is the characteristic of the soul—that we can rise higher than mere intellectual argument—for what is denied to the calculating reason can be glimpsed by the despised imagination; for there are things of faith, whereby we rise to God. V. BY THE SEASONS IN WHICH IT IS DEFITTING AND BEAUTIFUL. As in the "Nunc Dimittis" of the aged Simeon. What more natural than that he should now close his eyes in the last sleep? So there are seasons coming when the prayer will have a fitting charm for the soul. As we near the evening of life's busy day we may offer it with lips of wisdom, as well as with a heart longing after home. (*W. M. Statham.*) *The restlessness of human ambition*:—Would we see an object to the greatest advantage, it must be some distance off from us. The poor man's hut, ragged and full of squalor within, yet even from a due distance may appear a sweet and interesting cottage. The field grown over with thistles, at a distance charms the eye by its verdure. The marshy, stagnant and malarious lake seen at a distance is full of beauty. The country hamlet distance can transform into a paradise of beauty, in spite of the abominations that are at every door, and the angry brawlings of the men and women who occupy it. And this explains the feeling which

some of us may have experienced; we fancy that if we were removed to some other distant place we should be happier than where we are. Instead of resting in the quiet enjoyment of what we have, our wishes wander abroad, and we are ready to say, "O that I had wings like a dove, for then I would fly away and be at rest." But it is important to be observed that when we have reached the wished-for spot, rest is as far from us as ever. Now, all this is true of the region of the soul and the moral nature. We think that what we have not must be better than what we have. Am I unlearned? I sigh for the name and distinctions of philosophy. Am I rich? I would sooner be in a humble position. Poor? I envy the rich. Single? My fancy warms at the conception of a dear and domestic circle. Am I embroiled with family cares? I wish I were single again. The truth is, we never rest. We always want something more than we have. And when we have exhausted every personal ambition we have friends and children to provide for, and here is a never-ending source of ambition and anxiety. This is not peculiar to any one class. You see it at court, but you see it in the cottage too. It is the universal property of our nature. In the whole circle of our experience, did we ever see a man sit down to the full enjoyment of the present without a hope or a wish unsatisfied? Look into the heart, which is the seat of feeling, and we find a perpetual tendency to enjoyment, but not enjoyment itself; the cheerfulness of hope, but not the happiness of actual possession. Man lives in futurity. It is not the reality of to-day which interests him. It is the vision of to-morrow. Where, then, is that resting-place which the psalmist aspired after, and that he might reach it he prayed for the wings of a dove? It is not to be found on this side of Death. How important, then, that not the littleness of time, but the greatness of eternity; not the restless and unsatisfying pleasures of the world, but the enjoyments of heaven so pure, substantial and unfading, should be the object on which our hearts should be set. (*Thomas Chalmers, D.D.*) *The vagueness and endlessness of human aspirations*.—These words prove the essential identity of human nature seen with human nature thousands of years since. They are very ancient, but their spirit is perfectly modern. The first of modern essayists has said that the great characteristic of modern life is worry; but it should seem from the text that it was the great characteristic of ancient life too; for if there ever was such a thing in this world, here we have the utterance of a thoroughly worried man. And see what he says. From the midst of countless cares, fears, and griefs, he wearily looks up; he plainly sees that where he is, the day will never come in which cares, griefs, and fears will not still surround him; and so he bursts out into a vague, hopeless, yet passionate cry—he cannot clearly say for what—but only that he might get away to some place—he does not know where—in which these should be done with for ever! I spoke of the essentially modern tone of that fancy as proving how like we are now to what King David was centuries ago—as proving that man is always essentially the same. Do you not remember that when the greatest living poet wishes to set before us a human being of this age, restlessly dissatisfied and disappointed, he puts upon his lips words which look almost like this vague aspiration of the psalmist? He represents him, too, as confusedly wishing that he could get anywhere away from where he was; that he could burst all links of civilized habit and leave all traces of civilized man behind him. And no doubt we can all at times sympathize with the fancy; for it is certain fact that the many advantages of civilization are to be obtained only at the price of countless and ceaseless worry. No doubt we must all sometimes sigh for the woods and the wigwag; but the feeling is as vain as that of the psalmist's aspiration in the text. But it is just this thing which makes the aspiration in the text one so practically profitable for us to think of; it is just because in its vagueness, its unreasonableness, its endlessness, it is so accurate a type of the endlessness and the vagueness of human aspirations. Oh, give the psalmist the swift wings; and whither could he fly? Give him all the universe to choose from; and where would he find the place where he could be at rest? Give men all this world could yield them; tell men that for the naming it, they shall have every wish gratified to the utmost, that begins and ends on this world and this life; and they will be as far from rest for their weary souls as ever. And, thank God, we know the reason why. It is because "this is not our rest." It was because God had unalterably fixed and appointed, that worldly things alone can never make the soul of man permanently happy. You think to make yourself content and happy without the good part in Christ, and the reconciled love of God in Him; you cannot, it is impossible. God

says No to that; it cannot be done. If you think and try to find real rest for your soul away from God in Christ; if you think to be really happy away from Christ, you are thinking and trying to do what, by the make of your being, is impossible. You might as well think to quench the thirst of the parched throat with sand, as to satisfy man's thirst for happiness with anything merely worldly. You are on the wrong course altogether when you try to do that. Now, it would be our salvation could we only feel and realize the fact that this world is not our rest; that rest and peace are only in God as seen in Christ. The wings and the wilderness would not have made the psalmist happy; and no imaginable worldly blessings will ever suffice to make us so. The only real rest that the soul of man can ever know, is that which is given by Him who said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And not even that rest, given by the Redeemer to His own, is perfect in this present life; the best believer's heart will be many a time disquieted and perplexed, so long as he abides here. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." It remaineth; it is waiting for them, far away. This is not our rest; our rest is beyond the grave. (*A. K. H. Boyd, D.D.*) *The soul's desire for rest.*—I. THE REST DESIRED. We do not know when David wrote this psalm, nor does it matter. He often longed to rid himself of present entanglements, only get away from such men as Job, only escape from the sea of cares in which he was plunged, he might be happy. We all know the feeling. We all know what it is to have such a dissatisfied feeling with our present circumstances. We may, then, I think, find it interesting and profitable to inquire what really is the rest which the soul craves. 1. There is the rest of reconciliation with God. We can never entirely forget our relation to God. 2. Deliverance from trouble. Trial, temptation, doubt—these are forms of trouble which extort this cry. The dying saint cries for this rest. II. THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS REST WAS TO BE ATTAINED. "O that I had wings like a dove." This suggests—1. The instinctive desire for home as the resting-place. Reference is made here, evidently, to the wonderful instinct of the carrier-pigeon. Hundreds of miles away it will with unerring instinct find its home, drawn as by an invisible cord. So the soul longs to return to God, its true home. In those better moments that sometimes come to men's hearts, you feel the desire to be reconciled to God, and thus obtain deliverance from the fear you entertain at the thought of meeting Him. You have felt like a child away from home, who fancies all would be well with him if he were again at home. The biographer of Michael Bruce tells us that, when he felt he was dying, "the young heart yearned for home—for a mother's hand, a mother's face, a mother's kiss, a mother's love"—so have you felt the desire for home, wondering, it may be, how to get back to God, and how to make your peace with Him, but conscious that your heart will not be at rest until you have the light of His countenance lifted up upon you; and your cry is, with the psalmist, "O that I had wings like a dove; for then would I fly away and be at rest." And if I speak to any who are restless and dissatisfied with the life of sin, and whose consciences are speaking to them of God their Father, I would say to them, Listen to the voice of conscience—return to God, and you will find your sins forgiven, your fears removed, the past forgotten, and the future radiant with hope. Come home, poor prodigal, come home. 2. The second idea suggested by this figure is the directness of the dove's flight home. When instinct has taught the bird where home lies, it makes straight for it—you cannot hinder its flight, or turn it aside. Instinct will not allow it to rest until it has returned to the dove-cote. Would that souls took such direct course in their way back to God. How wearily did Luther toil in his round of ceremonies before he found his true way to God. 3. The swiftness of the dove's flight home. Give the carrier-pigeon the wing, and not only does it make direct for home, but with an easy speed that distances the fastest train. Its eagerness to return gives speed to its flight, as, with unwearied wing, it pursues its homeward journey. So will it be with the soul that has not only been awakened, but has discovered the direct way to return. It will hasten to be at rest. The flight of the dove is, after all, slow compared with the act which takes the soul to God in Christ. Swift, indeed, is the flight of the dove. And what are the wings that bear the soul to its rest? We can understand how the dove wings its way homeward. We can understand how the wanderer returns home—but how does the soul get back to God? or, in other words, how does the soul become reconciled to God? It is by faith. Faith furnishes the wings, and thus the soul returns to God. Thus it is that the penitent soul may mount, in a moment, from the pit of ruin to the rest of home,



and the prodigal may return home on the wings of faith with swifter motion than dove ever knew, and so for ever be at rest. (*James Jeffery, M.A.*) *The cry of humanity for rest*.—I. THE EXCLAMATION IS PERFECTLY NATURAL. Who can think of the daily life of our merchants with all their ventures, investments and transactions, without feeling that without anything of indolence or the mere spirit of repining, thousands of men and women legitimately long to get out of the care and clamour of life; to get far away into the refreshing silence and solitudes of nature, where the wearied spirits and jaded faculties may find rest? II. THE WISH IS NOT ALWAYS CREDITABLE. Instead of crying out, "O that I had wings like a dove"—O that I had the spirit of a man, both to discern clearly what the Lord has given me to do, and the spirit of activity and obedience to go and do it, and do it perseveringly, while life and health are given, so that when rest comes it may be enjoyed as a boon after honest toil, and not wear the aspect of a premature or dishonourable repose. III. SOMETIMES IT TURNS OUT TO BE A MISTAKEN WISH. Under circumstances of trial and great pressure of duty the cry goes forth, "O that I had wings." You determine to cut the cable that ties you to local engagements and arduous duties, and you flee away as fast as the wings of steam can carry you to some secluded spot—"to a lodge in a vast wilderness, some boundless contiguity of shade." But lo! when arrived there, have you not sometimes found that your cares and anxieties, from which you would fain escape, have travelled with you by the same train or boat? You need not go out of this psalm for the answer—for the best of all antidotes to this complaint. David knew it. He not only repaired to the wilderness, he betook himself to God (Ps. xvii., xviii.). He prayed, and like Luther in later days, he prevailed. In verse 22, the fugitive, but devout king, from the depths of his own experience, gives this blessed piece of advice to all anxious souls, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord," etc. (*D. Jones, B.A.*) *Seeking rest by flight*.—This disposition to seek rest from our burdens by flight is as prevalent to-day as in the days of the psalmist. We still try to fly away from our difficulties instead of seeking the strength of God to sustain them, and I want to ask your attention to one or two ways in which this flight is sometimes made. Here, then, is a man whose business affairs are becoming involved. His resources are being more and more impoverished. He feels as though he is being gradually and relentlessly closed in as by an iron wall. Night comes into his day, and the iron feet of anxiety crush all the joy out of his life. His cares accumulate until they become a huge burden, which lies like a cold, heavy stone upon his heart. This goes on for weeks, perhaps months. The worry gnaws away at his heart without ceasing, and makes him depressed, and nervous, and irritable, unpleasant to his family, disagreeable to his friends, and obnoxious to himself. At length when the burden is intolerable, he cries in the bitterness of his soul, "O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest." Now, that is an evil moment, a moment fraught with infinite peril, when a man begins to think of flying away from his burden. For in these matters thought is so speedily followed by purpose, and purpose so speedily followed by action, that even thought itself must be regarded as pregnant with tremendous issues. When a man begins to think of flying away from his burden, depend upon it he will soon make an attempt to fly. And how is the attempt very frequently made? A vast number of men try to get away from the burden of their worries and cares by an excessive indulgence in drink. Again and again have I heard men say, "I could bear it no longer; the burden was crushing me, and so I took to drink." And so the man uses drink as a kind of opiate. He takes that mind of his, which is "heated hot with burning fears," and he plunges it in forgetfulness by means of drink. He takes to drink as a means of flight from care. Let me say, then, in the first place, that it is a most cowardly and selfish resource. It is cowardly if for no other reason than that it means a showing of the white feather; but it is cowardly for the additional reason that when a man takes to drink he deliberately sells his birth-right, and throws away the prerogatives of a glorious manhood. He takes his pearls—the pearl of reason, the pearl of conscience, the pearl of will—and casts them before the swine of passion and lust. But it is more than cowardly, it is intensely selfish. It means that the man considers himself and himself alone. When a man flees to drink to gain rest from his burden, he does so at the expense of putting an extra burden upon somebody else. But it is more than cowardly and selfish; to fly to drink is useless. The man says, "I will take to drink and be at rest." Does he find rest? He says, "I will bury my sorrow." Where?

"In drink." Is the grave deep enough? Drink is the poorest cemetery I know in which to bury one's care. Everything you bury in drink has a speedy resurrection. Drink cannot hold it. Bury sorrow in drink, and it will soon rise again from its grave. But more than that—the sorrow reappears, stronger and heavier; the grave of drink in which you thought to bury it has only nursed and fattened it, and there it is wilder than ever! You fled for rest, and behold fresh trouble! Is it not, as that old herdsman, Amos, said, nearly three thousand years ago, "As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him"? Let me now take another example. Here is a man whose burden does not arise from an involved business, or from the worry which comes from an impoverished purse. It is not the care of the world which weighs upon him, but the burden of an outraged conscience. He carries a load of guilt which weighs upon his heart like lead. His burden depresses him, and produces lowness and insipidity of life. And so, while some men carry a load of care, this man carries a load of remorse. And this remorse seems to sit between the shoulders, as Dante says it does in hell, and with its sharp teeth is ever gnawing at the guilty man's life. At length the burden of guilt becomes intolerable, and the man cries out in his heart, "O for the wings of a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest." Here again is a perilous moment when a man begins to think of flying away from his burden. The thought will be followed by an attempt. The man who thinks of flying away from the gnawings of his conscience will soon be trying to fly away. And how is the attempt very frequently made? A vast number of people seek to get away from the burden of their conscience by an excessive indulgence in pleasure. They fly away on the wings of pleasure to be at rest! Now let us look at this. A man who has violated his conscience soon finds ordinary pleasures tame and tasteless. There is nothing like a sense of guilt for destroying the taste for the quieter pleasures of life. And so men seek refuge from guilt in sensational and distracting enjoyments. Revelry is sought as a means of gaining quietness and peace. When Macbeth had murdered Duncan, and Banquo had also been despatched, Lady Macbeth arranged a feast, that in company and revelry, and jest and song, the murderer might fly from the cries of his own conscience. And how did it succeed? In the very midst of the feast, when the merry-making was at its height, when jest and jollity freely flowed, Macbeth gave a great start, and cried, "Never shake thy gory locks at me." What did he see? The ghost of the one he had murdered! The deed of yesterday intruded into the feast, and even in the very heart of pleasure painted before him the ghost of the one he had slain. Oh, these ghosts! these ghosts of yesterday, these ghosts of past sins, how they will glide into our revelries and change them into bitterness and pain! If we only knew how to get away from the ghost of guilt! I tell thee, conscience-burdened man, if thou take the wings of pleasure and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there the ghost shall meet thee, the burden will remain. "Be sure your sin will find you out;" the ghost will rise before you in the very midst of the revelry and dance. Oh, men and women who feel the burden of guilt, don't seek to fly away from it. Bring it, and cast it upon the Lord. Tell Him that you have heard that with Him there is mercy and forgiveness and plenteousness of grace, and that you kneel at His feet if perchance there may be healing and strengthening for you. He will sustain you. Remember that He has, in untold number, relieved men and women whose consciences were as restless as yours, and whose guilt was as burdensome as yours, and He has imparted to them His own calm. He will likewise say to thee, "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee." That forgiveness of God loosens the guilt which holds a man in bonds, just as the sun breaks up an ice-blocked river and lets the boats go free. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *Man's higher longings*:—And the question arises, What causes this longing after rest?—why do these hopes and fears, these dreamings and aspirations, these mental struggles after what lies so far away from the natural man, so constantly find their place in the story of human lives? The answer is surely plain and simple. It is because, though we are only imperfect men, yet we are still men made in the image of God; it is because the soul, the very light which God has placed within, though often shaded and darkened, is never wholly extinguishable by earth and the things of earth. Because, though all too often the sounds are stilled by the crash of the world's unrest, there are times when in each heart the tones of the voice of God are heard calling to nobler and better things. Let us not drown that voice. Let us not grieve that Holy Spirit, lest He turn and leave us. Rather let us leave all to Him and, calmly confident in His power, rest

in the certainty that as day succeeds to day, so shall each returning dawn see us further and further upon the track that leads to that goal for which we long; for "there is a hand that guides." Nor is there the least uncertainty as to how He will work upon us. The teaching of the Gospel solves the problem, for there we learn that in the power of that Holy Spirit we shall be enabled to follow the Master. Yes, His strength will enable us who would, to come after Him, to deny ourselves, and, taking up our cross daily, to follow Christ. Only so; holiness like Christ's, perfection like God's, may only be had through Christ. Our wills must be subordinated to His, our steps planted in His footprints, everything and everybody must be given up that comes between Him and ourselves, each thought must be brought into harmony with His mind, and this, mark you, in a world where temptations to an opposite course are neither few nor far between—this, too, by men whose natures run directly contrary to such a course. (*W. C. Hawkesley, M.A.*)

Ver. 14. **We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company.**—*The union of religion with friendship recommended*:—I. RELIGION WILL, IN A VERY HIGH DEGREE, MULTIPLY AND EXALT THE PRESENT PLEASURES OF FRIENDSHIP. The pleasure of sympathy, we know, always bears a direct proportion to the magnitude and intrinsic interest of the subject by which it is excited. It will be readily granted, that when the subjects of our contemplation possess intrinsic dignity, when our thoughts themselves are high and employed upon high things, we feel greater pleasure in their interchange, and mark with warmer satisfaction the sympathy of those whom we esteem. But for grandeur of extent and depth of interest united, where is the subject that will bear a moment's comparison with religion? II. The pleasure which we take in the sympathy of our friends on any subject will be affected, not only by its inherent dignity and importance, but also by THE RELATION WHICH IT BEARS TO OURSELVES PERSONALLY, by the individual interest, greater or less, which we have in it. Those circumstances and events in which we feel ourselves most immediately and deeply concerned; our prospects in life, for instance, our plans of usefulness or enjoyment, the fortunes and interests of our connections, the characters and conduct of our friends—these are the subjects which are reserved most carefully for the private ear of friendship, on which we look for corresponding emotions of sympathy with the greatest anxiety, and hail them with the most lively pleasure. "To have the same desires and the same aversions," has been said to constitute true friendship; to the perfection of which, therefore, it must be necessary, that these desires and aversions exist in corresponding strength, where the exciting causes are the same. The deeper the interest felt, and the more complete the sympathy, the greater will be the pleasure derived from it. But what is there of more essential importance to our happiness than religion? III. As the pleasures of religious sympathy are likely to be greater in proportion to the superior dignity and deeper interest of the exciting cause; so also will they be heightened by reflection on THE PURITY AND EXCELLENCE OF THE SOURCE FROM WHICH THEY SPRING. Combined pleasures heighten and improve each other. Do we receive gratification from a worthy object, from one which we know ought to excite it? The consideration of the worth of that object, and the moral approbation consequent thereon, increase the gratification. Sympathetic feelings of satisfaction and pleasure may be called forth very strongly by a trifling and unworthy cause; but when this is the case, such pleasure will unavoidably be diminished by reflection; it will not bear examination; it cannot stand the test of time. Not so the pleasures of religious sympathy; the sources of these are always high and exalted; the subjects of them ever worthy the contemplation of the immortal soul. (*A. R. Beard.*) *Religion the assuager of the pains, and consoler of the sorrow, of friendship*:—I. IN THE TEDIOUS HOURS OF ABSENCE, HOW POWERFUL IS THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION TO CALM THE ANXIETIES, AND KEEP ALIVE THE SYMPATHIES, OF FRIENDSHIP.—Friends who have a lively faith, a firm confidence in an omnipresent God, need never consider themselves as separate or far distant from each other. Mountains may intervene, oceans may roll between them; one may dwell on the bosom of the boundless deep, the other far inland, in the valley amongst the hills; yet are they not apart; they have a bond of union of which the world thinks not; they are, and feel themselves, united in Him "who is never far from any one of us," but "in whom," at every instant of time, "we live, and move, and have our being." God is with them as their common father, benefactor, and friend. II. RELIGION WILL

HAVE POWER TO CONSOLATE US WHEN OBLIGED TO WITNESS THE TEMPORAL SUFFERINGS OF THOSE WHOM WE LOVE. Who is there that does not grieve to trace the expression of pain or sorrow in the countenance of a friend, especially when he feels himself unable to remove the source from which it springs? A friend is cast down in the world, and we possess not the means of raising him; he is tortured by disease, to which we can bring no relief; these, indeed, are severe trials, yet religion will teach us how to bear and to improve them. It is from her we learn that the Father of our race doth "never willingly afflict or grieve His children"—that "He chastens them not for His own pleasure, but for their profit, that they may be made partakers of His holiness." These, surely, are consolatory words to him who is called to witness the sufferings of a friend; words that may serve at once to console his own mind, and to suggest to him the best topics of consolation.

III. RELIGION WILL BRING CONSOLATION TO US, WHEN SUFFERING UNDER A PAINFUL SENSE OF THE MORAL IMPERFECTIONS OF OUR FRIENDS. She will carry our view forward to that blessed country where sin and sorrow shall be no more, where the great enemy shall cease from troubling, and the good man, freed from the assaults of temptation, shall be at rest. Then shall the good qualities of the virtuous friend shine forth with unclouded lustre, and the attachment formed on earth be continued in heaven, unalloyed by sorrow and undisturbed by sin.

IV. EVEN TO HIM WHO MOURNS THE UTTER MORAL DEGRADATION AND CONSEQUENT ESTRANGEMENT OF A FRIEND, RELIGION WILL BRING SOME COMFORT. She will soothe him with the consciousness of having done everything to prevent a catastrophe so mournful. She will provide him with a sure refuge in that Friend who cannot become unworthy of him, and will not desert him. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 17. **Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice.**—*Prayer*.—I. THE NATURE OF OUR PRAYER. Prayer is the humble expression of our wants and of our desires to Almighty God; and it comprehends, at least, the following particulars. 1. Prayer is an acknowledgment of the being and of the providence of God; "He that cometh to God must believe that He is;"—an expression of our dependence upon God; and a profession of our belief in His omnipotence, goodness, grace, and bounty—"that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." 2. Prayer re-establishes communion between God and man. It opens and maintains intercourse with the skies. 3. Prayer is the grand means by which we obtain our spiritual blessings from the hands of God. 4. But nothing is real prayer except it arise sincerely from the heart, and is presented through Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and man, accompanied at all times by a measure of faith (John xiv. 6; James i. 6, 7).

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THE AUTHOR OF OUR TEXT PERFORMED THIS DUTY. This was distinguished by fervour, regularity, and frequency. 1. Fervour in prayer is the earnest manner in which we breathe out our desires to God; not so much the strength of the voice, as the ardour of the soul (Rom. viii. 26). 2. Regularity was associated with the psalmist's performance of this duty. He had stated times for prayer. And do not creatures, circumstanced as we are, need every help? 3. Frequency is another thing signified. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*)

Ver. 19. **Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.**—*No changes*.—Who can they be—where can they live, of whom it can be said that they have not changes! Can they be inhabitants of this world of which, if one thing can be said of it with greater certainty than another, it is that it is a scene of perpetual change! "Change and decay in all around I see." No changes! We must not take the expression in a hard and narrow literal sense, or it would be true of no man. Many changes come alike to all, and one at the end of life of which Job speaks when he says, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait until my change come." The changes of which the psalmist speaks must mean changes that disturb, changes that unhinge all plans and arrangements, changes which frustrate hopes. These are the changes which some men have not, and because they have them not they fear not God. Our subject, therefore, is—the perils of an undisturbed life. I. How is this? Freedom from change was never intended to work such sad result, but quite the reverse. It is due not to absence of change, but to the man's own perverse and perverting heart. He turns the sweet into the bitter, the healthy into the poisonous. It is man's eye which is evil, because God is good. The fact that a man's life has not been wrecked by storms or rent by great upheaving sorrows should appeal to the man's gratitude. He should say,

"What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and will call upon the name of the Lord." But it is melancholy to see what a strange power the heart has to turn good into evil. It is like some plants which can elaborate and secrete out of bright sunshine and pure air and water the very elements of death. Such are the men who have no changes, and therefore—mark the word—"therefore they fear not God." They have no changes. They devise their plans, and they all succeed. Whatever they touch turns into gold. All the vessels they launch on the great sea of life have prosperous voyages, and return heavily laden with a rich cargo. Their neighbours have losses and misfortunes, but they, never. Now, this wonderful exemption from sudden and sharp vicissitudes tends to engender self-confidence. They are prone to imagine that their better fortune is due to better management. And no doubt not a little may be said in favour of their view of the case. For business, like every other thing, has its own laws, the observance of which will for the most part conduce to prosperity. But such prosperity has a melancholy tendency to produce forgetfulness of God. And when it has gone on for years in an unbroken stream, and a stream swelling and deepening with the years, then is this tendency seen, and this sore temptation felt in their most horrible forms. Because they have no change, therefore, etc. And the like may be said of unbroken, uninterrupted health. But others besides have frequently no changes. The circle of their social life seems wonderfully free from infraction, and that for a long period. It seems as if the ordinary calamities of life could not reach them. There has been no darkening of the windows, there has been no grave to purchase, there has been no hearse at the door. The deepest fountains of sorrow have been unopened, there has been no yearning, unavailing as it is keen, "for the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still." And what is the result, what at least is too often the result? Therefore they fear not God. His blessings have been so constant and so great that they do not fear Him. They think that to-morrow will be as to-day, and still more abundant. The absence of change produces hardness of nature. As one of the greatest blessings is tenderness of heart, so one of the greatest perils in life is that the heart should become hardened. A healthy heart is one which is open to all Divine influences and to all just human appeals. A man becomes practically useless as his heart loses power of sympathy. Hence is change so needful for us would we succour the sorrow of others. But a man cannot do this if he has never known sorrow of his own, if he be one who has "no changes." Ah! if the world were made up of no other class of men than these, life would be a fearful thing. It is well that there are some hearts that cannot be thus steeled, hearts that can feel for others, and that can feel for others because frequently they have themselves known sorrow and trouble. No heart has had a thorough education which has not passed through the school of grief. Until it has sat in this class it is crude and narrow and hard. The tendency of continued prosperity, or exemption from calamity, is to create in the mind a sense of claim upon God; and a sense of wrong when the interruption comes. When the usual blessing does not make its appearance at the usual time, the man looks up under a sense of wrong, and upbraids the Providence which seems to have forgotten him. Why has it forgotten him? Why should he be deprived of his usual mercies? And instead of reckoning up all the years during which his table has been spread and his cup has run over, and bursting forth in a song of thanksgiving for all he has received, he complains of God for the removal, or even the diminution, of his comforts. The absence of change produces neglect of eternity. Nothing is more certain than this, and nothing is more natural. When men are settled in any condition which yields them satisfaction they long to remain in it. To live for the present life is as natural as to live in it; and it is the main temptation we have all to overcome to set our affection on things which are on the earth. It is wonderful how men get reconciled by habit even to a state which is by no means the happiest; but when it is one of comfort they have no desire to see it altered or disturbed. "Soul, take thine ease," is a very common feeling among those whose circumstances are on the whole fairly pleasant. They get settled in their lives. They have their portion in this life; and they do not think of another life, nor care to think of it. How many will have to thank God for ever for the blow which swept away in a night the wealth in which they trusted. It was then that for the first time they understood the meaning of the words, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal."

How many, too, who have forgotten God in the days of their vigour, have found Him on their beds when the strength has gone from them like water from the summer brook. And some have needed a still greater change. But even these changes may fail. Some have borne them all, and still fear not God. Happy the man that has learnt to place his hope in God. (*Enoch Mellor, D.D.*) *The discipline of change*:—The natural heart of man longs for peace, and looks to repose as fit and proper. We feel ourselves in the midst of ceaseless change and decay, and are always seeking a centre of rest. We would hasten our escape from the windy storm and tempest. Yet, with all our longing for peace, we are played on by forces that make for change and unrest, swirled by the ceaseless flux and flow of the tide. Life is like the swift ships, says Job, like ships driven out in the darkness, tossed on the storm, battling on to a quiet harbour. It is like vapour of the hills, says St. James, like the fragile mist that can be withered by sun or torn by wind. There is no real rest in the world for body, or mind, or heart, or soul. This condition of unstable equilibrium is, of course, most evident in connection with outward things in our life, the trappings and the circumstances. But the same transiency is seen in inward things also. Even love suffers loss, as the objects of love pass off at the dread call of night. Even faith cannot remain fixed, but has new problems which demand new efforts at adjustment. We must admit also, if we are honest with ourselves, that we need the stimulus of constant change if life is to attain its best results. We settle down in slothful ease and sluggish indifference, with eyes blinded and hearts made fat by the prosperity that knows no fear. Changelessness would only lull the senses and the faculties to sleep. We are only kept alert by the unstable tenure with which we hold life and all it contains. If we knew we would only meet the expected and always at the expected turn or road, there could be no expectation at all, no wonder, no apprehension, no fear, no hope, no faith. Experience could bring no education, and all our powers would be atrophied. Most of all is this true in the moral sphere. It is in no lotus isle that men are bred. In the stress and strain of life character is formed. Through doubt and uncertainty and sore trial of faith is faith alone made perfect. As a matter of fact, degeneracy has always set in with both nations and men when prosperity has been unchecked and the sunshine of favour has been unalloyed. It is through the conquest of nature, and through the conquest of enemies, and through self-conquest that the conquering peoples have been built. The lesson is painted on a large canvas in universal history; and it is repeated to us in miniature in individual experience. Men live only by custom and convention when they are withdrawn from this discipline of change; and to live only by custom is to be drugged by an opiate. Everything that makes men great partakes of the discipline. There is no music in a monotone; there is no art in one universal drab colour. Thought is born of mystery. Science is the daughter of wonder, and wonder is the fruit of all the changes and movements of the world. Religion even has her secure empire in the hearts of men through the needs of men's hearts, the need for which they crave of a changeless centre in the midst of change. Every deep crisis of life, with its thrill of joy or its spasm of sorrow, with its message of loss or of gain, is part of God's higher education. The discipline of change is meant to drive us out beyond the changing hour to the thought of eternity, out from the restless things of sense to find rest in God. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow, the same in nature, in character, in love, even as Jesus revealed Him, the eternal Father who yearns over His children in deathless love. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." If that is failure, even though it means continual peace and prosperity, what shall we say of the failure of those who know the desolation and terror of change and yet have not learned; who still cling to the things of sense that have failed them before; who have suffered all the strokes of fortune, all the pangs of heart, all the shocks that paralyze the soul, and yet have never submitted, never trusted, never feared, never loved God? What failure is like that of those who have been chastened and yet never softened, who have gone through the fire without learning the lesson, who have tasted the sorrow without the sympathy, who have borne the cross without the love? (*Hugh Black, M.A.*) *Afflictions*:—There are some who have no changes of fortune from prosperity to adversity. "Therefore," says the psalmist, "they fear not God." I. DIFFERENT KINDS. 1. Disappointments. 2. Financial ruin. 3. Sickness. II. USES. 1. Corrective. "Before I was afflicted I went astray." 2. Instructive. Prosperity is apt to intoxicate the imagination; affliction teaches humility and dependence upon

God. 3. Sanctifying. They purify the heart, bring God nearer to the soul, and make the promises more precious. III. IMPROVEMENT. 1. Continued prosperity is not always best for man. If prosperity hardens the heart and keeps God out, then is affliction a blessing. 2. Under severe affliction grace is needed to keep the soul from despair. 3. If we are without affliction, are we sure that we do not spiritually need their discipline? (L. O. Thompson.) *Life's vicissitudes*.—You pick up two stones lying near the seashore and only a few yards apart. They not only belong to the same geological formation, but have been splintered from the same rock. One is rugged, made up of sharp, uneven angles, and irregular, broken surfaces. The other is smooth, rounded into an almost perfect sphere, has every delicate vein showing, and is polished as on a lapidary's wheel. What is the secret of this contrast? The one had fallen from the cliff and had been stranded above high-water mark. It had lain for centuries just where it dropped. It had undergone no changes and upheavals. The other had fallen within reach of the waves, and every ebbing and flowing tide had lashed it to and fro for year upon year. It had never been left still for long, but had been tossed, jostled, ground, and polished against the pebbly beach till it took that form of comeliness and beauty. So it is with many lives. The lives of some seem to have fallen to them in pleasant places. Life has brought few changes. And the Holy Book says of such, "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." Other lives are "Still from one sorrow to another thrown." They sometimes say, "All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me." But what spiritual beauty they have won from their tribulations!

Ver. 22. **Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.**—*Grace to bear the burden laid on us*.—I. SEE THAT YOUR BURDENS ARE ALL OF THE LORD'S APPOINTMENT. How many are the burdens that we make for ourselves, which we need not and ought not to bear. They are sinful, and we ought to cast them away. II. EXPECT FROM GOD PROPORTIONED STRENGTH. Why do you anticipate long reaches of future possibilities? You are vainly trying to break the faggot at once, which can only be overcome stick by stick. Take life not by weeks or years, but by days. Truly Jesus is the great bearer away of burdens, for He has "borne our sins in His own body on the tree," and the guilt of sin is our heaviest burden. In all our sorrows we have His sympathy as "a merciful and faithful High Priest," who is "touched with a feeling." What, then, is left for us to carry is only the light end of the cross—an easy yoke and light burden. III. REST ON GOD FOR ULTIMATE ENDURANCE. A spirit such as has been described, continually receiving its daily and proportioned replenishment from heaven, will not look much to the future. It will be too busy with present duties. As our great poet Tennyson has beautifully declared, true virtue will scarcely dream of a promised elysium, where she may leisurely bask in the sun, and repose from all effort amid crowns, and songs, and feasts. Nay, he nobly answers, "Give her the glory of going on and not to die." Anything else would be death and worse than death. Virtue cannot rest in material reward. She has acquired a noble habit of active benevolence, and she could not bear its cessation. She craves endless, immortal service. "They shall serve Him day and night in His temple." Verily, "give her the glory of going on and not to die." (Andrew Reed, B.A.) *Our burden-bearer*.—Whatever else these words mean, they mean that the Lord is to be used. Whatever presses upon me in any way and troubles me, I am to take it off my shoulder and let the Lord carry it for me. Now, we want that truth to go sinking down through the soul, that God is not only my Creator but my Father; my Father, who cannot help loving me and caring for me everywhere and in everything. But men don't believe this. The world is real enough to them, but all this about the Lord, how unreal it sounds. And it never will be otherwise until to all such words about Christ the Spirit giveth life. He must reveal Christ to us. Pray for His help. Now, our text teaches—I. THAT THE LORD IS WITHIN MY REACH. He is near me, I am to cast my burden upon Him. Now, this is just what we don't do. We kneel, and sigh, and pray about our burden, that we may cast it on the Lord, but we don't do it. We look up and sigh, and resolve that we will, but nothing comes of it. Some years ago I was staying in a Swiss city, and from the windows of my hotel I looked out on the bridge that crossed the Rhine. At the middle of the bridge there was a tiny wayside chapel, and as the peasants went to market they set the heavy basket down on the steps while they turned in to pray. Then they came out and took up their burdens again. That is how many

people do with their troubles—they pray about them, and then pick them up again. What folly it is to call that casting! On the other side of the parapet there swept the swift current of the Rhine. Now, if one should take up the load with both hands, and swing it with all his might over the side, and then let it go whirling through space until it splashed into the waters, and went, swept away for ever—that is casting. So, then, on the Lord's part and on ours here is something to be done. To hear of it only is nothing—less than nothing. Do not let us cheat ourselves with words. And note, further, that it is to be done thoroughly. There is a kind of casting our burden that does not get rid of it at all, but only doubles it. If a friend of mine has some anxiety of which I can relieve him, and I say, "Now, I will see to that matter. Don't you trouble about it any more." What should the man say? "Thank you, I am sure; I will leave it with you, then." And away he goes, saying, "Well, that burden is gone, at any rate." And he feels lighter, and walks more briskly. But what if, instead of that, he should keep worrying me perpetually, "I hope you will not forget, will you? I do trust to you to remember. I really am very anxious about it—very." I should say to him, "Well, if you want to do it, sir, go and do it; but if I am to do it, fear not—I will." Don't you see the man has doubled the burden? He has put it on my shoulders, and carries it on his own at the same time. Oh, this untrusting trust, this unbelieving faith!

**II. CAST UPON THE LORD THE BURDEN OF BEGINNING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.** There are many of you who are feeling that burden, and a very heavy burden we may make of it. We have an idea that we want so many things besides Jesus, and that we cannot get Jesus until we get these other things. We want to feel our sins, and we want repentance, and we want earnestness, and we want faith. And then it may be that we are haunted by the fear of some past failure, or there is some besetment that grips us with a might that we cannot loosen. So the heart sinks under the burden. Now, what are you going to do? Time does not lessen the weakness. Waiting is not likely in any way to mend matters. This burden of want, of weakness, of fear is exactly what you have to roll off upon the Lord. Boldly go to Him and say, "Lord Jesus, Thou hast come into this world to save me. I am very needy and very foolish, but Thou knowest what I want; and Thou knowest all that I shall ever want. And now, Lord Jesus, I am just going to let Thee save me, now and always." As this is the beginning of the blessed life, so it is the secret of it all along. Religion is ours just exactly in proportion as we avail ourselves of Jesus Christ. Victory is ours just exactly as we let Jesus Christ help us. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*) *Burdens cast upon the Lord.*—I. THERE IS AN ENDLESS VARIETY OF THESE BURDENS laid upon us in this world. Care, toil, affliction, trial, weakness, dejection, want, fear, duty, endurance; and for all there is only one relief, "Cast thy burden"—"thy" burden, for there the emphasis is to be laid—"upon the Lord." I will classify these burdens. 1. Those of the flesh; such as, natural weakness, sickness, pain, sensual desires, corrupt affections, wasting toil, poverty. 2. Mental burdens: ignorance, mystery, knowledge; for "he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." 3. Social burdens, or burdens of the heart. Their name is legion. 4. Spiritual burdens. That of sin, of spiritual desertion, of fear.

**II. THE ENCOURAGEMENTS**—we have to cast our burdens upon the Lord. 1. We may do it. He "will not break the bruised reed, nor," etc. 2. Help in bearing our burdens is sure, if we seek aright. "He shall sustain thee." He does not promise to rid us of the burden but to sustain us under it, and that is better still. So was it with Paul. "My grace is sufficient for thee." (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *What to do with our burdens.*—I. **THE PERSONS ADDRESSED.** 1. They are burden-bearers. Who are not included in these? They differ from one another in all variety of ways, but all are alike here. 2. These burdens are very various. No two are exactly alike. God appoints them to each of us according to His own loving wisdom (Ps. xxxi. 7). God never makes a mistake. **II. THE DUTY ENJOINED.** "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." There is One on whom we may cast our burdens, even the Lord. But men turn to other expedients. With what success let Isaiah tell (xxix. 8). How are we to fulfil this duty? 1. By telling God all about our burden. 2. Asking His help to bear it. 3. Submitting to His will in reference to it. **III. THE PROMISE BY WHICH THIS DUTY IS URGED.** "He shall sustain thee." God does this sometimes—1. By removing the burden. 2. By sustaining the burden-bearer; not removing the burden, but upholding those who have to bear it. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *Burdens cast upon God.*—I. **WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY BURDENS.** By this metaphor, we are to understand all natural



evils, whether of body or of mind. Wounds, bruises, diseases, and every species of sickness, may be properly called bodily evils; but bereavements, disappointments, and all the marks of Divine displeasure, may more properly be termed mental evils. These two kinds of natural evil are intimately connected, and very frequently enhance each other. Men are here born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward. How often are their bodies racked with pain! How often are their eyes filled with tears! II. WHAT IT IS FOR THE AFFLICTED TO CAST THEIR BURDENS UPON THE LORD. 1. It implies a realizing sense that God has laid their burdens upon them. 2. They cannot do this without acknowledging that God has a right to lay their burdens upon them. 3. This implies entire submission to the conduct of God, or a willingness to endure the burdens which he pleases to lay upon them (Micah vii. 7; Job i. 21; 2 Kings iv. 26). 4. This farther implies casting themselves upon the Lord, which is the essence of the duty enjoined in the text. Men cannot lay the burdens which they feel, upon God; nor can God take to Himself the burdens which He lays upon them. But they can cast themselves upon the Lord, which will afford them immediate support and relief under their burdens. When the general of an army lays a heavy burden upon an obedient soldier, he may cast himself, and consequently his burden, upon the general, by saying, "Sir, this appears a burden too heavy for me to carry. But you know what is proper to lay upon me. I am your soldier; my strength and my life are at your disposal. It is your concern to improve my strength and my life for the public good. And if it be best that my strength should be exhausted, or my life sacrificed, at this time, by bearing this burden, I have nothing to say; I cheerfully submit." Just so the child of sorrow may go to his heavenly Father and say, "My burden is great, and it seems I must sink under it. But Thou knowest what is best. I am in Thy hand as the clay is in the hand of the potter. Not my will, but Thine, be done."

III. WHAT EVIDENCE THERE IS THAT GOD WILL SUSTAIN THEM. 1. There is ground to believe that God will sustain those who cast their burdens upon Him, because He laid their burdens upon them to show their weakness, and make them take hold of His strength. 2. Those who cast their burdens upon the Lord are properly prepared to receive Divine support and consolation. 3. The glory of God requires Him to support those who look to Him for strength or relief under their burdens. 4. God has promised to afford all proper support and relief to those who come to Him with their cares and burdens, and place an unshaken confidence in His faithfulness. IMPROVEMENT. If God will sustain those who cast their burdens upon Him, then—1. Burdens may become the means of great good. 2. The greatest burdens may become the most beneficial. 3. The afflicted never have any reason to murmur or complain under the burdens which are laid upon them. 4. The afflicted never ought to faint and sink under the weight of their burdens. 5. It highly concerns them to call upon His name. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *The burden of the righteous*:—I. THE RIGHTEOUS MAN. Justified by faith. No condemnation. II. THE TRIALS OF THE RIGHTEOUS MAN. 1. Those which he bears in common with all men. Sickness, poverty, bereavement. 2. Those peculiar to the class to which he belongs. The prevalence of sin in the world, the difficulties attending the diffusion of Gospel truth, and the temptations which militate against a godly life, are burdens which all Christians are to bear in common. 3. Those which are restricted to him exclusively as an individual. He has his individual hopes and fears, his individual strength and weakness, and his individual pleasures and sufferings. III. THE DUTY OF THE RIGHTEOUS MAN IN VIEW OF HIS TRIALS. "Cast thy burden on the Lord." 1. The possibility of relief. The burden can be removed. This is true of all his burdens. 2. There is but one way of obtaining this relief. By casting it on the Lord. 3. This one way of relief requires a personal effort. "Cast." IV. THE ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH IS GIVEN TO THE RIGHTEOUS MAN TO CAST HIS BURDEN ON THE LORD. "He shall never," etc. 1. The Lord's ability to sustain. 2. His willingness to sustain. He is a God of mercy. 3. He has made great arrangements to relieve man of his burden. In His providence, in His word, in His Church, and in the agency of His Holy Spirit. Then cast thy burden upon Him, O my soul, and He will sustain thee. (*P. L. Davies, M.A.*) *Man's burden and help*:—I. THE BURDEN. 1. Temporal burdens. (1) Affliction. (2) Disastrous providences. (3) Poverty. (4) Domestic troubles. 2. Spiritual burdens. II. THE DIRECTION. "Cast thy burden," etc. 1. In confident faith. 2. By constant prayer. 3. By cultivating a devotional frame of mind. III. THE PROMISE. "He will sustain thee."—1. By imparting increased strength. 2. By the removal of our burdens. (*T. Smith.*) *Life's burden and*

its relief:—I. EVERY HUMAN LIFE HAS ITS BURDEN. "Thy burden." There is a physical, social, moral, religious burden. Burden suggests three thoughts. 1. Unnaturalness. We are not born with burdens. Have angels and innocent beings a heavy burden? I trow not. 2. Oppression. A burden presses one down. Life's burden often presses heavily on all the powers of one's nature, corporal, mental, and moral. Christ saw the race "heavy laden." 3. Obstruction. How a burden retards the traveller's progress. By reason of the load that presses on us we cannot move on in the path of life. II. EVERY HUMAN LIFE MAY HAVE ITS RELIEF. "Cast thy burden on the Lord." 1. The Lord will bear the burden. He will bear it, either by removing it altogether, or by imparting strength more than equal to its pressure. 2. There is a method of transferring the burden. The more the confidence the more the burden is transferred. God is more than a counsel for our legal embarrassments, more than a physician for our diseases, more than a father in whom to repose all our concerns. (*Homilist.*) *The passing of the burdens:*—We all know the critical moment when we are contemplating seeking relief by leaving our tasks. "I will just leave the whole thing; I will get away from it!" Such flight is usually fruitless. We carry our burden with us. On the further shore it sits upon us still. 1. There are some types of burden in which the refuge of flight will be found to be a rare and splendid defence. "Flee youthful lusts." In these matters flight is the only method of salvation. Get away from inflammatory books. Give up inflammatory companionships. "Flee from idolatry." Do not take part for a moment in the temple worship of an alien god. Do not sit in the temple of Mammon. Do not play with worldly maxims. Do not think there is security in partial worldliness, in a moderate compromise. 2. But the majority of burdens cannot be disposed of by the method of flight. We have no resources but to cast them on God. What becomes of them when we take them to the Lord? There are some burdens which pass away, even while they are being recounted. They evaporate in the telling! To talk about them to God is to lose them! If you take a dimmed, steamed mirror into a dry, sunny room, the obscuring veil passes away, and the mirror becomes clear. And there are some burdens which perplex the spirit, and hinder its outlook, which, when we take them to the Lord, pass away like mist in the sunny light of the morning. (1) There is the burden of fearfulness. What is this burden except the lack of assurance? The depression is born of uncertainty. The soul moves in fear, because it does not feel the presence of God. The lack of assurance breeds the restless offspring of anxiety, fretfulness and care. Now, this is one of the burdens which evaporate in the telling. Fearfulness is always the companion of little faith. If we have triumphant faith, fearfulness is abolished. "Perfect love casteth out fear." While we are talking to our Father, the sweet genius of assurance returns. Our faith awakes. Our love revives. The heart grows calm in spiritual fellowship. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord," and, even while thou art telling it, the burden will disappear. (2) There is the burden of perplexity. Here, again, is a burden which frequently disappears while we are describing it. If we take it into our Father's house, even if it does not pass entirely away, it will be so eased that it will not crush us like an iron garment. We shall have freedom of movement. It is a beautiful experience in the lives of the saints that, when they take their burden to God, they frequently find the clue even while they are bowed in prayer. "In Thy light shall we see light." (3) There is the burden of guilt. No man can reverently and penitently take this burden to the Lord without losing it. It goes in the telling of it. "Father, I am no more worthy to be called Thy son, make . . ." "Bring forth the best robe." "So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up to the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulder, and fell from off his back. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." 3. There are some burdens which are not removed even when we take them to the Lord. They do not disappear in the telling. Is there some other gracious ministry of the loving Lord? Yes, if the burden remain, the bearer of it will be strengthened (2 Cor. xii. 7-9). Some burdens are permitted to remain. Perhaps the burden is an unwelcome and unpleasant duty. Perhaps it is some physical infirmity. Perhaps it is prolonged labour in a wageless and most exhausting sphere. What, then, will God do with us? "He shall sustain thee." The Lord will deal with the bearer of the burden. He will increase thy strength, and so in reality diminish thy load. This word "sustain" is a fine, wealthy word of most comforting content. There is in it a suggestion of the ministry of a nurse. He will deal with us as though we were

infants. He will be to us the great mother-God. And He will manifest towards us all the tenderness of a nursing ministry. There is also in the word the suggestion of food. He will feed us. He will give to us the bread of life. He will increase our vitality. He will make our powers more alive, more wakeful, more exuberant. And I find in the word the further gracious meaning of "support." He will carry me, if need be. The concluding word of the text is purposed to heighten the assurance of the psalmist into the peace of absolute certainty. "He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." The life that is held by God, possessed and inspired by God, will be delivered from all trembling uncertainties. On the one hand, he will not be dismayed by a frown or a threat; nor, on the other hand, will he be enticed by some bewitching fascination. He will continue his way unmoved. The road will be straight; the walk will be firm; his footing will be sure. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The Lord our burden-bearer*:—What wonderful condescension there is in this. Were we to see a royal prince taking upon his own back some heavy load out of pity for some poor man who was staggering beneath it, how we should admire and extol such gracious condescension. But what would that be compared to the grace of God as declared in our text. Consider—I. THE BURDEN HERE REFERRED TO. It may be—1. Of remorse and guilty agitation. Some do not feel this, for they have "seared" their consciences, and so a hard insensitive surface over them that will not feel when accusation is brought against it. But others do feel this. Now, our text is for them. 2. Of solicitude. It may be concerning temporal things, or spiritual, or both. 3. Of service. Moses felt this, and so do many now. All of us have some service to render. 4. Of grief. 5. Of fear. 6. Of temptation. Now, whatever it be, give heed to—II. THE DIRECTION AS TO WHAT WE ARE TO DO. There are many counsellors—philosophy, morality, the world; but inspired wisdom gives the counsel of our text. Now, such counsel implies—1. Some acquaintance with God. 2. Desire of His assistance and relief. 3. Faith. 4. Prayer. 5. That we are so to cast our burden upon the Lord as not to bear it ourselves, but to leave it with Him. See Hannah. III. THE ENCOURAGING STIMULUS THAT IS ANNEXED TO THE DECLARATION IN THE TEXT. 1. He can sustain thee. What is the amount of the burden that you have? Is it heavy as the Alps? Is it heavy as the globe? Roll it on Jesus Christ, roll it on His almighty strength; He is able to carry any load, to bear any and every weight; He can sustain thee. 2. He is mercifully disposed to sustain thee. One of the most miserable delusions of the philosophical infidelity conceived of God, was, that He is a great Being that cares nothing at all about little things—that He sits in the circle of eternity, not noticing the worms on this speck of matter called the globe, in this far-off region in the universe of space. That may be the notion that infidelity has of God, but that is not the notion the Bible gives of God. 3. He has solemnly bound Himself to do it. In the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, you find two things mentioned by which the people of God have strong consolation—the promise and the oath of God; and by these two things you are assured that God will sustain you in the day of trouble. 4. He has sustained you. It will be very easy for you to put your eye on several memorials that you yourselves have reared to the honour, and the goodness, and the faithfulness of God. (*T. E. Beaumont.*) *The burden of life*:—A perfect being has no burden; nothing is too great, nothing too small; there is neither excess nor defect; there is no falling short of a given mark, no inconsistency, no incompetency, no pain, no disease, no slow declining and fading away. But we are not perfect; we are conceived and born in sin; the brand of sin is on us; our life is brief, and the knowledge of that brevity haunts the fast-flying hours. We long to be better, wiser, purer than we are, to be safe from storm and clear of anxiety, to be strong and well, in body, mind, and spirit; that we are not what we would be, either towards our God or towards our poor, dear brethren in this world, where all alike have sorrow and demand help, is, in short, the burden of this mortal life. Will you, then, cast your burden on the gay world and hope to lose sight of it there? The world of pleasure is always ready to relieve us of our burdens; as we enter her wide and attractive halls, there are ministering spirits at the doors to take from the incomer what robe or garment of sorrow he may have, and put it away. The worst of this is, that the thing so put away is not lost, nor destroyed; it is carefully wrapped up; it is marked with your name; and it is there in its dark receptacle, waiting till the entertainment breaks up, and ready for you again. Within the great dance-hall, and up and down through the illuminated gardens, where the music is playing and everything looks

fair, they are laughing and singing, and going to and fro, and the sorrow is forgotten for the hour, and it seems to have been wise and right to dispose in that way of the burden of our sorrow and our sin. But what we brought in with us, we must take again as we go forth; and to the old load shall be added a hundred-fold of weight of shame and remorse. Can we think of any other expedient to save us from the alternative of going straight to the Lord? Perchance you may cast your burden on some friend or fellow-sinner. It is natural for us to tell our griefs to each other; a sorrow shared is a sorrow lessened. But here also is danger. Friendship is an uncertain thing; it is often too frail to bear rude handling. A man to be a real helper ought to be wise and good, a true and faithful guide, calm, strong, learned, prudent. Every argument which leads us to cast ourselves on such a friend, is an argument in favour of One who is all that and more; to whom the wise man owes his wisdom, and the strong man his strength. And thus are we brought to God, as the best on whom to cast the burden, for the simple reason that none else but He can give us relief. Go to thy Lord; take to Him the trouble, whatever it be, and tell it out to Him. Open thy heart, though to Him it is always open; seek Him as thou wouldst a confidant, a bosom friend. Thou hast thy burden, of necessity or want, of hard work and dull hours bringing little or no good, of anxiety about others or fears for thyself; of buried hope or affections wasted on unworthy objects; of spiritual dryness, or lack of earnest faith; of longing for the unattainable or regret for the irreparable; whatever it be, bring that sorrow straight to thy God, with the conviction that it is the only rational and sensible thing to do, that all other expedients are vain, that there is no help in the world, or in any child of man, or anywhere out of Him; and surely the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain. (*Morgan Dix, D.D.*) *Burdens adapted to those who bear them*.—Every man's "burden" is just the one fitted to the individual man. It is suited for his present discipline—a selected, ordained, adjusted thing—"thy burden," "your burden." It is a celebrated thought of an old-world moralist (Socrates) that, if all the misfortunes of mankind were cast into a public stock, to be equally distributed among the whole species, those who now think themselves most unhappy, would prefer the share they are already possessed of before that which would fall to them by such a division; and an old-world poet (Horace) carries the thought even further when he says, "that the hardships or misfortunes which we lie under are more easy to us than those of any other person would be in case we could change conditions with him." And this is the moral of the old-world fable, which tells us that Jupiter made a proclamation that every mortal should bring in his griefs and calamities and throw them into a heap. This was done in a plain appointed for the purpose, and the heap became a prodigious mountain that seemed to rise above the clouds. The heap was at last distributed among the two sexes, who made a most piteous sight as they wandered up and down under the pressure of their several burdens. The whole plain was filled with murmurs and complaints, groans and lamentations. Jupiter at length taking compassion on the poor mortals, ordered them a second time to lay down their loads, with a design to give every one his own again. They discharged themselves with a great deal of pleasure. But the phantom which had led them into error was replaced by a goddess of quite a different figure—her motions were steady and composed, and her aspect serious but cheerful. Every now and again she cast her eyes towards heaven, and fixed them upon Jupiter: her name was Patience. She took her stand by the mount of sorrows, which at once contracted to one-third of the size. She then returned every man his own proper calamity, and teaching him how to bear it in the most commodious manner, he marched off with it contentedly, being very well pleased that he had not been left to his own choice as to the kind of evils which fell to his lot. Thus far the fable. What is all this but St. Paul's teaching (Gal. vi. 5). It is what the psalmist says, "thy burden." It is what St. Peter means, "All your care" (*M. Fuller*.)

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 PSALM LVI.

VERS. 1-19. **Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up.—The deprecable and the desirable:—**I. THE DEPRECABLE IN RELATION TO MAN. 1.

infants. He will be to us the great mother-God. And He will manifest towards us all the tenderness of a nursing ministry. There is also in the word the suggestion of food. He will feed us. He will give to us the bread of life. He will increase our vitality. He will make our powers more alive, more wakeful, more exuberant. And I find in the word the further gracious meaning of "support." He will carry me, if need be. The concluding word of the text is purposed to heighten the assurance of the psalmist into the peace of absolute certainty. "He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." The life that is held by God, possessed and inspired by God, will be delivered from all trembling uncertainties. On the one hand, he will not be dismayed by a frown or a threat; nor, on the other hand, will he be enticed by some bewitching fascination. He will continue his way unmoved. The road will be straight; the walk will be firm; his footing will be sure. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The Lord our burden-bearer*:—What wonderful condescension there is in this. Were we to see a royal prince taking upon his own back some heavy load out of pity for some poor man who was staggering beneath it, how we should admire and extol such gracious condescension. But what would that be compared to the grace of God as declared in our text. Consider—I. THE BURDEN HERE REFERRED TO. It may be—1. Of remorse and guilty agitation. Some do not feel this, for they have "seared" their consciences, and so a hard insensitive surface over them that will not feel when accusation is brought against it. But others do feel this. Now, our text is for them. 2. Of solicitude. It may be concerning temporal things, or spiritual, or both. 3. Of service. Moses felt this, and so do many now. All of us have some service to render. 4. Of grief. 5. Of fear. 6. Of temptation. Now, whatever it be, give heed to—II. THE DIRECTION AS TO WHAT WE ARE TO DO. There are many counsellors—philosophy, morality, the world; but inspired wisdom gives the counsel of our text. Now, such counsel implies—1. Some acquaintance with God. 2. Desire of His assistance and relief. 3. Faith. 4. Prayer. 5. That we are so to cast our burden upon the Lord as not to bear it ourselves, but to leave it with Him. See Hannah. III. THE ENCOURAGING STIMULUS THAT IS ANNEXED TO THE DECLARATION IN THE TEXT. 1. He can sustain thee. What is the amount of the burden that you have? Is it heavy as the Alps? Is it heavy as the globe? Roll it on Jesus Christ, roll it on His almighty strength; He is able to carry any load, to bear any and every weight; He can sustain thee. 2. He is mercifully disposed to sustain thee. 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 PSALM LVI.

VERS. 1-13. **Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up.—The deprecable and the desirable.**—I. THE DEPRECABLE IN RELATION TO MAN. 1.

Craven-heartedness. A man whose heart is morally sound is bold as a lion, invincible as the light of day. 2. Presumptuous revenge. II. THE DESIRABLE IN RELATION TO GOD. 1. A desire to trust Almighty God (ver. 3). All souls should centre in Him, cling to Him as planets to the sun. This is the real antidote to cowardly fear. 2. A desire to praise Almighty God (vers. 4, 10, 12). Praise consisteth in attuning our whole lives to His Spirit and law. The hymn of praise acceptable to Him is not a composition of words, but a composition of soul virtues and noble deeds. 3. A desire to be remembered by Almighty God (ver. 8). No words can affect a true heart as tears can; God's infinite heart feels our tears as they fall. 4. A desire to walk before Almighty God (ver. 13). To "walk before God" implies a constant consciousness of His presence and an enjoyment of His friendship. "Walk" before Him with His light shining behind you and over you, lighting up all the path and scenery ahead. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 3, 4. **What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.**—*Fear and faith:*—It is not given to many men to add new words to the vocabulary of religious emotion. But so far as an examination of the Old Testament avails, I find that David was the first that ever employed the word that is here translated, "I will trust," with a religious meaning. And it is a favourite word of his. I find it occurs constantly in his psalms; twice as often, or nearly so, in the psalms attributed to David as in all the rest of the psalter put together; and it is in itself a most significant and poetic word. But, first of all, I ask you to notice how beautifully there comes out here the occasion of trust. "What time I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee." This psalm is one of those belonging to the Sauline persecution. If we adopt the allocation in the superscription, it was written at one of the very lowest points of his fortunes. And there seem to be one or two of its phrases which acquire new force, if we regard the psalm as drawn forth by the perils of his wandering, hunted life. For instance—"Thou tellest my wanderings," is no mere expression of the feelings with which he regarded the changes of this earthly pilgrimage, but is the confidence of the fugitive that in the doublings and windings of his flight God's eye marked him. "What time I am afraid," I will trust. That is no trust which is only fair weather trust, nor the product of outward circumstances, but of his own fixed resolves. I will put my trust in Thee. True faith, by a mighty effort of the will, fixes its gaze on the Divine helper, and there finds it possible and wise to lose its fears. Then, still further, these words, or rather one portion of them, give us a bright light and a beautiful thought as to the essence and inmost centre of this faith or trust. Scholars tell us that the word here translated "trust" signifies literally to cling to or hold fast anything, expressing thus both the notion of a good tight grip and of intimate union. Now, is not that metaphor vivid and full of teaching as well as of impulse? "I will trust in Thee." "And he exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord." We may follow out the metaphor of the word in varied illustrations. For instance, here is a strong prop, and here is the trailing, lithe feebleness of the vine. Gather up the leaves that are creeping all along the ground, and coil them around that support, and up they go straight towards the heavens. Here is a limpet in some pond or other, left by the tide, and it has relaxed its grasp a little. Touch it with your finger and it grips fast to the rock, and you will want a hammer before you can dislodge it. Or, take that story in the Acts of the Apostles, about the lame man healed by Peter and John. All his life long he had been lame, and when at last healing comes, one can fancy with what a tight grasp "the lame man held Peter and John." That is faith, cleaving to Christ, twining round Him with all the tendrils of our heart, as the vine does round its pole; holding to Him by His hand, as a tottering man does by the strong hand that upholds. And then one word more. These two clauses that I have put together give us not only the occasion of faith in fear, and the essence of faith in this clinging, but they also give us very beautifully the victory of faith. You see with what poetic art—if we may use such words about the breathings of such a soul—he repeats the two main words of the former verse in the latter, only in inverted order—"What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee." He is possessed by the lower emotion, and resolves to escape from its sway into the light and liberty of faith. And then the next words still keep up the contrast of faith and fear, only that now he is possessed by the more blessed mood, and determines that he will not fall back into the bondage and darkness of the baser. "In God I have put my trust; I will not

fear." He has confidence, and in the strength of that he resolves that he will not yield to fear. There are plenty of reasons for dread in the dark possibilities and not less dark certainties of life. Disasters, losses, partings, disappointments, sicknesses, death, may any of them come at any moment, and some of them will certainly come sooner or later. Temptations lurk around us like serpents in the grass, they beset us in open ferocity like lions in our path. Is it not wise to fear unless our faith has hold of that great promise, "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; there shall no evil befall thee"? (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *On public prayer in connection with natural national calamities*:—There are two classes of calamities in connection with which men have felt themselves in all ages moved to public confession and supplication; those which come to them from the hand of Providence through the order of the system of Nature around them, and those which have their origin wholly or chiefly in the follies, vices and sins of mankind. But the two stand by no means on the same ground with regard to the question of national humiliation and prayer. In the case of calamities which a nation has brought upon itself by its follies and crimes, there can be no question of the duty of humiliation and prayer. But when we are asked to join in an act of national humiliation on account of a scanty harvest, we seem to be standing on quite different ground. Chastisement which seems to fall on us from the skies brings suffering, but with it much that modifies it, and which may make us see, if we have but the open eye, that it is blessing in disguise. If we were asked to recognize in a late and scanty harvest a signal part of the Divine chastisement, I should feel little disposed to respond. And this not on the ground of doubts about the power of prayer in its legitimate sphere; but rather from a deepening sense of the reality and grandeur of this power of prayer. We are only just emerging from Jewish levels of thought and belief in the Christian Church. Through all the Christian ages we have been prone to return on the tracks of Judaism, and to conceive of God, in His ways in the providential government of the world, as the ruler, after all, of a little realm, at the centre of which are the interests of our little lives. 1. The principle on which we are less ready than of old to rush to confession under natural national calamities of an ordinary type, is a just and noble one, and is a sign of vital progress in our theological conceptions, and our view of our relation to the world and to God. 2. This progress in the Christian thought of our times runs parallel to the progress in our conceptions of the true nature and the subject-matter of prayer, which is the fruit of growing knowledge and experience in the individual believing soul. As experience widens and deepens prayer becomes, or ought to become, less a cry of pain, and more an act of communion; intercourse with the Father in heaven, whereby His strength, His serenity, His hope flow into and abide in our hearts. I should think but little of a Christian experience in which there is not a constant lifting up into the higher regions the subject-matter of prayer. 3. I by no means say, that even in an advanced state of Christian intelligence, there may not be natural national calamities, under which it would be wise and right for a nation to humble itself in confession and supplication before God. We must not regard our prayer as a sure means of securing the removal of such calamities. Always, behind the prayer, if it is to be worth anything, is the thought, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth to Him good." There is in man, deep down in his nature, a sense, not only that the relation between his nature and the world around him, and the God who rules it, have become jangled and out of tune, but also that the responsibility for the discord lies at his door. Everywhere, in all countries, in all ages, at the bottom of man's deepest thoughts is the sense of sin. It is natural for men to rush to humble confession and importunate supplication when they think that the hand of God is upon them in judgment; and it is good and right for them at such seasons to approach Him, if they will but remember that the message of the Gospel is that God is reconciled in Christ to His children, that all His dealings with them, His sharpest and sternest discipline, are moved and ruled by the hand of that love which gave the well-beloved Son to Gethsemane and Calvary, that men might know its measure. (J. Baldwin Brown, B.A.) *Faith conquering fear*:—Our nature is strangely compounded. Trembling and trust often co-exist in us. It was so in David, whose heart is laid bare to us in these psalms. Now, fearfulness, although it has some ill effects which are sure to appear unless it is kept under the control of faith, nevertheless it has its own appointed good results in the formation of Christian character. Some have no fear, they are utterly unconcerned as to God and His claims. They need that the alarm bell of fear



should be rung in their hearts. And many Christians need more of it: their flippant talk about sacred things; their indifference as to the condition of the ungodly: their heedlessness of walk would cease and give place to a holy fear. Fear, then, is not to be indiscriminately condemned. But it is when fear paralyzes trust that it becomes a sin, and as such is condemned. I. OCCASIONS OF UNDOE FEAR ARE—1. The Christian worker's sense of responsibility. 2. Experiences of affliction. 3. Constitutional nervous disorder. 4. Anxiety as to the future. II. ITS DISADVANTAGES: it hinders all success and misrepresents God. III. ITS CURE. Get more light and exercise more trust. (*Alfred Rowland, B.A.*) *Fear and trust*:—"What time I am afraid." Alas! those times are many. Let me speak of three causes of fear and unrest, and the trust which should remove them. I. FEAR FOR THE MORROW. There is the fear which arises from a contemplation of possible exigencies and contingencies in the future of our life's temporal economy. Where one can sing—

". . . I do not ask to see  
The distant scene: one step enough for me,"

a hundred are bowed down with anxiety, worry, care, and the restlessness of doubt. I am perfectly sure that underneath the placid face and the serene smile that sits on many a brow there is much fear and alarm as to the future. What is the remedy for this? What is there that will give a man peace? My answer is—Trust! Trust in God, His wisdom, His love, His Fatherly care, His plans and His purposes! If there is one phase of the teachings of the Bible that has been more attested by human experience than another, it is the assurance that trust in God is the secret of strength, serenity, and peace. He is behind all events, and before all contingencies. He is above the cloud and below the waters. Say, then, O ye timid ones, ye sorrowing ones, ye foreboding ones, ye anxious ones, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee." II. Another great cause of fear is THE FACT OF DEATH. God has so constituted us that the very elements of life stand in battle array against the elements that produce death. It is natural, and in perfect harmony with God's purpose in us, that we should cling to life; and by so much as we cling to life, by that much do we fear death. And perhaps the two feelings in regard to death that most contribute to this fear are the loneliness and uncertainty that inevitably belongs to it. "I shall die alone," said the great Pascal. Nothing is so distressing to the human spirit as solitude, and when solitude is overhung with darkness it is then full of awfulness. And it is the awfulness that comes from the solitude and darkness of death that makes us shrink from it. What is the panacea for this fear? Trust in God—God's presence, God's sustaining hand. If there be a Providence watching over us in life, is it not reasonable to suppose that some provision for our need in the hour and conflict of death is made for us? that His providence will open the gate of death for us and guide us through? that His care for us will be as manifest then as now? Does a mother watch over her child all day—fondle it, nestle it in her bosom, teach it, protect it, uphold it—and then leave it alone when the darkness comes? III. FEAR IN REGARD TO THE DESTINIES OF THE FUTURE LIFE. They ask, Where will my destiny be? Shall I be numbered with the blest, or rejected with the lost? Momentous questions! Tremendous thoughts! I cannot wonder that they make men anxious. The wonder is that, living as we do on the threshold of eternity, we are not more concerned. Whither, at such times of foreboding, shall we flee for succour? To God, the Father of our spirits. Every soul that turns to Him with the cry, "Father, I have sinned"; every heart that yearns for His forgiveness, shall have refuge and peace on earth, shall have a welcome home in heaven (*W. J. Hocking, B.A.*) *The saints' great resource in times of fear*:—I. THERE ARE MANY TIMES AND CIRCUMSTANCES CALCULATED TO AWAKEN OUR FEARS. 1. Our state of sin should awaken great fear in our hearts. 2. Well may we fear when conscience convicts and condemns. 3. In times of temptation we ought to fear. 4. A backsliding state may well make us afraid. 5. To be in affliction and nigh to death in a state of impenitence, is a state which should excite the greatest fears. II. THERE IS AN ADEQUATE RESOURCE UNDER EVERY KIND AND DEGREE OF FEAR. 1. God has revealed the doctrine of His providence as an antidote to all those fears which relate to this life. 2. He has revealed the doctrine of His grace as an antidote to all those fears which result from sin and guilt. 3. He has revealed the doctrine of immortal glory and blessedness to remove the fear of death and our anxiety concerning another world. III. THERE IS A GREAT BLESSED-

NESS IN KNOWING THIS RESOURCE BEFORE OUR FEARS COME. 1. In some cases the knowledge of this Divine resource has delivered the mind from all fear.—Fear concerning the body or the soul—life or death, the grave or eternity (Job xiii. 15; Prov. xxviii. 1). 2. Where it does not do this, it may prevent the worse effects of fear. Two ships in a storm, the one with a good anchor and anchorage, and the other without either, meet that storm under widely different circumstances (2 Cor. vii. 10). 3. Sometimes in the most fearful circumstances it enables us not only in patience to possess our souls, but to glorify God. IV. THE GREATEST OF ALL FEARS WILL SEIZE UPON THOSE WHO KNOW NOT THIS ONLY TRUE ANTIDOTE TO FEAR. 1. The absence of that salutary fear, which leads to provision against danger, proves the extremity of that danger in which we are involved. 2. That fear which is accompanied with utter despair must be the portion of those who have not found the true refuge. 3. They will realize infinitely more than they ever feared in the very deepest seasons of their despair in this life. For it is very certain no man ever formed a sufficiently awful idea of the worm that dieth not, and of eternity. Let all these considerations induce sinners to prize that refuge of mercy and grace which the Gospel presents, and let us be allowed to turn them all into an occasion for urging upon them the immediate and indispensable necessity of trust in God. (*Evangelist.*)

Ver. 4. *In God will I praise His word.*—*The moral impulse imparted to individuals and communities by the study of the Bible:*—My object is not merely to demonstrate the inspiration of the Bible, but to win you to the study of it. It may possibly be alleged by many persons, especially of the more busy classes of society, that they have no time for the attention to the Bible which is recommended. 1. The plea is dangerous as well as monstrous and criminal. If a son or a friend were to aver that he had become too busy, that he was too much engaged, for days and weeks and months together, to read an epistle from a distant land, dictated by parental love or by friendship, to what conclusion should we come as to the nature of the pretence or the character of the mind that could dictate it? Could we, even in this ordinary case, admit for an instant the validity of the excuse, or suppose that any business of life could be so urgent? 2. The plea is untrue. A few verses, snatched from the hurry of life (if life must indeed be so hurried) may suffice. In a few minutes you may read enough to furnish materials for reflection and inquiry. You may walk or work—and think. And we claim such study for the Bible because—I. THE INFLUENCE WHICH IT EXERTS IS DISTINCTLY MORAL. It deals with man as a moral being, responsible for his actions, and to be influenced by motives. II. AND THIS IMPULSE WHICH IT COMMUNICATES IS HOLY. Notwithstanding passages in it which infidels have urged have an unholy tendency, the overwhelming effect of the book is towards holiness. Not so other sacred books—the Koran, and the like. III. AND THIS IMPULSE IS MIGHTY. IV. PROGRESSIVE. V. BUT SIMPLY INSTRUMENTAL. The truth contained in the sacred volume exerts an influence analogous, both in its force and its secrecy, to that of some of the most wonder-working agencies of nature. It resembles the unseen presence of magnetism or electricity, which move as by a touch the elements and masses around us—disposing them to order or clothing them with beauty; or it is like the vegetative power, that in the darkness and concealment of the earth and the clods of the valley impels the seed to shoot and rise and spread fertility upon the smiling surface. In the secret recesses of the soul, and in the dark and hidden depths of a heart, no human eye can penetrate and no human philosophy unravel—it subdues and sanctifies, works repentance and humiliation, and the settled purposes of a renewed mind, till on the surface appears the penitential tear, the bended knee, the contrite sigh, the believing and imploring reception of Christ, the moral and spiritual renewal of character, the outward, fearless, and heaven-sealing profession of a true religion; and every right-minded observer attests the truth of the Divine declaration, “Behold I make all things new.” (*F. A. Cox, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. *Thou tellest my wanderings: put Thou my tears into Thy bottle; are they not in Thy book?*—*Life on the human side and the Divine:*—There is a description of life given in the Bible which has been objected to as depressing and unreal. Life is represented, it is said, as a scene of unending struggle and sorrow; and men are made to walk under a constant shadow. There is some apparent truth in this. But the question to be first asked is, Has the Bible view of life truth in it? If so, is it not better to take it fairly into account? And it may be a further question, Has the Bible no compensation for the saddening view of life

which it sometimes presents? I. **THE HUMAN SIDE OF LIFE.** It is described under the form of wandering and tears: its activities as "wanderings," its passive side as "tears." Still it may be said, What reason can there be in taking David's life, and making it a copy of all human lives? Has not God given us in the world sunshine as well as cloud, has He not scattered manifold pleasures through it, and should we not thankfully acknowledge this? It is very true, and we must beware of taking any part of the Bible, and pressing it so far as to make it contradict both itself and our experience. Now, there are two things which God in His kindness has sent to the relief of men in the journey of life. There are the natural blessings that are, in a measure, close to all, visiting them often whether they will or not; and there are the helps and hopes which come from a felt relation to Himself. The first may be called the blessings of His hand, the second of His heart. The cloud would be too dark for poor humanity unless God had given it a silver lining, and it is neither good for us, nor grateful to Him, to overlook this. We may begin with the strange, mysterious pleasure God has put into life itself—to live, to breathe, to look on things and have an interest in them, to move, to walk among them—these are roots that go down into the world and hold men on to it by an indescribable attachment. It is one of the kind things in the world that God has given man a liking to life itself. How much there is that is pleasant. Nature, in her varied beauty; the benediction of work, of honest, earnest work, whether it be of hand or head; the kindly affections of the human heart, the love of home and kindred, the solace of friendship, the happiness of doing any good. We seem far enough away now from wandering and tears, and yet they return upon us. It was a saying of the ancients that "for every joy granted to man, there are two sorrows, one before and one behind." Have you not felt this description of life true in its changefulness? How few of us are in the homes of our youth! Or, if near them, how far have we wandered in associations! Changes have taken place around and within which make us almost forget what we were. "Our fathers, where are they?" Or think of life in its constant struggle, perfection never gained, rest never reached. But come—

II. **TO THE DIVINE SIDE OF LIFE.** What does the view of God secure for the man who looks to Him? Well—1. A Divine measure. "Thou tellest my wanderings." This means not merely that God speaks of them, but takes the tale and number of them. Plato has said that in making the world "God mathematizes." All is fixed and sure as is the science of numbers. It does not seem so, but it is. 2. This view of God secures a Divine sympathy in life: "Put thou my tears into Thy bottle." However skilful the guide might be, he would not meet our case unless he had a heart. There are rough defiles and thorny brakes through which the road leads—there is no help for it: these things make it the road; but what concerns us most is the manner of the Guide—that He should take our frailty into account and provide resting-places and refreshment for us as they are needed. 3. This view of God secures a Divine meaning in life—"Are they not in Thy book?" It is natural to understand this of both the wandering and the tears. They are written down, and therefore have an intelligent and consistent meaning. And by and by we shall see this. (*J. Ker, D.D.*) *Tears of Jesus:*—In the cabinets of antiquaries is often to be seen a small bottle found in ancient tombs. It is called a lachrymatory, or tear-bottle, and is supposed to have contained the tears of some bereaved relative of the departed one who was laid in the tomb. The heathen believed that the gods loved to see a good man struggling with adversity, for then the greatness of the human soul comes out. And our God loves to see the faith and patience of His sorrowing servants. But we desire to speak of Jesus, whose language the psalmist, by prophetic anticipation, speaks. The tears of Jesus, then, are our subject. His life was characterized by sorrow. But He did not weep at His crucifixion—there was never moral weakness in His tears. He was full of sympathy, and He was full of tenderness, but He was never moved to tears by the cruelty of men. But He wept in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us of "His strong crying and tears." There are tears which we cannot fully understand; but they were tears for the sins of the world, the weight of which in that most mysterious agony He was then bearing. Shall we, then, continue in sin? And He wept at the grave of Lazarus (John xi.). Then it is not inconsistent with spiritual-mindedness—as some say it is—to feel very keenly the sorrows and distress of life. "Jesus wept." And thus He assures us of His sympathy. And He wept on His way to Jerusalem, when He beheld the city and wept over it. It was the day of His triumphal entry,

and yet He wept. But it was not for Himself, but for others—for the people of Jerusalem. They were tears of patriotism. He wept for His country's sorrows. But observe it was not so much the national disasters as the national sins, that He wept. It is the reverse with the tears of ordinary patriotism. And patriotic pride and boasting, how often it is because of prosperity rather than of righteousness. But let our patriotism be sanctified by prayer. Prayer was in the heart of Jesus for His country. Let it be so for ours. (*Dean Goulburn.*) *Man's tears in God's bottle*:—Tears are here employed as exponents of sorrows and troubles. But it is not all tears that are treasured up by God. I. TEARS OF REPENTANCE. When the early years have been marked by transgression, the coming of the days of grace can never be without tears. Take as illustrations the woman who was a sinner; the Philippian jailor; Peter when he went out and wept bitterly on that day which we may regard as the day of his abiding conversion to God. II. TEARS WHICH ARE WEPT IN THE SPIRITUAL CONFLICTS OF LIFE. III. TEARS WEPT OVER THE WICKEDNESS OF MEN AND THE APPARENT SLOWNESS WITH WHICH THE KINGDOM OF GOD MAKES ITS WAY. The greatest and the best men the world has ever known have been the men who have experienced the deepest sorrow. The man who can smile from the cradle to the grave knows neither himself, nor the world, nor God. Ezekiel tells of those on whom the Lord bid him put a mark for that they "sigh and cry for all the abominations that he done in the city." Their tears were put into God's bottle. Never was the truth contained in our text more wonderfully illustrated than in the history of our Blessed Lord and Saviour. Not a tear He shed was lost. "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." "He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall quicken in His hands." (*Enoch Mellor, D.D.*) *Treasured tears*:—The so-called lachrymatories, or tear-bottles, found in museums of art, were applied to no such use as their name implies. They probably contained unguents that were used in preparing the dead for burial; which accounts for their presence in tombs. The psalmist rather had in mind the skin bottle of his day, in which, by a bold figure of speech, he conceives of God as treasuring our tears with that same Divine carefulness which numbers the hairs of our heads or notes the falling sparrow. But why should God treasure our tears in His bottle? 1. As a token of prayers to be answered. Tears and prayers are closely connected. "Strong crying and tears" accompanied the "prayers and supplications" of Christ in the days of His flesh. The woman that was a sinner said nothing as she bathed the travel-stained feet of her Lord with her tears. Such tears are the guarantee of sincerity, the evidence of moral earnestness, and the token of prevailing prayer. The tears in God's bottle represent petitions filed away for answer in His own good time. 2. In token of wrongs to be avenged. The tears of martyrs thus treasured up plead like the blood of Abel. It is a perilous thing to make a little child to weep by our cruelty or by injustice to smite the fountain of tears in the widow's heart. Every such tear of the poor and needy is gathered into God's bottle, and will be a swift witness against us, till the wrong is atoned for or avenged. (*J. F. Elder, D.D.*) *The tenderness of God towards His afflicted people*:—I. AN ASSURANCE. "Thou tellest my wanderings." They were numerous and various. But what do these wanderings take in? 1. Moral infirmities, or deviations from duty. What is the whole course of a state of nature but a series of wanderings? It is well if God sees that you feel them to be your afflictions and that you repent of them. 2. These wanderings take in local changes. See Abraham, Israel, David—what wanderings were theirs? Some of the most eminent servants of God were wanderers (Heb. xi.). "They wandered about," etc. And it is so still. For conscience' sake many have had to wander about seeking how to live. But they are not purposeless; God has taken count of them all. "Thou tellest my wanderings." Therefore we are not to think that God disregards all individualities. II. THE PRAYER. "Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle." There are some persons who despise tears as weak and womanly. Do they remember who He was who wept at the grave of Lazarus? Do they remember who He was, who, "when He came nigh unto Jerusalem, wept over it," etc.? "True greatness," says Lavater, "is always simple"; and true courage, I am persuaded, is always combined with tenderness. Homer—that matchless painter of men and manners—makes no scruple to represent his bravest of men, Ajax, and his wisest of men, Ulysses, as weeping; and the latter as weeping no less than three times in the course of a few lines. The Easterns wept more readily, and were less ashamed of indulging their tears, than we. David was a man of tears. Of

these tears, let us now, if we can, trace out the sources. One source of these tears was affliction. He had many trials and troubles, which his greatness could not prevent, or even alleviate; yea, which his greatness rather increased. Another source of his tears was sin; and a much more plentiful one than his sufferings. "My sin," says he, "is ever before me." Not only his great sin in his fall, but his daily and hourly failures. "Who," says he, "can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." And David wept for the sins of others, as well as his own. "I beheld the transgressors," says he, "and was grieved. Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not Thy law." III. THE QUESTION. "Are they not in Thy book?"—that is, Are they not written and recorded there? What book? The book of His providence? Yes, they are all there; their number is there; their quality is there; their degree is there; their duration is there and all their sad memorial is there. The book of His remembrance (Mal. iii. 16). Now, let us conclude—1. By admiring the condescension of God. 2. Let us, as Young says, "not stop at wonder," but "imitate and live." 3. Ye wanderers, ye weepers, repair here. God is able to comfort in all our tribulation. (W. Jay.) *Tear-bottles*.—There are some very good people who always have their tear-bottle by them, and who always treasure up every little grief and every little disappointment. Whenever you meet them, the first thing you see is the tear-bottle; and you soon see there is more in it than there was last time. Now, of course I am not speaking of those who have indeed great trials, but of those who make a great deal of little ones. I do not want you to get into that gloomy way of living. (D. Davies.)

**Vers. 9-11. When I cry unto Thee, then shall mine enemies turn back.—Prayer vanquishing enemies.**—I. THIS PRAYER IMPLIES THE EXISTENCE OF CONFLICT. David was pursued from place to place by his adversaries. The Christian, too, has many enemies. Within him and around him. II. THIS PRAYER SUPPOSES HELPLESSNESS. The enemies which the Christian has to fight are numerous, potent and subtle; and he is perfect weakness. III. A CONVICTION THAT THERE IS ALL NEEDFUL HELP IN GOD. IV. APPLICATION TO GOD FOR HELP. "I cry unto Thee." Make me a conqueror, etc. This cry we must consider as secret, earnest and constant, and connected with confidence. V. THIS PRAYER WAS SUCCESSFUL. "Then shall mine enemies turn back." This is expected from immutable promises (Isa. liv. 17; 2 Pet. iii. 9). God will cause our pursuing enemies to turn back, for can they fight with omnipotence? Or He will give unto us grace, Divine armour, to enable us to stand and conquer in the evil day. APPLICATION. 1. How great the privilege of having an interest in the Divine favour. 2. How exposed and wretched is the sinner. (*Helps for the Pulpit.*)

**Vers. 12, 13. Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto Thee.—The Christian's vows and praises.**—I. A SOLEMN OBLIGATION ACKNOWLEDGED. "Thy vows are upon me, O God." 1. Vows made in public. (1) Entered into in baptism. (2) Ratified in confirmation. (3) Renewed in the Lord's Supper. 2. Vows made in private. II. A HOLY DETERMINATION MADE. "I will render praises unto Thee." 1. In the public acknowledgment of mercy (Heb. xiii. 15; 1 Pet. ii. 5; Hos. xiv. 2). 2. In the eloquent language of the life (Rom. xii. 1; Heb. xi. 5). In conclusion, let each ask—1. How have I hitherto fulfilled my vows? 2. How may I henceforth do so? (J. D. Lane, M.A.) *Christian vows*.—A vow may be defined as a promise made more solemn by a special appeal to God. It is as respects purpose, what an oath is as regards fact. And the appeal may be of different kinds. It may be expressed in the form of a prayer to God to punish or be propitious to the maker of the promise, according as he breaks or keeps his word. It may be again in the form of a prayer for some present blessing, for which some specified return of gratitude is promised. Or lastly, it may be merely an appeal implied in the solemnity of the occasion, or of the expression of the promise, by which it is understood that the maker of it sets himself consciously in the Divine presence, and calls upon God to witness that promise. We have instances of all these three kinds in the Old Testament. The expression "So do God to me and more also," so often accompanying an intimation of purpose, constitutes a vow of the first kind. Jacob's vow in Bethel is an example of the second kind. And of the third, we have a noble instance at the end of the Book of Joshua, where at a solemn concourse of the tribes at Shechem, the people expressly took Jehovah for their God, and devoted themselves to Him. It is

manifest, however, that this is a matter in which Old Testament practice is no rule for Christians. God's people of old were kept shut up under a system of special ordinances, whose obligation has now ceased. Now, of the three kinds of vows which have been mentioned, the two former must by their very terms be generally excluded from a Christian man's practice. We have left, then, for our consideration our third class, consisting of promises made with more than ordinary solemnity, accompanied by an expressed or implied appeal to God. Of these vows, as a class, we cannot but admit the legitimacy. They are by implication recognized in the New Testament, in those passages where St. Paul reminds Timothy of the good confession which he had made before many witnesses; as also in the very fact of baptism following upon a profession of faith, in which we have the virtual promise necessarily involved, and the solemnity clearly combined with it. But here everything depends upon the nature of the promise made. And it is this part of our inquiry which carries with it for us the things which are lawful. But such are not vows of celibacy, nor of total abstinence from alcoholic drinks, nor the vows of the monastic orders. Our ordination vows are not such, because they bind us not so much to the office as in the office. We are not by them tied down to any rule of life other than the requirements of our duty as Christian ministers primarily necessitate. And thus it seems to me that, while speaking on a particular case, we have in reality met with that description of a lawful Christian vow, of which we were in search. And the description will be this: Such vow must not bind a man to a course of conduct first marked out by its terms, and devised for it, but must constitute an additional obligation to a course of conduct already, for other reasons, incumbent upon him. The vow must be made for the duty, not the duty for the vow. We have, I think, now prepared the way to speak of the great lifelong promise and vow which the Church requires of her members. The points contained in it are every one of them plain Christian duties for every man. They remain the same, be the vow taken or not. They are no artificial narrowing of the limits of blameless and godly life—to which we have no right to bind any man; but describe it in its fullest extension. Beyond their limits, there is no allowable latitude; short of their prescription, no safe walking before God. The whole operation, then, of our vow is on the subject, not on the object of it. The object, a godly life, remaining one and the same for all, we strive to ensure the accomplishment of this object by intensifying the apprehension of it in the minds of the subjects on whom we have to work. "Thy vows are upon me, O God." How blessed a thing, could we be anchored safe by this assurance, while so many are making shipwreck of their faith! "I am not my own, but devoted to Thee and Thy work; all I am and have, to be used not for myself, but for Thee." How would such a persuasion simplify for us the difficulties of life; cut off the occasion of half our falls into worldliness and sin; brighten the light of our examples, and win souls for Christ! (*Dean Alford.*)

**Ver. 13. For Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not Thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?—***Mercies received:*—I. **MERCIES RECEIVED ARE IN A SPECIAL MANNER TO BE REMEMBERED.** This has been the method of God's people. David entitles Psalm xxxviii., "A psalm to bring to remembrance His afflictions," much more, then, His comforts (Ps. lxxvii. 10, 11). Paul remembered a manifestation of God to him fourteen years before (2 Cor. xii. 1). If God treasures up our tears, much more should we treasure up His mercies; as lovers keep the love tokens of those they affect. God hath a file for our prayers, we should have the like for His answers. He hath a book of remembrance to record our afflictions, and believing discourses of Him (Mal. iii. 16); why should not we, then, have a register for His gracious communications to us? Remembrance is the chief work of a Christian; remembrance of sin to cause a self-abhorroncy (Ezek. xx. 43). The remembrance of God for a deep humility (Ps. lxxvii. 3). Remembrance of His name for keeping His law (Ps. cxix. 55). Remembrance of His judgments of old for comfort in afflictions (Ps. cxix. 52). And remembrance of mercy for the establishment of faith (Isa. lvii. 11). Now, they are to be remembered because—1. They are the mercies of God. 2. Purchased by Christ. 3. Beneficial to us. And we are to remember them admiringly and thankfully (Ps. lxxvii. 11). Affectionately; obediently and fruitfully (Ps. cxvi. 16). Humbly: in their varied circumstances and details. II. **MERCIES RECEIVED ARE ENCOURAGEMENTS TO ASK AND HOPE FOR MORE.** For—1. There is as great ability in God (Isa. lix. 2). 2. As much tenderness as

before (Lam. iii. 22). 3. The same pleas to be urged in our prayers. 4. One mercy in spirituals is to no purpose without further mercies. God would not lay a foundation and not build upon it (Rom. viii. 32). III. IN CONCLUSION. 1. Take heed of forgetting mercies received (Jer. ii. 2; Ps. lxxviii. 20). For if we do not remember them we shall be apt to distrust God and abate in our love (Ps. lxxviii. 19). And if we do not remember we cannot improve them, nor so easily resist temptation. 2. Make use of former mercies to encourage your trust for the future (Ps. ix. 10; 1 Sam. xxi. 9). (*S. Charnock, B.D.*) *Confidence in God*:—This psalm seems to have been written when David, from the jealousy of the infuriated Saul, had taken refuge in the religion of Gath, and found himself an object of not unnatural suspicion, from which he escaped only by simulating madness. But his faith waxed stronger as the occasion of his trial comes. Just as there are sea-birds which sing amid the storm, whose earliest blast startles more timid wings, and sends them fluttering home, so in the season of his apparent hopelessness his heart trilled out some of his most rapturous doxologies, and some of the sublimest expressions of his confidence in God. So if our circumstances have been like to the psalmist's, if there be in our hearts memories of many sorrows and failures, of manifold enmity to the progress of the life of God within us, still let me ask you to take up the strain of these verses. If we have failed in the past, let us decide for God now. I. THE MOTIVE WHICH IS TO PROMPT US TO DECISION. "Thou hast delivered my soul from death." Motive is the spring of all mental action. We are free, but we are not independent of motives, and hence Scripture continually appeals to them. And here in the great matter of personal consecration to God, what can urge us more mightily than this, that God has saved our "soul from death"? And—II. THERE IS THE OBLIGATION. "Thy vows are upon me, O Lord." You are to feel that you are the Lord's; that you are not at liberty to swear any other allegiance or enter upon any other service. You are the Lord's bondsmen. Are you ready for this? It is the highest privilege. III. THE LEGITIMATE EXPRESSION IN WHICH THIS CONSECRATION EMBODIES ITSELF. 1. In praise. The Christian's is a joyful, willing service. 2. In a desire to walk before God in the land of the living. Is this our ambition—to walk before God here and now? I trust it is, and may the ardour of your desire know no abatement or decay. (*J. Morley Punshon, D.D.*) *Deliverance realized though unaccomplished*:—I. THE DELIVERANCE REALIZED BY FAITH BEFORE IT IS ACCOMPLISHED IN FACT (see translation in R.V.). He is still in the very thick of the trouble and the fight, and yet he says, "It is as good as over. Thou hast delivered." How does he come to that confidence? Simply because his future is God; and whoever has God for his future can turn else uncertain hopes into certain confidences, and make sure of this: that however Achish and his giant Philistines of Gath, wielding Goliath's arms, spears like a weaver's beam, and brazen armour, may compass him about, in the name of the Lord he will destroy them. They are all as good as dead, though they are alive and hostile at this moment. We to-day have the same reasons for the same confidence; and if we will go the right way about it, we, too, may bring June's sun into November's fogs, and bask in the warmth of certain deliverance even when the chill mists of trouble enfold us. But then note, too, here, the substance of this future intervention which, to the psalmist's quiet faith, is present. "My soul from death," and after that he says, "My feet from falling," which looks very like an anti-climax and bathos. But yet, just because to deliver the feet from falling is so much smaller a thing than delivering a life from death, it comes here to be a climax and something greater. The storm passes over the man. What then? After the storm has passed, he is not only alive, but he is standing upright. It has not killed him. No, it has not even shaken him. His feet are as firm as ever they were, and just because that is a smaller thing, it is a greater thing for the deliverance to have accomplished than the other. How did David get to this confidence? Why, he prayed himself into it. If you will read the psalm, you will see very clearly the process by which a man comes to that serene, triumphant trust that the battle is won even whilst it is raging around him. The true answer to David's prayer was the immediate access of confidence unshaken, though the outward answer was a long time in coming, and years lay between him and the cessation of his persecutions and troubles. So we may have brooks by the way, in quiet confidence of deliverance ere yet the deliverance comes. II. THE IMPULSE TO SERVICE WHICH DELIVERANCE BRINGS. "That I may walk before God in the light of the living;" that is God's purpose in all His deliverances, that we may thereby be impelled to trustful and

grateful service. And David makes that purpose into a vow, for the words might almost as well be translated, "I will walk before Him." Let us see to it that God's purpose is our resolve, and that we do not lose the good of any of the troubles or discipline through which He passes us; for the worst of all sorrows is a wasted sorrow. "Thou hast delivered my feet that I may walk." What are feet for? Walking! Further, notice the precise force of that phrase, "that I may walk before God." It is not altogether the same as the cognate one which is used about Enoch, that "he walked with God." The one expresses communion as with a friend; the other, the ordering of one's life before His eye, and in the consciousness of His presence as Judge and as Taskmaster. Think of what a regiment of soldiers on parade does as each file passes in front of the saluting point where the commanding officer is standing. How each man dresses up, and they pull themselves together, keeping step, sloping their rifles slightly. We are not on parade, but about business a great deal more serious than that. We are doing our fighting with the Captain looking at us, and that should be a stimulus, a joy, and not a terror. Realize God's eye watching you, and sin, and meanness, and negligence, and selfishness, and sensuality, and lust, and passion, and all the other devils that are in us will vanish like ghosts at cockcrow. III. THE REGION IN WHICH THAT OBSERVANCE OF THE DIVINE EYE IS TO BE CARRIED ON. "In the light of the living." That seems to correspond to the first clause of his hope; just as the previous word that I have been commenting upon, "walking before Him," corresponds to the second, where he speaks about his feet. "Thou hast delivered my soul from death. . . . I will walk before Thee in the light of the living"—where Thou dost still permit my delivered soul to be. And the phrase seems to mean the sunshine of human life contrasted with the darkness of Sheol. Our brightest light is the radiance from the face of God whom we try to love and serve, and the psalmist's confidence is that a life of observance of His commandments in which gratitude for deliverance is the impelling motive to continual realization of His presence, and an accordant life, will be a bright and sunny career. You will live in the sunshine if you live before His face, and however wintry the world may be, it will be like clear, frosty day. There is no frost in the sky, it does not go above the atmosphere, and high above, in serene and wondrous blue, is the blaze of the sunshine. And such a life will be a guided life. There will still remain many occasions for doubt in the region of belief, and for perplexity as to duty. There will often be need for patient and earnest thought as to both, and there will be no lack of calls for strenuous effort of our best faculties in order to apprehend what our Guide means us to do, and where He would have us go, but through it all there will be the guiding hand. As the Master, with perhaps a glance backward to these words, said, "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." If He is in the light let us walk in the light, and to us it will be purity, and knowledge and joy. (A. Maclaren, D.D.)

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### PSALM LVII.

VERS. 1-11. **Be merciful unto me, O God.**—*Spiritual experimentalism*.—I. A BLESSED RELIGIOUS EXERCISE. 1. Praying. "Be merciful unto me," etc. An epitome of all true prayer. Mercy is what we need; to remove our sense of guilt, to break our moral chains, to clear our spiritual vision, to quicken and harmoniously develop all the powers of our higher nature. 2. Trusting. "My soul trusteth in Thee." This implies—(1) A knowledge of the trustworthiness of God. (2) A supreme love for the excellency of God. 3. Resolving. "Yea, in the shadow," etc. God is the natural Protector of souls. 4. Hoping (ver. 3). All godly souls are in a waiting attitude. II. A WRETCHED SOCIAL CONDITION. Among savage, crafty and deadly enemies (vers. 4, 6). That men should feel thus to their fellow-men argues two things. 1. That morally they are in an abnormal condition. 2. That sin is essentially malignant. Sin, when it enters the soul, scorches all benevolent sympathy. Sin never fails to make its subject a tormenting devil. III. A HAPPY MORAL STATE. Moral fixation, or godly decision of soul,



"My heart is fixed." In our unregenerate state the heart is unsettled, divided, distracted, and herein is its misery. This fixation originates—1. High happiness. "I will sing and give praise. Awake, psaltery and harp," etc. 2. High worship. "I will praise Thee, O Lord," etc. (*Homilist.*) *Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing:*—The writer begins in deep distress; but he prays himself out of the pit; and in the end he rises to a sunny height of security and faith, where he praises the God who has delivered him. I. THE ART OF PRAYER (vers. 1-6). Here he, first, clearly and fully describes his trouble. This is part of the art of prayer. It is often because we have nothing definite to pray about that our devotions are unsatisfactory. God is as interested in the trials of His people to-day as He was in those of David. Next, he argues his case. And this also is part of the art of prayer. God likes us to put our intellect as well as our feeling into our prayers. His first argument is that he is trusting in God (ver. 1): he is trusting, he says, as the fledgeling covers beneath the wing of the mother bird. Can God leave in the lurch any one who is thus depending on Him? But in verse 2 he uses a still stronger argument: he appeals to God's character, calling Him "God that performeth"—or rather perfecteth—"all things for me." God the Perfecter, who, when He has begun a good work, must finish it—how can He leave the career of His servant in its broken and incomplete condition? This is an argument we can all use, and it is one which cannot fail with God. He has now raised himself to complete confidence that God will deliver him; and to this he gives exquisite expression in the third verse, describing Mercy and Truth as two angels, whom God will send forth to rescue him from his necessities. In the same way in the 23rd psalm Goodness and Mercy are represented as attendants, following a good man all the days of his life, watching over his footsteps and always at his service. II. THE ART OF PRAISE (vers. 7-11). First, praise begins with the fixing of the heart—"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed." The flutter of excitement is over, and he is able to collect his powers in perfect repose. But, secondly, they are not to go to sleep, though they are in repose; for he says, "Awake up, my glory; awake psaltery and harp; I myself will awake early." "My glory" is a name in Scripture for the soul, and surely a very fine one; the soul is the glory of man. But it needs to be awakened to engage in God's praise. There is music in it, as there is in a piano when it is shut; but the instrument must be opened and the keys touched. The music in our souls is allowed to slumber too much. The words, "I myself will awake early," ought rather to read, "I will awake the dawn." David was to be so early astir at his devotions that, instead of the dawn awakening him, he would awake it: he would summon it to arise out of the east and help him to praise his Maker. But it is not Nature alone he would inspire with his enthusiasm: so full is he of joy in God that he wishes to communicate his emotions to all his fellow-creatures (ver. 9). How marvellously has this wish been fulfilled! The Psalter has been translated into scores of languages, and wherever it has been known it has been loved. Finally he gives the reasons for praise (ver. 10), "For Thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and Thy truth unto the clouds." These will always be the reasons for praise that is truly hearty—to know the mercy that is as far above our sins as the dome of heaven is above the earth, and to know the faithfulness which, having begun a good work in us, will complete it unto the day of Christ. (*J. Stalker, D.D.*) **In the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge.**—*Christ our refuge:*—What a beautiful illustration is the city of refuge of olden time of Christ as our Refuge! We have heard the solemn words, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." How can we escape from death? There is a Refuge, even Jesus; and we can hide in Him and be safe. 1. The cities of refuge were so scattered over the country that one of them could be easily reached from any part. "Kedesh" in the north, and "Hebron" in the south, while "Shechem" lay midway. "Bezer" was situated in the flat country, while "Ramoath" and "Golan" were on elevated ground. So our Refuge is easily reached by any one, it is "whosoever believeth in Him," and "him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." It is the simple coming to Him and the taking Him at His word. 2. The gates of the cities of refuge were open day and night, that the man-slayer might enter at any time. And we, too, may go to our Refuge at any time. He is ever ready to hear our cry and to rescue us, and to save us; but let us not delay. 3. Any one might flee thither, the stranger as well as the Israelite. So it is with Christ: all may come to Him, of whatever nationality (Gal. iii. 28). 4. When the man-slayer reached the city of refuge, he had to plead his cause to the elders of that city, and then, if neces-

sary, before the congregation of the children of Israel; and it was only when his innocence, of the crime of murder had been proved that he was allowed to take refuge there; otherwise he was delivered up to the avenger of blood to be slain. But in Christ the murderer may take refuge, and find pardon and peace; the worst of sinners have found refuge there. 5. Then we read that the man-slayer who had fled for refuge should stay in that city, for if he went out of the gate at any time the avenger of blood might slay him, and his blood would be upon his own head. He should have remained in the city whither he had fled. So with us; if we are not in Christ the Refuge, we are out at our own risk. (*L. Shorey.*)

Ver. 4. **My soul is among lions.**—*Among lions*:—Some of you cannot say this, and you ought to be very thankful that you cannot. You live under very favourable circumstances. But there are many that are far less happily placed, and we are bound to remember them, and to sympathize with them. Now, when may a Christian man truly say, "My soul is among lions"? He may say this when he is surrounded by those, whether in his home or place of business, who reproach and rebuke, jest and jeer at him, for Jesus Christ's sake. Many are so placed. Now, I would speak to such as are amongst these lions—dogs would be almost a better name for them. I. **BY WAY OF COMFORT.** 1. You will have fellowship with your Lord and His Church. He and they had to bear what you have, and far worse. 2. You should thereby be driven nearer to God. Be sure that you live near to God. 3. Endeavour to be very calm and happy. Take as little notice of the scoff as ever you can. Very seldom defend yourselves. The hammer strikes hard upon the anvil, but the anvil wears out many hammers. 4. Remember that the lions are chained. See the history of Daniel. 5. If your soul is among lions, there is another lion there—the lion of the tribe of Judah. The Covenanters have said that they never had such Sabbaths in Scotland as when they were hunted amongst the crags and glens by Claverhouse's dragoons. Great power, then, attended the Word. 6. You will come out of the lions' den unharmed. 7. And soon you shall be among the angels. II. **BY WAY OF ADVICE.** 1. If you dwell among lions do not irritate them. Some Christians do, and so have made matters bad for themselves. You cannot ram religion down people's throats, or scold people into it. 2. Do not roar yourself. Do not meet railing with railing, hard words with hard words. Do not get soured in spirits. Overcome evil with good. 3. But do not be cowardly. A lion is afraid of a man if he looks him steadily in the face. Courage is what is wanted. 4. Do not go out alone among them—take your Lord with you. 5. If you feel very weak about it you may pray the Lord in His providence to move you to quieter quarters. But, better still—6. Ask for grace to stop with the lions and tame them. Sometimes the Christian should say, "God has made me strong, I will stop here and fight it out. My Master would have me go where I am most wanted, and so I will stay here." Do not be afraid of sinners, but seek to save them. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 5. **Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Thy glory be above all the earth.**—*The Lord alone exalted*:—I. **AS THE ABSOLUTE DECREE OF HEAVEN.** For—1. His own glory is the first principle with God. 2. The ordination of Christ to His official work put Him under responsibility to effect this. 3. The principle is essential to the nature and existence of God. II. **THE LAW OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE.** All the leading truths of the Bible contribute to the glory of God—election, regeneration. The union between Christ and His Church. Redemption. III. **THE LANGUAGE OF EVERY BELIEVING HEART.** For it is his desire, purpose and endeavour that God may be exalted. (*Joseph Irons.*)

Vers. 7, 8. **My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed.**—*The heart fixed*:—He summons his powers at once for the execution of his purpose. No sooner is the resolve taken, than at once to the practice of the same. How striking and beautiful it is! Oh! it is well when the practice thus follows the principle, when the execution is contemporaneous with the purpose. "I will awake early," the psalmist says. The figure there is exceedingly beautiful. It is in the original, "I will awake the early dawn"; not "I will awake when the morning breaks," but "I will awaken up the morning." "I will be beforehand with it; I will challenge the day." Now, this purpose and determination results from a peculiar state of heart—My heart is fixed. Therefore let us consider—I. **THIS STATE OF HEART.** "O God, my heart is fixed"—all is suspended upon that. When that is the case,

there is salvation; till then, nothing is done. When that is done, all is done. The angels rejoice in heaven, and God Almighty, the Father of our Lord, is glorified. The heart, as we all know, is the man; all else of the man is governed by the heart. The physical and intellectual powers, what are they? The whole complex machinery of our constitution, what is it? Simply the servant of the heart. "Aye," but some one will perhaps say, "the question is, upon what is the heart fixed?" Now, really, that is not the question. It is a question according to man's mode of thinking, and according to man's mode of acting, perhaps. II. I grant you, there are ten thousand things that solicit the heart, and after which the heart of man runs; but **THERE IS BUT ONE THING IN THE UNIVERSE UPON WHICH THE HEART CAN BE "FIXED."** Why, unless the object is fixed itself, how is it possible for the heart to be fixed? It may be directed towards, but how can it be fixed? If the thing is not fixed, what is fixed? One thing—God is fixed, and it is a simple truth that man is never fixed until he is fixed upon God. Surely a house, as to its fixedness, depends upon the foundation. Build a house on the sand, and is it fixed? You may fix it there as you think, but is it fixed? The foundation shifts, and what becomes of the house? Oh! the heart can only be fixed according to the fixedness of that on which it rests. (*Capel Molyneux.*) *Religious decision:—I. ON WHAT WAS DAVID'S HEART FIXED?* 1. On God and His service. 2. On the diligent study of the lively oracles of God. 3. On the duty of prayer. 4. On the grand purpose of furthering the interests of Zion. II. *WHY SHOULD WE DO LIKEWISE?* 1. Because indecision degrades the character of man. 2. There is no solid and substantial reason why the heart should not be fixed on God. 3. The nature of spiritual religion as developed in the Gospel, requires and supposes this fixedness of heart. 4. If we are not thus decided, we shall never accomplish anything truly good and great in the service of God. It is the man of settled views and fixed purposes before whom obstacles, that would be unconquerable to others, give way. (*Evangelist.*) *Decision:—There are many temptations to a man to wander in doubt and uncertainty. He is driven hither and thither by doubts of self, of God, of revelation, of the past, and of the future. But there is no rest for that man until he is able to exclaim, "My heart is fixed."* I. **THERE IS A POSSIBILITY OF POSITIVE RELIGION.** 1. The word "positive" is a species of cant phrase much used by doubters and Agnostics. But in this case we may strictly apply it to the state of a true believer. The inquirer has reached a state of satisfaction. He has found what he needed. There is for him now no further tossing about on the tempest of fear or anxiety. 2. There is something very blessed in this state of satisfaction. It is that of a mariner having arrived in port, of a student having attained the goal he coveted, the architect having seen the realization of his plans. 3. This state, too, is essentially a religious one. Nothing earthly can afford positiveness. There can be no certainty in any human act or any human hope; but in the search after God there can be, and is, perfect finality. II. **THIS STATE OF SATISFACTION IS A STATE OF PRAISE.** 1. The key to open the door of heaven is praise. The solution of all doubts is praise. The end of all difficulties is praise. 2. The state, then, of our own miserable darkness and unrest rests upon the fact that we are always looking on ourselves, not on God. If we look on ourselves, we shall naturally see our own defects, sorrows. But if we look to His brightness we shall lose sight of all that is dark, and in His certainty we shall find an eternal stand and an unchanging hope. (*Homilist.*) *The fixed heart:—I. THE FIXED HEART.* For a fixed heart I must have a fixed determination, and not a mere fluctuating and soon broken intention. I must have a steadfast affection, and not merely a fluttering love, that, like some butterfly, lights now on this, now on that, sweet flower, but which has a flight straight as a carrier-pigeon to its cot, which shall bear me direct to God. And I must have a continuous realization of my dependence upon God, and of God's sweet sufficiency, going with me all through the dusty day. Is our average Christianity fairly represented by such words as these of my text? Do they not rather make us burn with shame when we think that a man who lived in the twilight of God's revelation, and was weighed upon by distresses such as wrung this psalm out of him, should have poured out this resolve which we, who live in the sunlight and are flooded with blessings, find it hard to echo, with sincerity and truth? Fixed hearts are rare amongst the Christians of this day. II. **THE MANIFOLD HINDRANCES THAT WE MEET TO SUCH A UNIFORMITY OF OUR RELIGIOUS LIFE.** There is, for example, the tendency to fluctuation which besets all our feelings, and especially our religious emotions. What would happen to a steam-engine if the stoker now piled on coals

and thou fell asleep by the furnace door? One moment the boiler would be ready to burst; at another moment there would be no steam to drive anything. That is the sort of alternation that goes on amongst hosts of Christians to-day. Their springtime and summer are followed certainly by an autumn and a bitter winter. Every moment of elevation has a corresponding moment of depression. But is there any necessity for such alternations? Some degree of fluctuation there will always be. The very exercise of emotion tends to its extinction. Varying conditions of health and other externals will affect the buoyancy and clear-sightedness and vivacity of the spiritual life. Only a barometer that is out of order will always stand at set fair. The vane which never points but to south is rusty and means nothing. But while there cannot be absolute uniformity, there might and should be a far nearer approach to an equable temperature of a much higher range than the readings of most professing Christians give. There is, indeed, a dismally uniform arctic temperature in many of them. Their hearts are fixed, truly, but fixed on earth. Their frost is broken by no thaw, their tepid formalism interrupted by no disturbing enthusiasm. We do not speak now of these, but of those who have moments of illumination, of communion, of submission of will, which fade all too soon. To such we would earnestly say that these moments may be prolonged and made more continuous. We need not be at the mercy of our own unregulated feelings. We can control our hearts, and keep them fixed, even if they should wish to wander.

III. THE MEANS BY WHICH SUCH A UNIFORM CHARACTER MAY BE IMPRESSED UPON OUR RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE. A man climbing a hill, though he has to look to his feet when in the slippery places, and all his energies are expended in hoisting himself upwards by every projection and crag, will do all the better if he lifts his eye to the summit that gleams above him. So we, in our upward course, shall make the best progress when we consciously and honestly try to look beyond the things seen and temporal, even whilst we are working in the midst of them, and keep clear before us the summit to which our faith tends. If we lived in the endeavour to realize that great white throne, and Him that sits upon it, we should find it easier to say, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed." But be sure of this, there will be no such uniformity of religious experience throughout our lives unless there be frequent times in them in which we go into our chambers and shut our doors about us, and hold communion with our Father in secret. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *The fixed heart*:—Speak to those who have decided, but who may be loosening their hold on God under the strain of life. No better description can be given of the influence of life on the Christian than this—it tends to loosen the bonds. They need to be constantly refixed. 1. Some disciples went back under the strain of Christ's higher teachings. 2. Some forsook under the strain of Christ's sufferings. 3. Some were hindered in running—"Ye did run well, who hath hindered you?" 4. Some were enticed by false doctrine. 5. Some were borne away by the love of the world. 6. Some are reproached for being neither cold nor hot. These old readings of Christian living suit us now. Then times of refixing ourselves are needed. What fixity should we try to reach? I. FIXITY MAY CONCERN THE INTELLECT. Show the importance of firm and ever-growing mental hold of truth and of God. Fixity for the intellect can only come with growth. II. FIXITY MAY CONCERN THE WILL. A power of resolve may shape a life. Illustrate by familiar tale in John Foster's "Essays," showing the power of decision. III. FIXITY SHOULD CONCERN THE HEART. "My heart is fixed, O God." The true life-force is from the heart. Heart things are the lasting things. To the heart God appeals. The heart God wants. Intellectual fixity may not be possible. Will-fixity may depend very much on disposition. Heart-fixity triumphs over all externality. It concerns the principle and spirit of the life. Fixed everywhere and in everything for God. How broad, comprehensive, practical! (Robert Tuck, B.A.) *The prepared heart*:—This psalm is very strangely compounded. It is described in the title as the utterance of David when he fled from Saul and hid himself in the cave. It is the cry of a man beset with trouble and danger; yet all through it, we are startled by sudden transitions from cries for help and stories of wrong to cheerful expressions of hope and outbursts of praise. This condition of hopefulness and of cheerful steadfastness in the midst of trouble is one of those things which always puzzle a mere man of the world, but which present no mystery to a soul which walks with God. But the fact goes much farther than cheerfulness in trouble. The word "fixed" literally means "prepared," "fit," "ready." "O God, my heart is prepared." It is about this habitual preparation of heart that

I wish to speak. The ideal perfect Christian life would be a life in contact with God along its whole line. It would be everywhere and always in communion with God. God's will and God's love would fill and move in every inlet and curve of the life, as the ocean in its gulfs and creeks and round its promontories; and upon this high plane the general tenor of the life would be more even. It hardly needs to be said that we do not live in this condition, and that we do need certain special influences to recall our minds to heavenly things, to lift them into the atmosphere of rest and of devotion, and to keep them from drifting away into worldliness and sensuality. God has recognized the need and has met it. He has given the Sabbath with its rest from labour, He has given the sanctuary with its quickening influences, He has commended the season of special prayer. We are led up to these Pisgahs and Hermons of spiritual vision, to the end that we may carry the power of these visions into life's common routine, to sanctify and to elevate that. These things are not an end unto themselves. The disciples were not permitted to stay on the Transfiguration Mount, but that glorious vision strengthened and kindled their hearts for the hard mission for which they were chosen. These exceptional experiences in our lives are intended to foster in us that constantly prepared, fixed heart of which David here sings: the heart that shall be prepared for praise, and for trust, and for worship, not only while sitting in heavenly places, but also among lions, among them that are set on fire, when the net has been prepared for the steps and the soul is bowed down, amid the fret and worry of life, and on the dead level of daily duty and care. (*Marvin R. Vincent, D.D.*)

*A fixed heart:*—There are many who doubt whether it is possible for a man to-day to say, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed." There are so many ideas that have changed in only a generation, there are so many views that have broadened, and there are so many beliefs that have been entirely given up, that it seems impossible any more for a man's heart to be fixed. It seems like deliberately shutting the eyes and stopping the ears to hope that the change is all over. A Christian's heart is fixed on that which is almost as old as the hills. The essence of your faith, the solid core of it, Abraham had almost four thousand years ago. Our faith in God is Abraham's faith, only fuller and lighted up with all the glory that shone from the face of Jesus Christ. It is stronger and surer for every heart that has been fixed by it since Abraham. Has it not worn well, this faith of ours? It has lived on through the downfall of five great universal kingdoms, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. It went down to Egypt with Jacob; it went forth to Canaan with Moses. It battled with the heathen. It rose in triumph under David; it sank back under defeat and destruction. It rebuilt its Holy City. It waited for Christ; it founded the Church and charged the apostles. It worked in the mines; it died at the stake; it endured persecution and loss. It fought the barbarians and converted them. It saved Europe. It kept strong when men were ignorant and debased. It quickened with the Renaissance; it purified itself in the Reformation. It fainted during the eighteenth century; it rallied again and rode the storm of the French Revolution. It burst out again in the nineteenth century in splendid missionary zeal. It is to-day stronger, broader, surer than ever it was before. The greatest thing about a man is the fixedness of his heart. When men say they cannot be sure of believing to-morrow what they believe to-day, they do not know of what kind of eternal stuff a man's soul is made. The very essence of belief is that it is something never to be changed, fixed and eternal. If there is no eternal belief there is no belief at all. Belief means that, no matter what may happen, it will stand fast; belief is the insight of an eternal soul looking beyond time and chance. The man who has not come to believe in something that will last on to all eternity has not yet found out what there is down deep in his soul. The best thing there is about us men and women is our loyalty, our power of standing fast, of pledging our souls for time and eternity. Because we are eternal souls, we cannot help believing eternally. We want loyalty and the willingness to wait. When we meet with a doubt or a difficulty we ought to wait until Christ speaks. Shame on us if the reading of a single book, or a single argument of an unbeliever, can divert the stream of the faith of four thousand years from flowing through us and refreshing us. There are men and women to-day doubting God because of their misfortunes or their sufferings, although from the dawn of history men have transformed their lives and glorified humanity through their trust. Read all the books you like, but remember that Christian faith is not an argument, but it is an affair of loyalty. Your mind ought to receive new impressions, but your heart

ought to be fixed. (*John Tunis, B.A.*) *The advantages of a fixed heart*:—A garden that is watered by sudden showers is more uncertain in its fruits than when it is refreshed by a constant stream; so when our thoughts are sometimes upon good things and then run off, when they do but take a glance, as it were, upon holy objects, and then run away, there is not such fruit brought into the soul as when our minds by meditation do dwell upon them. The rays of the sun may warm us, but they do not inflame unless they are contracted in a burning-glass; so some slight thoughts of heavenly things may warm us a little, but will never inflame the soul till they be fixed by close meditation. Therefore David tells us his "heart was fixed," and saith the same concerning the frame of a good man. (*H. G. Salter.*) **I will sing and give praise.**—*The true source of spiritual song*:—The text affirms a fact, and declares a resolution. "My heart is fixed;" this is the fact; and hence, apparently, the resolution, "I will sing and give praise." **I. THE MEANING OF THE WORDS.** "My heart is fixed." 1. On what the psalmist had fixed his heart. On God. Everywhere else there might be darkness and despair, but here there were light, consolation and security. As he recalls to remembrance all that God had already done for him, and all that he had promised yet farther to do, his spirit enters a serener world, and he refrains from his complaint against his inveterate enemies. And observe, that in fixing his heart on God, the psalmist more especially contemplates those gentler features of the Divine character, on which the regards of the guilty and dependent creature must ever most complacently rest (vers. 2, 3). 2. How, or with what sentiments, it was so fixed. The expressions of confiding regard which occur throughout the psalm indicate that the heart of the writer was fixed on God by faith. In faith it is that he exclaims, "My soul trusteth in Thee," etc.; and it is in the same faith, too, that he purposes to pray, when he says, "I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth for me." Nor could his heart have been otherwise fixed on God, than by the virtue of that all-important principle which lies at the very source of practical godliness, admitting the light by which Divine truth irradiates the soul, and constituting the assimilating power, by whose energy the things believed are converted into the bread of life. **II.** If the heart be thus fixed on God, PRAISE AND DEVOUT SONG WILL BE THE UNFAILING RESULT; for fixedness of heart, or steadfastness of faith, is the only proper condition of the soul for these sacred exercises. We may use vain repetitions without a fixed heart. But if we would pour out our whole souls before God in those fervid and earnest supplications which, and which alone, we know to be acceptable; and if we would attain a humble assurance that we have been heard in heaven, we must go to the altar with fixed hearts. When, again, with the psalmist, we would "sing and give praise," the mercy of God will be brought home in clearest and most lively apprehensions to our hearts, and then, instead of finding it difficult to pour forth the melody of joy and salvation, that will become the only possible mode of giving form and voice to the sentiments that swell and glow within us. (*W. Stevenson.*)

**Ver. 8. Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early.**—*Art and worship*:—Art and Worship—these stand in our day like two rival spirits, contending for the mastery in the religious life of this country. In all our churches, alike in country parishes as in our great cities, where popular concerts and music for the million has done so much to raise the standard of taste, there is everywhere the same sense of unequity. To some, music is the heavenly maid, and the more elaborate and artistic the more their soul is dissolved, as Milton describes his in ecstasies under Church music—

"There let the pealing organ blow  
To the full-voiced choir below,  
In service high, and anthems clear,  
So may with sweetness through mine ear  
Dissolve me into ecstasies,  
And bring all heaven before mine eyes."

But all men have not this sensibility to sound. The inner spirit is not reached in this way by concord of sweet sounds. There are some to whom music is only the least disagreeable of noises. But putting aside the two extremes of the highly-trained ear, delicately strung to vibrate within at the least note of music, and the ear dull, if not deaf, to its sweet influences, the vast majority of mankind

are in the middle state on the subject. They think of music very much as the lady who, when asked how she liked the art, made answer that music was good when it was good. Now, though that sounds very much like a truism, it conveys an important thought, which is this—that music only answers the end it was intended for when it stirs the soul by quickening the sensibilities. What I mean is, that through the sense of hearing a quiver of emotion is borne in on the soul, nameless and undefined, and that this taken up into the soul is there translated into thought and clothed in some intelligible form. I pity the ear which is unable to be the channel through which impressions of this kind pass which enter the soul as sound, and are there transmuted into spiritual impressions. But I know that many are not impressionable enough to be set thinking in this way on high and heavenly themes. On the contrary, elaborate music acts on them almost as a disturbing element in devotion, and they are set thinking not so much of the words of the *Te Deum*, as of the execution of the choir. To the choir let me say that the higher the class of the music the more carefully it should be executed. It is an inflection to a trained ear to hear high symphonies and sonatas where tune is secondary, and the stress depends on time and tone, rendered aimless by a careless and half-trained choir. Now let me say a word to the congregation, and particularly to the least musical portion, as I assume the majority to be. Ought there not, in the first place, to be some give and take on your part? A service has three parts—the prayers, which are for all, without exception; the praise, which is also for all who can follow to take part in; and the sermon, in which the preacher alone speaks, and all listen with as much attention and interest as he can draw out. “Awake up, lute and harp; I myself will awake right early.” The psalmist first calls up sounds of praise from wood and wire—the mere mechanical instruments of music. But does he stop there? If so, we should never rise above the mere externals of worship. Our churches would be no better than concert halls, and our services only oratorios. But not to end thus, he goes on to say, “I myself will awake right early.” He means that the praise which began with mechanical effort, as of lute and harp, shall go on and rise into the higher region of spiritual service. I myself will awake, and that, too, right early—i. e. with all my soul and strength. If music does not go on to this it fails of its object, and does harm instead of good. Our aim, then, should be to spiritualize our services. The senses are to buoy up the spirit, as a *Santa Philomela*, borne aloft on a network of the expanded wings of swans. This may be a fancy, but it symbolizes a great thought of the relation of art to worship. We shall never fully reach it on this side of eternity. But in heaven the *hallelujah* of the long thanksgiving psalm will be the perfect marriage and union of art and worship. (J. B. Heard, M.A.) **I myself will awake early.**—*The Alarm*.—The proper subject of such a text as this would be the excellence of early rising, especially when we would serve God. The dew of dawn should be consecrated to devotion. In the original it is, “I will awaken the morning.” Early rising is an economy of time, an aid to health, and thus it doubly lengthens life. Our first hours are our best. But we wish to speak now rather of the awakening than to plead for the “early.” It is bad to awake late, but what shall be said of those who never awake at all? Better late than never, but with some, it is to be feared, it will be never. Therefore I would ring the alarm-bell till the sluggard cries, with new-born determination, “I myself will awake.” In the world people are, and must be, awake; let it be likewise in the Church. I. **WHEN WE WOULD PRAISE GOD.** Our text is connected with the duty of praise. Let us be awake in such praise, both in private and in public. How often do we hear half-awake singing! We shall not praise at all if our souls be not awake. Sleeping birds sing not. When the three holy children sung in the fire their song was sweet indeed; yet had they not been thoroughly in earnest, they had poured forth no holy hymn. II. **WAKEFULNESS IS A GREAT NEED IN THE ENTIRE SPIRITUAL LIFE.** It is a great want of the Church now. Slumber is so natural to us. Our talk about the things of God is very much like the talk of sleepers. “Yet,” says one, “I hope we act consistently.” I trust you do, but there are many people who walk in their sleep, and, alas! I know some Christian professors who appear to be trying very hazardous feats of sleep-walking just now. Some somnambulists have been able to walk in places where, had they been awake, they never would have been able to endure the dizzy height; and I see some Christians running awful risks, which I think they would never venture upon unless they had fallen into the deep sleep of carnal security. Dissenting Churches I know best about, and there are many where the

minister preaches in his sleep, where prayer is offered in sleep, and even the communion is celebrated amid a profound spiritual slumber. Adam slept soundly when the taking away of his rib did not awaken him, but what shall we say of those who startle not though they are losing all the strength and glory of their souls? But we must wake up, for we are in an enemy's country. Did not the Master say, "Watch"? III. CERTAIN WAYS OF KEEPING YOURSELVES AWAKE. Make it a matter of prayer. Use means; set the alarm of a good conscience, and mind you never tamper with it: attend an earnest ministry; let in the sunlight upon your souls, the light of the Sun of Righteousness; take example from the activity of the world. "I cannot sleep after such an hour," says one, "for I hear the tramp of those who are going into the city, and the grind of the street traffic." Read the biographies of eminent servants of Christ who have been full of zeal for Him. They will shame us out of our sloth. Above all, hear the trumpet of the second coming, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him." Let that awaken and keep us awake. IV. THE GREAT AND URGENT NEED THAT THE UNCONVERTED SINNER SHOULD AWAKE. A deep and horrible sleep holds you fast. If it were not so, you would perceive your danger and be alarmed. God has many ways of waking His elect ones. See Paul. The garden at Philippi. Augustine. Have a care lest you awake too late. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

VERS. 9-11. **I will praise Thee, O Lord, among the people.**—*Exemplary praise*:—I. ITS THEME. Mercy and truth. 1. The blessings which flow from them reach to all men. 2. They are worthy of the unreserved confidence of all men. II. THE SPIRIT OF ITS OFFERER. 1. Strong confidence in God. 2. fervent gratitude and reverent admiration towards God. III. ITS ENTHUSIASM. Seen in his resolution to praise God—1. With the noblest powers of his being. 2. With choice instrumental accompaniment. 3. With affectionate zeal. IV. ITS SPHERE. Universal. V. ITS IMPERFECTION (ver. 5). Our most reverent and most enthusiastic praise is inadequate to so sublime and glorious a theme. (*Anon.*)

### PSALM LVIII.

VERS. 1-11. **Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation!**—*Man in many aspects*:—I. THE CHARACTER OF DEPRAVED MEN PORTRAYED. 1. Unrighteous in judgment. 2. Wrong in heart. 3. Violent in the treatment of men. 4. Early in apostasy. 5. False in life. 6. Malignant in spirit. 7. Deceitful in heart. II. THE DESTRUCTION OF WICKED MEN INVOKED. 1. Their entire destruction. 2. Their quick destruction. III. THE SPIRIT OF RIGHTEOUS MEN MISREPRESENTED. The psalmist utters a calumny in representing them as delighting in blood. If righteous Noah had delighted in the sufferings of his enemies, would he have built an ark? No; righteous men are not men of vengeance, they are not men of blood. IV. THE VERDICT OF ALL MEN ANTICIPATED. "So that a man shall say, Verily, there is a reward for the righteous." 1. This is a testimony that often seems to be at variance with the providential government of the human race. 2. This is a testimony that every man sooner or later will be bound by his own conscience to render. Retribution is inevitable—(1) From the law of causation. We are to-day the result of our conduct yesterday, and the cause of our conduct to-morrow; and thus ever must we reap the works of our own hands. (2) From the law of conscience. The past works of our hands are not lost. Memory gathers up the fragments of our life; and conscience stings or smiles, according to their character. (3) From the law of righteousness. There is justice in the universe; and justice will ever punish the wicked and reward the good (*Gal. vi. 7*). (*Homilist.*) *Faith in righteousness*:—This is a difficult psalm. It is difficult even to read; the most advanced scholarship can make hardly anything of some of the verses. Besides, the situation which it describes is very foreign to us; and here and there when it expresses delight in the destruction of enemies, the sentiment jars on the Christian sense. Yet it is a psalm of high originality, the poetic imagery being both abundant and uncommon; and it gives such clear expression to the voice of eternal righteousness that it is worth while to make an effort to extend



our sympathies widely enough to comprehend it. I. **THE THRONE OF INIQUITY** (vers. 1-5). Perhaps the opening words ought to be as they are given in the margin of the Revised Version, "Is the righteousness ye should speak dumb?" The psalmist is accusing the administrators of justice of bribery. In the second verse, he describes them as weighing out violence in the scales in which justice ought to be weighed. That is, they observed all the solemn forms of justice, but had no regard for the interests of those who could not pay for their verdicts. In the East this has always been, and is at the present day, one of the leading features of an evil time. Justice cannot be procured; the well-doing man is harassed by his wicked neighbours, and has no redress. The effect of this condition of things on the general community is given in vers. 3-5. Society is poisoned in every department. Lying especially is everywhere rife, as it will always be where there is a corrupt administration of justice. Insensibility to the voices of reason and of the spirit is universal. Men are, he says, like the deaf adder, which stoppeth her ear and will not listen to the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely. There have been epochs in history like this—when at the top of society there has been a corrupt court with a profligate aristocracy, and down through all ranks of the people the poison of falsehood and worldliness has been so diffused that there has been apparently no audience for any one speaking for God, and no career for any one wishing to be simple and true. On the small scale, such a situation often exists. The individual finds himself in a position where those above him are false, reckless and profligate; success seems to be obtainable only by lying and selfishness; and a tender conscience has no chance.

II. **THE THRONE OF GOD** (vers. 6-9). What is to be done in such a situation? The natural thing is to conform, and this is what the majority in all ages do: being at Rome they act as Rome does. Indeed, without religious conviction it is difficult to see how any one can act otherwise, where sin is strong and tyrannical, occupying all the high places, speaking through the organs of public opinion, and exhibiting to the young hundreds of examples. But it is here the Bible helps us. The writer of this psalm, though surrounded by prosperous wickedness, saw, over against the throne of iniquity, another throne lofty and eternal. It was the throne of the living and righteous God. He fixed his eyes on it till his soul was filled with faith and strength; and then, when he turned his eyes to look again on the images of the evil world's power, their glory and stability had disappeared, and they looked fleeting and paltry. In a series of striking figures of speech he expresses his disdain of them. They are like toothless lions and fangless serpents (ver. 6); like a torrent which for a moment may seem to be a river, but immediately disappears in the sand (ver. 7); like an abortion; for their plans will come to nothing (ver. 8); they are cooking the flesh of their pleasure in a pot, but, before it is ready for eating, a whirlwind from the desert will carry the fire away (ver. 9).

III. **THE SPECTACLE OF JUSTICE** (vers. 10, 11). Not only does the psalmist, inspired by the vision of the eternal throne, foresee that this must be the issue, but he earnestly pleads for it; and he does so on two grounds—that the righteous may obtain the reward of their righteousness, and that all men may see that there is a God that judgeth in the earth. The triumph of injustice can only be temporary. There is a day coming when all the unjust judgments both of corrupt tribunals and of unrighteous society will be reversed. Even now God asserts Himself and vindicates His own; and, when He does so, the instincts of every honest heart must rise up to welcome Him. (*J. Stalker, D.D.*) *The perversion of justice*:—Agesilaus, indeed, in other respects was strictly and inflexibly just; but where a man's friends are concerned, he thought a rigid regard to justice a mere pretence. There is still extant a short letter of his to Hydrieus the Carian, which is a proof of what we have said: "If Nicias is innocent, acquit him; if he is not innocent, acquit him on my account; however, be sure to acquit him." (*Plutarch.*)

**Ver. 2. Yea, in heart ye work wickedness.**—*Sin in the heart*:—There once sailed from the city of Orleans a large and noble steamer, laden with cotton, and having a great number of passengers on board. While they were taking in the cargo, a portion of it became slightly moistened by a shower of rain that was falling. This circumstance, however, was not noticed; the cotton was stowed away in the hold, and the hatches fastened down. All went well at first, but one day an alarm of fire was made, and in a few moments the whole ship was enveloped in flames. The damp and closely packed bale of cotton had become heated, and it smouldered

and got into a more dangerous state every day, until it burst forth into a large sheet of flame, and nothing could be done to "quench" it. Now, that heated cotton, smouldering in the hull of the vessel, is like sin in the heart. Do not let us think lightly of sin, speaking of little sins and big sins, white lies and black lies. Sin is sin in God's sight, and God hates sin. (N. Jones.)

Ver. 4. **Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear.**—*A generation of serpents*.—This verse spends itself on a double comparison; of persons and conditions. The persons compared are men and serpents; the conditions or qualities upon which the similitude stands are poison and deafness. The former whereof is indefinite: "Their poison is as the poison of a serpent," any serpent. The latter is restrictive: "Their deafness is like the adder," one kind of serpents. I. Poison—there is such a thing as poison; but where to be found? Wheresoever it is, in man who would look for it? God made man's body of the dust; he mingled no poison with it. He inspired his soul from heaven; he breathes no poison with it. He feeds him with bread; he conveys no poison with it. Whence is this poison? (Matt. xiii. 27). That great serpent, the red dragon, hath poured into wicked hearts this poison. In this poison there is a double pestilential effect. It is to themselves death; to others a contagious sickness. 1. To themselves. It is an epidemical corruption, dispersing the venom over all parts of body and soul. It poisons the heart with falsehood, the head with lightness, the eyes with adultery, the tongue with blasphemy, the hands with oppression, the whole body with intemperance. It poisons beauty with wantonness, strength with violence, wit with wilfulness, learning with dissension, devotion with superstition. And in all this observe the effect of this poison in themselves. For it doth not only annoy others, but mostly destroy themselves. But the poison of the wicked, whilst it infects others, kills themselves. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself" (Prov. v. 22). Their own wickedness, like poison, bath in themselves these three direful effects. (1) It makes them swell with pride, and blows up the heart as a bladder with a quill. "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse?" (1 Sam. xxv. 10). "Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him?" (Job xxi. 15). Thus the spider, the poisonous vermin, "climbs up to the roof of the king's palace" (Prov. xxx. 28). (2) It makes them swill; the poison of sin is such a burning heat within them, that they must still be drinking. (3) It makes them burst (Acts i. 18). This is the catastrophe of a wicked life. "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (James i. 15)." 2. To others. You see how fatal the poison of the wicked is to themselves. The hurt it doth to others consists in outward harming, in inward defiling them. Outwardly.—Their poison breaks forth in the injuries of all about them. They spare neither foreigner nor neighbour. There he little snakes in Babylon, that bite only foreigners, and not inhabitants. Pliny writes of scorpions in the hill Caria, that when they sting only wound the natural-born people of the country; but bite strangers gently or not at all. These, like fools, not only strike them that are nearest, but beateem their poison to the overthrow of all. Such a one cannot sleep except he have done mischief; nay, he dies, if others do not die by him. Inwardly.—Their poison doth most hurt by infection. Their poison is got by touching—he that toucheth pitch shall be defiled: by accompanying with them (Prov. i. 14); by confederacy; by sight—the very beholding of their wickedness causes it in others. II. **THEIR PERSONS**—we have spoken of their poison. They are said to be as serpents (Matt. xxiii. 33; Ezek. ii. 6). 1. There are mystical serpents. 2. There are the dart-like serpents (Acts xxviii.). He is the angry man, the hasty, furious one, who flies upon another with a sudden blow. 3. The great serpent of all, the devil (Rev. xii. 3). Faith in Christ can alone put him to flight. For the remedy of this poison (see John iii. 14), and further let there be repentance. (Thomas Adams.) *The deafness of sinners*.—We do not know what revelations have been made. We do not know but the air is full of messengers and messages. If a million bands were playing near a man and he was stone deaf, he would not hear the music. A blind man might stand amidst uncounted myriads of flowers on the Grand Prairie in Illinois, and not know that there was a flower there. And you may be utterly blind and deaf to the messengers and messages of the higher life, because you are not in that state of development by which you may perceive them. (Henry Ward Beecher.)

Ver. 10. **The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall**

**wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.**—*Satisfaction in the destructive providences of God:*—That is a terrible picture. It expresses not only the dreadful abundance of blood, but also the satisfaction of the "righteous" at its being shed. There is an ignoble and there is a noble and Christian satisfaction in even the destructive providences of God. It is not only permissible but imperative on those who would live in sympathy with His righteous dealings and with Himself, that they should see in these the manifestation of eternal justice, and should consider that they roll away burdens from earth and bring hope and rest to the victims of oppression. It is no unworthy shout of personal vengeance, nor of unfeeling triumph, that is lifted up from a relieved world when Babylon falls. If it is right in God to destroy, it cannot be wrong in His servants to rejoice that He does. Only they have to take heed that their emotion is untarnished by selfish gratulation, and is not untinged with solemn pity for those who were indeed doers of evil, but were themselves the greatest sufferers from their evil. It is hard, but not impossible, to take all that is expressed in the psalm, and to soften it by some effluence from the spirit of Him who wept over Jerusalem, and yet pronounced its doom. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The rejoicing of the righteous at the overthrow of the wicked:*—Hearing a whole quire of birds chirping merrily together, my curiosity was excited to inquire into the occasion of their convocation and merriment, when I quickly perceived a dead hawk in the bush, about which they made such a noise, seeming to triumph at the death of an enemy. I could not blame them for singing the knell of one who, like a cannibal, was wont to feed upon their living bodies, tearing them limb from limb, and scaring them with his frightful appearance. Over this bird, which was so formidable when alive, the most timid wren or titmouse did not now fear to chirp and hop. This occurrence brought to my mind the case of tyrants and oppressors. When living, they are the terror of mankind; but when dead, they are the objects of general contempt and scorn. "When the wicked perish, there is shouting" (Prov. xi. 10). The death of Nero was celebrated by the Romans with bonfires and plays; birds ate the naked flesh of Pompey; Alexander lay unburied thirty days; but a useful and holy life is generally closed by an honourable and lamented death. **Verily there is a reward for the righteous.**—*The character of the righteous:*—What are the personal attributes that go to make up, constitute, and distinguish a righteous character before God? I. **IT HAS CHRIST FOR ITS GROUNDWORK.** Being "over all God blessed for ever," His life was not derived from, nor dependent on, any other. His life was not only innocent of every transgression, in thought, word, and deed; but He was "Jesus Christ the Righteous." He neglected no duty, personal, relative, or official. His life was a service; His death was a sacrifice—of propitiation for the sins of the world. II. **IT HAS FAITH FOR ITS PRINCIPLE, OR INSTRUMENT OF APPROPRIATION.** Is faith, then, in itself, a meritorious, or deserving act or exercise? No more than the outstretching of the arm, the opening of the hand to receive Christ, or of the opening of the eye to look to Him, or the moving of the feet to come to Him. It is simply the instrument, the graciously furnished, and Divinely appointed instrument, the only Divinely appointed instrument, or organ, by which the sinner receives, and becomes united to "Christ the righteousness of God." "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace." III. **IT HAS THE HEART FOR ITS SEAT.** Justification is a change of state, by which we are freed from condemnation; sanctification is a change of nature, by which we are brought into resemblance and communion with Him. The one indicates a relative change in relation to the law; the other, a real and personal change in God's sight. By the one, we receive a title to the promised recompense of reward; by the other, we are "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." IV. **IT HAS THE LIFE FOR ITS EVIDENCE.** A man is not certainly known by what he says, but he is known by what he does, and does habitually in every condition and relation of life. (*G. Robson.*) *A reward for the righteous:*—I. **WHAT ARE THE DISCRIMINATING FEATURES WHICH DISTINGUISH THE RIGHTEOUS.** 1. In describing the righteous, we must distinguish them—(1) From the great mass of mankind, from the world that "lieth in wickedness" (Rom. iii. 10). (2) From mere moralists, who trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others (Rom. x. 3). 2. In describing the righteous, we characterize them. (1) By the genuineness and spirituality of their faith. Righteous men are men of faith (Heb. xi. 3-7). Righteousness is obtained by faith (Rom. iv. 3, 5, 13, 20, 22; Gal. iii. 6). But faith must have an object; this is the Lord Jesus Christ, who became sin for us. (2) By the rectitude and purity of their principles.

(3) By the consistency of their conduct. II. WHAT IS THAT REWARD TO WHICH THE RIGHTEOUS ARE ENTITLED? 1. A gracious and voluntary reward (Rom. vi. 23; Rev. ii. 7, 10, 17). 2. Distant and remote. 3. Suitable and proportionate. 4. Glorious and eternal, and therefore worthy of its Author. In the descriptions of this reward we remark two things; a complete freedom from all evil, both moral and natural, and from all possibility of evil; and the eternal enjoyment of all the good of which their natures are capable. III. WHAT EVIDENCES HAVE WE FOR CREDITING THE ASSERTION IN THE TEXT? 1. The character of God. He is a being of infinite goodness, and His goodness will incline Him to reward the righteous. He is a being of infinite justice, and His justice prompts Him to render to every man according to his works. 2. The positive declarations of Scripture (Gen. xv. 1; Matt. xix. 28, 29; Heb. xi. 6; Rev. xxii. 14). 3. The general consent of mankind. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *A full reward*:—A military gentleman once said to an excellent old minister in the north of Scotland, who was becoming infirm, "Why, if I had power over the pension list, I would at once have you on a pension of half-pay for your long and faithful services." He replied, "Ah, my friend, your master may put you off with half-pay, but my Master will not serve me so meanly; He will give me full pay. Through His grace and favour I expect a full reward, and nothing less will content me." (*The Quiver.*) **Verily, there is a God that judgeth in the earth.**—*God's dealings with mankind*:—I. THE PRESENT APPEARANCES OF THINGS ARE APT TO MAKE WRONG IMPRESSIONS ON OUR MINDS, RESPECTING GOD'S DEALINGS WITH MANKIND. Though we may see the wicked in prosperity and the righteous in affliction, we should ever keep in mind, that prosperity is no sign of God's favour, and that affliction is no necessary sign of His displeasure; and therefore, amidst the changes and vicissitudes of life, let us be on our guard against false and hasty reasonings, with regard to God's dealings with mankind. II. A DAY WILL COME, WHEN THE TRUTH WILL BE SEEN AND ACKNOWLEDGED BY ALL, that "verily there is a reward for the righteous; doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth." While we reflect upon these things, as certain and true, it is most important to inquire particularly into the nature of this judgment, and of this reward. The Bible gives us full instruction in this matter. It tells us, that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good"; and that God "will render to every one according to his works." (*J. S. Pratt.*) *The marks of a moral and judicial government*:—I. THE GENERAL LAWS AND CONSTITUTION OF NATURE EXHIBIT THE JUSTICE, AS WELL AS THE WISDOM OF GOD. As there is an evident subservience of the general frame of the world to the benefit of human life, and such various provisions in nature to answer the Divine intentions of producing knowledge, virtue, and happiness in mankind; as numberless proofs of wisdom and benevolence appear throughout the whole; here is the strongest presumption in favour of the Divine justice; and it is most irrational to imagine that injustice can find place in a plan or constitution of so much wisdom and goodness. II. In consequence of that constitution of things which His creative wisdom hath established, and which shows undeniably the goodness of His intentions, THERE ARE CERTAIN MEASURES OF DIVINE JUSTICE IN CONTINUAL EXECUTION, FOR THE PUNISHMENT OF VICE AND THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF VIRTUE. Here begins the moral government of God; and the marks or proofs, by attending to which, we may be convinced that there is verily a God that judgeth in the earth. The subordinations of human society are appointed by the Author of nature for the purposes of His governing justice, civil and domestic government, etc. We may further trace the footsteps of Divine justice in the natural resentments of mankind against the perpetrators of wicked actions; who thereby expose themselves to a general indignation or contempt; for the passions and affections of men, even of vicious men, naturally rise in favour of virtue and detestation of vice in others. There is an order, also, in the constitution of the human body, for the punishment of some vices. As those crimes which are most injurious to society are generally punished, by the public resentments of that society which they injure; so those vices that are of a personal nature find their own punishment nearer home. Finally, there is the most certain and effectual provision of nature, for the punishment of wickedness and the reward of virtue, in the frame of the human mind. There is as it were a tribunal of justice erected in every man's own heart, where conscience sits as judge, to whose approving or condemning sentence men are continually exposed, and most of all in the seasons of retirement and reflection. III. THESE MEASURES OF DIVINE JUSTICE ARE MORE EXTENSIVE THAN MEN GENERALLY APPREHEND OR BELIEVE. The stings of conscience are often

keen and piercing to the inmost soul; the passions of vice are corroding, and destroy mental quiet and repose; the resentments of society, the disaffection of friends and relatives, are galling to the heart; the terror of human laws is grievous and burdensome; and infamy, disease and death, the frequent effects of debauchery and villainy, cannot be thought slight punishments. Now, though wicked persons may avoid some of these punishments, yet it is hardly possible that any criminal in the world can escape them all. The internal peace and pleasure which arise from innocence and conscious virtue are little esteemed or considered; nor are the troubles and pains, which ensue from guilt in the natural course of things, much regarded as proofs of Divine justice. IV. THE PARTICULAR INSTANCES WHICH APPEAR TO THE CONTRARY ARE BUT EXCEPTIONS TO THAT GENERAL ORDER ESTABLISHED IN NATURE. The tyranny and persecution which have raged in the world for a succession of ages, by which the best of men have been the most inhumanly treated, present the darkest scene that ever was beheld in the world, in respect to the providence and justice of the Supreme Governor. But these persecutions were the means of trying and exercising the probity and piety of numbers of men, and of producing the noblest harvest of genuine virtue. It may be reasonably thought that it was in order to this end Divine Providence permitted such an amazing tyranny to rise, prevail, and continue. In this view the Holy Scriptures teach us to look upon such scenes, and thus to reconcile them with the justice of an over-ruling Providence. V. To vindicate the perfect justice of the Divine government, to give proper consolation to the minds of good men, and to raise virtue to the highest excellence and stability, RECOURSE MUST BE HAD TO THE DOCTRINE OF A FUTURE LIFE; and in this point the Gospel-revelation is abundantly sufficient to give entire satisfaction, and to support all good men under the severest trials. (*S. Bourn.*) *The righteousness of God's government of men*:—It was a saying of Solon, the Athenian law-giver, that a republic walks upon two feet; one being just punishment for the unworthy, the other due reward for the worthy. If it fail in either of these, it necessarily goes lame

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### PSALM LIX.

VERS. 1-17. *Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God.*—*Revelations of the good and bad in human nature*:—I. THE ENMITY OF MAN TOWARDS MAN. 1. From the description that David here gives of his enemies, we learn that—(1) They hated him with a deadly hate. They sought nothing less than his life; they were "bloody men." (2) They hated him without a cause. "Without my fault." (3) They hated him with furious rage. They are represented as furious beasts of prey, as ravenous dogs, as malignant slanderers, whose words are cutting as a "sword," from whose mouth belches the lava of abuse. (4) They hated him with persistent effort. They watch in the day, wait in ambush, return at night, and thus on until their fiendish purposes are attained. 2. The fact that men are thus enemies to men—(1) Argues human apostasy. At some time or other there has happened in human life a moral earthquake which has riven the social body into pieces. (2) Reveals the need of Christ. He reconciles man to man by reconciling all men to God. II. THE APPEAL OF SELFISHNESS TO HEAVEN. What merit is there in such a prayer as this? Can it ever meet acceptance with that God who willeth not the death of a sinner, and who is not "willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"? III. THE CONFIDENCE OF PIETY IN GOD. Despite all the imperfections of David's character, the root of the matter was in him. "I will sing aloud of thy mercy," etc. Perfection of character is only gradually reached. "The acorn," it has been said, "does not become an oak in a day; the ripened scholar was not made such by a single lesson; the well-trained soldier was not a raw recruit yesterday; it is not one touch of the artist's pencil that produces a finished painting; there are always months between seed-time and harvest; even so, the path of the just is like the 'shining light' which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (*Homilist.*) *God's defence of His persecuted people*:—A lady was wakened up by a very strange noise of pecking against the window-pane, and she saw a butterfly flying backward and

forward inside the window-pane in great fright, and outside a sparrow pecking and trying to get at it. The butterfly did not see the glass, and expected every moment to be caught; and the sparrow did not see the glass, and expected every moment to catch the butterfly; yet all the while the little creature was as safe as if it had been three miles away, because of the glass between it and the sparrow. So it is with the Christians who are abiding in Christ. His presence is between them and every danger. It really does seem that Satan does not understand about this mighty and invisible power that protects us, or else he would not waste his efforts—like the sparrow, he does not see. And Christians are often like the butterfly, and do not see their defence, and so are frightened, and flutter backwards and forwards in terror. But all the while Satan cannot touch the soul that has the Lord Jesus between itself and him. (*Christian Age*.)

**Ver. 9. Because of his strength, will I wait upon Thee.**—*Waiting and singing* (with ver. 17):—"My strength! I will wait upon Thee," so says the psalmist in the midst of his troubles; and because he does so, he says at the end of the psalm, repeating his earlier vow, but with an alteration that means a great deal, "My strength! I will sing unto Thee." If you have waited, while in the middle of trouble, you will be sure to sing after it, and perhaps even during it. **I. THE THOUGHTS OF GOD THAT LIGHT UP THE DARKNESS.** "My strength," "my tower," "the God of my mercy"—these are the thoughts which burn for this devout soul in the darkness of trouble. Notice, first, how that "my" is the very strength and nerve of the psalmist's confidence. It is not so much what he thinks God to be—though that is all important—as that he thinks that, whatever God is, He is it to him. "My defence, my strength; the God of my mercy"—who gives it to me, that is, the mercy that I need. And notice the happy reiteration indicative of assured possession, and blissful counting of one's wealth. With each repetition of the "my" there is a fresh outgoing of the heart in confidence, in conscious weakness, and in believing appropriation of God's strength a tightening of the fingers on his treasure. If we are in sorrow, let us say, "I will go unto God, my exceeding joy." If we are exposed to the hurtling of a whole flight of arrows of disaster, let us say, "I dwell in the pavilion where no calamity comes." If we are conscious of weakness, let us cast ourselves into those strong arms, and be sure that from their clasp there will come tingling into our feebleness the electric thrill of His almightiness, and that we, too, shall be able to "do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us." My strength, because I am weak; "my fortress," because I am assailed; "the God of my mercy," because I need His mercy. **II. WHAT SUCH VIEWS OF GOD HEARTEN A MAN TO DO.** "My strength, I will wait upon Thee," says the first of our texts. "I will look unto Him" is, perhaps, nearer the meaning of the words than the "wait" of our version. If these three blessed thoughts, "my strength, my tower, the God of my mercy," are uppermost in our heart, there will be the fixed attitude and eye of expectancy. Did you ever see a dog sitting and looking up into its master's face, waiting for a morsel to be cast, that it might snap at it and swallow it? That is a very homely illustration of the way in which Christian men should sit and look at God. If He is "my strength," and "my tower," and if "my mercy" comes from Him, then no attitude befits me except that of such gazing expectancy and steadfast direction of mind and heart to Him. "My strength, I will watch Thee." And there should be, too, not only expectancy in the look, but patience, and not only expectancy and patience, but submission. Stand before Him, waiting to know what is to be done by you with the strength that He gives, and how the mercy that He inbreathes is to be expressed and manifested in your life. This waiting should be the fixed attitude and posture of our spirits. The psalmist had to make a definite resolution to look away to God, for there was a great deal that tempted him to look elsewhere. He says, "I will wait," and the original conveys very strongly the idea of his having to set his teeth, as it were, in the effort to keep himself quiet and waiting before God. If we look to Him we are kept up, and we are kept right; but it takes all our will-power, and it needs a very resolute effort if we are not to be forced out of the attitude of faith and to let our eyes turn to alarmed gazing at the stormy seas. Without such effort we shall be weakened by looking at the foes and not at the fortress, at the difficulties and inward weakness and not at our strength, but we shall find the means of making this effort after steadfastness of expectant gaze in faithful remembrance of the great Name of the Lord, our strength and our fortress. **III. WHAT COMES OF**

THIS WAITING. He that began with saying, "O my strength, I will wait upon Thee," ends with saying, "O my strength, I will sing praises unto Thee." That is to say, away in the future there lies the certainty that all will end in thankfulness and rapture of praise-giving, and in the present, whilst the attitude of watchfulness has to be kept up, and evils and dangers are still round us, there may glow in our hearts a quiet assurance as to how they are all going to end, and how for the waiting in the present there will be substituted glad praise in the future. Into the midst of winter we can bring summer. We can live by hope, we can say, "To-day I will watch, to-morrow I shall praise." And because to-morrow we shall praise, there will be some praise mingling with the watchfulness of to-day. Let us do the one now, and at last we shall do the other. Do the one, and even in the doing of it the other will begin. The waiting and the praising are twins, the one a trifle older than the other. "Unto Thee, my strength, will I look," and even now the waiting soul may have a song, feeble perhaps and broken, like the twitter of birds when the east wind blows and the clouds are low in the early spring, but which will mellow and swell into fuller rapture when the dark, ungenial days are overpast. (A. Maclaren, D.D.)

Ver. 10. **The God of my mercy shall prevent me.**—*A singular title and a special favour:*—Our trials and troubles, while they test and develop us, do also by Divine grace strengthen and improve us, and ever have we great cause to bless God for them when grace sanctifies them to our highest good. Had not David been a man of many afflictions he would never have penned such a verse as our text, a confident utterance of unstaggering faith, full of meaning, rich with consolation, the very cream of assured hope in God. I. DAVID'S LOOKING TO HIS GOD. "The God of mercy," saith he. Note that this psalm was composed by him upon the occasion of his being shut up in the house of Michal, Saul's daughter, and surrounded by his adversaries. The messengers of the bloodthirsty king watched the house all night long, to kill him, and when they had not effected their purpose, Saul demanded that he should be brought, on his bed, into his presence, that he might slay him. It was not easy for a man, when his enemies were watching the house, to escape out of their hands. David, however, does not appear to have been at all disturbed, but with perfect confidence in God he expected that a way of escape would be made for him. 1. David looked to God on this occasion because he had before this habitually waited upon Him. His faith had realized the existence of God, and his soul had felt the power of that realized truth. This is a thing unknown to the unconverted, and unfelt to any high degree by large numbers of those who profess to know the Lord. 2. David was driven more closely to his God by the peculiar trouble with which he was environed. It is a blessed thing when the waves of affliction wash us upon the rock of confidence in God alone, when darkness below gives us an eye to the light above. The psalmist says in the verse preceding the text, "Because of his strength"—that is, the strength of the foe—"will I wait upon Thee, for God is my defence." Because the enemy is too strong for me, therefore will I turn to my God, and invoke His omnipotence as my defence. To come to the end of yourself is to get to the beginning of your God. Blessed is that extremity which is God's opportunity. 3. As soon as David had looked alone to his God his trials grew small. In his own esteem they grew to be nothing, for he says, "Thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them, Thou shalt have all the heathen in derision"; and methinks something of the laughter of God penetrated David's spirit; and in that house wherein he was enclosed as a prisoner he smiled in his heart at the disappointment which awaited his foes. Faith laughs at that which fear weeps over; it leaps over mountains at whose feet mere mortal strength lies down to die. II. DAVID'S APPROPRIATION OF THE DIVINE MERCY. "The God of my mercy." Notice that the pith of the title lies in the appropriating word "my." Luther used to say that the very soul of divinity lay in the possessive pronouns; another divine said that all the stir there ever has been in the world has been caused by meum and tuum, mine and thine. "It is mine," says one man; "It is mine," cries another man, and then comes a conflict. "It is mine," says one king; "Nay," says another, "it is not thine," and then fierce war begins. Nothing influences a man so much as that which he calls his own. "The God of my mercy." 1. David appropriated to himself a portion of Divine mercy as being peculiarly his; and we shall never advance in the divine life unless we do the same, for the mercy which is in common to all men, of what avail is it to any man? But the mercy which any

one man by faith grasps for himself, this is the mercy which will bless him and which he will prize above all things. 2. I think he meant, too, that there was a portion of mercy which he had already received, which was, therefore, altogether his own. The "God of my mercy"—he meant the God of the mercy he had already experienced. Well may it bring the tears into your eyes to think of it. The mercy which nursed you in your infancy; the mercy which watched over you in your youth and kept you when you were apt to stray; the mercy which restrained you from many a deadly sin, etc. 3. And, remember, that all the mercy you have had is little compared with the mercy you have yet to receive. As the rich father thinks, "This will I give to my eldest son, and that to the second, and that to the third," and so he puts by a portion for each of his children; so has God mapped out and allotted for each one of us some choice and special mercy fitted for our peculiar case, which no one can receive but ourselves, but which we must and shall obtain. 4. But I think David made a larger grasp than this, for when he said, "The God of my mercy," he felt as if all the mercy in the heart of God belonged to him. If any one saint should have all the wants of all the saints in the world put upon him, and if his necessities should be so great that nothing would supply them but the whole of the infinite mercy which fills the heart of God, that child of God should have all the mercy which the Lord Himself can dispense. III. David CONFIDING IN GOD. "The God of my mercy shall prevent me," or anticipate me by His mercy. Now, it so happens that the Hebrew word may be read in all three tenses, and some have said it should be understood, "The God of my mercy has prevented me"; others, "does prevent me"; and a third party, like our translators, read it, "shall prevent me." Whichever tense you choose is true, and the whole three put together may be viewed as the full meaning of the passage. 1. "The Lord has prevented me." This is one of the grand doctrines of the Gospel, the doctrine of eternal love, spontaneous, self-generated, having no cause but itself. God loved us before we loved Him—he prevented us with love. Before His people were born God had elected and redeemed them, and prepared the Gospel, by which in due time they are called. He is before us in all good things. O Lord, Thou hast the first hand with Thy people; they seek Thee early, but Thou art up before them, Thou hast distanced them in the race of affection; Alpha art Thou, indeed! 2. The Lord hast prevented us, but the meaning of the passage is that He does still prevent us. Is He not daily doing so? Before you can feel the pinch of want the mercy is given. God goes before you day by day, and His paths drop fatness. Even in the common acceptance of the word "prevent" God has often so gone before us that He has prevented us from the commission of many sins, into which otherwise we should have fallen to our sorrow and damage. Again, how often has He prevented our prayers! Before we have asked, we have had; while we were yet calling, we have received. The desire of the righteous is granted oftentimes as soon as it takes shape, and before it is expressed. 3. It will always be so. God will prevent us. A good captain, when he is marching an army through a country, takes care to make provision for every emergency. It is time for the soldiers to camp, and they need tents. Bring up the baggage wagons, here are the tents which you ask for! The men must have their rations. Here they are! Serve them out! The army comes to a river by and by, how will they pass it? Why, the engineers are ready, and pontoons are very soon thrown across. It is wonderful how the well-skilled commander foresees every possible emergency, and has everything ready just at the nick of time. Much more is it so with our God. So let us close with these three practical reflections. If He prevents us with mercy, let us not hesitate to come to Him. Loiter not, O soul, if thou wouldst have the mercy of God. Is God so quick? Wilt thou be slow? Does He go first, and wilt thou not follow? 4. Is God so quick in mercy? Let us who are His be very quick in service. Say in your heart, "My God, since Thou dost prevent me, I cannot hope to keep pace with Thy mercy, but at any rate I will not lag further behind Thee than I must. When I have done all I can for Thee, how little it is, but that little shall be done." George Herbert once described the good man as resolved "to build a spital, or mend common ways," and in his day these were acts of charity which piety delighted in; other good deeds are more fitting for these days. Houses for worship are wanted in many a populous district, and orphan children need to be fed. He who can buy no sweet cane with money, can bring time and zeal and effort, and these are precious. What, then, will you do? 5. And now finally,



believer, cast yourself into your Lord's arms. Have done with fretting; have done with anxiety and doubt. Mount like the lark to your God, and sing as you mount. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Vers. 16, 17. **But I will sing of Thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of Thy mercy in the morning.**—*Meditation and praise*.—I. THE SUBJECT OF THE PSALMIST'S MEDITATION. 1. He meditated upon the Divine mercy. All the perfections of the Divine nature are glorious, and furnish matter for delightful meditation. But it is from His mercy that we draw our chief consolation, encouragement, and hope. 2. He contemplated God as his refuge in trouble. "Thou hast been my defence and refuge," etc. We have every encouragement to put our trust in God. He is represented as a "rock," a "fortress," a "high tower," a "shield," and a "buckler." God as a refuge—(1) Is near—always at hand. (2) Affords the greatest security. (3) Is suitable. Our troubles differ, but He is a suitable refuge in every trouble. (4) David proved God as his refuge. Saul had laid plots to destroy him, but the Lord had delivered him. We also have obtained support and relief by trusting in God. 3. He contemplated God as his strength and confided in His power. In what respects are we to consider God as the strength of His people? (1) He defends them from danger by His power. (2) He assists and strengthens them for duty by His grace. II. THE INFLUENCE OF THE PSALMIST'S MEDITATION. It led him to praise God. 1. Praising God is most reasonable. 2. Is a pleasant and delightful exercise. 3. Should be a part of every day's employment. Divine goodness is daily manifested, and should be daily acknowledged. 4. Will tend to prepare us to meet the trials which may yet be before us. 5. Will tend to meeten us for the enjoyment of heaven. 6. Requires a suitable frame of mind. True praise springs from gratitude; and is promoted by a consideration of what God is, what He has done for us, and what He has promised to do for us. CONCLUSION. 1. How great are the privileges of the people of God! 2. How important seriously to consider whether we are interested in these privileges. 3. Learn the importance of continuing to make God our refuge in trouble. (Anon.) **In the morning.**—*Morning energy*.—The morning is my time fixed for my meeting the Lord. What meaning there is in the word "morning"; it is a cluster of rich grapes. Let me crush them and drink the sacred wine. "In the morning"—then God meant me to be at my best in strength and hope; I have not to climb in my weariness; in the night I have buried yesterday's fatigue, and in the morning I take a new lease of energy. Give God thy strength—all thy strength He asks only what He first gave. In the morning—then He may mean to keep me long that He may make me rich. In the morning—then it is an endless road He bids me climb, else how could I reach it ere the sun be set? Sweet morning! there is hope in its music. (Joseph Parker.) **The God of my mercy.**—*Personal appropriation of mercy*.—If God show mercy to thousands, labour to know that this mercy is for you. "He is the God of my mercy." A man that was ready to drown saw a rainbow; saith he, "What am I the better, though God will not drown the world, if I drown." So, what are we the better—God is merciful—if we perish? Let us labour to know God's special mercy for us. (Watson.)

# PSALM LX.

VERS. 1-12. **O God, Thou hast cast us off; Thou hast scattered us.**—*A psalm of defeat*.—In our own language we possess many fine songs of patriotism. It would be impossible to overestimate the value of such a song as "Scots wha hae" as a means of keeping alive patriotic sentiments in the breasts of the people. What a treasure it would be if we had a dozen other incidents from the great epochs of our history embalmed in equally immortal verse and sung at every fireside. The Hebrews had their history thus set to music; and the poetical commentary on their national fortunes reaches down to the very bottom of their meaning, for it reads them in the light of eternal truth. I. A PATRIOT'S DEPRESSION (vers. 1-5). The enemy had invaded the country, and there was sufficient force to withstand them. So great was the panic that the inhabitants were like drunken men, unable

to comprehend the extent of their calamity and unable to stand up against it (ver. 8). But the worst was that it was a triumph of the heathen over the people of the true God, to whom a banner had been given to display because of the truth (ver. 4). The humblest Christian has received a banner to display because of the truth. We are working for a cause which is old as eternity and lofty as heaven. Our personal success or defeat is nothing; but the victory of the truth is everything. This great verse was given out by Ebenezer Erskine beneath the castle walls of Stirling when he and his congregation were turned out of the Church of Scotland; and it has been connected with other great historical scenes in the history of the Church. II. THE PROMISE RECALLED (vers. 6-8). At this point a change comes over the spirit of the writer. Prayer has brought him to himself. We are either to suppose that, in reply to an inquiry addressed to God, perhaps through the Urim and Thummim, he receives an oracle on the situation, or that, his memory being quickened by a sudden inspiration, he recalls an ancient oracle, given in some similar crisis, in which God promises to His anointed king the complete possession of the Holy Land and also the subjection of the neighbouring peoples. The oracle is quoted after the psalmist has expressed his joy at recalling it. God promises to divide Shechem, as at the Conquest under Joshua He divided the different parts of the land to the various tribes, and to mete out the valley of Succoth. Why these two places are specially mentioned, it is impossible now to say. They may have been strongholds of the enemy. Then (ver. 7) Gilead and Manasseh, which stand for the part of the country beyond the Jordan, are claimed by God as His. And of Ephraim and Judah, which represent the division west of the Jordan, it is said that the one shall be His helmet ("the strength of mine head") and the other His sceptre (not "lawgiver"). As the Holy Land is represented by these well-known parts, the hostile nations, which are to be subjugated, are represented by Israel's three well-known foes—Moab, Edom, and Philistia. And, as the positions which Ephraim and Judah were to occupy are depicted by saying that they are to fulfil the honourable offices of helmet and sceptre to God, the fate of the hostile nations is similarly depicted by representing them as fulfilling to Him the basest offices (ver. 8). Moab is to be the vessel in which He washes His feet when coming home from a journey, and Edom the slave to whom, in so doing, He flings the dusty sandals which He has taken off; while Philistia is to grace his triumph. In this way the psalmist rallied his spirit in an hour of disaster. And, in fighting the Lord's battles, we can similarly fall back on the promise recorded in the second psalm, that the heathen shall be given to Christ and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. The humblest Christian can fall back on the promise that none shall pluck him out of Christ's hand, and that the good work which God has begun shall be perfected. III. THE RETURN OF HOPE (vers. 9-12). At ver. 9 he turns to face the crisis which in the first part of the psalm he had bewailed. He sees the difficulty of the situation. Edom is a strong enemy, and its capital, Petra, a "strong city." "The entrance to it," says a traveller, "is by a narrow gorge lined by lofty precipices, nearly two miles in length. At some places the overhanging rocks approach so near to each other that only two horsemen can proceed abreast." Who, asks the psalmist, is to bring me thither? And the answer is, None but God. For a time He had deserted them, perhaps because they had been trusting to themselves or to their past victories. They needed to be humbled and to learn the lesson that "vain is the help of man" (ver. 11). But defeat had taught them this lesson; and now they are trusting only in their God. When God's servants have reached this state of mind, nothing can stand before them. And so this psalm, which began in panic and tears, ends with the trumpet note of hope (ver. 12). (J. Stalker.)

Ver. 4. *Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth.*—*Our banner:*—In the Lord Jesus we find the clue to the history and the solution of the prophecy. He is the banner—He is the ensign that is lifted up before the people. He is the Jehovah Nissi, "the Lord my banner," whom it is our joy to follow, and around whom it is our delight to rally. I. WHEREFORE HE IS SO CALLED. 1. As the point of union. In stress of war all gathered round the standard. And so all Christians around Christ. All followed its guidance. 2. And the banner, let it be remembered, is always the object of chief attack. The moment the adversary sees it, his object is to strike there. Did they not of old aim their shots at the flagstaff to cut down the banner? So

has the Lord Jesus Christ been ever assailed. 3. And why should the banner be the object of attack but for this very reason, that it is the symbol of defiance? As soon as ever the banner is lifted up, it is, as it were, flapped in the face of the foe. It seems to say to him, "Do your worst—come on! We are not afraid of you—we defy you!" Every time a sermon is preached in the power of the Spirit, it is as though the shrill clarion woke up the fiends of hell, for every sermon seems to say to them, "Christ is come forth again to deliver His lawful captives out of your power; the King of kings has come to take away His subjects." We have not quite exhausted the metaphor yet. 4. The banner was ever a source of consolation to the wounded. He sees the banner still waving, and with his last breath he cries, "On! on! on!" and falls asleep content, because the banner is safe. It has not been cast down. Though he has fallen, yet the banner is secure. Even so every true soldier of the Cross rejoices in its triumph. 5. The banner is the emblem of victory. When the fight is done, and the soldier cometh home, what bringeth he? His blood-stained flag. And what is borne highest in the procession as it winds through the streets? It is the flag. They hang it in the minster; high up there in the roof, and where the incense smoketh, and where the song of praise ascendeth, there hangs the banner, honoured and esteemed, borne in conflict and in danger. Now, our Lord Jesus Christ shall be our banner in the last day, when all our foes shall be under our feet. II. WHO GAVE US THE BANNER? Soldiers often esteem the colours for the sake of the person who first bestowed them. You and I ought to esteem the Gospel of our precious Christ for the sake of God who gave Him to us. "Thou hast given a banner." God gave us the banner in old eternity. III. TO WHOM IS THIS BANNER GIVEN? Shall the banner be put in the drunkard's hands? Shall the great truth of Christ be left to those who live in sin? Now, inasmuch as this banner is given to those that fear God, if you fear God it is given to you. I do not know in what capacity you are to bear it, but I do know there is somewhere or other where you have to carry it. Mother, let the banner wave in your household. Merchant, let your banner be fixed upon your house of business. Let it be unfurled and fly at your masthead, O sailor. Bear your banner, O soldier, in your regiment. IV. WHY WAS THIS BANNER GIVEN TO US? To be "displayed because of the truth." There let it be displayed. Preach Christ. Lift Him up with a clear voice as one that has something to say that He would have men hear. Speak of Him boldly as one who is not ashamed of his message. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The missionary banner*:—We may regard the banner as telling of the Divine presence and power of our Lord Jesus Christ. And thus understood, notice—I. THE CHARGE THAT IS GIVEN TO US. We are to carry this banner in the front of the advancing force, and we are never to neglect or lose it. This banner was so carried by the apostles and the believers of the Pentecostal Church. II. THE OBLIGATION THAT IS IMPLIED BY ITS POSSESSION. God has given this banner to us, and it involves great responsibility. What the Gospel has done for us should urge us to make it known, should make us eager in the work, counting it our high privilege. And it comes associated with Divine promises. III. THE MOTIVE BY WHICH THE RESPONSIBILITY IS URGED—"because of the truth." For it is the only truth that can meet the wants of guilty souls and bring light and blessing to men. And this banner has been borne and with results full of blessing, for the results of mission work within the last ninety years are greater than those of the first century of apostolic labour with Pentecostal power. (J. P. Chown.) *The Cross, the banner of the Church*:—I. IN WHAT RESPECTS THE GOSPEL IS COMPARED TO A BANNER. 1. For the mustering of the troops to battle. 2. To guide the soldier to conflict. 3. To animate the sinking hopes and courage of the soldier. Now, the Gospel does all this in the spiritual warfare. II. TO WHOM THE LORD GIVES THIS BANNER—"to them that feared Thee." III. TO WHOM THE LORD GIVES THIS BANNER—"to them that are animated by the truth." IV. WHEREFORE IT IS TO BE THUS DISPLAYED. Different motives may animate us herein: party spirit, and the like. But the right motive is "because of the truth," that it may be more known and welcomed. (J. W. Cunningham, M.A.) *Christ a banner to His Church*:—I. AS A POINT OF UNION. When Christ is preached, when the banner is raised, His people gather around it and follow it. All true Christians are an army gathered under the same banner, to fight against common enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil. II. AS A SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT. We know the dismay and discouragement which often follow when a standard-bearer fainteth. Whereas the sight of their colours floating in the air gladdens and inspirits the troops. Hence we learn that the believer, in

his Christian warfare, is to gather strength and courage, by continually "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith," etc. In all his difficulties and trials, the believer is to "consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself," etc. III. As a TERROR TO THE ENEMIES OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE. This follows, by necessary consequence. For if He ensures victory to His people, He must overthrow their enemies. If He is to cover His people with the garments of salvation, He must also clothe their enemies with shame. (R. W. Diddin, M.A.) *The standard-bearer*:—Here we have the believer presented as a standard-bearer. I. A BANNER. The republic of God has its flag. II. THE BEARER. Every one who "fears" God. In an army every man is a soldier; in God's army every soldier is also a standard-bearer. He bears both weapons wherewith to fight, and the flag wherewith to witness; and the flag is as important as the sword or shield. God's army is made "terrible" to the enemy by its banners. III. THE DUTY. The banner is to "be displayed." God's believing people are to confess Him before men; display the flag, openly declare that He is their God and they are His disciples. IV. THE OBJECT. "Truth" here stands for everything in doctrine and duty which is Godlike and profitable. In two ways the display of the army's colours furthers the cause. 1. In the impression made on the foe. 2. In the incentive furnished to heroic endeavour and endurance on the part of fellow-soldiers. (A. T. Pierson, D.D.) *Keep the flag flying*:—At the relief of Kimberley the garrison could say that through all the siege, "Her Majesty's flag had been kept flying." And when Sir George White was relieved at Ladysmith, he exclaimed, "Thank God, our flag has been upheld." Paul, after the siege of a long life, felt the same triumphant boast about the banner entrusted to him. *The royal flag supreme*:—Let our party flags be seen by all means, but grouped around Jehovah Nissi, not planted in its place. It is narrated that during the times of the Crusade, when the Lion-hearted Richard I. of England, the Emperor of Austria, and the King of France were jointly waging war against the heroic heathen Saladin, a jealousy sprang up in the camp between England and Austria, and one morning the British banner was found lying in the dust on St. George's Mount, and the standard of Austria occupying its place. No sooner did impetuous Richard hear of the insult offered to the Royal ensign than he strode forth alone, and before the assembled hosts hurled Austria's ensign to the ground, and caused the British lion once more to take pre-eminence, remarking, "Your banners may be planted around mine, but never take its place." So let it be with us, beloved. Upon the St. George's Mount of our heart and life let the Lion of Judah, Jehovah Nissi, alone have the place of honour. (A. G. Brown.)

**Vers. 6-9. God hath spoken in His Holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth.**—*A war-song of Israel*:—In this war-song we are given the key to the whole story of Jewish development as the interpretation of life—that interpretation which has, through Christ, received its verification as the universal method by which religion becomes a practical force in the world. Look at it. First, how real, how practical, how concrete it all is. It is not selfish, personal trouble about which he is vehement. He is one with his people, and it is their distress which is his. And then, secondly, these disasters cannot be for him blind accidents. They are not the cruelties of some ruthless fate, or the mere victories of force, accident, fate. God's will is the sole, paramount interpretation of every incident, and there can be no other. "Thou also hast been displeased." That is the only reasonable account of the matter. And then, after that, in that thought lies his hope. If God has done it, and done it for correction, then God can also undo it, and undo it He surely will. He, by His own right hand. Who but He? The people—broken, shattered, bruised, and drunken—they cannot heal themselves. They cannot restore themselves to their old soundness and strength. Their sin has wrecked their power to be as they were. They can but recognize the hand of God that broke and scattered them. God can do the rest. Their renewal, their recovery, must be all His act, and He will be sure to do it, because He has smitten that He may heal. What other motive could He have? And then out of that thought the psalmist passes on to the martial outburst which is so charged with the spirit of Asensontide. Israel, if she is to recover, we say, must throw herself altogether on the prevenient help of God. "God has spoken in His holiness." That is what precedes. He and no other has taken the great step on which all depends. God has planned for Himself already an organized kingdom, and each spot, and each district, and each centre

is selected and named. And this highland chief, this king, this servant of His, has been shown it all. He has been told exactly what is in God's mind. Now, surely we can feel the very touch of an Ascension flame in the old words. This poise of the soul—this spiritual situation in which the believing soul for ever finds itself wherever it would act in God's name—this mode and method of all religious faith wherever it be found—these have been caught for us here: these have been fixed. They are wholly and utterly the same to-day for us as they were for that border-chief in his warfare with Edom. Just to rehearse the succession of his thoughts and of his prayers with our mind. First, Ascensiontide summons us to look out, as he did, beyond the circuit of our own private affairs, and to take our place amid the rank of the people of God, and to identify ourselves with His historical kingdom. Look at Christ's Church as it fares in the world. That Church is the creation of His royalty. There He has set His name, and with her lies our lot. Her interest, her fortune, her fears, her distress, all are ours. We are committed to her, so that our very faiths are interwoven one with another. If she is in strength we are strong, and if she is burdened we are weak with her weakness. Look out on her. How goes it? Alas, for us as for him, the same spectacle. God has cast us out. God has scattered us abroad. God's hand is in it. And, if God's hand is in it, then God's mind is behind it. God acts for a purpose, and that means for a purpose unrelinquished and invincible, towards which He is ever pressing on; if it cannot be by victory, then by penalty, by discipline. What is that purpose? Ascensiontide is our answer. Then it was that God spoke out in His holiness. He revealed His whole intention. He clothed Himself in His righteousness. What was it to be? Oh, with the psalmist let us exult, for God in His exultation, lifting His Son to His throne on high, pronounced that in Him, the Beloved, He would claim the entire world for Himself. Every nation was to be a province of His kingdom, who was to be King of kings and Lord of lords. "I will rejoice," he cried, as he saw it himself. So our King, aware of all the purposes of God, cried aloud to His great apostle in the vision, saying, "I am He who was alive and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore. And I hold in My hand the keys of death and hell. I will rejoice, for I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine, and Ephraim is the strength of my head, and Judah is my law-giver." So the cry of the ascended Lord rings out over the whole, asseverating its perpetual claim. "Mine," for instance, "is the intellect in its exquisite skill, in its courage, in its profundity; mine is science in its patience and its truth; mine is art; mine is the whole world of feeling, emotion, passion; mine is marriage in all its inexhaustible magic; mine is the home in the honour of motherhood; the crown of children; mine is the heart with its sorrows and its joys; mine is the will with the force of its unresting efforts; mine is man. To everything in him I allot function and duty and service and liberty and gladness. Ephraim is the strength of my head, and Judah is my lawgiver." Nor can He, the Victor, stop at the borders of His kingdom of grace. Still that kingdom must grow, must expel wrong, injustice, lust, misery, cruelty. These yet hold their own in the high rocks and fastnesses of the hills of Edom—in their castles and cities in the rich coasts of the Philistines. And these must yield; these must break. God has promised it. He has set the name of Jesus over everything that is named, and He must reign until He subdue all things unto Himself. (*Canon Scott Holland.*)

Vers. 8-10. **Moab is my washpot.**—*Moab is my washpot*:—"Moab is my washpot," nothing more—a thing contemptible and despicable as compared with the eternal realities of covenant blessings; yet, for all that, there was a use for Moab, a use to be rightly understood. My object will be to show that, contrary to the ordinary course of nature, but not contrary to faith, even this ungodly world may be made to assist our advance in holiness. Moab may become our washpot. The defiling world may be made helpful to us in the following ways. I. First of all, ungodly men, if we are in a gracious spirit, may be of solemn service to us, because **WE SEE IN THEM WHAT SIN IS**. They are beacons upon the rocks to keep us from danger. They are our washpot in that respect, that they warn us of pollution, and so help to prevent our falling into it. We were "heirs of wrath even as others." "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Our sins are different, but we were all without exception shapen in iniquity, and as in water, face answereth unto face, so the heart of man to man. When you see the wickedness of an ungodly man, make him your washpot, by remembering that you also,

though you are regenerate, are encompassed with "the body of this death." By remembering what we are, and what we were, we may, by taking warning from the evil courses of others, avoid the like condemnation. There are certain sins which we readily detect in others, which should serve as loud calls to us to correct the same things in ourselves. For instance, as to the matter of bodily indulgence. The sinner is a man who puts his body before his soul, and his head where his feet should be; he is a monster in nature. When, therefore, you see a drunkard, or an unchaste person, say to yourself, "I must mortify my members, and give my spiritual nature the predominance. For this I must cry mightily to God, the Eternal Spirit, lest the body of this death prevail over me. I must keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest I, too, become a prey to the same animal passions, which lead sinners captives." Warnings are neglected by the foolish. The young sluggard sees the huge thorns and thistles in the older sluggard's garden, and yet he follows the same lazy habits. One sheep follows another into the shambles. The Lord make us wise and prudent, and from the errors of others may we learn to steer our own course aright. II. WE SEE IN THE UNGODLY THE PRESENT EVIL RESULTS OF SIN. 1. First, are you not very certain, those of you who watch unconverted and ungodly people, that they are not solidly happy? What roaring-boys they are sometimes! How hilarious their laughter! Their joy comes and goes with the hour. See them when the feast is over—"Who hath woe? Who hath redness of the eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; the men of strength to mingle strong drink." Mark them when alone: they are ready to die with dullness. Ungodly men at bottom are unhappy men. "The way of transgressors is hard." "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Their Marah is never dry, but flows with perennial waters of bitterness. 2. It is not merely that ungodly men are not happy; there are times when they are positively wretched through their sin. Sometimes fear cometh upon them as a whirlwind, and they have no refuge or way of escape. When we think of the despair of men, of blasted hopes, Moab may become our washpot, and may keep us from setting our affection upon their fleeting joys. If young men knew the price of sin, even in this life, they would not be so hot to purchase pleasurable moments at the price of painful years. Who would coin his life into iniquity to have it returned to him in this life, red-hot from the mint of torment! III. Men of this world are made useful to us since THEY DISCOVER IN US OUR WEAK PLACES. Their opposition, slander, and persecution, are a rough pumice-stone, to remove some of our spots. If we cannot bear a little shake from men, how shall we bear the shaking of heaven and earth at the last day? The world often tries us as with fire, and the things which we reckoned to be gold and silver perish in the ordeal if they are but counterfeit, but we are gainers by such a loss. In the world our temper is tried, and too often we become irritated. What then? Why, just this. If sanctification has regulated our emotions, patience will have her perfect work, and charity will suffer long; but if we are soon angry and find it hard to forgive, let us not so much find fault with those who try us as with ourselves, because we cannot bear the ordeal. Our pride must go down, we must become slow to wrath, we must be content to be as our Lord, the meek and lowly Saviour. IV. IN REFERENCE TO THE WORLD TO COME, the terrible doom of the ungodly is a most solemn warning to us. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Moab is my washpot*:—Implying that Moab should be reduced to slavery, it being the business of a slave to present the wash-hand basin to his master. With the Greeks, *πλύνειν τὸ πρὸς*, to wash down any one, was a slang term, signifying to ridicule, abuse, or beat; hence we have the word washpot applied to the subject of such treatment. "You don't appear to be in your right sense, who make a washpot of me in the presence of many men."—Aristophanes. (Thomas S. Millington.) *Over Edom will I cast out my shoe*.—*Edom vanquished*:—The person who is about to wash his feet casts his shoe to a slave. "To Edom will I cast my shoe." (Hengstenberg). Or also the idea of casting the shoe in contempt upon Edom expresses at once the taking possession victoriously of the Edomite land and the treading upon the pride of Edom, wherewith he had trodden the Israelite land as an invader. The casting of the shoe was also a symbol of transference of possession (Ruth iv. 7). (A. R. Fausset.)

Ver. 9. *Who will bring me into the strong city?*—*The Christian warfare*:—We are all familiar with the idea that the life of the Christian and the progressive advance of the kingdom of heaven involves a conflict, a never-ceasing warfare.

We are, however, I think, sometimes unmindful that that warfare must assume very various phases according to the varying conditions and circumstances; and that much watchfulness, skill, determination and patience is needed for the frequent re-organization of forces, the re-adaptation of resources, and the revision of methods. Thus, with the individual, there are often constitutional tendencies which can only be counteracted by, it may be, a lifelong watchfulness and sustained assault; there are often strongholds of confirmed habit which have been allowed to entrench themselves within us, and which nothing short of a tedious system of siege operations can reduce. How true it is, we must all know, that spiritual growth and development of the Christian character are retarded because we have left such-like strongholds unreduced. Our forgetfulness of this aspect of our militant position may arise from a yielding to the temptation that these tedious siege operations can be dispensed with. We hope that if left alone these strongholds of evil tendency and habit will surrender while we make the easier conquests; or we hope that we may enter into possession of our promised land and leave these fortresses standing, content with a resolution to watch them; or we decide that, as we cannot hope to reduce them absolutely, we will make, as we think, safe terms with them, so that they shall not molest us or disturb our peace. Or it may be that we fail to gain permanent possession of them because we are tempted to evade the truth that no stronghold carried by assault is secured unless we are ready at once to occupy the position and to hold it. Evil habits are not eradicated until they are permanently replaced by good habits; it is only the gradual intrusion and establishment of good habits that ousts the evil and at last permanently excludes them. And this securing a permanent footing for habits of acting aright is an exceeding slow process. In order to form a habit, a series of individual actions must be persistently repeated for a considerable time, and before the habit has become irrevocably established we must expect to meet many reverses and engage in many desperate rallies. We live in impatient days; there is a tendency to resort to methods of spiritual warfare which seem to produce speedy results; adventurous raids are made here and there, while the strongholds stand unassailed, and ground gained is not held for want of those less showy operations which are needful if we would make each step secure. To my younger hearers especially I would say, Be not deceived; steady, persevering effort is needed if you would become real masters of yourselves. Depend upon it, as with Israel of old, you cannot advance far towards getting possession of your promised land, possession and control of your passions, your will, without finding a fortress to be subdued. What is true of the individual growth in grace, is true also with the extension of Christ's kingdom upon earth. There are occasions where the Church finds herself confronted by towering strongholds of formidable strength which have long held captive the minds and hearts of her fellow-men, strongholds which cannot be carried by simple assault, but which must be reduced by the slow and persistent advance of regular approaches. At such times there is a demand made upon the Church's faith, and the same temptation to shirk the trying duty presents itself. It is also true that in regard to the Church's advances, much unpretending monotonous labour has to be expended in securing the ground gained. We have need not only of men who will carry on the message, but also of men who will unobtrusively sacrifice themselves to the often unexciting and sometimes very trying, but most important work of slowly building up the new life in the new believers; helping them by slow degrees to assimilate the life, the character, the habits, personal, domestic, and social, of the new man which they have newly put on. "Who will lead us into these strong cities?" We answer, "Christ"; and then, when we further ask, "How can we best bring the power of Christ to bear upon them?" we reply, "First endeavour to secure that the fountain shall be pure, that the stream of life going forth from your English shores shall be living, and strong, and clear; then let us have men devoted, who can explain the nature of the living stream, and direct inquiries to the source of its virtue as a healing power; thirdly, let the consecrated intellect of England help us to express Divine truth more truly and exhaustively; and then such a threefold cord may well be expected to be a mighty instrument for the pulling down of the strongholds." (*Bishop E. R. Johnson.*) *The inspiration of a great leader*:—The inspiration of a leader's presence and courage has turned many a defeat into a victory. Marlborough, Henry of Navarre, and Napoleon are instances, with Garibaldi and our own Gordon. But the memory of a great leader is inspiring also. The last words of Hedley Vicars were, "This way, 97th!" and although the

captain fell, his men rushed forward and repulsed a force ten times their number. We are to arm ourselves with that panoply of perfect trust and perfect obedience which our Divine Leader put on, and in which He endured and conquered. Many a child has borne pain and contumely with fortitude and patience, upheld by the thought of the Saviour's sufferings. *Christ the invincible warrior*:—It has been said of Edward, the Black Prince, that he never fought a battle which he did not win, and of the great Duke of Marlborough, that he never besieged a city that he did not take. Shall that be said of men which we deny concerning the Most High God? Is He less successful than some human generals? Shall these invincibly prevail, and grace be liable to defeat? Impossible.

**Ver. 11. Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.**—*Help in God in all times of trouble*:—If a man had a long and perilous journey to take, in which he would be exposed to many difficulties and great dangers, would he not most thankfully receive from any one the kind offer of direction and assistance, that he might perform it with success and security? The life of man is such a journey, during which he is exposed to many difficulties and dangers. **I. IN THE WORLD WE MUST EXPECT TRIBULATION.** As fallen creatures, we are constantly liable to infirmities, affliction, and disappointment. **II. VAIN IS THE HELP OF MAN.** Man may not have the ability nor the inclination to help us in our worldly troubles. Man may not feel for our misery, nor be disposed to aid us in our distress. He may promise us his assistance, and yet desert us "in the very time of need." "Vain is the help of man." Man may endeavour to help; but it is so feeble, as to be of no real service. God, and God alone, can remove the burden, or support us under it. **III. HOW IS THIS HELP TO BE OBTAINED?** By humble, fervent, and believing prayer. "Give us help in trouble, for vain is the help of man." It is freely bestowed in Christ Jesus to all that need it and seek it of God in humble and fervent prayer. (*C. Davy.*) *The common in human life*:—**I. A common human condition.** "Trouble." He has, almost from birth to death, to "walk in the midst of trouble"—troubles personal and social, material and spiritual—troubles of body, troubles of intellect, troubles of conscience. 1. Those that are spiritually pernicious—tending only to intensify the rebellion of the soul, harden the conscience, etc. 2. Those that are spiritually beneficent. To all regenerate and Christly men troubles are morally disciplinary (Heb. xii. 11). **II. A common human instinct.** "Give us help from trouble." Man in great trouble instinctively cries to the Supreme for help. Even irrational creatures seem to shriek for help in trouble. Tyndall says of the hare, when the greyhound is almost upon her, that she abandons hope through her own efforts, and screams convulsively into space for help. Man's instinct is of a higher kind. The space into which he cries in trial is not empty. He sees a God in it. This instinct is as deep as the soul and as wide as humanity. It is developed by saint, by savage, and by sage. 1. This instinct implies a constitutional, an ineradicable belief in the existence, personality, accessibleness and entreatability of a God. 2. This instinct shows that prayer is not against the laws of nature, but one with it. As sure as the sun will rise, men will pray. **III. A common human experience.** "Vain is the help of man." 1. He cannot give an effective deliverance from trouble. That which makes anguish is the state of the soul—disordered affections, guilt of conscience, moral regrets, and dark forebodings. Unless these are removed the troubles remain. 2. He cannot give a permanent deliverance from trouble. Whatever alleviation he may afford to the sufferer, it can be only temporary. Let our prayer therefore be, "Give us help from trouble; for vain is the help of man." (*Homilist.*)

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#### PSALM LXI.

**Vers. 1-8. Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer.**—*A meditation on the sixty-first psalm*:—In the first verse it is not the Jew but the man that speaks. The same idea can be found in all languages. When David speaks thus, he speaks for the whole world! There is no doubt the most intense personality in the petition; it is "my" cry, it is "my" prayer. What then? Even when the



man individualizes himself most carefully, he does but mingle most familiarly with all other men. This is the voice of an exile—a man far from the city which he loves most; yet even at the extremity of the land he says he will cry unto God. Why not? God can give the exile a home! Wherever God reveals himself in loving pity and all the riches of His grace, the soul may take its rest, knowing that no lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up thereon. David cried from the end of the land! We have cried from the same extremity. By processes too subtle for us to comprehend, God has often caused our misfortunes to become our blessings. In the midst of the psalmist's trouble there rises an aspiration—"lead me to the rock that is higher than I." The self-helplessness expressed in this prayer moves our entire sympathy. "Lead me"—what a blind man who had wandered from the accustomed path would say; "lead me"—what a lame man would say who had fallen by reason of his great weakness; "lead me"—what a terrified man would say who had to pass along the edge of a bottomless abyss. It is in such extremities that men best know themselves. David wished to be led to the rock; he wished to stand firmly, to stand above the flood-line; to have rest after so great disquietude. Then there is a rock higher than we? We have heard of Jesus Christ by this strange name; we have heard of Him as the Rock of ages; we have heard of Him as the Rock in the wilderness; we have heard of Him as the Stone rejected of the builders but elected of God to the chief place. The aspiration is succeeded by a recollection (ver. 3). History is rightly used when it becomes the guide of hope. The days of a man's life seem to be cut off from each other by the nights which intervene; but they are continuous when viewed from the altitude of Divine providence. Yesterday enriches to-day. All the historic triumphs of the Divine arm stimulate us in the present battle. We may say of God—What Thou hast been, Thou wilt be; because Thou hast inclined Thine ear unto us, therefore will we call upon Thee as long as we live. "I will abide in Thy tabernacle for ever, I will trust in the covert of Thy wings." Here is a beautiful combination—worship and confidence! The relation is not only beautiful, but strictly sequential; for worship is confidence, and confidence is worship. Truly to kneel before God is to express trust in Him, and truly to express trust in Him is to bow down and worship at His footstool. This is the complete idea of worship: not prayer only, not hope only, not adoration only, not a blind dependence only; but all combined, all rounded into one great act of life. "Under the covert of Thy wings"—how tender the figure! The bird spreads her wings over the nest where her young ones lie, and thus gives them warmth, and affords them all the little protection in her power. What a beautiful image of unity, defence, completeness, safety, is so frail a thing as the nest of a bird! Multiply that image by infinitude; carry it far above all the mischances which may befall the little home of the bird, and then see how full of comfort is the idea. We have heard of a "shelter," and a "tower," and a "tabernacle,"—words which have much meaning for the heart when its distresses are not to be numbered, and which reach their full explanation only in that great Saving Man who was wounded for our transgressions. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The pious experiences of an exile:*—

I. A DEEP SENSE OF ISOLATION. "From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee." Few feelings are more saddening than the feeling of loneliness. It hangs like a cold leaden cloud over the heart. In this loneliness, and far away from the scenes of his home and populations of men, he prays. The Great Father is accessible in all seasons of the soul, and all points of space.

II. A FELT NEED FOR DIVINE HELPS. Many things would tend to overwhelm the heart of David with sorrow—the conduct of Absalom his son, the treachery of professed friends, the disorders of his country, and, above all, remorse on account of the many wrong things he had done and which had perhaps brought all these distresses upon him. Under such a load of sadness, he feels that his only hope is in God. The soul in its sorrow requires something outside of itself and greater, and there is a Rock for tempest-tossed souls.

III. A YEARNING FOR LOST PRIVILEGES. "I will abide in Thy tabernacle for ever." He was far away from this tabernacle now,—a scene where he had often worshipped and experienced the raptures of religion. Profoundly does he feel the loss, and hence he resolves on his return to abide there, not only to visit it occasionally, but to continue as a resident, "dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life." When there, he had felt like the young bird under the wing of its parent, warm, safe, and happy; and this privilege he yearned for again. "I will trust in the covert of Thy wings." It is an old adage, that "the well is not missed until it is dried up." The loss of blessings

is evermore the means of deepening our impressions as to their value. IV. AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF DIVINE KINDNESS (ver. 5). The "heritage" mentioned is participation in the honours and privileges of the chosen people, and such were indeed great (Rom. ix. 4, 5). What a heritage! And this David acknowledges as being given to him by God. Whatever privileges we have, personal, social, political, or religious, our "heritage" is the gift of God. V. AN ASSURANCE OF FUTURE PROSPERITY. "Thou wilt prolong the king's life." He seems to have been assured of two things. 1. The lengthening of his rule as a king. "Thou wilt prolong the king's life"—add days to that reign which was nearly brought to an abrupt termination. 2. The continuation of his privileges as a saint. "He shall abide before God for ever." These two things he seems to have been assured of—that he should live for years, and for years to come enjoy the presence of his God. Blessed assurance this! VI. A CRY FOR MORAL EXCELLENCE. "Mercy and truth." These are the cardinal virtues. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." A soul full of benevolence and in harmony with eternal realities. In this all good is comprised. Herein Paradise blooms and blossoms. The profoundest hunger of all souls should be for these two things, grace and truth. Having these, all else follows. VII. A RESOLUTION TO WORSHIP FOR EVER. Worship is the highest end of being. Religion, or worship, is not the means to an end, it is the grandest end of existence. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 2. From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.—*David's refuge*:—This psalm, like very many others, begins with tears and ends with praise. It is very often so, in coming to a throne of grace day by day. Many a believer has gone down upon his knees with a broken heart, and has risen with it healed and fully cured. I. DAVID'S RESOLUTION. "I will cry unto Thee." Now, the term "cry" is of very frequent use in Scripture, and it is very expressive. It signifies earnestness—it signifies desire for relief; it is the expression of want. A child cries, a child cries long before it can speak: and how prevailing is that cry! How a mother's heart yearns at the cry of her infant! II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES. "When my heart is overwhelmed." You see the circumstances here are most serious. He might have taken up the language of Hezekiah and said, "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." But still, although he was overwhelmed, he pursued the right course. For what is the remedy in affliction? "Is any afflicted? Let him pray"—"pray." It is, perhaps, reasonable, and to a certain extent natural, that men under the pressure of affliction should go down upon their knees. Many a tear has been dried so; and the deeper the sorrow, the more reason there is to cry to God. III. But, you see, not only the circumstances, "When my heart is overwhelmed," but "From the end of the earth"—IN WHATEVER PLACE YOU MAY BE. The psalmist mentions the end of the earth, however distant he might be from that which was the appointed place of prayer, the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, where the saints were in the habit of assembling together. We know now under the Gospel dispensation, that wherever there is a place of prayer, the most obscure position cannot cut off the communication between a spiritual heart and Heaven. How blessed is this! For our encouragement, how very numerous are the instances recorded in the Word of God of definite prayers on the part of God's saints, and definite answers on the part of God! No fewer than eighty-eight distinct prayers of men of God, and eighty-eight distinct answers from the Lord, are recorded in the Old Testament; and no fewer than forty-eight instances of the same kind occur in the New Testament. And, doubtless, these are only just sprinkled in that we may be encouraged, whenever we find them, to see that there is a reality about it—that God's saints of old have endeavoured to cultivate this state and condition, and that God has marked it by His especial favour. IV. WHAT THE PSALMIST PRAYED FOR—"Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." This gives us an idea of safety in the midst of trial, and support when one is almost ready to be swallowed up. Now, the rock that you and I must look to is the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and to Him the Holy Spirit must lead us. We need to be led, or we shall never come to Him. And observe in the next verse to the text the way in which the psalmist draws his encouragement. "For Thou hast been a shelter to me, and a strong tower from the enemy." You see, the experience of the past may confirm our hope for the future, for He is the "same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," and "they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee." (*J. W. Reeve, M.A.*) *Faith and its aspirations*:—I

remark, first, that this is the expression of faith, as distinguished from science, and it justifies that faith. The present age is not, I think, to be characterized above all others as an age of intellect. It is an age of wonderful control over the forces and facts of nature: By this knowledge, certainly, man has great power, as he has by all intellectual acquisition. Intellectual strength is a wondrous faculty. In yonder closet there sits a pale thinker, in body puny almost as an infant, shrinking from the cold, and withering under the heat like a sensitive plant. And yet upon some occasion that man will stand up, and his words will run like an electric shock through the hearts of thousands, and they will be swayed by the sheer force of his mind like the leaves of the summer forest. He sets his pen to the vindication of some truth, and his documents flying abroad, alarm councils, change faiths, and alter politics. It is possible you may find a few rare instances of men who can make out what is called a scientific religion, and live by it; having a cause for every effect, and a law for every crisis; finding the source of their own suffering at the end of the scalpel, and counting up their beating pulses by the tick of the watch. But there are few people who can stand on the level of the mere facts of nature and say it is enough to know that the earth turns on its axis, and that all things move in order. We want something higher than all this. These forces of nature have no particular sympathy with us. They are relentless, silent, stern. We crave something akin to ourselves—something near to our own souls, as nature is not—something that is higher than ourselves, to lift us up. It must be above the facts that prevail around us. Therefore, we say, what comes through science does not make up the complement and perfection of human nature. We need an element of faith—that kind of faith with which this grand old psalm was written. The soul wants something more than what the mere intellect gives; something that can reach the depths of its affections, and strengthen it in its moral weakness. So I come to observe, finally, that there are occasions in life when religion demonstrates itself to be a special need and prompting of the soul; when not only is this text found to be the language of religion, above all science and all mere morality, but above all mere logical arguments, above all debates, above all controversy; when there breaks out a demonstration of the truths of religion in just such language and experience as that which is contained in the words of the text—"When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I." (*E. H. Chapin.*) *The believer's refuge in distress*:—I. There is no speck in this earth, no place in the vast extent of God's boundless creation, WHERE HIS POWER, WISDOM AND GOODNESS DO NOT EXTEND. For whither will you flee, where the hand of God cannot reach you; or where the eye of God cannot see you, and witness your every thought, word and deed? "Who by searching can find out God? Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?" For what proportion can any series of finite numbers bear to Infinity? II. CONTEMPLATE THE PERIOD WHEN THIS URGENT REQUEST IS MADE, AND WHEN THIS EARNEST SUPPLICATION IS POURED FORTH; namely, when the heart is overwhelmed, when the spirit is sorrowful, and when the soul is bowed down; when deep calleth unto deep, and when the waves and billows roll over the sinking and sorrowing soul. It would be easy to explain why the heart of the sincere Christian is often overwhelmed. Not only has he his troubles and trials in common with the rest of the world, but he has those which are peculiar to him as a member of the household of faith—as a traveller who is journeying to a foreign country—peculiar to him as a citizen of that city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God—peculiar to him as a soldier who is marching through an enemy's country to take possession of the promised land. III. THE GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL ENCOURAGEMENT EVERY TRIED, TEMPTED AND TREMBLING SINNER HAS TO REPAIR TO THIS ROCK OF DEFENCE. For every believer freely acknowledges, and from his inmost spirit feels, that he is a weak, defenceless creature, unable to contend in his own strength against the powers of sin and death leagued against him; he finds that he has not only to wrestle against "flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places"; consequently he had need to take upon him the whole armour of God—he had need to fly for refuge to a stronger arm than his own for protection. (*N. Meeres, B.D.*) *Man's need of the superhuman*:—Unless the rock be beyond our height it cannot shield us from the sun-glare, nor from the arrows of the enemy. We need—I. A FAITH THAT IS BEYOND THE RANGE OF EARTHLY KNOWLEDGE. Daniel Webster said he would not believe in a religion whose doctrines he could comprehend. II. A POWER TO HELP US THAT IS BEYOND OUR OWN POWER, in order

to conquer ourselves. (*Homiletic Monthly.*) *The higher life*:—We all feel within us that there is something higher, purer, and more firm and endurable than the ignoble and unstable level on which we are living just now. We feel that a higher state is what we should aim at; and it is this instinct which always seems to draw us on. When a man reverently reads the life of Jesus and the writings of the apostles, he feels there is a higher, nobler and purer life to which he is drawn; and I think a prayer in harmony with our feelings is this, "Lead me to the rock, or to the life, that is higher than I." One feature of this higher life, and one step towards it is this—that in the midst of our crosses and worries and troubles we shall endeavour to be patient and cheerful. Cheerfulness is a great promoter of happiness in ourselves and others. If we have not naturally a cheerful disposition, we should try to cultivate it. "Assume a virtue if you have it not." We may learn many a lesson of the higher life from the book of Nature. Some one has advised us to go to the ant for a lesson in industry, to the dove to learn innocence, and to the serpent to see wisdom; but let us go to the robin redbreast for a picture of cheerfulness. What can be a finer lesson in patient cheerfulness than the warbling of the robin on your window-sill in a winter morning, when the whole earth is like one hard piece of ice? Tucking one leg under his wing to keep it warm, the robin chirps and warbles to us a lesson of unalloyed patience. There is a step which leads us still higher; it is to be gentle. Gentleness is very high up on the rock of the heavenly life, and therefore it is a step which is rather difficult to mount. Gentleness is the disposition of God. Twice in the Bible we have these remarkable words, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." Another characteristic of the higher life is willingness to voluntarily suffer for the good of another. I trust we all believe in this kind of religion. We may have it by prayer. "Lead me," says the psalmist; "I cannot be self-denying for others unless Thou lead me to be so. Lead me therefore, O God, and it can be done." (*W. Birch.*) *The sheltering rock*:—I. THE SEASON REFERRED TO—"When my heart is overwhelmed." There are such seasons in Christian experience. 1. From a sense of the Divine claims we owe obedience (Deut. vi. 5; Matt. xxii. 37). 2. From the pressure of heavy trials (Ps. lv. 12-14). 3. From the keenness of temptation to which the very best of men are subject. Moses, David, Daniel, Job, and even our Lord Himself, were all tempted. 4. From the anticipations of future evils. II. *WHITHER THE PSALMIST DESIRES TO BE LED*:—"To the Rock that is higher than I." "The rock" gives the idea—1. Of strength (Ps. lxii. 2, 6, 8). 2. Durability: "I am the Lord, I change not." "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday," etc. III. *THE GROUNDS OF THE PSALMIST'S PLEA*:—"from the ends of the earth." 1. This prayer is prompted by a consciousness of need. 2. It is addressed to the true source of ability. 3. It is encouraged by past experience (Ps. lxi. 3). (*G. Stockdale.*) *God the saint's rock*:—There are two things here—1. The state wherein the psalmist was—"the end of the earth," in loneliness and distant from the house of God. And his heart was overwhelmed, and he fainted under his distress. 2. The course he takes in this state. He cried unto the Lord. His faith made him do so, for faith makes the heart sensible of affliction, and complain of it unto God, and earnestly endeavour to come near to God. What it craves is, that God would lead him to the rock, that is, that God would give him access unto Himself by Christ, in whom God is our rock and refuge. I. *NOTE SOME INSTANCES OF THIS CRY OF FAITH* (Jonah ii. 2, 8). David in many instances. II. *THE GROUNDS OF IT*. 1. Faith does this, because it is able to distinguish between the covenant itself, which is firm, stable, invariable; and the administration of the covenant, which is various and changeable; I mean the outward administration of it. And this God teaches us (Ps. lxxxix. 30-34). 2. Faith will naturally thus act, as it is the principle of the new nature in us that came from God, and will tend unto Him, whatever difficulties lie in the way. III. *WHAT IT IS, THAT IN SUCH AN OVERWHELMING CONDITION AS I HAVE DESCRIBED, FAITH REGARDS* IN GOD, to give it a support and relief, that it be not utterly overwhelmed. 1. The first thing faith considers in such a condition is the nature of God Himself, and His excellencies. There are three or four circumstances that may befall us in our distress, that faith itself can get no relief against them, but from the essential properties of the nature of God. 2. Believers may be brought into distress in all places of the world: in a lion's den with Daniel; in a dungeon with Jeremiah; they may be banished to the ends of the earth, as John to Patmos; or they may be driven into the wilderness, as the woman by the fury of the dragon. Now, what can give relief against this circumstance of distress which may befall the

people of God? (Jer. xxiii. 23). 3. God is ever the same. 4. There is relief to be found in God, and only in Himself, in the loss of all, when nothing remains. This was Habakkuk's comfort if all should fail him; yet, saith he, "I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation." 5. The last circumstance of distress is death, with the way and manner whereby it may approach us: and how soon this will be we know not. The soul's relief lies in God's immutability, that we shall find Him the same to us in death as He was in life, and much more. (J. Owen, D.D.) *The strong sanctuary*:—An ineradicable sense of dependence inheres in every finite being as he is brought into conscious life. A created nature must go out of itself and make its sanctuary in a greater and a holier nature before it can be rightly centred and rationally satisfied. This predisposition to lean, to nestle, to seek sanctuary, is the common birthmark of everything in which there is the breath of life. Rather than have no refuge at all, the troubled man will fly to one who is weaker and less discerning than himself. He will consult an authority he cannot trust rather than be shut up within the ring-fence of his own infirm and imperfect personality. The castaway on an unknown shore will make the savage he has tempted into his service a confidant, and will teach his own speech to the parrot, so that he may hear some other voice, rather than be abandoned to his own resources. The general who has lost a battle, and whose habit it has been to maintain a severe aloofness from every member of his staff, will take counsel in the days of his defeat and humiliation with a dependant, and discuss schemes of campaign with a cook or a campfollower, rather than be left to himself. The lost traveller in the desert will yield himself at last to the instincts of his horse or camel, for he has a maddening horror of the repeated misjudgments which are taking him farther and yet farther from wells of water and palm-trees and the tents and habitations of men. We must have some kind of refuge outside ourselves, if it be but the beggar's cave. It would be a poor look-out for us if there were nothing within our horizon measuring up to a loftier altitude than our own few paltry cubits of stature. What a wilderness of peril, torture, trepidation, this earthly life would be if there were no high tower, no strong fortress, no enduring refuge, open for us to run into! We need to lean on one towering aloft above this poor, decrepit nature of ours, to fly to the overshadowing power of the Most High, to penetrate the inmost secrets of His love. We demand that which transcends ourselves, and yet is at the same time gentle, gracious, sympathizing. "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Nothing which is on our own level can quiet our fear and appease our distress. Fleeing from ourselves and from all the terrors that pursue us, bidding farewell to the very sins that seem as inseparable from us as our shadows, we may make our dwelling-place and our abiding home in the brightness of His ever faithful presence. This strong and enduring sanctuary can only afford its peace and shelter to our troubled spirits when we are willing to accept terms of reconciliation with God. "God is a refuge for us," and we cannot hide in the refuge and at one and the same time be estranged from God. The melancholy perplexity of many around us consists in this, that they crave a hiding-place from the evils and terrors which infest human life, and yet they cannot or will not turn their faces Godward. The centrifugal tendency seen in Cain when he fled from the face of the Lord, and yet shuddered at the thought of the pain, execration, antagonism, which were everywhere confronting him in his flight, reappears in us. We want to leave both God and the terrors which beleague our steps behind; and the two things are absolutely incompatible. We must humble our pride, consent to be contrite, accept God's truce, if we are to come into the impregnable sanctuary of His gentleness and power. (T. G. Selby.) *The rock higher than I*:—Palestine was not only a land that flowed with milk and honey, but a land of rock and river, and of towering mountains, presenting to his eye a diversified scenery of valley and height, of hill and dale. To apply the term Rock to God, as the refuge and defence of His people in times of difficulty and danger, as the natural rocks were to the distressed Israelites, became as it were a proverbial form of speech, which almost ceased to partake of the nature of metaphor. The Lord is my rock and my fortress. Who is a rock, save our God? Then he forsook the God that made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. So in the New Testament Christ is called the Rock that supplied the Israelites with means to quench their spiritual, as the rock of Horeb quenched their natural thirst. He was the Rock that followed them. The prayer, then, of David in the text, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I," is a prayer for all people and in all times. Adversity is a painful school, but

it seems to be the order of God's providence that the majority of men, if saved at all, should be saved so as by fire. The weakness of humanity requires to be demonstrated, not only in the truth of Scripture, but in their own persons, in order to bring conviction to their minds and to impress their hearts. When merry, we find it easy to sing psalms; it is only when afflicted that we heed the injunction to seek relief in prayer. It is only when sick that we apply to the Great Physician, when lost that we seek to be saved. Not the mighty, the noble, the wise, but sinners are called to repentance; it is only in weakness that we are made strong. When we are victorious upon the plain we turn our backs to the fortress and the rock; it is the routed army that flees to it for shelter and support. But God is no less the needed Rock that is higher than we in prosperity; indeed, if possible, the more needed than in adversity. Of the two we think the history of the human heart will show that the former is the more dangerous and the more fraught with perils to the souls of men. There is no one of us but at some time has felt the need of the Rock that is higher than I. If we have had full garners, we have feared lest in gaining the world we might perchance lose our own souls; if we have been called to suffer and endure, we have wanted beneath us the everlasting arms to be our comfort and support. It is a necessity of our natures, it grows out of our relations to God. We are His creatures; He is the source of our spiritual and natural life, and it is only His sustaining power that can preserve that life in being. If left to ourselves, Scripture, reason, experience, all teach us that we grope as the blind, we totter and fall, and are made painfully conscious of our own weakness and infirmities. To give us confidence, to enable us to go forward without faltering or fear, we must have some other reliance than our own strength and efforts, some other trust than our own unaided resources in the fierce warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Are we weak? there is the source of strength. Are we sorrowing? there is comfort. Are we penitent? there is pardon. Were it merely a Rock, the symbol of strength alone, of that power which can destroy as well as save, our faith might falter and our hopes might fail; but it is the Rock of Love as well, Jesus is a High Priest who can be touched with a feeling for man's infirmities, for He was tempted and tried in all points as are we, only without sin. (*G. F. Cushman, D.D.*) *Christ our Rock*:—I. THE STATE DESCRIBED. 1. Man is an emotional being; so delicate and subtle is the organization of the human heart, that a single sound will influence it. So highly wrought that it may be operated upon by the most refined instrument which creature skill ever constructed. So tenderly susceptible, that a word is often times enough to lift it into ecstasy, or depress it to despair—so sensitive, that the glance of an eye can fill it with joy, or transfix it with grief. 2. We may understand, therefore, how it is, that in some circumstances, under strong influences—a sudden influx of joy, or prosperity, or under a storm and inundation of woes—the heart becomes overwhelmed. The Christian is not exempt from the troubles and trials of life; and, in addition to them, how frequently is he overwhelmed with a sense of his own unworthiness—his imperfections; the smallness of his faith—and the coldness of his love. How often does he make the language of the psalmist his own, and say unto God, "When my heart is overwhelmed within me, lead me," etc. II. THE IMPORT OF THE PRAYER. Here is the expression of conscious weakness, "Lead me." He feels the need of assisting grace, and Divine support—and with the self-diffidence and conscious weakness of a little child, he tries to grasp his Father's hand—"Lead me." "Higher than I." This implies confidence—faith in God—in the sufficiency of Christ. He acknowledges in Christ some one to look up to, superior to any human source; here is humility. (*J. D. Carey.*) *The appeal of the human to the Divine*:—No irreligious man, no liver of the lower life, no man sunk in the material, could pray this prayer. It is the cry of the spiritually awakened man, for only he knows there is anything higher than himself, and only he would ever cry out for its possession. 1. This man's conception of Deity has two sides to it—a physical and supernatural. He conceives God in the form of a natural and poetical image; sees Him as a Rock. To others God might be Father, lover, friend, but to him He was the rock, that against which birds and armies and tempests dash themselves to pieces, but also that on which flowers bud out of the winds, and birds build their nests, and men hide from the march of tempests. But it is possible that in this other phrase—"higher than I"—we have another conception of the Divine. Change "higher than I" into "too high for me," and you have the conception which held his mind. Too high! i. e. on a higher level, of another order, of a greatness I can

never attain, nor match, nor rival! Too high, *i. e.* God is everything man is not. Man, frail, tainted, limited, weak, foolish. God, enduring, holy, omnipotent, unchangeable, all-wise. Too high! *i. e.* beyond human apprehension! "Too high for me," makes Him the unknowable, the unsearchable splendour, horned in unapproachable light, and worshipped from afar. 2. This discovery and conception of the Divine is not without its effect on the man. First it creates a thirst, a desire in the man. The vision breaks up his self-content, and fills him with a heavenward longing. "O Rock, Thou the timeless, the restful, the immutable, let me hide myself in Thee." Man is but the lichen that would root itself on the unshaken and unshakable. The other effect is of a different character. It is said that the revelation of God is the revelation of a man's self. When Job saw God, he cried, "I abhor myself." When Isaiah beheld Him, he exclaimed, "I am a man of unclean lips." Everywhere else man is the all—the king—only in the temple is he the little helpless child with no language but a cry. Man can see the good, dream it, idealize it; he can long for the good, love it, worship it, but it is his disappointment and his hell that he knows it is not in him to be it, to win it, nor possess it. 3. With this point the experience seems to terminate. When man reaches the point of inability, he reaches the end. There is nothing more for him to do than to sit down, fold his hands and wait for the inevitable. If he cannot, he cannot, and he can only acquiesce in his helplessness. But such a termination is impossible. The point where man breaks down is the point where the Divine enters and begins its miracles. The revelation is meant to set the human in action, to lift him to something higher. Instead, therefore, of the conception ending with inability, it ends with a sobbing prayer. It is an appeal for means—"Cut steps in the cliff that I may climb it, let down the rope and draw me up." It is an appeal for help—"I stagger with fatigue and weakness, put an arm round me and help me up the stone-strewn steeps." It is a cry for guidance—"Take my hand and guide me, and put my foot on the first stair of the stairway that leads to Thee." It is a cry for light—"I am confused with fear and doubt, give me light that I may see the way that leads to Thee." It is a cry for shelter—"Suns smite me, and sanddrifts sweep over me, and the whole landscape reels and swims; lift me into the shadow of Thy wings." It is a cry for salvation—"I cling to Thee, but the storm beats and the waves drag and my hold is slipping, put out Thy hand and draw me from the hungry waters." It is the prayer of the helpless, the appeal of the human to the Divine—man in his weakness casting himself on the benevolence and omnipotence of Deity, man in his despair abandoning himself to God. Lead me, let me reach Thee, dwell with Thee, and be one with Thee for ever. (*C. E. Stone.*) *The high rock*:—I. PRAYER IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE—in every place, and in every condition of our spirit. I think David meant, by the expression, "the end of the earth," a place where he should be far away from his friends, far away from human help, and far away from God's sanctuary. 1. God's people are sometimes brought into such a condition that they are far away from friends. Perhaps you know what it is to have a trouble which you are compelled to bear yourself, which you could not describe even to those in your own house, though your friends would have been ready to help you if they had known; yet it was such that, with all their readiness, they would not have had ability to assist you in it, the biggest words could not have told it, and the bitterest tears could not have spelled it out. You were far away from friends in reality, though they were all round you. Now, this is what David meant by "the end of the earth,"—far away from friends,—yet even then, when friend and helper and lover failed, did he cry unto his God. 2. Again, he meant, by "the end of the earth," far away from human help. There are times when we are sighing after spiritual mercies, when we are groaning under the withdrawal of God's countenance, when our sins are hunting us like packs of wolves, when afflictions are rolling over us like huge billows—when faith is little, and fear is great, when hope is dim, and doubt becomes terrible and dark—then we are far away from human help; but, blessed be God, even then we may cry unto Him. 3. By "the end of the earth," I think, too, David means at a distance from the means of grace. Sometimes, by sickness, either personal or the sickness of our relatives, we are detained from the house of God; at other times, in journeying by land or upon the sea, we are unable to be in God's sanctuary, and to use the means of grace. II. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN EVEN A BELIEVER CANNOT GET TO CHRIST AS HE DESIRES. Sometimes God, in His sovereignty, is pleased to show a man his sin, and not to show him his Saviour, for a season; he strips the

sinner, perhaps he leaves him to shiver in the cold before he clothes him, just to let him know what a boon that robe of Christ's righteousness is. He sometimes gives repentance and faith at the same time, just as the thunder sometimes follows the lightning at once; at other times, He gives repentance, and then He makes us tarry for many a day before He gives us full assurance of our interest in Christ; but they are sure to follow one another, sooner or later. "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Oh, help me to believe! Lord, enable me to see the need of Thy Son, give me the power to look unto Him who was pierced, and, as Thou hast given me eyes to weep, so give me eyes to look on Him, and grace to rejoice in Him as mine." III. We are now coming to that part of the text which most of all delights my soul, the thought of Jesus CHRIST, WHO IS THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER THAN WE ARE. Here is a man who is a great sinner. "Ah!" he says. "I am indeed a great sinner; my iniquities reach so high that they have ascended above the very stars; they have gone before me to the judgment-seat of God, and they are clamouring for my destruction." Well, sinner, come thou here, and measure this Rock. Thou art very high, it is true; but this Rock is higher than thou art. Here comes another forward; he is not a man full of doubts and fears, but he is a man of hopeful spirit. "Oh!" says he, "I have many sins, but I hope that the Lord Jesus Christ will take them all away. I have many wants, but I hope that He will supply them. I shall have many temptations, but I hope that He will ward them off. I shall have many difficulties, but I hope He will carry me through them." Ah! man, I like to see thee have a good long measuring-rod, when it is made of hope. Hope is a tall companion; he wades right through the sea, and is not drowned; you cannot kill him, do what you may. Hope is one of the last blessings God gives us, and one that abides last with us. If a man is foodless, and without covering, still he hopes to see better days by and by. Now, sinner, thy hopes, I would have thee to see, are very tall, and very high; but remember, this Rock is higher than any of thy hopes. "Well," cries another, "from what I have heard, and what I have read in God's Word, I am expecting very great things of Christ when I shall see Him as He is. Oh, sir, if He be better than the communion of His saints can make Him, if He be sweeter than all His most eloquent preachers can speak of Him, if He be so delightful that those who know Him best cannot tell His beauties, what a precious—what a glorious—what an inconceivable Christ He must be!" Ah, I am glad thou art measuring Christ by thine expectation! But let me tell thee, high as thy expectations are, He is higher than thou art. Expect what thou mayest; but when thou seest Him, thou wilt say with the Queen of Sheba, "The half was not told me." Now, as some of you will be exercised with troubles, remember that the Rock is higher than you are; and when your troubles reach you, if you are not high enough to escape them, climb up to the Rock Christ, for there is no trouble that can reach you when you get there. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The saint's asylum in distress*.—I. THE DISTRESS SUPPOSED. "When my heart is overwhelmed." 1. By distressing temptations. 2. By providential visitations. 3. By inward fears and depressions. II. THE ASYLUM REFERRED TO. "The rock higher than I." III. THE PRAYER PRESENTED. "Lead me to the rock," etc. 1. Conscious insufficiency. 2. Confidence in Christ's all-sufficiency. 3. Earnest desire to feel our connection with Christ. (J. Burns, D.D.) *Overwhelmed*.—Imagine a vessel at sea, and you can get an idea of the meaning of our text. It has been labouring in a storm; sometimes lifted up to heaven, as though its masts would sweep the stars; then again descending until its keel seemed dragging on the ocean bed; first staggering this way, and then that way, reeling to and fro, now rushing forward and now starting back—like a drunken man, or like a madman who has lost his way. At last, a huge sea comes rolling on; its white crest of foam can be seen in the distance, and the sailors give up all for lost; on comes the wave, gathering up all its strength till it dashes against the ship, and—down the vessel goes, it is overwhelmed. The decks are swept, the masts are gone, the timbers are creaking, the ship descends, and is sucked down as in a whirlpool; all is lost. "Now," says David, "that is the case with my heart; it is overwhelmed, drawn into a vortex of trouble, borne down by a tremendous sea of difficulty, crushed and broken; the ribs of my soul seem to have given way; every timber of my vessel is cracked and gone out of its place. My heart is overwhelmed within me." Can you now get an idea of the extreme sorrow of the psalmist's spirit? "Yet," says he, "even then will I cry unto Thee." Oh, noble faith, that can cry amidst the shrieking of the tempest and the howling of the storm! Oh, glorious faith, that



from the bottom of the sea can shoot its arrows to the heights of heaven! Oh, masterpiece of faith, that from a broken spirit can present prevailing prayer! Oh, glorious triumph, that from the end of the earth can send a prayer which can reach all the way to heaven! (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The highest rock*:—This Rock is higher than thou art. All thou hast enjoyed of Christ is but as the beginning of a topless mountain. When I have been in Scotland, I have gone up some of the hills there; and I have thought, "This is a very high place indeed; what a fine view there is, what a height I have reached!" "Ah!" some one has said, "but if you were to see the Alps, this hill would only seem like the beginning, you would only have got to the foot when you had climbed as high as this;" and so it is with you. By your experience, your sweet enjoyment, you think you have reached the top of the mountain; but Christ comes and whispers to you, "Look yonder, far above those clouds; you have only begun to go up; this hill of communion is only one step; as yet you have only taken a child's leap; you have farther to go, far higher than you could imagine or conceive." Ah! this is indeed a Rock higher than thou art, the highest in communion, and the next to the throne of God. (*Ibid.*) *Continuance in prayer—a test of sincerity*:—"Will the hypocrite pray always?" No, as the wheel wears with turning, till it breaks at last, so doth the hypocrite. He prays himself weary of praying; something or other will in time make him quarrel with that duty, which he never inwardly liked; whereas the sincere believer hath that in him which makes it impossible he should quite give over praying, except he should also cease believing. Prayer is the very breath of faith; stop a man's breath, and where is he then? 'Tis true the believer through his own negligence may find some more difficulty of fetching his praying breath at one time than at another, as a man in a cold doth in his natural breath. Alas, who is so careful of his soul's health that needs not bewail this. But faith to live and this breath of prayer to be quite cut off is impossible. The Christian's wants, sins and temptations continually return upon him, he cannot but continue also to pray against them. "From the ends of the earth will I call unto Thee," said David; "wherever I am, I'll find Thee out; prison me, banish me, or do with me what Thou wilt, Thou shalt never be rid of me." (*W. Gurnall.*)

**Ver. 3. For Thou hast been a shelter to me, and a strong tower from the enemy.**—*Past mercies earnest of future ones*:—The psalmist had good ground for the determination which he cordially expresses. It is manifest that, with David, to call to mind past mercies was to expect future. He was at the very ends of the earth; his heart was overwhelmed; but as soon as he remembered how God had delivered and shielded him before, he was at once confident that the wings of his protection were stretched over him still. Perhaps he recollected how he had been saved from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear—how wonderfully he had been enabled to smite down the uncircumcised Philistine; and then, remembering that God was still the same God, he took courage, and felt it impossible that he could now be deserted. Let us, then, show the soundness of David's argument. If it be not sound, and God, though He once loved us and sought to do us good, doth now no longer love us, then He, the unchangeable must have changed. But is the Lord's arm shortened that He cannot save? The mercies, therefore, that memory adduces cannot have exhausted Him; otherwise He were not Almighty; nay, they actually pledge Him to assist me, otherwise He were not unchangeable. And consider St. Paul's argument: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" The apostle here makes the great fact of human redemption—a redemption of which all men, without exception, are the subjects—a reason why God should bestow upon us whatsoever is good; or rather, an evidence that He cannot be willing to withhold from us any real benefit. And, perhaps, there is hardly the use made which there might be of the grand fact of redemption, when men are to be urged to dependence on God, or to confidence in His mercy. It is generally to God as a God of providence, rather than of salvation, that reference is made. We speak of Him as the Being who has watched over us from infancy upwards; and we argue that He who has bestowed so many blessings will surely not forsake us if we will trust in His protection. The argument is quite correct so far as it goes. There is no fault to be found with it, except that it does not take the highest ground. For it is not every man, who, like David, has been wondrously delivered from the vicious, uncircumcised Philistine, and who

can therefore say of his Maker, "Thou hast been a shelter for me." Still every man may say this, though he may be quite unable to trace any single interposition, or speak of special instances in which he has been secured by the shelter of the Almighty—every man may say it, because he has had a share in the general providence of God, having been fed by His bounty, and guarded by His power. Every man may say it, because on his behalf—as actually on his behalf as though he had been a solitary offender—did God's own Son take on Him human nature, undergo ignominy, and die as a propitiation. The mother who has lost a child, and yet has been enabled, when that child was carried forth to the burial, to exclaim, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"—what right has she to be confounded or dismayed when another child seems sickening, as though it were about to die? Why should she recoil from the new trial as certainly more than she can bear, when she has the memory of support given her in her former affliction? God comforted her then; why not now? And so with other mourners and other trials. It is in this way that we would have you live over again times and seasons of extraordinary mercies, in order that you may be nerved for extraordinary trials. Christians should study the history of eminent saints, in order that, through observing what deliverances have been wrought for others, they may be encouraged to expect deliverance for themselves. There is not a converted man who has not such a book—the book of his own experience, on whose pages are inscribed the unnumbered things that God has done for himself. Its title may be said to have been written on the day of conversion, and each following page on every succeeding day. It is the history of himself, and there is a reality about it to convince, which the history of another can scarcely ever have. And note, too, the striking expression of St. Paul, "I know whom I have believed." It was no mere report or hearsay with him, that God was a merciful Father, or Christ a powerful Saviour. He had had proof, and he knew and was "persuaded that he was able to keep that," etc. He had stored in his memory evidences both of the love and might of the Redeemer to which in the hour of trial he could appeal. And if we did the like, then we should not be, as we too often are, dismayed by the prospect of any new trial, or as much disheartened by the pressure of some new burden, as though we never had experienced the supports and consolations which the Almighty can bestow. Let mercies be remembered as well as enjoyed, and they must be as lights in our dark days, and as shields in our perilous. Strive to acquire the habit of noting and recording the blessings you receive; so that you may have, as it were, books to which to refer. We care not whether or not you do what many have done—accustom yourselves to the keeping a diary in which to register the incidents of life. We are not anxious about the method, but only as to the thing. In one way or another, keep the past before you, if you would look the future calmly in the face. Every fresh discovery of God's gracious care of us will increase our admiring love, and with our love our happiness. Thus will life be to eternity what the past is now to the future, the supplying motive to a yet heartier rejoicing in the Lord our God. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *A strong tower*:—Let us think of the Lord as a strong tower. I. REMEMBER THAT THE CHILDREN WANTED SUCH A REFUGE JUST AS MUCH AS THE GROWN-UP PEOPLE DID. It would never have done for the mother to have left her little child, or the father his boys and maidens. The enemy would have carried them away as slaves, or perhaps have killed them. Whenever temptation comes to you remember that none of us can fight this enemy by ourselves. We must run away at once and hide ourselves in Jesus. Nor is this the only enemy that makes us need the strong tower. We have often to run away from ourselves. Our tempers perhaps are passionate, and set us all on fire, like robbers used to do to the cottages and homes of the people. The feelings sometimes are full of anger and hatred, like those cruel men. Now for them too the Lord is a strong tower. He comes forth with His strong right hand to destroy this nest of robbers. II. THINK WHAT A SAFE REFUGE WE HAVE WHEN THE LORD IS OUR STRONG TOWER. He is the Almighty. III. David not only speaks of the safety, but of THE BLESSEDNESS ALSO. "I will trust in the covert of Thy wings" (ver. 4). When I was going over that great castle, I thought that it was a very good place to hide in, but not a very comfortable place to live in. But when I got up to the very safest place of all, there I found a most pleasant little cottage; the ivy grew on the thatch, the jessamine and rose hung about the porch, a bird was singing merrily over the door, and from within came the happy laugh of children. There was strength, and there was comfort too. There was safety,

and loving care. And so is it in the Lord's strong tower. The Almighty power goes around us to defend us, and the arms that encircle us are the arms of Love. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*)

Vers. 4, 5. **I will abide in Thy tabernacle for ever; I will trust in the covert of Thy wings.**—*Comfort in exile.*—1. The Lord can give such satisfaction to a sad heart in the time of its trouble, that the trouble may turn to be no trouble, even while it lieth on still, as here is to be seen in David's comfort, who speaketh as if he were restored, while he is yet in exile. 2. Spiritual consolations in temporal troubles do both give satisfaction to a soul for the present and for the time to come, for everlasting happiness; "I will abide in Thy tabernacle for ever": his hope is, that not only he shall be restored to the fellowship of the saints, at the tabernacle in Jerusalem, but also that he shall be in God's company in heaven, represented by the tabernacle, and that for ever. 3. True consolation standeth not in earthly things, but in things heavenly, and things having nearest relation thereto; for David's comfort was not so much that he should be brought to the kingdom, as that he should be brought to the tabernacle, and to heaven by that means. 4. Sincerity setteth no term-day to God's service, or to the seeking of communion with Him. 5. The ground of all spiritual consolations is in the mercy and grace of God offered to us in Christ, represented by the wings of the Cherubims stretched out over the mercy-seat; there faith findeth a rest and solid ground, able to furnish comfort abundantly: "I will trust in the covert of Thy wings." 6. Access to God in prayer, and approbation of the conscience, and the sincere pouring forth of the heart melting with present felt sense of God's love, do strengthen greatly the assurance of everlasting communion with God; "For Thou, O God, hast heard my voice." 7. As spiritual comfort in time of trouble granted to a believer is indeed the earnest of everlasting life, so should they to whomsoever the earnest is given make reckoning that by this earnest the inheritance is confirmed unto them by way of possession begun: "Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear Thy name." 8. The inheritance of the chief of God's servants, and of the meanest and weakest of them, is one; the right of every believer is alike good, albeit the hold laid upon the right by all is not alike strong; and what the strongest of the godly do believe for their own consolation and salvation, the weakest may believe the same to belong to every believer that feareth God. (*D. Dickson.*) **Selah.**—*Selah.*—The majority of Bible-readers think the word of my text of no importance. They suppose it to be a superfluity, a mere filling-in, a meaningless interjection, a useless refrain, an indefinable echo. *Selah!* It is never a Scriptural accident. Seventy-four times does it appear in the Psalms, and three times in Habakkuk. You must not convict this book of seventy-seven trivialities. *Selah!* It is an enthroned word. If, according to an old author, there are words that are battles, this word is a Marathon, a Thermopylæ, a Waterloo, a Sedan. It is a word decisive sometimes for solemnity, and sometimes for beauty, and sometimes for grandeur. Through it roll the thundering chariots of the omnipotent God. **I. THE SELAH OF POETIC SIGNIFICANCE.** When you find this word you are to rouse yourself to great stanzas. You are to open the door of your soul for analogies. You are to spread the wings of your imagination for flight. "I answered thee in the secret place of thunder; I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. *Selah!*" "The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved. I bear up the pillars thereof. *Selah!*" "Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory. *Selah!*" "Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. *Selah!*" "Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. *Selah!*" "The Lord of Hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah!*" "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. *Selah!*" "I will trust in the covert of Thy wings. *Selah!*" "O God, when Thou wentest forth before Thy people, when Thou didst march through the wilderness. *Selah!*" You see the text is a signal hung out to warn you off the track while the rushing train goes by with its imperial messengers. Poetic word, charged with resurrections and millenniums! **II. THE SELAH OF INTERMISSION.** Gesenius, Tholuck and Hengstenberg agreed that this word often means a rest in the music. According to the Greeks it is a diapsalma, a pause, a halt in the solemn march of cantillation. God thrusts the *Selah* into His Bible and into our lives to make us stop and think, stop and consider, stop and admire, stop and repent, stop and pray, stop and be sick, stop and die. It is not the number of times that we read the Bible through

that makes us intelligent in the Scriptures. We must pause. It may take us an hour to one word. It may take a day to one verse. It may take a year to one chapter. We must pause to measure the height, the depth, the length, the breadth, the universe, the eternity of one passage. Matthew Henry made a long pause after the verse, "Open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise," and it converted him. Cowper made a long pause after the verse, "Being justified freely by His grace," and it converted him. God tells us seventy-seven times meditatively to pause in reading two books in the Bible, leaving to our common sense to decide how often we ought to pause in reading the other sixty-four books of the Bible. Pause and pray for more light. Pause and weep for our sins. Pause and absorb the strength of one promise. It is not the number of times you go through the Bible, but the number of times the Bible goes through you. Pause! Reflect! Selah! So, in the scroll of your life and mine, we go rushing on in our song of prosperity from note of joy to note of joy, and it is smooth and long-drawn-out legato, and we become indifferent and unappreciative, when lo! we find a blank in the music; no notes between these two bars. A pause! The spaces will be filled up with a sick-bed, or a commercial disaster, or a grave. You and I have been halted by more than one Selah! But, thank God, it is not a ruinous break-down; it makes the past mercies the more valuable, and will make the future the more tender. Whether we understand now or not, it is best for us to pause. It is good to be afflicted. The Selah is not misplaced or wasted. Indeed, we shall all soon have to stop. Men of science are improving human longevity, but no one has proposed to make terrene life perpetual. Yet the Gospel makes death a Selah between two beatitudes, dying triumph standing on one side the grave, celestial escort standing on the other. III. THE SELAH OF EMPHASIS. Ewald, the German theologian, thinks this word is from the Hebrew word "to ascend," and that it means "you are to lift up your voice and make distinct utterance." Oh! how much we all need to correct our emphasis. We put too much emphasis on the things of this world and too little emphasis on the things of the next world. Behold wretchedness on a throne! Napoleon, while yet emperor, sat dejected, with his face buried in his hands, and a little page presented him a tray of food, saying, "Eat, sir, it will do you good." The emperor looked up and said to him, "You are from the country?" "Yes." "Where your parents have a cottage and some acres of land?" "Yes." "There is happiness," cried Napoleon. Then behold happiness under worst worldly disadvantage. "I never saw until I was blind," cried a Christian blind man one day. "I never knew contentment when I had my eyesight as I do now that I have lost it. I can truly affirm, though few know how to credit me, that I would on no account change my present situation and circumstances with any that I ever enjoyed before I was blind." Oh, my hearers, change your emphasis. Put less weight on this world and more weight on God as a joy and an unfading portion. IV. THE SELAH OF PERPETUITY. The Targum renders this word "for ever." Many writers agree in its meaning "for ever." In the very verse from which my text is taken, Selah means not only poetic significance and intermission and emphasis, but eternal reverberation. For ever! God's goodness for ever, God's government for ever, gladness of the righteous for ever. This Selah of perpetuity makes all earthly inequalities insignificant; the difference between sceptre and needle, between Alhambra and hut, between chariot and cart; between throne and kerbstone, between Axminster and bare floor, between satin and sackcloth, trivial. This is the Selah that makes getting ready so important. For such a prolongation of travel, are we provided with guide books and passes and escort? Are we putting out into wilderness sirocco-swept and ghoulishaunted, or into regions of sun-lighted and spray-sprinkled garden? Is it to be Elysium or Gehenna? As we start we must keep on. That current is so swift that once in it no oar can resist it, no helm steer out of it, no herculean or titanic arm baffle it. Hear the long-resounding echo—For ever! But there are two for evers. The one is as swift as the other, as long as the other, as mighty as the other, but the one empties into an ocean of gladness, opaline above and coralline beneath. The other goes down over a plunge of awful abyss of despair. On the one sail argosies of light, on the other the charred hulks of a fiery cyclone. Wake up to the value of your deathless spirit! Strike out for heaven! Arouse ye, the men and women for whom Christ died! Selah! (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 5. Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear Thy name.—

*Our heritage*:—So, then, they that fear God have an heritage. Not, perhaps, in this world, but even as to temporal good, they are often above others. And as to spiritual good—they have indeed “a goodly heritage. The Lord is their portion and His promises, and the inheritance in heaven.” Now, this heritage is given. And we may know that we possess it. “Thou hast given me,” etc. Can we read our title clear? “Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness.” (W. Jay.)

Vers. 6-8. **Thou wilt prolong the king's life: and his years as many generations.**—*The perpetuity of Christ's kingdom*:—He prophesieth not simply of the stability of the kingdom in his own person and posterity, but under the type; namely, he speaketh of the perpetuity of the kingdom of Christ, the true King of Israel, for which end he prayeth that mercy and truth may be forthcoming to subjects of Christ, that His kingdom may be prolonged; and so David in his time, and all the saints in their time, may joyfully praise God continually. Whence learn—1. It is not unusual with God, together with present consolation, and the light of future salvation in Christ, to reveal also and give assurance of great things concerning Christ's kingdom. 2. The glory of Christ and perpetuity of His kingdom is every subject's good and comfort, for this is comfort for David, that Christ shall live for ever, that He shall abide before God for ever. 3. The kingdom of Christ, and government of His subjects in His Church, shall be allowed of God, and be protected of God, and blessed of God for ever, however it be opposed by men in the world. 4. The perpetuity of Christ's kingdom and preservation of His subjects in this life, till they be possessed of heaven, is by the merciful remedying the misery, and removing of the sin which they are subject unto, and by performing of what He hath promised and prepared through Christ to bestow upon them. 5. The best retreat that can be made after wrestling and victory over troubles is prayer and praises; as here David after his exercise prayeth, “O prepare mercy and truth”; and then saith, “unto thee will I sing.” 6. As the main matter of our vows is the moral duty of rejoicing in God, and hearty praising of Him, so renewed experience of God's mercy and truth towards His people in Christ is the main matter of our joy in Him and praise unto Him: “O prepare mercy and truth,” etc. (D. Dickson.)

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### PSALM LXII.

VERS. 1-12. **Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from Him cometh my salvation.**—*A testimony and an exhortation*:—I. A RELIGIOUS TESTIMONY. 1. Concerning self (vers. 1, 2, 6, 7). His confidence in God was—(1) Supreme. “He only is my Rock.” (2) Steadfast. “I shall not be greatly moved.” (3) Pacific. “Truly,” or, “is silent my soul.” 2. Concerning contemporaries. (1) Malignant (ver. 3). (2) False (ver. 4). David's testimony concerning his contemporaries is applicable to the men of our age. Read the malignity of our times in the bloody wars, etc. Read the falsehood of our times in the schemings of politicians, the tricks of tradesmen, and the hollow shams in all departments of life. 3. Concerning God (vers. 11, 12). (1) His power. All kinds of power belong to Him—physical power, intellectual power, moral power. (2) His mercy. God's kindness is even greater than His power, inasmuch as it inspires, directs, and controls. It is kindness that nerves and moves the Omnipotent Arm. (3) His justice. This testimony of God is sublime and meets our highest ideal. II. A RELIGIOUS EXHORTATION. 1. To self (ver. 5). Man is a duality; in him there are two personalities in one. These often battle with each other, sometimes blame, and sometimes commend each other. Man is constantly exhorting himself, sometimes to be more industrious in business, more accurate in studies, more temperate in habits. Here is a man exhorting himself to wait only on God. This religious exhortation is—(1) Most available. Every man has a preacher within. (2) Most efficient. All outward preachers are only available so far as they can rouse the inner preacher, and make him thunder in the great temple of conscience. 2. To others. (1) Concerning a right object of trust. “Trust in Him at all times,” etc.

Trust Him, not only when the weather of life is calm and sunny, but trust Him amidst the rush of tempest, the roar of thunder, and the convulsions of volcanoes. Trust Him fully; pour out your heart. As all the roots of the tree strike into the soil, so let all the sympathies of your nature strike into God. (2) Concerning a wrong object of trust. "Trust not in oppression," etc. Men do trust in oppression, not only tyrants, warriors, slaveholders, but unjust masters and mistresses that expect more service from employes than is just: hence the exhortation, "Trust not in oppression; "If riches increase." (1) Here is a circumstance which most desire. Some for wrong reasons, some for right reasons. (2) Here is a possibility which some may possess. "If riches increase." In some it is impossible; the poor men often get rich in one or two ways, either with or without their efforts. (3) Here is a duty which all should discharge. "Set not your heart upon them." Why? Because to love them is unworthy of your nature. Because to love them is to injure your nature. Because to love them is to exclude God from your nature. Because to love them is to bring ruin on your nature. (*Homilist.*) *Faith triumphant*:—The psalm falls naturally into three parts of four verses each; and in the original each of these begins with the same particle, which unfortunately is either not translated in our versions, or rendered by different words. It means Yes, Surely or Verily, and expresses a conviction freshly acquired. This is the character of the entire psalm: it is a series of maxims hewn straight from life. I. THE SILENCE OF FAITH (ver. 1-4). "Truly my soul waiteth upon God," literally, "is silent unto God." Silence is sometimes very eloquent. When one has suffered a great wrong or is accused of some outrageous baseness, there may be an impressiveness in dignified silence, which the loudest protestations could not equal. In the trial of Jesus there are three or four moments of silence which perhaps bring home to us the height of His moral grandeur as powerfully as anything in His life. So faith has its silence. It is not always silent. On the contrary, it sometimes cries aloud; it groans and complains; it argues and beseeches. Perhaps the faith of the psalmist had passed through these stages before reaching the silent stage, for he tells us (vers. 3, 4) that he had enemies, who had pushed their attacks to the verge of murder. In such circumstances, faith may well have cried or groaned or argued; but these stages are past; and now it is silent before God. It lies before Him in perfect peace, confident that His will must overrule all. For (ver. 2) He is a rock and a defence; and therefore, says the child of faith, "I shall not be greatly moved." II. THE INSTRUCTION OF FAITH (vers. 5-8). Having attained to such a height, he is seized with the spirit of a teacher. 1. He begins with instructing himself. "My soul, wait thou upon God." When we get up to heights of experience, we ought to mark in the rock how high we have climbed, for we know—

"How difficult it is to keep  
Heights which the soul is competent to gain."

When we are high up, there are outlooks which we are unable to see at ordinary times; and it is well to record them as is done here. The truths about God which we thus learn in moments of great experience are the most precious portion of all knowledge: they are better than we can learn from books or doctors or sages. Blessed is he who possesses convictions which he has not been taught by men, however wise, but has wrung out of his own experience. 2. He also instructs others (ver. 8). It is the natural way of experience to overflow into testimony; and when the soul has attained rest itself, it naturally seeks to assist the struggling. Thereby it not only proves that it has attained, but extends and strengthens its attainments; because we are never safer or healthier than when we have left off thinking of ourselves and are able to care for others. III. THE ALTERNATIVES TO FAITH (vers. 9-12). In this last section the psalmist contrasts faith in God with the other refuges in which he was tempted to put his trust. These were men (ver. 9) and money (ver. 10). To one in David's position, it would naturally seem a great thing to have men's alliance; but he had tried them and found them wanting. This is a word for all times: by any one who has a great cause—who is fighting for Christ's cause—democracy and aristocracy are alike to be distrusted; God alone is the watchword. The other substitute for God which David was tempted to trust was money, whether obtained by foul means or fair; and here he touches a still more universal chord. In thinking of the future and of the changes and chances of life, we are all tempted to look in this direction. How many are devoting themselves to the pursuit of money, caring little for scruples,

but only feeling that, if they had enough of it, all would be well. Others, seeking wealth by honest means, have the same confidence. But the poorest man who has faith in God is safer. This is the testimony of Scripture, and it is the testimony of experience as well. So we come back to the wisdom of the man of God. Once, he says, he has heard, yea, twice—that is, it has been borne in on him again and again as a Divine truth—that “power belongeth unto God.” This is the end of the whole matter; this is the resource that will avail in every difficulty, which will last through time and through eternity. (*J. Stalker, D.D.*) *Silence to God* (with ver. 5):—“My soul is silence unto God.” That forcible form of expression describes the completeness of the psalmist’s un murmuring submission and quiet faith. His whole being is one of great stillness, broken by no clamorous passions; by no loud-voiced desires; by no remonstrating reluctance. That silence is first a silence of the will. Bridle impatience till God speaks. Take care of running before you are sent. Keep your will in equipoise till God’s hand gives the impulse and direction. We must keep our hearts silent too. The sweet voices of pleading affections, the loud cry of desires and instincts that roar for their food like boasts of prey, the querulous complaints of disappointed hopes, the groans and sobs of black-robed sorrows, the loud hubbub and Babel, like the noise of a great city, that every man carries within, must be stifled and coerced into silence. We have to take the animal in us by the throat, and sternly say, Lie down there and be quiet. We have to silence tastes and inclinations. There must be the silence of the mind, as well as of the heart and will. We must not have our thoughts ever occupied with other things, but must cultivate the habit of detaching them from earth, and keeping our minds still before God, that He may pour His light into them. Alas! how far from this is our daily life! Who among us dares to take these words as the expression of our own experience? Is not the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt, a truer emblem of our restless, labouring souls than the calm lake? Put your own selves by the side of this psalmist, and honestly measure the contrast. It is like the difference between some crowded market-place all full of noisy traffickers, ringing with shouts, blazing in sunshine, and the interior of the quiet cathedral that looks down on it all, where are coolness and subdued light, and silence and solitude. This man’s profession of utter resignation is perhaps too high for us; but we can make his self-exhortation our own. “My soul! wait thou only upon God.” Perfect as he ventures to declare his silence towards God, he yet feels that he has to stir himself up to the effort which is needed to preserve it in its purity. Just because he can say, “My soul waits,” therefore he bids his soul wait. That vigorous effort is expressed here by the very form of the phrase. The same word which began the first clause begins the second also. As in the former it represented for us, with an emphatic “Truly,” the struggle through which the psalmist had reached the height of his blessed experience, so here it represents in like manner the earnestness of the self-exhortation which he addresses to himself. He calls forth all his powers to the conflict, which is needed even by the man who has attained to that height of communion, if he would remain where he has climbed. And for us who shrink from taking these former words upon our lips, how much greater the need to use our most strenuous efforts to quiet our souls. If the summit reached can only be held by earnest endeavour, how much more is needed to struggle up from the valleys below. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Waiting upon God is the soul casting its anchor*:—It was the speech of Taulcrus, one that Luther prized above all. Says he—Though the mariners may make use of their oars in the time of calm, yet when a storm comes down the mariners leave all and fly to their anchor. So, though at other times we may make use of resolutions and vows, and the like, yet when the storm of temptation comes down, nothing then but fly to the anchor of faith, nothing then like to casting of anchor into the vail. (*Bridge.*)

**Ver. 2. He only is my rock and my salvation.**—*God alone the salvation of His people*:—“My rock!” What a history the rock might give you of the storms to which it has been exposed; of the tempests which have raged in the ocean at its base, and of the thunders which have disturbed the skies above its head; while it, itself, has stood unscathed by tempests, and unmoved by the buffetings of storms. So with our God. The rock is immutable; nought hath been worn from it. Yon old granite peak hath gleamed in the sun, or worn the white veil of winter snow—it hath sometimes worshipped God with bare, uncovered head, and at other times the clouds furnished it with veiling wings, that, like a cherub, it might adore its

Makor; but yet itself hath stood unchanged. The frosts of winter have not destroyed it, nor have the heats of summer melted it. It is the same with God. The ten thousand uses of the rock, moreover, are full of ideas as to what God is. You see the fortress standing on a high rock, up which the clouds themselves can scarcely climb, and up whose precipices the assault cannot be carried, and the armed cannot travel, for the besieged laugh at them from their eminence. So is our God a sure defence; and we shall not be moved if He hath "set our feet upon a rock, and established our goings." Many a giant rock is a source of admiration from its elevation; for on its summit we can see the world outspread below, like some small map; we mark the river or broadly spreading stream, as if it were a vein of silver inlaid in emerald. We discover the nations beneath our feet, "like drops in a bucket," and the islands are "very little things" in the distance, while the sea itself seems but a basin of water, held in the hand of a mighty giant. The mighty God is such a rock; we stand on Him, and look down on the world, counting it to be a mean thing. We shall notice—I. THE GREAT DOCTRINE, that God only is our salvation. II. THE GREAT EXPERIENCE, to know and to learn that "He only is my rock and my salvation"; and—III. THE GREAT DUTY, which you may guess at, which is, to give all the glory and all the honour, and place all our faith on Him who "only is our rock and our salvation." I must tell you a singular story, which was related at our Church meeting, because there may be some very poor people here, who may understand the way of salvation by it. One of the friends had been to see a person who was about to join the Church; and he said to him, "Can you tell me what you would say to a poor sinner who came to ask you the way of salvation?" "Well," said he, "I do not know—I think I can hardly tell you; but it so happened that a case of this sort did occur yesterday. A poor woman came into my shop, and I told her the way; but it was in such a homely manner that I don't like to tell you." "Oh, yes, tell me; I should like to hear it." "Well, she is a poor woman, who is always pawning her things, and by and by she redeems them again. I did not know how to tell her better than this. I said to her, 'Look here; your soul is in pawn to the devil; Christ has paid the redemption money; you take faith for your ticket, and so you will get your soul out of pawn.' " Now, that was the most simple, but the most excellent way of imparting a knowledge of salvation to this woman. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The Rock confers immovability to the believer:*—In the old classic story Hercules the giant challenged the whole world to produce a man who could wrestle with him and come off victor. There stepped forward a man of feeble build and almost dwarfish stature. Hercules disdainfully advanced and, lightly closing with this weak-looking fellow, put forth just a little of his strength, but the little man held his feet. Hercules, wondering at this, grappled with the unpromising wrestler, and put forth every atom of his strength to fling him. But, instead of being hurled to the ground, the stranger's feet are immovable, and he still stands. At last, strength gone, amid the laughter and jeers of the crowd over their broken idol, Hercules slunk away, completely beaten, utterly humiliated. That night a traitor friend of the dwarf's visited the tent of the discomfited giant and whispered, "Gold! Gold, and I will tell you why you could not win to-day, but why you can to-morrow. The man you are wrestling with to-day is Antæus, the son of Earth. While his feet touch the ground all the strength of his mother earth passes into him, and he cannot be thrown. But only sever his connection with the ground by a hair's breadth and you have him." Next day the crowds gathered vaster than ever to witness Hercules' defeat again. Antæus is there, too little suspecting that his secret is betrayed. The giant advances to his opponent, and, before the dwarf is aware, with a sudden spring lifts him off the ground, and in a moment has his knee on his breast. Oh, take hold of the strength of God. Keep your feet on the Rock of ages. While you do so you are invincible. (J. Robertson.)

VERS. 5, 6. Truly my soul waiteth upon God . . . My soul, wait thou only upon God.—*Silence to God:*—These clauses correspond: the "truly" of the first is the same word as the "only" of the second, and in each it stands at the beginning. Literally the words are, "My soul is silence unto God." His whole being was one great stillness before God. This silence is—1. Of the will. Resignation is its characteristic; is a silent will. Such will strong: it is no feeble passiveness. 2. Of the heart. 3. Of the mind. How we need to be still and let God speak. The second clause is an exhortation to the psalmist's own soul, and such



self-exhortation, if not the affirmation of the first clause, we can make our own. There must be conscious effort and self-encouragement would we preserve the highest religious emotion. As the constant wash of the sea undermines the cliffs and wastes the coasts, so do the wear and tear of daily occupation act upon and wear away the higher emotions of our religious life. Therefore stir up your soul to wait only upon God. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) **I shall not be greatly moved.**—*The upgrade of faith* (with ver. 6):—I. **THE PSALMIST HAS ALREADY ATTAINED TO A GOOD DEGREE IN THE SCHOOL OF FAITH.** "I shall not be greatly moved." And how did he attain to this degree? 1. He began by waiting upon God. "Only to God is my soul silenced" is the original, and it is expressive in that form, is it not? I have no one else in view, I am listening to God alone; my soul has ears, and they are open to hear what He will say unto me, for He will speak peace unto His people. This is the right attitude. 2. Having begun by waiting silently upon God, the psalmist soon enjoyed the realization of His power, His grace, His interest. "He only is my rock." That metaphor means more than we imagine. David knew what rocks were, the use and purpose and comfort of them. What the hills and the rocks were to the conies, that the caves and dens of the earth had been to the hunted king, and that God was to him in all his soul's perplexities. He further calls Him his salvation, adding this to the metaphor that he had already employed, as much as to say, "It is not mere metaphor. This is song, but it is not mere song; it is poetry, but it is practical for all that. God has been to me as this rock of my salvation, a Rock of Ages, a cleft rock, in which I have been secure." Further, he says, "He is my defence," a high tower, a lordly castle; something even better than the caves of the earth, though they served David's purpose well enough when occasion demanded. But God is to us the best of the best, the noblest of the noble; a tower, but a high tower as well as a strong tower, not merely a rock-hewn shelter, but a lordly castle, behind whose bulwarks we are not only safe but happy. 3. This produces firm confidence. "I shall not be greatly moved." The compass trembles and wavers and vacillates, but it trembles back to the pole; it is not greatly moved. I may fall, but I shall rise again. If I am perplexed I am not in despair. If I am cast down I am not, and shall not be, distressed. With such a rock—for who is a rock like unto our God?—may we not with confidence say, "I shall not be greatly moved." II. **HE HAS MADE IMMENSE PROGRESS** (ver. 6). "I shall not be moved." That is not so long a sentence as the other, but if it is not as long it is as strong, and stronger, and I prefer strength to length. The omission of that word greatly marks a growing faith, and makes a world of difference. "I shall not be moved." There is no qualifying adverb; it is absolute. "I shall not be moved in the least degree, not an inch, not a hair's breadth. I shall not be moved at any time, while I live, nor when I come to die, nor when I stand before the judgment seat. I shall not be moved." You see there is no qualification whatever. Do you wish you could get to this? Notice how swift the growth has been. I believe that the psalmist was just speaking his actual experience, and it could have taken only a minute or so to say the intervening words. Ah, but God's plants grow quickly. The lilies of the Lord spring up in an hour or so, when He shines upon the seed and waters it with His grace. But how can we account for this growth? First on the ground that real faith is vital. It is bound to grow. It has the life of God, it is the germ Divine, and just as in the hands of the mummy the wheat and peas have lain three thousand years, but when brought forth to light and planted in the ground they spring to beauty, their life being in them all the time, so faith cannot be destroyed. It is God's own life; it is bound to live and conquer. Moreover, faith rises to occasion. It is like the stormy petrel that delights in the breeze, and is never so happy as when the storm is strongest. Moreover, it grows by exercise. The more faith is acted upon, the more active it is. Now let me say that nothing short of this should suffice any one of us. I know that half a loaf is better than no bread. I know that a feeble faith is infinitely to be preferred to none at all, but on that same line of argument you may well declare that such a faith as this we have been speaking of is greatly to be preferred to that we thought of at the first. Why should we be content with small measure when God will give it to us heaped up, pressed down, and running over? (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 5. **My soul, wait thou only upon God.**—*The waiting soul.*—The text applies to every believer. I. **CONSIDER WHAT IT IS TO WAIT UPON GOD.** It is the

act of the soul. Here, the soul means the whole man. II. IT IS A WAITING LIKE THAT OF A SERVANT UPON HIS MASTER. III. IT EXCLUDES ALL OTHER WAITING: "wait thou only upon God." IV. IT IS AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE. No man waits upon God until he knows God. V. OF CHILDLIKE TRUST. VI. THE MOTIVE OF ALL THIS—"my expectation is from Him." It is a great expectation: of guidance now, of eternal life with Christ hereafter. And it is from God, derived from, warranted by, established in God. And all on account of the redemption which is in Christ. (*George Fisk.*) "Silent unto God!"—"My soul!" Here is a man communing with his own soul! He is deliberately addressing himself, and calling himself to attention. He is of set purpose breaking up his own drowsiness and indifference, and calling himself to a fruitful vigilance. There is nothing like the deliberate exercise of a power for making it spontaneously active. We must challenge our own souls, and rouse them to the contemplation of the things of God. "My soul! look upon this, and look long!" But let us see to it that when we do incite the attention of our spirits we give them something worthy to contemplate. Here the psalmist calls upon his soul to contemplate the manifold glory of God. Let us gaze at one or two aspects of the inspiring vision. "He only is my rock." Here is one of the figures in which the psalmist expresses his conception of the ministry of his God. "My rock!" The figure is literally suggestive of an enclosure of rock, a cave, a hiding-place. Perhaps there is no experience in human life which more perfectly develops the thought of the psalmist than the guardianship offered by a mother to her baby-child when the little one is just learning to walk. The mother literally encircles the child with protection, spreading out her arms into almost a complete ring, so that in whatever way the child may happen to stumble she falls into the waiting ministry of love. Such is the idea of "besetment" which lies in this familiar word "rock." It is a strong enclosure, an invincible ring, a grand besetment within which we move in restful security. "He is my salvation." Then He not only shields me, but strengthens me! Salvation implies more than convalescence, it denotes health. It is vastly more than redemption from sin; it is redemption from infirmity. It offers no mediocrity; its goal is spiritual prosperity and abundance. This promise of health we have in God too. He accepts us in our disease; He pledges His name to absolute health. "Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end." "He is my defence." The psalmist is multiplying his figures that he may the better bring out the riches of his conception. "Defence is suggestive of loftiness, of inaccessibility. It denotes the summit of some stupendous, outjutting, precipitous crag! It signifies such a place as where the eagle makes its nest, far beyond the prowlings of the marauders, away in the dizzy heights which mischief cannot scale. God is my defence! He lifts me away into the security of inaccessible heights. My safety is in my salvation. Purity is found in the altitudes. In these three words the psalmist expresses something of his thought of the all-enveloping and protecting presence of God. He is "my rock," "my salvation," "my defence." What then shall be the attitude of the soul towards this God? "My soul, wait—be thou silent unto God." The spirit of patience is to be hushed and subdued. Our own clamorous wills are to be checked. The perilous heat is to be cooled. We are to linger before God in composure, in tranquillity. We are to be unruffled. "One evening," says Frances Ridley Havergal, "after a relapse, I longed so much to be able to pray, but found I was too weak for the least effort of thought, and I only looked up and said, 'Lord Jesus, I am so tired,' and then He brought to my mind 'Rest in the Lord,' and its lovely marginal rendering, 'Be silent to the Lord,' and so I was just silent to Him, and He seemed to overflow me with perfect peace in the sense of His own perfect love." "My expectation is from Him." The word translated "expectation" might also be translated "line" or "cord." "The line of scarlet thread." The line of all my hope stretches away to Him, and from Him back to me! The psalmist declares that however circumstances may vary, the cord of his hope binds him to the Lord. Ever and everywhere there is the outstretched line! "My line is from Him." Whether he was in trouble or in joy, in prosperity or adversity, on whatever part of the varying shoreline he stood, there was the golden track between him and his God. "Thine expectation shall not be cut off; the line shall never be broken. 'I shall not be moved.' Of course not! A man whose conception of God is that of "Rock," "Salvation," and "Defence," and who is "silent unto Him," and is bound to Him by the golden "cord" of hope, cannot be moved. But mark how the psalmist's confidence has grown by the exercise of contemplation. In the outset

of the psalm his spirit was a little tremulous and uncertain. "I shall not be greatly moved." But now the qualifying adverb is gone, the tremulousness has vanished, and he speaks in unshaken confidence and trust, "I shall not be moved," (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The inexhaustible fount*:—This is faith with its eyes open, seeing how great and how good our God is. If only we know God, and know Him as "our God," we at once pass into the possession of a great inheritance. This includes safety, rest, transfiguration of soul, victory, eternal joy.

**I. THE SOUL IS OUR CHIEF CONCERNMENT.** The body of man has a value peculiarly its own, yet the soul is incomparably more precious. The body looks down and scorches the ground for its delights; the soul looks up and culls treasures from the realms beyond the stars. Its home is on high; it is destined to soar.

**1. The soul has kinship with God.** **2. The soul has large capacities.** **3. The soul has the possibility of endless life.**

**II. THE SOUL IS FULL OF NEED.** **1. This is a patent fact.** Can the tree flourish without its root? Can a house stand without a foundation? Can a babe prosper without its mother? Nor can man without God. **2. We need Divine instruction.** The first cry of the soul is for light. **3. We need God's life within.** Penitence is budding life; prayer is life; pardon is life; righteousness is life; sonship in God's household is life; hope of heaven is life. "He that hath the Son hath life." **III. THE SOURCE OF REAL GOOD—GOD.** This is a vital discovery; for there is a sad tendency to trust in anything rather than in God. But here we have—**1. Great resources.** He who created out of nothing this vast universe can as easily create more. Can we hold the Atlantic in the palm of our hand? Neither can we measure the resources of God. **2. Great promises.** God's promises are the forthputtings of Himself. They are God's character transposed into words. What magnificent pledges have we from God! "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people;" "My covenant with them will I not break;" "With that man will I dwell, who is of an humble and a contrite heart;" "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." **3. Great provisions.** Everything is laid under tribute to serve redeemed men, viz. nature, providence, human history, angels, suffering, death, the cross of Jesus Christ.

**IV. THE CHANNEL OF BLESSING, viz. waiting upon God.** **1. This implies faith.** In every transaction of daily life we exercise faith. We put our faith in men, though they have often deceived us. We put our faith in the processes of nature—in the revolutions of the seasons, in the stability of this very unstable globe. Shall we not much more put our faith in the everlasting God? **2. Waiting implies submission.** "To wait" means that I defer to the good pleasure of God. Though He tarry, I will wait for Him. My range of vision is very narrow. His eye sweeps the universe. My idea of what is best is very imperfect; His idea is perfect. God is my King—my gracious Master; therefore I will "wait." **3. Waiting means prayer.** It is not essential that there should be words, though words are helpful to ourselves. The mightiest prayer is silent—the outgoing of unconquerable desire. (*J. Dickerson Davies, M.A.*) *Waiting upon God*:—**I. EXHORTATION**—"wait." It is easier for some to fret and fume. Waiting is a lesson taught in the school of experience. But we are often like children scratching in their gardens to see if the seeds sown yesterday are coming up. **II. DEFINITION**—"upon God." To some, waiting is sitting with folded hands. This is not waiting upon God. In this, courage, resolution and other manly qualities are demanded—patient, prayerful use of means. **III. LIMITATION**—"only." Only? yes, only! This is a limitation indeed. Is it not written, "It is better to trust in the Lord than put confidence in princes"? Also, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no salvation," and again, "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man," etc. **IV. ILLUMINATION**—"Expectation." If the picture has been grey or dark here is illumination. This may appear mercenary. Mercenary? Listen, was Moses mercenary? "He had respect unto the recompense of reward—he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." Remember Him also, who for "the joy that was set before Him endured the cross." **V. APPLICATION**—"my soul," "thou," "my": this application is personal. This is the only fitting application, "My soul, wait thou only upon God," etc. (*Pulpit Treasury*.) **My expectation is from Him.**—*Expectation*:—There is nothing that fills life with such joy and rest as expectation! It is the "beyond" of human history, and no landscape is beautiful without perspective. David's light was dim, but there was a "beyond" in his life. So with Isaiah. But it was Christ that most of all kindled this expectation. Now, concerning it, note—**I. IT WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.** **II. IT WILL NOT BE ALTOGETHER DEFINED.** **III. IT WILL NOT INJURE**

DUTY. Secularists say it will and does. But what would the present life become were there no expectation of a future? IV. IT WILL NOT DIE OUT. Man cannot else live. We have in Christ the earnest of it. (W. M. Statham.)

Ver. 8. Trust in Him at all times.—*The duty of trusting in God*:—I. AN INTERESTING FACT ASSERTED. "God is a refuge for us." This is a fact in which all mankind are deeply interested. If God be not our refuge, we are undone, and must finally perish in our sins. But, thank the Lord, He has not left us without help. He "hath remembered us in our low estate, for His mercy endureth for ever." II. AN IMPORTANT DUTY ENJOINED. "Trust in Him at all times." This is both the imperious duty, and the highest interest of every human being. There is no season in the whole compass of human existence when it is not needful to trust in the Lord. III. AN ENCOURAGING DIRECTION URGED. "Ye people, pour out your hearts before Him." "Thou, God, seest me," is a sentiment that should deeply impress our minds at all times; but especially in our addresses to the throne of grace. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons*.) *Confidence in God*:—I. THE OBJECT OF OUR CONFIDENCE—GOD. Trust in Him: in His perfections and prerogatives—His power, wisdom, goodness, love. Trust in Him at all times: prosperity, sorrow, etc. Trust in Him at all times. May I? You must. Is it not presumption? Nay; the presumption would be the other way. When your child trusts in your affection, and walks in obedience to your will, regarding your promise as truth, that child is not presumptuous. It is presumptuous when he disputes your authority or truthfulness, and is refractory. Filial affiance, humble love, lowly but perfect confidence, are not presumption, but obedience. II. This is our privilege, that WE MAY POUR OUT OUR HEARTS BEFORE GOD. Pour out your heart in personal prayer and supplication. God sees the heart; yet open it yourself to Him. Spread your case before Him. It will be your comfort and relief, your solace and your satisfaction. III. THE SAFETY WHICH IT ASSURES TO ALL WHO EXERCISE THAT CONFIDENCE, AND AVAIL THEMSELVES OF THAT CONSOLATION. God is a refuge for us. There is our security. (*J. Stratten*.) *How are we to live by faith on Divine providence?*—I. TRUSTING IN GOD IS A BELIEVER'S DUTY (Ps. lxxv. 5; Prov. iii. 5; Isa. li. 5; Ps. liii. 8; lxxviii. 22). II. WHAT IT IS TO TRUST IN GOD. 1. Generally. To trust in God, is to cast our burden on the Lord, when it is too heavy for our own shoulder (Ps. lv. 22); to dwell "in the secret place of the Most High," when we know not where to lay our heads on earth (Ps. xci. 1); to "look to our Maker," and to "have respect to the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. xvii. 7); to stay ourselves, when sinking, on the Lord our God (Isa. xxvi. 3); in a word, trust in God is that high act or exercise of faith, whereby the soul, looking upon God, and casting of itself on His goodness, power, promises, faithfulness and providence, is lifted up above carnal fears and discouragements, above perplexing doubts and disquietments, either for the obtaining and continuance of that which is good, or for the preventing or removing of that which is evil. 2. More particularly. (1) The ingredients of trust in God are—A clear knowledge or right apprehension of God, as revealed in His Word and works (Ps. ix. 10; xci. 14). A full assent of the understanding, and consent of the will, to those Divine revelations, as true and good, wherein the Lord proposeth Himself as an adequate object for our trust. A firm and fixed reliance of the whole soul on God. (2) Its concomitants—An holy quietness, security and peaceableness of spirit, springing from a full persuasion of our safety. A steadfast, well-grounded hope, which includes—(i.) A holy and confident expectation and looking out after God's gracious presence; (ii.) An humble and constant waiting on God's leisure. An humble, holy and undaunted confidence. (3) Its effects. Fervent, effectual, constant prayer. Sincere, universal, cheerful, constant obedience. Soul-ravishing, heart-enlivening joy (Ps. xlii. 5; Isa. xlii. 2; 1 Pet. i. 8). III. WHAT IS, OR OUGHT TO BE, THE GRAND AND SOLE OBJECT OF A BELIEVER'S TRUST. The Lord Jehovah is, or at least should be—1. The grand object of a believer's trust. "Put your trust in the Lord" (Ps. iv. 5). In whom should a dying creature trust, but in a "living God"? (1 Tim. iv. 10). In stormy and tempestuous times, though we may not run to the bramble, yet we must to this Rock, for refuge (Isa. xxvi. 4). When the sun burns hot, and scorches, a Jonah's gourd will prove insignificant: no shadow like that of a God's wings (Ps. xxxvi. 7). 2. The sole object of a believer's trust.—Holy trust is an act of worship proper and peculiar to a holy God. No creature must share in it: whatever we trust in, unless it be in subordination unto God, we make it our God, or at least our idol. True trust in God

takes us off the hinges of all other confidences: as we cannot serve, so we cannot trust, God and Mammon. There must be but one string to the bow of our trust; and that is the Lord. IV. WHAT ARE THOSE SURE AND STABLE GROUNDS ON WHICH SAINTS MAY FIRMLY AND SECURELY BUILD THEIR TRUST ON GOD—1. God's almighty arm and power. The Lord hath an arm, an outstretched arm (1 Kings viii. 42); a hand, an omnipotent hand; a hand that spans the heavens (Isa. xl. 12), that stretcheth them out as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in. On this Almighty arm may believers trust (Isa. li. 5). 2. God's infinite and free goodness, mercy and bounty. His bowels are as tender as His arm is strong. 3. God's many, choice, exceeding great and precious promises.—These are the flags that faith keeps by her, the apples [which] she hath hoarded up in store, to revive and quicken in a day of swooning. Who will not trust the word, the promise, the protest of the King of kings? (Heb. xiii. 5; Isa. xliii. 2; iv. 5, 6). 4. God's inviolable, steadfast, never-failing faithfulness (1 Cor. x. 13). God's goodness inclines Him to make good promises, and His faithfulness engages Him to make those promises good. 5. God's most holy, wise, powerful, gracious providence (Acts xvii. 25, 28; Prov. xv. 3). Faith reflects on former experiences, its own and others; and by the holy skill it hath in the physiognomy of providence, clearly reads and collects what God will do, in what God hath done. It casts its eye on—(1) The experiences of others.—And judges herself to have an interest in those very providences of grace which they enjoyed. (2) Its own experiences (1 Sam. xvii. 37; 2 Cor. i. 10). 6. Those dear relations in which the Lord is pleased to stand and own towards His people cry aloud for their trust in Him. Hath He built the house, and will He not keep it up? He that made us will assuredly take care of us. We may safely give up ourselves, our trust, our all, to Him, who hath given us ourselves and our all. This relation the apostle makes the ground of trust (1 Pet. iv. 19). V. WHAT ARE THOSE SPECIAL AND SIGNAL SEASONS WHICH CALL ALOUD FOR THE EXERTING OF THIS DIVINE TRUST? The wise man tells us there is an appointed time for every purpose under heaven: a time to kill and to heal, to plant and to pluck up, to weep and to laugh, to get and to lose, to be born and to die (Eccles. iii. 1, etc.). In all these, trust in God is not, like snow in harvest, uncommonly, but seasonable, yea, necessary. VI. HOW FAITH OR TRUST EXERTS, PUTS FORTH, DEMEANS, AND BESTIRS ITSELF IN THESE SIGNAL SEASONS. 1. In times of fulness and prosperity. When it goes well with us and ours; when the candle of the Lord shines on us and our tabernacle; when our lines fall in pleasant places, and our God makes us to lie down in green and fat pastures: now, now is a fair opportunity for faith or trust to exert itself, yea, and to appear gloriously. And, indeed, it requires no less than the utmost of faith's skill to steer the soul handsomely in this serene and smooth-faced calm. And so—(1) Faith or trust looks upward, and there fixeth its eye on God. And so holy faith delivers herself, in such expressions as these; namely—(i.) How full soever my large cistern be, it is the Lord, and the Lord alone, that is the grand Fountain, or rather Ocean, of all my enjoyments. (ii.) Since all that I have is received of God, I may not, I must not, boast, crack, glory, as if I received it not (1 Cor. iv. 7). (iii.) Inasmuch as all that I have is from God's blessing and bounty, this whole all shall be for His praise and glory. (iv.) Because all my enjoyments proceed from God's free-gift, or rather his loan, therefore they must and shall be readily surrendered to God's call. (v.) Now I enjoy most from God, now, even now, it is necessary that I should trust mostly, yea, wholly and only, in God. (vi.) These outward enjoyments are indeed sweet; but my God, the author of them, is infinitely more sweet. On the things of God. Faith discovers a world beyond the moon, and trades thither; leaving the men of the earth to load themselves with clay and coals, faith pursues its staple commodity, and traffics for grace and glory. (2) Faith or trust looks downward, on its fullest and sweetest temporal enjoyments.—And so it accurately weighs these enjoyments in the balance of the sanctuary, and so makes a just estimate of them as to their worth and value. 2. In times of sadness, afflictions, wants, sufferings, miseries.—When the hand of the Lord is gone out against us, and He greatly multiplies our sorrows; now, now is a time for a saint's trust to bestir itself to purpose. (*T. Lyte.*) *Trust in God*.—You believe in God; that is to say, He has a place in your intellectual notions; you could not on any consideration allow His name to be blotted out of your creed; you are intellectually sure that He lives. Now, be true to your own creed, and trust in Him. You believe that the river runs to the sea, and that the sea is large enough to sustain your ship,—then

act upon your faith and launch the vessel. If you keep your vessel on the stocks when she is finished, then all your praises of the ocean go for nothing; better never have built the ship than leave her unlaunched—a monument of your scientific belief, but also a testimony of your practical infidelity. This figure will serve us still further. This faith in God is truly as a sea-going ship. You have this great ship; she is well built; you know her preciousness—but there you are, hesitating on the river, running down to the harbour-bar and coming back again aghast as if you had seen a ghost: have faith; pass the bar; leave the headlands behind; make the stars your counsellors, and ride upon the great sea by the guidance of the greater sun. This is faith: not a mere nodding of the assenting head, but the reverent risking of the loving, clinging heart. To have a God in your belief is to sit in a ship which is chained upon the stocks; but to have a God in the heart, ruling the understanding, the conscience, and the will, is to sail down the river, enter upon the great ocean, and pass over the infinite waters into the haven of rest. Trust in Him at all times. Religion is not to be occasional but continuous. In the daytime our faith is to shine as the sun; in the nighttime it is to fill the darkness with stars; at the wedding-feast it is to turn the water into wine; in the hour of privation it is to surround the impoverished life with angels of hope and promise; in the day of death it is to take the sword from the destroyer and to give the victory to him who is apparently worsted in the fight. In exercising this trust there are two things to be remembered. First—We get some of the highest benefits of life through our most painful discipline. The very act of trust is a continual strain upon the understanding, the affections, and the will. The trust is not an act accomplished once for all, something that was written down in a book long ago and may be made matter of reference and verification; religious trust is the daily condition of the soul, the state in which the soul lives and moves and has its being, the source, so to say, from which it draws all its inspirations, the feast at which it sustains its confidence, and the whole condition which underlies and ennobles the best life. We must remember, too, that the time of full explanation is not until by and by. It is hardly to be questioned that our disappointments may one day come to be reckoned amongst our blessings. We need thus to be taught the lesson of patience, to be chastened, mellowed, and subdued, and to be taught how good a thing it is, not only to wait upon God, but to wait for Him, to wait through long days and weary nights, to stand outside heaven's door and to abide there in the confidence that at His own time and in His own way the King will come, and do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. The exhortation takes another turn—"pour out your hearts before Him." Though He knows all, yet He must be told all. Make God your confidant. Hannah said, "I have poured out my soul before the Lord." The figure represents the act of giving up the whole of the contents of the heart to God's keeping. It is not a word now and then that has to be spoken, or a hint that has to be given, or a signal that has to be held out; the action is a complete emptying of the heart, the outpouring of every secret thought, purpose, motive, desire, and affection, that thus the man may stand in a right attitude and relation towards his God. Our communion with heaven should be unreserved. The very first condition to true, profound, and edifying worship is that we should cleanse out our hearts of every secret and pour out the whole contents of our being in penitence and thanksgiving before God: then the vision of heaven will shine upon us, then the comforting angels will be seen with gospels from the throne of grace, then new heavens shall beam above us, and a new earth shall spread out all its flowers and fruits for our delight and our sustenance. Our communion should not only be unreserved, it should be long-continued: "pray without ceasing." As our breathing is continual so ought our aspiration to be unceasing. The only true analogy about the soul's life in reference to communion with God is to be found in the continual breathing of the bodily life. We breathe without knowing it. When we are in health we are not aware that we have a physical nature at all; everything works harmoniously and smoothly, and without giving any reminder to the man that he is inhabiting a decaying or uncertain dwelling-place. It is even so with the soul. This is a sense in which we may enjoy an unconscious piety that has lived itself out of the region of statute and machinery, scaffolding and external upholding, and that poises itself as on strong wings at the very gate of the morning. This is not carelessness; it may be the very last expression of long-continued spiritual culture. There should be some difference of a most obvious and practical kind between those

who believe in God and those who do not. Trust in God should express itself in calmness and beneficence of life. The Christian should live to give. Christianity is expenditure. We have nothing that we have not received, and because we have all things in Christ we are to give and labour with both hands earnestly, leaving God to provide for the future as the future may reveal itself. If we may so say it, we can give God no greater pleasure than to cast all our care upon Him, to entrust to Him every concern and every detail of life with absolute fearlessness and perfect consecration. The very hairs of our head are all numbered. Our down-sitting is of consequence to God, and our uprising is matter of note in heaven; yea, our going out and our coming in would seem to touch the solicitudes of our Father. All this will be romantic to the soul who has had no spiritual experience; but we must not consult the blind upon colours, or the deaf upon harmonies, or the dead upon the duties, the enjoyments, and the sacrifices of life. "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." The natural man does not understand spiritual things; they can only be spiritually discerned. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Continuous trust in God*:—The emphasis must be put upon the continuousness of the trust. We are called upon to trust God where we cannot praise Him. It is in the Garden of Gethsemane that we can best show the reality and force of our trust in God. Even infidels may laugh at midday, and fools be glad in the time of abounding harvest; only he who lovingly trusts in God can be calm in the darkness, and sing songs of trust when the fig tree does not flourish. Trust of this kind amounts to an argument. It compels the attention of those who study the temper and action of our lives. Naturally they ask how it is that we are so sustained and comforted, and that when other men are complaining and repining we can repeat our prayer and sing the same song of trust, though sometimes, indeed, in a lower tone. We are watched when we stand by the graveside, and if there Christian faith can overcome human sorrow a tribute of praise is due to our principles. And many men may be prepared to render that tribute, and so bring themselves nearer to the kingdom of God. A beautiful refrain is this to our life-song, "Trust in Him at all times"—in youth, in age, in sorrow, in joy, in poverty, in wealth; at all times, in good harvests and in bad harvests, in the wilderness and in the garden, on the firm earth and on the tumultuous sea; at all times, until time itself has mingled with eternity. (*Ibid.*) **God is a refuge for us.**—*God our refuge*:—I. THE REPRESENTATION HERE GIVEN OF GOD. "God is a refuge for us." 1. A secure refuge. 2. An ever-present refuge. 3. An accessible refuge. 4. The only refuge. II. THE EXHORTATION GROUNDED UPON IT. 1. We are to maintain a continual reliance upon God. 2. We are to make an unreserved disclosure of our wants to Him. "Pour out your hearts before Him." (*R. Davies, M.A.*) *God the refuge of His people*:—I. THE NECESSITY OF A DIVINE REFUGE. 1. As it respects man as a sinner, he needs a refuge. (1) He is guilty, having broken the righteous law of God. (2) He is condemned, and the object of pursuit (Gal. iii. 10). (3) He is helpless. He cannot give satisfaction (Rom. iii. 19, 20); he is weak (Rom. v. 6); he can give no atonement for the past (Micah vi. 6, 7). 2. As it respects the believer. (1) With his own heart—Satan, his mighty adversary. (2) Tribulation. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks," etc. (3) In a dying hour, and at the last day. (4) The believer needs a refuge on account of his helplessness (2 Cor. xii. 10; John xv. 5). II. THE NATURE AND PROPERTIES OF THIS REFUGE. 1. God is a refuge for the guilty. Even as the cities of refuge were provided for the guilty manslayer. The most guilty—the vilest of the vile—find refuge and succour (Heb. vi. 18). 2. He is a refuge for His people in conflict. Such He was to David (2 Sam. xxii. 1–3; Ps. cxlii. 4–6). He will give grace sufficient to war a good warfare. 3. God is a refuge in tribulation (Ps. ix. 9; lxx. 16; Jer. xvi. 19). 4. He is a refuge of strength for the weak and helpless. 5. He will be a refuge in death, and at the judgment day. Then will He be recognized as a God in covenant, and He will save His people. (*Helps for the Pulpit.*)

Ver. 10. **If riches increase, set not your heart upon them.**—*The increase of wealth*:—I. HERE IS A CIRCUMSTANCE WHICH MOST DESIRE. Who does not desire the increase of his secular possessions? This desire is virtuous, or otherwise, according to the grand reason that originates and governs it. 1. There is a wrong reason. When wealth is desired either for its own sake, or for purposes of display, ease, voluptuousness, and self-indulgence, the desire for acquisition is vitiated and corrupt. These are the ends of mere worldly men in the aspiration. 2. There

is a right reason. He who desires wealth in order properly to discipline his spiritual nature, alleviate the woes of humanity, and help forward the cause of truth, right and benevolence, is righteous in this acquisitive propensity. II. **HERE IS A POSSIBILITY WHICH SOME MAY POSSESS.** The possibility is the increase of riches. This increase in the case of many, perhaps, is all but impossible; still, in the case of others, it is not so. Poor men often get rich in one of two ways; either with, or without, their own efforts. 1. With their own efforts. By inventive skill, well-directed industry, mercantile forecast, and systematic economy, very often we find poor men rising from great poverty to immense wealth. When such a result is reached apart from fallacious representations, fraudulent transactions and unrighteous speculations, it is at once gratifying and commendable. 2. Without their own efforts. Not a few indolent and worthless men become rich. By birth they come into an inheritance, or by a kind of "luck" they are endowed with handsome legacies. Seldom in such cases is wealth of any real worth to its possessors: and it often proves their moral ruin. III. **HERE IS A DUTY WHICH ALL SHOULD OBEY.** What is that? "Set not your heart upon them." However in manner, or amount, they may increase, they should not occupy the heart. But why? 1. Because to love them is unworthy of your nature. The soul was made to set its affections upon moral, not material, worth, upon the Divine attributes of imperishable mind, not upon the qualities of corruptible matter. The money-lover prostitutes his affections and degrades his nature. 2. Because to love them is to injure your nature. The man who loves wealth offers violence to the dictates of his conscience, fills his heart with harassing cares and anxieties, and materializes the Divine affections of his nature. We become like the objects we love; the man who loves his gold becomes like a miserable grub or a lump of clay. 3. Because to love them is to exclude God from your nature. The soul is so constituted that it cannot love two opposite things supremely at the same time. 4. Because to love them is to bring ruin on your nature. The greatest agony of the soul is bereavement—the separation from the object we love. Such a separation is inevitable where wealth is loved; here the lover and the loved must eternally part. (*Homilist.*) *The heart in the wrong place:*—In one of the art galleries of Italy there is a curious picture, by an early painter, which represents a sick man stretched on his bed, and his physicians come to visit him. They have examined their patient, and ascertained his malady to be that his heart is gone—it has altogether disappeared. From a pulpit near by, St. Anthony of Padua is preaching on the text, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." He announces where the sick man's heart will be found; and the clue he furnishes is followed up in another compartment by a group of the sick man's friends, who open his strong box, and stand amazed at discovering the missing member reposing among the abundant gold pieces. It is as true as though it was a literal fact, that the heart may be enticed from its rightful place to lie among earthly treasures.

**Ver. 11. God hath spoken once: twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God.**—*The omnipotence of God:*—First allow me to remind you of the definition of power which is adopted by the most approved writers. They instruct us to consider power as divided into two kinds, active and passive power. By active power we are to understand the capacity possessed by any substance or being of effecting change or alteration upon any other substance or being; so that it is an instance of active power when we speak of fire as having the capacity of melting gold, for we mean that fire has the capacity of effecting on gold that alteration of its consistency which we denominate melting. So it is also an instance of passive power when we speak of the capacity of any substance to undergo changes; as when we say of gold that it possesses the power of becoming melted, or of having its consistency altered by the influence of fire. From this statement of the most approved definition of power we advance to an attempt to illustrate the power of the Deity as far as we are enabled to do so, first, from the appearances of nature. The first of these is the vastness of its extent. According to the modern doctrines of astronomy, the solar system, of which the globe on which we live forms a portion, consists of several worlds, most of them larger than our own, and many of them very much so; and that these severally are carried round the sun in different orbits at an equable but rapid speed. The agency, whether immediately exerted or resulting from the constitution of self-acting causes, which could effect such amazing alterations of the originally confused and undistributed



matter of the universe, which could continue them in this state of action, overwhelms the imagination. Another characteristic of the power of the Deity, as illustrated in the works of nature, is that of the variety of modes by which it is displayed. The insatiable variety of nature has ever been considered one of the most wonderful of the qualities of the universe. This is exhibited in nothing more strikingly than in the ability exerted to secure the same ends by widely different means. Astronomers, for instance, tell us that the general provision made for giving light to a planet during the absence of the sun is by moons similar to our own, differing in number in proportion to the size of the planet round which they revolve. In the case, however, of the planet Saturn, this purpose is accomplished partly by numerous moons, and partly by a most singular deviation—namely, by a ring of such size as would reach from our earth to the moon, which is suspended at the distance of twenty thousand miles above the planet itself, and revolves and reflects the light of the absent sun upon its immense regions. Another characteristic of the power of the Deity, as illustrated in the works of nature, is that of complexity. Nothing, perhaps, more effectually demonstrates power than the arrangement and combination of numerous portions of machinery so as to produce, by their relative action, one result. The display of power will, of course, be in proportion to the extent of the complexity, and will be augmented according as the materials adopted are of a varying nature; in proportion, also, as they are difficult of management, and as the result is successful. It may be most safely asserted that all these qualities pre-eminently distinguish the works of the Creator. (*J. F. Denham, M.A.*) *The reiterated message and the twofold hearing*:—"God hath spoken once." This is a description of sovereignty. The oriental despot speaks once, decisively, unequivocally, and only once. If the inferior does not instantly understand and obey, off with his head! But though the old divines laid all the stress on the sovereignty of God, this does not constitute His chief glory. There are other and diviner elements in Deity than this. According to the psalmist, God stretches a point in pity for human weakness and incapacity. He speaks more than once. If His first message is misunderstood, He repeats it. "Twice have I heard this." God spoke once as a Sovereign, the second time as a Father. And "twice" stands as a figure of speech, not for one repetition, but for many. "Once," "twice." Some people cannot wait for God's second word. They seize on a text for controversial purposes, tear it out of its connection and proper sequence, and imagine they have proved something by it. But wait! Is there not another text? Has not the truth another phase? Is there not a New Testament as well as an Old? Is there not a Church as well as a Bible? Is there not a Spirit as well as a Church? The true "mind of the Spirit" lies in the consensus of all the texts, in the harmony of all the voices. Not only is there the reiterated message, but there is twice hearing for every message. "Twice have I heard;" once with the ear, once with the heart. It is the sympathetic intelligence, the spiritual faculty alone that hears. When you knock at a door, it is not the door that hears, but the resident within. Much truth falls upon men's ears but as the tap of the knocker upon the unconscious door. Now observe the first element in that idea which had thus impressed itself upon his mind. "Power belongeth unto God." That was a natural impression. That is, as a rule, the first truth that the human mind lays hold of in its attempt to conceive a first cause. It deifies power. But while the Hebrew conception began here, it did not stop here. It included the idea of mercy as well. Now, as it cannot be said that we find this idea in nature, it is all the more remarkable that these Hebrew seers and poets should have had, not merely a glimpse, but so firm a grasp of it. This was the thought of God in which they exulted, and to which they sometimes gave utterance in sublimest fashion. "He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names." "He bindeth up the broken in heart, He healeth all their wounds." Isaiah xl. is a beautiful poem of reconciliations; of the reconciliation of the majesty and mercy, the power and tenderness of God. But now I ask your attention to the psalmist's enlightened conception of mercy as well as of God, "for thou renderest to every man according to his work." That is not at all the conventional idea. We rather think of mercy as "letting off" the criminal, and shielding him from the deserts of his transgression. But that is really an altogether mistaken view. The truest mercy is to let him suffer, and let him learn by his suffering. Otherwise, mercy to him is wrong to the other members of the community. Further, the unkindest thing to any man himself is to leave the roots

of evil in his nature, there to spring up and bring forth all their baleful harvest. This is what we do, however, when we only relieve him from the painful results of his wrong-doing. The sooner he perceives the real quality and tendency of his actions, and the more rigorously he therefore seeks to eradicate the last fibre of evil propension from his being, the sooner will he come to a healthy and happy moral condition. And all this arrives through the experience of that suffering which is the inevitable consequence of moral guilt, and the purpose of which is disciplinary and not vindictive. And so the psalmist mentions it as an essential element in the Divine mercy, that it "renders to every man according to his work." (*J. Halsey.*) *The power of God*.—I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE POWER OF GOD. 1. As to the principle. It is an ability to do all things, the doing of which speaks power and perfection; that is, whatever is not repugnant either to the nature of things, or of God; whatever does not imply a contradiction in the thing, or an imperfection in the doer; an ability to do all things which are consistent with itself, and with the Divine nature and perfection. To help our conception—(1) Let us imagine a principle from which all other power is derived, and upon which it depends, and to which it is perfectly subject and subordinate. (2) A perfect active principle, which can do, not only what any finite being or creature can do, but what all beings joined together can do; nay, more and greater things than they all can do. (3) A perfect active principle, to which nothing can make any considerable, much less effectual resistance, which can check and countermand at pleasure, and carry down before it, and annihilate all other powers that we can imagine besides this; because we cannot imagine any other power that is not derived from this, and does not depend upon it. (4) A perfect active principle, which can do all things in a most perfect manner, and can do all things at once, and in an instant, and that with ease. (5) The most perfect active principle we can imagine, the utmost bounds and limits of whose perfection we cannot imagine, that is, when we have imagined it to be as perfect, and to act in as perfect a manner as we can imagine, yet we have not reached the perfection of it; but after all this, that it can do many things more than we can imagine, and in such a manner much more perfect than we can imagine. 2. As to the exercise of it. The Divine will determines it to its exercise, the Divine wisdom directs and regulates the exercise of it; that is, God exerciseth His power willingly, and not by necessity, and in such manner, for the producing such effects, and in order to such ends and purposes, as seem best to His wisdom. Hence He is said to act all things according to His good pleasure, and according to the counsel of His will; that is, freely and wisely. II. THIS PERFECTION BELONGS TO GOD. This I shall show—1. From the dictates of natural light. This was one of the most usual titles which the heathens gave to their supreme deity, "Optimus Maximus"; next to his goodness they placed his greatness, which does chiefly appear in his power; and they did not only attribute a great power to him, but an omnipotence. Now their natural reason did convince them that this perfection did belong to God by these three arguments—(1) From those two great instances and expressions of His power, creation and providence; for the heathens did generally acknowledge the making of the world, and the preservation and government of it, to be the effects of power, determined by goodness, and regulated by wisdom. (2) Because all other perfections, without this, would be insignificant and ineffectual, or else could not be at all. Without this, goodness would be an empty piece of good meaning, and not able to give any demonstration of itself; knowledge would be an idle speculation; and wisdom to contrive things, without power to effect them, would be an useless thing. (3) Without this there could be no religion. 2. From Scripture. (1) Texts which in general ascribe power, might, strength to God—Ps. xxiv. 8; xxix. 1; 1 Chron. xxix. 11; Matt. vi. 13. (2) Those which ascribe this to God in an eminent degree—Job. ix. 4. (3) Those which ascribe such a power as transcends any human or created power. Such as those which express all the power which men have to be derived from God—John xix. 11. And those which advance the power of God above the power of men—Luke xviii. 27; Eph. iii. 20; 2 Chron. xx. 6; Job ix. 4. Those which declare all things to be equally easy to him, and nothing difficult—Jer. xxxii. 17; 2 Chron. xiv. 11; 1 Sam. xiv. 6. (4) Those which ascribe all power to Him, by the titles of "Almighty, All-sufficient"—Gen. xvii. 1. Rev. iv. 8, 11; xv. 3; xvi. 7; xix. 16. Job xlii. 2. "Thou canst do all things"—Matt. xix. 6; Mark x. 27; Luke i. 37. (*J. Tillotson.*) *All power God's*.—There are two theories, differing widely, with regard to the Divine power. According to the one view,

the Almighty has lodged in the various agencies of the material world capacities and tendencies, by virtue of which they prolong the order and harmony of nature, perpetuate the races of organized and animated being, and work out a course of events, incidentally disastrous, yet in the main beneficial, and adapted to produce a vast and ever-increasing preponderance of happiness over misery, and of good over evil. According to the other view, God is actively present in the entire universe, upholding all things by the word of His power, guiding the course of events by His own perpetual fiat—preserving, indeed, a certain uniformity in sequences which we call cause and effect, so far as is needed to assist human calculation and to give definite aim to human endeavour, but behind the order of visible causes adjusting whatever takes place with immediate and constant reference to the needs, the deserts, and the ultimate well-being of His creatures; ordaining the seeming evil no less than the seeming good, making even wicked men His sword. I hardly need say that this last is the view directly sanctioned by the express language and the entire tenor of Scripture. Indeed, as much as this is admitted by the Christian advocates of the former theory, who regard the sacred writers as by a bold, yet legitimate figure ascribing to the direct action of the Almighty whatever takes place under a system initiated by His power and sanctioned by His wisdom. But there was, it seems to me, immeasurably more than figure in their minds. To them the curtain of general laws, which hangs in so dense drapery before the eyes of modern philosophy, was transparent, and they saw no intervening agency, no intermediate force, between the Creator and the development of His purposes in nature and in providence. Our view of the direct administration and perfect providence of God is confirmed by the results, or rather by the non-results, of science. Six thousand years of research have failed to reveal the latent forces, to lay bare the hidden springs, of nature. Gravitation, cohesion, crystallization, organization, decomposition,—these are but names for our ignorance,—fence-words set up at the extremest limits of our knowledge. That Nature pursues her course and events take place under such and such conditions is the utmost that we can say. We find it impossible to conceive of any innate or permanently inherent force in brute matter, but by the very laws of thought we are constrained to attribute all power to mind, intelligence, volition. But what shall we say of man's power over outward nature and events? We are conscious of free volition. Is it ours to execute our own volitions; or is it literally in God that we live, and move, and have our being? I cannot conceive of divided power, of concurrent sovereignty, in the same domain—of our ability to do what He would not have us do. That we can will what He wills not we know only too well; but must we not reach the conclusion that He executes our volitions for us whether they be good or evil—nay, that the execution of these volitions, whatever they are, is always good—that He literally makes "the wrath of man" to praise Him, and "the remainder of wrath"—that whose mission would be unavailing for the purposes of His righteous administration—He will so "restrain" as to frustrate of its end? In thousands of ways His providence may and does make void the thought of evil, the counsel of violence—avert the blow which guilty man would aim at the peace of his fellow-men. Evil and death come to none for whom it is not the fit time and way in the counsels of retributive justice, or the best time and way in the counsels of paternal love. There are indeed mysteries in Providence—heights which we cannot scale, depths which we cannot fathom. We seek only to look between the leaves of the immeasurable volume, where Jesus has unloosed the seals. I have barely endeavoured to develop what we must believe, if we would receive our Saviour's lessons, and imbibe His spirit of implicit trust and self-surrender. Where Reason fails, let Faith usurp her place, and let us rest in the calm assurance that what we know not now we shall know hereafter. This we do know now—that our times are in our Father's hands, our path through life marked and guarded by His watchful providence, and that to the soul that stays itself on Him all things must work together for good. (*A. P. Peabody.*)

Ver. 12. *Also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy.*—*The mercy of God to miserable sinners His distinguishing attribute:*—I. ITS PROPERTIES. 1. Free and sovereign. 2. Rich and exceedingly abundant. 3. Effectual. 4. Comprehensive. 5. Perpetual. II. THE PROPER RESULTS OF THIS TRUTH UPON OURSELVES. 1. Let us take care to seek God's mercy in time. 2. Be encouraged to pray. 3. Let humble believers trust and not be afraid. 4. Thank God for His mercy. 5.

Imitate it. (*G. Burder, D.D.*) *The mercy of God*:—One is at first sight tempted to amend the psalmist's saying, and for "mercy" to substitute "justice." It seems characteristically just, rather than merciful, to render to men according to their works. But let us emphasize this word "his." Let us reflect that in what a man does there are elements which others have contributed, and for which others are responsible. It then begins to dawn upon us that some discrimination is possible, and that such discrimination is merciful. When we separate from a man's work that which is not strictly "his," but the work of his parents, or his teachers, or of the spirit of his times, even a bad man seems less culpable. Some, but less than all, of the wrong-doing that we see in him was really his. The savage who delights in torturing his prisoners, the persecutor who kindles the fagots for heretics, need the benefit of this discriminating word, "his work." Loss of sleep or dyspepsia may induce one to acts of peevishness or moroseness that are not wholly his work. The overworked pointsman who falls asleep causes a catastrophe not all his work. These discriminations society cannot always make and at the same time sufficiently safeguard public interests. But we may be assured that He who only is competent to unravel the complicated web does discriminate, and allots to each man retribution for no more than is strictly his. That there are such discriminations, however beyond our power to draw them truly, gives us a basis for charity in our estimate of those who excite our intensest reprobation. When we see a Nero or a Borgia, and are taxed to account for such an excess of wickedness, we may reasonably think it represents the accumulated contributions of more lives than one, and a responsibility in which more than one has share. Admitting all this, we must equally insist that no man can escape responsibility for the work which is strictly his. One may say, if he will, that man is nine-tenths environment, but one must not cancel the residual fraction for which the responsibility is his. No ship is started on the voyage of life with rudder lashed. In the most ill-starred, storm-crippled life, after all discrimination of the contributing forces which appear in the result, there is a certain remainder due to the free helm in the responsible hand—a work that is his, and a retribution due to that. What we have now to observe further is, that not only is the Divine discrimination merciful, but the retribution is also merciful. What should mercy seek first but to secure men against wreck and loss? And how can it secure them but by securing the moral order in its established lines of cause and consequence? We can do no more merciful thing for ourselves and our neighbours than to give the law of consequences full sweep, in rendering to each according to his work. To interfere, under however good a name, with the necessary trace of a growing character that is supplied by the law of consequences, is not mercy, but murder. For a man to imagine that he can lie, or steal, or scamp his work to his neighbour's damage or danger, and escape the evil consequence, or any part of it, is to think the most immoral and dangerous thought. And it is merely helping somebody to think such thoughts—taking down the guard-rail on the path along the edge of the precipice—when we allow a weak sympathy to interfere with the hand that is laying on some guilty back the scourge of just consequence. Is there, then, no place for leniency? May not one say with King Arthur in excusing Sir Bedivere—

"A man may fail in duty twice,  
And the third time prosper"?

Unquestionably; and yet who will gainsay that, as things go, the danger is not of too little leniency, but too much? No doubt it sounds charitable to say, "Let him off; he won't do it again." But mercy demands security for that, not only for society, but for the wrong-doer himself. Nature takes this security of us by enforcing her rule, Pay as you go. Plato profoundly remarks, "That it is better for a man to be punished than to escape. It saves him from a worse punishment in the degradation of his character." So in Mrs. Ward's *Marcella*, Raeburn says of the homicide Hurd, "I believe that if the murderer saw things as they really are, he would himself claim his own death as his best chance, his only chance, in this mysterious universe of self-recovery." To maintain moral worth, to save manhood from degradation, true mercy prefers the sound way to the soft way, and renders to each according to his work. What, then, becomes of the forgiveness of sins? Certainly, no cancelling of the spiritual law, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Forgiveness works no cut-off of consequences. It merely shifts the train of consequences from a down-grade to an up-grade, from

direction toward the outer darkness to the Father's house. It is the transformation of the consequences which issue from our indestructible past that forgiveness effects. The evil deeds which cannot be annihilated, and whose causative power must abide in our life either for evil or for good, cannot be cancelled by forgiveness, but only converted from a fatal to a vital issue. So the muck-heap, which above ground poisons the air, fertilizes the soil when put underground. The evil that is buried by forgiveness becomes a source of fruitfulness to the new-sown seeds of better resolution. (*J. M. Whiton, Ph.D.*) **For Thou renderest to every man according to his work.**—*The mercy of God seen in judgment:*—We have no difficulty in accepting the merciful character of God until we enter the realm of retribution and judgment. In the nature of the case our conclusions must be imperfect, from our meagre knowledge. I. THE GENERAL LAW. God administers in perfect equity the legitimate results of every man's efforts to himself. The term "render" has the germinal sense of restoring, paying back, or making up the account of—"rendering judgment." 1. This law—or method of God's procedure—is universal in His dominions. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Material, intellectual, moral. Yet we must not get the idea of law as above the Lawgiver or Executor. Unintelligent power is not a swaying sceptre: "Power belongeth unto God." 2. Nor must we think of God as held by any force, aside from His own wisdom, in the production of successive events in the universe: "There is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God." II. THERE ARE TWO SIDES TO THE TREMENDOUS FACT OF LAW. 1. The awful side. The side which thrills with its tremendous import—which threatens and yet invites. In its security of the reproduction of human actions. In nature. The fifth reproduction of a grain of wheat is 25,600,000,000 grains. Plant a cottonwood tree beside a stream in western prairies, and soon you will fringe the streams for ten thousand square miles. Memory is a reproductive spring of power as lasting as the soul. Panoramas, words, acts, buried for fifty years, spring from their graves with the bloom of youth upon them. How subtle, majestic and awful this power in moral realms! How large a sum of human life is fashioned by the subtle power of potent influence! 2. The other side of this awful fact of law is a glorious one. (1) Without it there would be no permanency in the domain of active matter or spirit. Permanency, and the sense of it, is essential to satisfaction in every field of pursuit. We struggle for it in our contest with nature, with the world, with life itself. This underlies our great hope of heaven: it will abide. (2) Without it there would be no incentive to effort. (3) Without it there would be no standing and universal warning against sin, or incentive to virtue. The Judgment Day is to test our whole being and doing. The mighty environment of law is to hold our destiny and establish our glory or seal our doom. Sin will generate an awful cyclone. Righteousness will sail into a quiet harbour of eternal placidity and safety. (4) There seem difficulties. It is hard for us to see and say, at all times, "the Judge of the whole earth doeth right," and "His mercy is unto children's children." In the chamber of death, specially of the young. In the wake of the cyclone. But think: it is after the war-cloud has cleared away that we see and feel the glory of results. When we are so infatuated with one department of life as to lose sight of the import of its outcome, it is difficult to see that mercy inspires justice and law. Yet so we teach our children by painful discipline, if necessary. Is it unkind to hold the boy to his books though he squirm and cry? No; the delights to come from acquired mental power lead us in kindness to hold him to toil now. When we judge of Divine administration from the narrow limitations of human judgment. How often, if we only knew, would our tears be turned into smiles! A mother prayed for her sick young son that "his life might be spared whether it was God's will or not," and he grew up to curse her life and break her heart. Two lessons this life under law should teach us—1. Faith in God: as an Administrator—Governor—wise, powerful, merciful, good. A personal Friend. 2. Obedience to His commands. How shortsighted the soldier who stops to question the orders from headquarters! (*M. D. Collins, D.D.*)

## PSALM LXIII.

VERS. 1-11. **O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee.**—*The greatest things of the soul.*—I. The greatest **HUNGER** of the soul (ver. 1). The soul wants God, as the thirsty land the refreshing showers, as the opening flower the sun-beam. II. The greatest **FAITH** of the soul (ver. 3). Lovingkindness is indeed better than life; it is independent, it is the cause of life, the redemption of life. It is lovingkindness that supplies the wants, gratifies the desires, develops the powers of life. All the elements of soul-joy,—gratitude, admiration, moral esteem, benevolence,—are awakened by lovingkindness. Lovingkindness is heaven. Faith in this lovingkindness is the greatest faith—greatest because it is the most soul-sustaining, soul-inspiring, soul-ennobling. III. The greatest **EXERCISE** of the soul—praise. It is not a service, but a life. It is not that which merely "goeth forth" in sacred music and on sacred occasions; but, as a sap in the trunk of the tree runs through all its branches and leaves and blossoms, so true praise runs through all the activities of human life. IV. The greatest **SATISFACTION** of the soul. David's great desire was, "To see Thy power and glory as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary." The blessedness of such a soul is ever with it. "The pleasure of the religious man," says Dr. South, "is an easy and portable pleasure, such a one as he carries about in his bosom, without alarming either the rage or the envy of the world. A man putting all his pleasures into this one is like a traveller putting all his goods into one jewel; the value is the same, and the convenience greater." V. The greatest **STUDY** of the soul (ver. 6). 1. Man can think upon God—not merely on what He has done, but on what He is, Himself. 2. Man can think upon God on his bed. When all other objects are shut out from him, when the beautiful earth and the star-spangled heavens are excluded, God can be brought into the soul as the subject of thought. No study so quickening. The thought of God vivifies the faculties and stirs the heart. None so humbling. With God before the eye of thought, all egotism wanes and dies. None so spiritualizing. With God before the mind's eye, fleets, armies, markets, governments, the solemn globe itself and all it contains, dwindle into insignificance. None so enlightening. The study of God lightens up all the fields of truth. All the branches have their root in God. VI. The greatest **TRUST** of the soul (ver. 7). (*Homilist.*) *Ancient piety*:—This psalm was composed in the wilderness of Judæa, where the privations he sustained lent language to devotion, and ardours to piety. It shows David as he really was, resting on the promises of God, and supported by earnestness and pledges of his future hope. It is a most luminous display of ancient piety. I. **ANCIENT PIETY IS FOUNDED ON FILIAL CONFIDENCE**: "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek Thee." A culprit cannot have this confidence in his judge, because he comes clothed with power to punish his crimes. But here the psalmist says, "Thou art my God"; mine by covenant; mine by promises; mine by innumerable blessings and answers to prayer; yea, thou art mine by full consent of heart, and by daily acts of faith, and devotion to all Thy holy will. II. **PIETY IS SUPREME IN ITS ASPIRATIONS AND DESIRES AFTER GOD**: "My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh," etc. A prince whose heart was less impressed with piety than David's might have said, "These sands and deserts, which afford neither bread nor water, are not places for religion. Restore me to the throne, and then I will be religious; put the sceptre into my hand, and then I will defend the saint; give me the means, and then I will make all my people happy." Ah! promises of future piety do not gain much credence in heaven. The bosom-sin which seduces the heart in the desert would seduce it on the throne. Not so David: he would bring burning coals to the altar, that its ardours might glow the more when allowed to tread the hallowed courts. He asks for God alone. III. **THERE IS A REALITY IN THE CONSOLATIONS OF RELIGION**; and a reality which surpasses all terrestrial enjoyments (ver. 3). IV. **PIETY: IT ABSTRACTS THE SOUL FROM THE WORLD**; diverts it from the keen sensations of adversity; and so unites it to God, as to communicate a plenitude of Divine felicity (vers. 5, 6). Devotion elevates the soul to the true source of felicity, to drink of streams which are never dry. The mind, contemplating its God in the wide unfoldings of revelation, spontaneously kindles with the fire of the altar, and with grateful utterance of the heart. V. **THE ENJOYMENTS OF PIETY ARE INSEPARABLY CONNECTED WITH THE EXERCISES OF DEVOTION** (ver. 5). While the psalmist was musing on all the ways of providence and grace, the fire

kindled in his heart. VI. IT WAS BY THESE EXERCISES, AND BY EXPERIENCE, that the ancient saints became decided in character, and attained THE FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH AND COMFORT (ver. 7). Those who waver in the faith, and are inconstant in duty, and whose religion is only like a winter's sun, find a failure in bringing the plants of grace to perfection. VII. The brightest trait of piety is yet to come: SHE HOLDS FAST HER ASSURANCE AND JOY IN THE TIMES OF AFFLICTION, AND FORESEES DELIVERANCE BEFORE THE ARM OF SALVATION CAN ACTUALLY APPEAR. In all her troubles, the voice of despair is never heard. She lays hold on the promises, and embraces the sure mercies of David. Hear the psalmist's words in the wilderness, when all his enemies account him as lost and undone (vers. 9, 10). You who may be tried in various ways, and with the long-continued strokes of affliction, take to yourselves the full cup of comfort from the Word of the Lord. David's God is your God, and He will deliver you in His own time, and in His own way, out of all your troubles. (*James Sutcliffe, M.A.*) *David's owning of, and application to, God*.—I. HIS OWNING OF GOD. "O God, thou art my God." This was a good beginning, and a very fair preface to that which follows after. And it is that, indeed, which lays a foundation to all the rest. It is that which must be necessarily premised in all our addresses to God, and petitions for anything from Him. 1. It is an expression of faith. David calls God his God, as having taken Him so to be to him. God is in a common and general sense the God of all men, as He is said to be the Saviour of all men (1 Tim. iv. 10). Namely, in regard of common and general blessings which He bestows upon them, of Creation and Providence. But for believers, and those which are His children, as the prophet David here was, He is their God more especially, in a more peculiar manner, above any besides; He is to them a God in covenant, engaging Himself to them, to do them good, and to provide graciously for them. And they call Him their God thus, and with this emphasis upon it. (1) The benefit of it is very great; yea, in effect all things else. To say, God is ours, is to say, The whole world is ours, and a great deal more; it is to give us title to everything which may be requisite or convenient for us. Whatever we can desire or stand in need of, it is all wrapt up in this, "Thou art my God." (2) It is an hard thing, too, it is a matter of difficulty. There are two states and conditions in which it is very difficult to say, "O God, thou art my God"; the one is the state of nature and unregeneracy; and the other is the state of desertion, and the hiding of God's face from the soul. 2. It is an expression also of obedience and self-resignation. Those whom God is a God to, He does bestow special favours upon them; and those to whom God is a God, they do return special services to Him; which is here now considerable of us. And so we shall find it to be all along in Scripture (Ps. cxviii. 28). II. HIS APPLICATION TO HIM. 1. His resolution, what he would do, "Early will I seek Thee." He promises to seek after God, and to do it betimes, which is an enlargement of it; where, while he signifies his own purpose, he does likewise signify our duty; while he tells us what shall be done by him, he tells us also what is to be done by us, namely, to seek the Lord early; not only to seek Him, but to be forward in our seeking of Him. (1) Early as to the time of the day. Early, that is, in the morning. We should give God the first of our thoughts every day. (2) Early, as to the time of our life, in the morning of our age. For men to defer their repentance and reformation to their old age, and when they have spent all their time before in the pursuit of their lusts, to think to seek God then, and that will be time enough;—that's but a vain conceit and imagination in them. (3) Early as to the time of God's judgments, and providential dispensations. We must seek Him early, that is, before He fetches us to Him, and compels us, as it were, to the seeking of Him. It is better in regard of piety, and it is better in regard of safety. It is more ingenuity in us in respect of God, and it is more wisdom in us in respect of ourselves. For hereby we save both Him and ourselves a great deal of labour, which otherwise He is put unto with us; and we may escape a great deal of smart which otherwise through our own wilfulness and neglect happens unto us. 2. His intimation of the state and temper which he was now in, or the ground and reason of his resolution. (1) The object of his desire was God Himself. As he is in a state of darkness, so he longs for God in the clearer evidence and more comfortable assurance of His favour and good-will towards him. As he is in a state of weakness, so he thirsts for God in the impartment of more of His grace, and strength, and assistance to him. As he is in a state of strangeness, some kind of distance and alienation from God; so he does also long for Him in the intercourse of communion with Him. (2) The

intention of his desire. His own necessities, and the sense and apprehension of them. This puts him upon this desire. A good Christian hath so much need of God, as that he cannot be well satisfied without Him. The amiableness of the object does provoke and excite the desire. God being so exceedingly lovely and admirable, as indeed He is in His own nature, it cannot but draw on those which do discern it, very much to desire it; and there's experience also in it which does promote it, and help it on. 3. The subject of the desire, which is here signified to be the soul and the flesh; his soul properly, his flesh by way of sympathy with it; they are both of them in it. (1) In the midst of any outward and temporal deficiencies, we should consider and reflect upon our spiritual. (2) The best way to correct and qualify our desires as to temporals, is to fasten them upon spirituals. When we would restrain any inordinate longing for some outward or earthly accommodation, or suppress any grief, either of the like nature, we cannot better do it, than by provoking ourselves to the desire of spiritual comforts. This helps, first, by way of diversion, and turning the stream of the affections another way, and so breaking off the violence of it, that it prevails not upon us. And then further, there is that also in spirituals which does supply and make amends to us for any temporal deficiency. (T. Horton, D.D.) *The saint claiming God as his God*.—I. CONCERNING THE DEITY WHOM FAITH CLAIMS. There can be no claiming or believing till He be known. It is therefore proper to begin with a display of His glory. 1. Every perfection in His glory. Had we the tongue and the voice of the seraphim, we could not declare it all. Paper broader than the earth, ink deeper than the sea, pens stronger than iron, and hands readier than the quickest scribe, could not write the thousandth part of it. 2. God is the Creator and Preserver of all (Isa. xlii. 5). 3. God is the spring and fountain of our reconciliation by the death of His Son. 4. God is the promiser and the lawgiver. Without the promise, we could not observe the law, and without the law, we would abuse the promise. 5. Our blessedness is in God (Ps. lxii). II. CONCERNING THE CLAIMING OF PROPERTY IN GOD. 1. The Word is the ground of our claiming property in God. 2. Believing in God through our Lord Jesus Christ is the exercise of our claim. Christ and God are not divided and separated, in our believing and claiming. God was, and is, and will be in Christ. Christ was, and is, and will be in God. 3. The promises of the covenant encourage our claiming interest and property in God through Christ Jesus the Lord. 4. The exercise of the heart which believes and claims interest and property in God is recommended by the example of Christ. In the anguish and bitterness of distress He cried, "My Father," and "My God." And no sooner was He delivered from the power of death by a glorious resurrection, than He said, "I ascend to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God." Follow His example. 5. The Spirit of adoption constrains to this exercise of the heart. Without His presence and operation, no man believes and claims interest and property in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 6. No law condemns this exercise of the heart. Believing and claiming interest and property in God through Jesus Christ is against no law. Is the law against the promises of God, or the promises against the law of God? God forbid. III. THE MANNER IN WHICH INTEREST AND PROPERTY IN GOD SHOULD BE CLAIMED IN BELIEVING. 1. In Christ. Christ is the true, and living, and only way to God. "No man," said He, "cometh to the Father but by Me." In claiming interest and relation in one, we claim interest and relation and property in both. The guilty and polluted cannot approach the holiness of the Lord but through, and by, and in a Mediator, whom He hath made unto them wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. 2. In humility. When we venture into the presence of the high and holy One, and say, "O God, Thou art my God," humility of mind is our adorning. Our unworthiness as creatures, and our pollution as sinners, should produce in us the deepest debasement before Him. 3. With reverence. "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him." When the humble spirit is before Him, saying, "O God, Thou art my God," it doth not allow itself to forget and disregard these instructions. 4. With confidence (Ps. xlviii. 14). IV. CONCERNING THE SEASONS IN OUR EXERCISE OF BELIEVING AND CLAIMING RELATION, INTEREST, AND PROPERTY IN GOD THROUGH CHRIST. 1. The season of labouring. God is the glory of our strength; and believing and claiming Him in Christ, what service may we not undertake boldly, and what labour may we not endure joyfully. 2. The season of suffering. We need to abound in the believing exercises of the heart to God-ward through Christ, in order to draw in strength from the promises to endure it, and



encourage and confirm hope of deliverance out of it. 3. The season of trouble and vexation of spirit. 4. The season of heaviness and grief. 5. The season of temptation. By steadfast believing, and continuance in well-doing, ye will, through the grace, and Spirit, and word of Christ, defeat every attempt to invalidate a claim, standing on His own My God and your God, My Father and your Father. 6. The season of dying. Steadfast believing in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement, will make us smile in the face of an enemy at whose appearance our heart would otherwise be alarmed and dismayed. (A. Shanks.) *God and the soul*:—The text might form a motto for what is termed, in the modern phrase, "personal religion." No religion, of course, can deserve its name if it be not personal at bottom, if it do not recognize as its basis the case of the personal soul face to face with the personal God. But, even with a view to the perfection of the individual himself, religion may, nay, it must, embrace other interests besides his own. Each time that, in the earliest creed, we formally profess our belief in God, we also profess our belief in the Catholic Church and the Communion of Saints. But at least in David we have a notable example of a sensitive, tender, self-analyzing soul, living in sustained communion with God, while yet deeply sensible of the claims of the civil and religious polity of Israel. "My God." The word does not represent a human impression, or desire, or conceit, but an aspect, a truth, a necessity of the Divine Nature. Man can, indeed, give himself by halves; he can bestow a little of his thought, of his heart, of his endeavour, upon his brother man. In other words, man can be imperfect in his acts, as he is imperfect and finite in his nature. But when God, the Perfect Being, loves the creature of His Hand, He cannot thus divide His love. He must give Himself to the single soul with as absolute a completeness as if there were no other being besides the soul which He loves. And, on his side, man knows that this gift of Himself by God is thus entire; and in no narrow spirit of ambitious egotism, but as grasping and representing the literal fact, he cries, "My God." Therefore does this single word enter so largely into the composition of Hebrew names. Men loved to dwell upon that wondrous relation of the Creator to their personal life which it so vividly expressed. Therefore we find St. Paul writing to the Galatians as if his own soul, in its solitary anguish, had alone been redeemed by the sacrifice of Calvary: "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." But here let us observe that there are two causes within the soul which might indispose us for looking more truly and closely at the truth before us. Of these causes, the first is moral: it is the state of unrepented wilful sin. It is hostile to the assertion no less of the love than of the rights of God. It is averse from Him. It has other ends in view which are so many denials of His supreme claims upon created life. It covers with involuntary dread at the sound of His voice among the trees of the garden. If the depraved and sinful will, still clinging to its sin, could conceivably attain to a spiritual embrace of the All-Holy God, so intimate, so endearing as is that of the psalmist, such nearness would be to it nothing less than repulsive; it would be scarcely less than an agony. The other cause is intellectual. It may, without offence, be described as the subjective spirit, which is so characteristic and predominant an influence in the thought of our day. In plain English this spirit is an intellectual selfishness, which makes man, and not God, the monarch and centre of the world of thought. Man is again to be, as of old with the Greek sophist, the measure of all things. God is as but a point on the extreme circumference of His creature's thought. Nay, more, in its more developed form, this temper makes God Himself a pure creation of the thought of His creature; and, by doing so, it at length denies His real existence. An educated man of the present day who would look God really in the face has perhaps no greater intellectual difficulty to contend with than the trammels and false points of view which strictly subjective habits of thought have imposed upon his understanding. While these habits are dominant in a man, God may be a portion, nay, the most considerable portion, of his thought; but God will not be in any true sense the man's God, before whom his soul bows. Among the many truths which the Supreme Being has disclosed to us men about Himself, there are two which, beyond others, are peculiarly calculated to enable us to realize our real relation towards Him. The first, the truth that God is our Creator. The second, the truth that He has made us for Himself, and is Himself the end and the explanation of our existence. The most simple and obvious truths are, as a rule, the most profound; and no apology is needed for asking each one of you to reflect steadily on the answer to this question, Where was I one short century ago?

The lowest and vilest creatures were more than we; in that to them a being had been given, while as yet we were without one. But at this moment we are in possession of that blessed and awful gift which we name "life." We find ourselves endowed with an understanding capable of knowledge, and with a heart formed for love. We cannot but ask how we came to be here, and we cannot worship God unless we believe that it was He who made us. Yet, though we witness around us the wreck of serious convictions, and the despair of true and noble hearts, and the triumph of false theories, and the additional difficulties of our daily struggle with unseen foes, and (it may be) with the results of our own past unfaithfulness to light and grace, we have but to look within ourselves to trace without doubt or misgiving the true law of that life which our God has given us. By gathering up the scattered fragments of the shattered statue, we can recover, if not the perfect work itself, at least the ideal which was before the Eye of the Artist. In this place we are sufficiently familiar with the presumption that there must be a correspondence and proportion between a faculty and its object. Why, then, does the human intellect crave perpetually for new fields of knowledge? It was made to apprehend an Infinite Being; it was made for God. Why does the human heart disclose, when we probe it, such inexhaustible capacities for love, and tenderness, and self-sacrifice? It was made to correspond to a love that had neither stint nor limit; it was made for God. Why does no employment, no success, no scene or field of thought, no culture of power or faculty, no love of friend or relative, arrest definitely and for all time the onward, craving, restless impulse of our inner being? No other explanation is so simple as that we were made for the Infinite and Unchangeable God, compared with whom all else is imperfect, fragile, transient, and unsatisfying. (*Canon Liddon.*) *The saint resolving to seek his God:*—I. CONCERNING SEEKING GOD. This includes—1. Our belief of His existence and attributes. 2. His relation to us in Christ, created by sovereign goodness, and set in an everlasting covenant. 3. Our blessedness in Him. In lively piety the belief of this is firm and operative. 4. Our duty to worship and glorify Him in the way appointed by Himself. Hearing the Word, receiving the sacraments, singing of psalms, with humiliation, thanksgiving, and prayer, are ordinances of worship; and observing them in their seasons is seeking God in convocations and assemblies. Reading, and prayer, and praise, and instruction, are duties of piety; and performing them is seeking Him in households and families. Reading, meditation, and prayer, are holy services; and doing them is seeking Him in closets and secret places. II. CONCERNING SEEKING GOD EARLY. 1. Early in respect of life. As soon as we awake into being, capable of exercising ourselves unto godliness, it should be distinguished by seeking the knowledge of Him who gave us our spirit and our breath. Before the world seize the heart and fill it with vanity and care, it will be your wisdom who are young to seek after God; for He is your life and the length of your days. 2. Early in respect of fervour. O that all our heart, and all our soul, and all our strength, and all our mind, were in the exercises of our piety toward the Lord our God! 3. Incessantly in respect of time or continuance in well-doing. Whatever hour it be in the day of life, it is early with the pious mind. Early in the morning of youth, early in the noon of manhood, early in the evening of old age. III. CONCERNING THE RESOLUTION OR DETERMINATION OF THE PIOUS MAN TO SEEK GOD EARLY. 1. Inclination is in a resolution or determination of mind for the exercise of piety. 2. In the resolution of the heart there is complacency in the exercise of piety. 3. Ardour in the resolution for piety. Coldness in seeking God is an infirmity of which pious men are ashamed. It quenches and grieves the Holy Spirit, who is the principle of their life and ardour. 4. Contention with the enemies of piety in the heart and in the world. Resolution to seek God early is lifting up a standard of opposition in the presence of a deceitful enemy, which hath made a settlement for itself in our heart. (*A. Shanks.*) *Seeking God:*—I. How SHOULD WE SEEK GOD? 1. Intelligently. 2. Earnestly. 3. Constantly. 4. Hopefully. II. WHERE SHOULD WE SEEK HIM? In the closet. In His Word. In the ordinances. III. WHEN SHOULD WE SEEK HIM? Early in life. In advance of temporal things. IV. WHY SHOULD WE SEEK HIM? He is the soul's life—"God." His nature is communicative—"My God." (*W. W. Wythe.*) *My soul thirsteth for Thee.*—*The soul's thirst and satisfaction* (with vers. 5, 8):—1. THE SOUL THIRSTING FOR GOD (ver. 1).—Now, the psalmist is a poet, and has a poet's sensitiveness to the external aspects of nature, and the imagination that delights in seeing in these the reflection of his own moods. So, very beautifully, he looks upon the dreary scene

around, and sees in it symbols of the yet drearier experience within. He beholds the grey monotony of the waterless wilderness, where the earth is cracked with clefts that look like mouths gaping for the rain that does not come, and he recognizes the likeness of his own yearning spirit. He feels the pangs of bodily weariness and thirst, and these seem to him to be but feeble symbols of the deeper-seated pains of desire which touch his spirit. All men thirst after God. The unrest, the deep yearnings, the longings and desires of our natures—what are they all except cries for the living God, the tendrils which are put forth, seeking after the great prop which alone is fit to lift us from the mud of this lower world? But the misery is that we do not know what we want, that we misinterpret the meaning of our desires, that we go to the wrong sources for our need; that when our souls are crying out for God we find them worldly good and say, "There, satisfy yourselves on that!" A man that has a wild thing in a cage, and does not know what its food is, when he hears it yelping, will cast to it what he thinks may fit it, on which it eagerly springs, and then turns from it in disgust. So, men seek to feed their souls on the things of earth, and, all the while, what they are crying for is, not earth, but God. Shipwrecked sailors drink salt water in their wild thirst, and it makes them mad. Travellers in the desert are drawn by the mirage to seemingly shimmering lakes, fringed with palm trees; and it is nothing but sand. "My soul thirsteth for Thee." II. THE SEEKING SOUL SATISFIED (ver. 5). The imagery of a feast naturally follows upon the previous metaphor of the soul's thirst. Now, it is to be observed here with what beautiful and yet singular swiftness the whole mood of the psalmist changes. People may say that that is unnatural, but it is true to the deepest experiences, and it unveils for us one of the surest and most precious blessings of a true Christian life—viz. that fruition is ever attendant upon desire. God's gifts are never delayed, in the highest of all regions. In the lower there often are long delays—the lingerings of love for our good—but in the loftiest, fruition grows side by side with longing. The same moment witnesses the petition flashed to Heaven, as with the speed of lightning, and the answer coming back to the waiting heart; as in tropical lands when the rain comes, what was barren baked earth in a day or two is rich meadow, all ablaze with flowers, and the dry torrent beds, where the stones lay white and glistening ghastly in the hot sunshine, are foaming with rushing streams and fringed with budding oleanders. This verse also tells us that the soul thus answered will be satisfied. If it be true that God is the real object of all human desire, then the contact of the seeking soul with that perfect aim of all its seeking will bring rest to every appetite, its desired food to every wish, strength for every weakness, fulness for all emptiness. Like two of the notched sticks that used to be used as tallies, the seeking soul and the giving God fit into one another, and there is nothing that we need that we cannot get in Him. Further, as our psalm tells us, the satisfied soul breaks into music. For it goes on to say, "My mouth shall praise Him with joyful lips." Of course, the psalmist had still many occasions for sorrow, and doubt, and fear. Nothing had changed in his outward circumstances. The desert was still round him. The foe was still pursuing murderous in heart as before. But this had changed—God was felt to be as close as ever He had been in the sanctuary. And that consciousness altered everything, and turned all the psalmist's lamentations into jubilant anthems. It transposed his music from the minor key, and his lips broke into songs of gladness. Translate these particulars into general thoughts, and they are just this:—No sorrow, nor anxiety, nor care, nor need for vigilance against danger ought to check the praise that may come, and should come, from a heart in touch with God, and a soul satisfied in Him. It is a hard lesson for some of us to learn; but it is a lesson the learning of which will be full of blessedness. There is a bird common in our northern districts which people call the storm-cock, because his note always rings out cheeriest in tempestuous weather. That is the kind of music that the Christian's heart should make, responding, like an Æolian harp, to the tempest's breath by music, and filling the night with praise. It is possible for us, even before sorrow and sighing have fled away, to be pilgrims on the road, "with songs and everlasting joy upon our heads." III. THE SATISFIED SOUL PASSES CLOSER TO GOD (ver. 8). Literally translated, though, of course, much too clumsily for an English version, the words run—"My soul cleaveth after Thee," expressing, in one pregnant phrase, two attitudes usually felt to be incompatible, that of calm repose and that of eager pursuit. But these two, unlike each other as they are, may be, and should be, harmoniously blended in the experience of a Christian life.

On the one hand there is the clinging of satisfaction, and, on the other hand, the over-satisfied stimulus to a closer approach. The soul that is satisfied will, and ought to, adhere with tenacity to the source that satisfies it. The dove folds its pinions when it reaches the ark, and needs no more to wing its weary way over sullen waters, vainly searching for a resting-place. Nomad tribes, when they find themselves in some rich valley, unload their camels, and pitch their tents, and say, "Here will we dwell, for the land is good." And so we, if we have made experience, as we may, of God and His sweet sufficiency, and sufficient sweetness, should be delivered from temptation to go further and fare worse. And then this clinging, resulting from satisfaction, is accompanied with earnest seeking after still more of the infinite good. In other regions, and when directed to other objects, satisfaction is apt to pass into satiety, because the creature that satisfies us is limited. But when we turn ourselves to God, and seek for all that we need in Him, there can be no satiety in us, because there can be no exhaustion of that which is in Him. The blessedness of search that is sure of finding, and the blessedness of finding which is calm repose, are united in the Christian experience. And we may, at every moment, have all that we want given to us, and by the very gift our capacity, and therefore our longings, be increased. Thus, in wondrous alternation, satisfaction and thirst beget each other, and each possesses some of the other's sweetness. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The saint thirsting for God*:—

**I. CONCERNING THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATERS.** 1. Where is the fountain of living waters? It is everywhere. 2. What is in the fountain of life? The incomprehensible Being with whom it is speaks of Himself in this sovereign exclusive style, "I live." 3. What comes out of the fountain of life? "Every good and every perfect gift." Particularly the Mediator and His fulness. The reconciliation of the world. The forgiveness of sins. The justification of the ungodly. The sanctification of the unholy. Grace and glory. 4. Which is the way of a thirsty man to get a drink of the fountain of life? "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," etc.

**II. CONCERNING THIRSTING AND LONGING FOR GOD, WITH WHOM IS THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE.** The rise, the tendency, the strength, the operation, and energies of these holy affections, may be observed in the following particulars—1. The thirst for God is the desire or longing of the new heart. 2. The thirsting and longing of the renewed mind for God are influenced by the knowledge and taste of His favour in Christ Jesus. Before we thirst for God, or long for him, we must know that He is, and taste that He is gracious. 3. The thirst or longing for God is attended with crying and tears. This mourning and crying among the sons of regeneration is not the noise and din of peevishness and discontent. It is the crying of the spirit of adoption in their heart, for the nourishing and strengthening of their life, with those pleasures and joys which they believe are in its fountain. 4. Thirsting for God, the fountain of living waters, increases with indulgence. The more freely and abundantly the thirsty soul is indulged in drinking at the fountain, the keener and more vehement is its thirst. 5. In thirsting and longing for God, there are strong mixtures of faith, and love, and hope, and joy, and the other graces of the Spirit. 6. Providential occurrences give the new heart a keener sensibility in thirsting and longing for God.

**III. HOW THIRSTING AND LONGING FOR GOD, THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATERS, CONTRIBUTE AID TO THE SUSTAINING OF THE LIVELINESS AND VIGOUR OF PIETY, WHEN CUT OFF FROM THE RIVERS AND STREAMS OF THE SANCTUARY.** 1. These energies of the new heart in a dry and thirsty land, keep its intercourse with the fountain lively night and day. 2. Assurances of favour through the offices of the Mediator are sent down from the fountain to the thirsting and longing soul. 3. In thirsting and longing for God in a dry and thirsty land, experience shoots up and rises to a great height. 4. In thirsting and longing for God in a dry and thirsty land, the fruit of righteousness sown in the new heart springs, and grows, and ripens, and comes to maturity. 5. In a dry and thirsty land, piety is removed from the fat places of the earth which are full of things unfavourable to its growth. In conclusion, observe—

1. The difference between animal and spiritual thirsting. 2. Intercourse with the Deity through the Mediator is not confined to courts, altars, and tabernacles. The whole wilderness of Judah, dry and thirsty as it might be, was a chamber of audience, into which David had access to the Deity day and night, to complain, to petition, and consult; and all around was court, altar, tabernacle, and holy of holies. He longed notwithstanding to be restored, and no wonder. Institutions for the multitude that kept holyday in the city were more desirable than the chamber opened in the field to an individual. 3. The Lord is not harsh and

unkind, in schooling His chosen in a wilderness, and trying them with hunger and thirst. Their education in the science and exercises of piety requires it, and His intention is to do them good at the latter end. (*A. Shanks.*) *The Christian's longing*:—All mankind are athirst. The human soul is made capacious; so capacious that nothing else can fill it, but that immortality for which man is created, and the favour and enjoyment of that God whose creature he is. There is a relationship between the capacity of the soul and Him who ought to fill it, such that its happiness depends on its union with Him, and is derived entirely from Him; and man, even when ignorant of God and alienated from Him, finds no real satisfaction from any other source. I. ACCEPTANCE. This is the first stage of the desire after God, for it is the desire of the heart-stricken sinner (Ps. xxvii. 9; xxxi. 16; xxxv. 3). II. ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD. The desire for this must be a feature of the advancing Christian. Love begets love, and hence "we love Him (God) because He first loved us." Now, in proportion as we love any one, we desire better acquaintance, in order that we may appreciate his excellences. III. The believer longs for COMMUNION WITH GOD. The more we love and reverence any one, the more must we long to be admitted to the privilege of intimacy, and the more highly shall we value that privilege, and fear its loss if we possess it. IV. The Christian's earnest desire is for CONFORMITY TO THE WILL AND TO THE IMAGE OF GOD. The faculty of imitation is instinctive. Hence the contagion of evil example; hence the instinctive imitation by children of their parents. This faculty is not destroyed in the believer, but, through grace, receives a new bias, his love and reverence for God naturally creating the desire to imitate His perfections, and thus to attain a growing conformity to His likeness. (*R. J. Rowton, M.A.*) *David's desire for God's presence*:—I. THE PRAYER. With David life would lose its light, its worth, its meaning, all its delight and all its joy without God. Ask him whether man could do without God, and he would tell you that without God this world is lodgings; but with Him it is Home—Home—a very different thing. He would tell you that without God there is no sunlight on the world, no meaning in history, no hope for humanity, no prospect. That without God there is nothing to enfranchise the soul, to emancipate it, to enlarge it. But with God's presence it has dignity, it develops its forces, and with Him it is secure. He would tell you that without Him the soul has no model on which to mould its life, no motive with which to animate itself in conflict, no quiet resting-place. David, above all things, wants God. He wants God—in the sense of wanting the Presence, Love, Protection, and Vindication of God. There are few people in the world that have not, in some direction or other, a conflict going on, a cause to be maintained; and one of life's keenest pains is, when doing one's best, to be left to think that after all God does not care, and will not espouse the right, but will leave it to sink or swim, and let the wrong come off defeated or victorious, as chance may have it. David desired otherwise, and believed it. He wanted God; he expected and desired that God would plead the causes of his soul, and wherein he was right, would take his part and give him his heart's desire. Thus, in the last place of all, there comes in the wish which would have been first, second, third, fourth, and everything probably in our case. II. THE LESSONS OF THIS PRAYER. 1. Do not lightly part with your belief in God. It is a very comforting thing that in the long run, all religious questions resolve themselves into the great question as to whether there is or is not a God to trust. Come with the believers, and live not in the God-forsaken world, without any light left in it, and no Rock of Ages on which to rest. Don't live in such a world as that, but live in the world whose canopy is the wing of God, and whose centre is the pierced heart of Calvary. You will find your blessedness in such a life. Men don't gather blessedness off briars, and joys off thistles. 2. Pray more fervently. The fault of our prayers is their littleness, we ask and distress God by the smallness of our asking. Ask for Himself, His glory, His beauty, His love, to rest upon you, the shadow of His wing, the whisper of His love; not small mercies, but great ones. And in order to be able to pray, do as David tells you he did, "follow hard after God." (*R. Glover.*) *The paramount need*:—What thirst means in a tropical wilderness none but those who have passed through it can tell. It is an overpowering and a paralyzing need. All this the psalmist had felt. As in the long marches through the desert sands, in the awful blaze of an Eastern noon, he had sighed for the pasture lands and the springs, so life seemed but a dry and weary waste until his soul was satisfied with the sight of God. It is a parable of the life, not of the psalmist only, but of the world; it is a picture of God's education of our race. Just as He did not teach

our forefathers the arts of life—the use of iron and of fire—by an immediate inspiration, but let them find them out by slow and gradual processes, as the need of them was felt; just as He has not put intellectual truths into our minds at our birth, but lets us work them out as the satisfaction of a felt desire, so it is with religion. He does not all at once satisfy our mouths with good things. He teaches us through the discipline of thirst and want. He lets each age tread its own path, work out its own problems, cope with its own difficulties, and be brought to Him at last by the constraining force of an unsatisfied desire. I might show that the parable is true of many ages, but I will take only two—the first ages of Christianity and our own. If we look at the first ages of our faith we see that it did not all at once convince men of its truth, as the sun that rose this morning told all who had eyes to see that a light was shining. Men came to it by many paths, and the greatest of all those paths led them through the splendid scenery of philosophy; for it was an age of culture; education was general in almost all the cities of the Roman Empire, and the basis of education was philosophy. Men were as familiar with some of the technical terms of metaphysics as they are now with some of the technical terms of chemistry or of physiology. To the better sort of men at the time, philosophy was a passion; it absorbed all the other interests of life. They not only lived for their beliefs, but were sometimes ready to die for them. And they were beliefs for which a man might be content to die. I should be the last to attempt to disparage the work which philosophy then actually accomplished; but it was no substitute for religion. It failed, and that on so large a scale, and among so many types of character, that the experiment need never be tried again; there was the demonstration for all time that the soul had a thirst which philosophy could not satisfy; it was the need of God, of a God whom men could love, of a God on whom they could lean, of a God to whom they could cry out in their despair, and their failure, and their sin: "My soul longeth for Thee." Side by side with philosophy was superstition. There were fantastic forms of worship, new divinities, and new modes of approaching them; but all these were various expressions of one overpowering thirst; and in the discipline of God the thirst was for a long time unsatisfied. It was not until all other waters had been found to be bitter that the masses of educated men came to drink of that living water which the Christian faith supplied—the water of the knowledge of God in Christ, which is, in the believer's soul, "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." That was one fulfilment of the parable. It is being fulfilled again before our eyes in our own time; we, too, are passing through another kind of scenery, a scenery so new and vast that we must be ready, as I doubt not that God is ready, to forgive those who, in their wonder at the newness and vastness of it all, have come to think that this at last is a satisfaction for the soul, and that in this crown of all the ages we have found in nature a substitute for God. Alike from the mountain-tops and the ravines and the far-off stars and from the depths of the deep seas, there shine out splendours upon splendours of new knowledge, and new possibilities of knowledge, which seem to lift us into a higher sphere of living than that which to our forefathers was possible. It is splendid scenery—the world has never seen its like—but, splendid as it is, there are needs, the deepest needs, of the soul which it does not, which it cannot, satisfy. In time there comes to all men the sense of thirst. There are few who rise at all times, there are none who rise uniformly at all times, to the heroic height of doing good for goodness' sake, and of furthering justice for justice's sake. The baffled efforts of the struggle for righteousness, the defects of truth, the relapse from self-control, make men weary before the day is spent; and across the evening of life, if not across its morning, there rises the sharp and sudden cry, a thirst which God alone can satisfy. And, on the other hand, in the rebound from the superabundant talk about religion which characterizes our age, from the battles of the Churches and the unsubstantial theories which claim the place of Divine verities, there are those who substitute for the whole of religion that part of it which consists in active philanthropy. For this, again, I have no word but that of praise. Without this religion can hardly be said to exist, but it is not religion; for though religion must move about the world with the busy feet of an angel of benevolence, benevolence does not of itself satisfy the soul's thirst for God. The soul comes back hungry from its errands of mercy—it needs a Diviner motive and a Diviner satisfaction. The beginning of it is neither the love of righteousness nor the practice of benevolence, but the thirst for God. Where that thirst exists there is religion; where that thirst is absent, there, in spite of all that a man may profess, religion

is absent also. And that thirst is satisfied. I will speak for a moment of its satisfaction not in society at large, but in the individual soul. The satisfaction is as real as the need, and He has placed it within our own power. To the simple-minded psalmist, living as he did before the age of philosophy—I had almost said before the age of theology—the satisfaction was to appear before the visible symbol of God's presence at Jerusalem. That, too, brethren, is part of the parable. It is true for all time. The soul's satisfaction is to realize the presence of God. The other name for it is faith. It is the seeing of Him who is invisible. (*Edwin Hatch, D.D.*) *Passionate devotion*:—It is not every one who can sympathize with the intensity of devout feeling here expressed. One must have seen the power and the glory in bygone days, to thirst and long for God like this. All, however, can understand something about it; all, at least, can stand apart and admire the man with thoughts so elevated, affections so pure, a soul so predominant over sense, that his very sensuous nature longs, not for the objects of sense, but for God! In all ages we find instances of this passionate devotion, which appropriates to itself the language of human affection, and applies it to the Infinite One. Now, what estimate are we to form of the devotion which assumes this character? Shall we condemn it as enthusiasm, or commend it as the pure and natural development of the affections towards God? Shall we cherish it in ourselves? or restrain such assimilations to human loves? I think we shall better be able to answer when we have examined a little into the conditions under which it arises. First, then, it is quite evident, those rising to this intensely passionate longing after God must have a great power of giving a reality to their ideas—I mean, of realizing their ideas as substantive, present existences. For God being known to us only in thought, must be represented by this realizing faculty of the mind as personally present with us, or no deep emotion can be awakened towards Him. You may contemplate His works, you may take the Bible and draw out a history of all He has done for man's salvation, you may reason most correctly upon the relations He sustains to your soul, you may ascribe to Him all goodness, truth, and holy beauty, all imaginable perfections; but unless you have the power of believing in the substantial reality of your ideas, no passionate love or desire (which can cling only to persons as known) can be excited within you. There may be trust, there may be reverence, there may be the deliberate surrender of the will to the great and glorious Being conceived in thought; but there can be for a merely logical, intellectual abstraction no passionate love. This, then, being undoubtedly the case, a second condition arises, namely, God, in order to be thus loved and desired, must be brought within the compass of human imagination, idealization—that is, being thought of and realized as personally present, the mind must form of Him some representation to itself, some conceivable and embraceable idea. Passionate love and desire cannot embrace the infinitely vague. Hence the fact that, within the Christian Church our Saviour and the Virgin have been made more frequently the objects of this passionate devotion than the Infinite Father. Well, then, if these be the conditions of this passionate love and desire for God, it already is evident there must be some element in it which needs toning down or modifying in some way or the other. For, whatever brings the glory and infinitude of the Creator down to the limitation and level of the creature must have an element of evil in it. We may take it as an axiom that, Whatever tends to exalt our notions of His perfections and glory, whatever tends to fill us with deep and humble reverence and awe, with adoration and lowly worship, that is leading us on the right road to a knowledge of God; and whatever limits, circumscribes, defines our image of Him, reduces Him within the narrow outlines of our delineations, that falsifies and corrupts our knowledge. False devotion pretends to know. It has come face to face with God, it says, and loves. Vain dream! It has rather created an image out of its sanctified fancy, and for that burns with passionate desire. And yet, we must be just. There is a truth in this imaging of God in the mind. It is not altogether a false representation of Him which the mind creates for itself. The elements out of which the representation is made are true, so far as they go. Have you ever seen the canvas intended for a great picture, after the artist has worked two or three days only upon it? That is like our sanctified imagings of God. All the right colours laid on, all the lines in the right direction, but what resemblance, nevertheless, is there to the perfected work? The sun is imaged in a dew-drop; but who could learn by looking in the dew-drop what are the majesty and glory of the sun? They are, then, divine properties which the soul loves in its image of God, but divine properties limited and reduced

to created patterns. Those who know God and think of Him as the omnipresent Spirit, the all-efficient power whose operations extend through, and whose nature is manifested in, all creation, cannot but adore and love as they contemplate His nature in these created manifestations. To them He necessarily is the one, all-sufficing, all-efficient God, the one joy and blessedness of all creatures. And, knowing Him thus, they cannot but desire to know Him more fully, to share more largely in the communications of His nature, to come into closer union with Him. For, to put it in another form, this is nothing more than desiring to share in, and partake more and more of, whatever is true, beautiful, and good in the world, to enter more and more into the blessedness of all true, beautiful, and good thoughts and feelings. For, not in His inmost being is God known or can He be enjoyed; but in these manifestations of Him,—in all His glorious and beautiful works, in all the glorious and beautiful thoughts He creates within us. And it is in keeping with this that the psalmist tells us in the text that his soul and flesh long for God, to see His power and glory so as he had seen them in the sanctuary. He did not dream that he, the finite, could appropriate to himself all the glory and power of the Infinite One. There is, therefore, no extravagance of language, transferring the passionate feelings awakened by human love to the Creator; but, what he prays for, longs, thirsts for, is to see more of God in His manifestations—more of that power and glory which he had already discerned as he heard the Levites chant His holy praise, and had joined in the sacrifices, the prayers, the worship of the temple. Whatever brought to him truer and more beautiful thoughts, purer and more ennobling feelings, that would fulfil the desire and satisfy the longing of his soul. (*J. Cranbrook.*) *Soul-thirst*.—I need not remind you how true it is that a man is but a bundle of appetites, desires, often tyrannous, often painful, always active. But the misery of it—the reason why man's misery is great upon him—is mainly, I suppose, that he does not know what it is that he wants; that he thirsts, but does not understand what the thirst means, nor what it is that will slake it. His animal appetites make no mistakes; he and the beasts know that when they are thirsty they have to drink, and when they are hungry they have to eat, and when they are drowsy they have to sleep. But the poor instinct of the animal that teaches it what to choose and what to avoid fails us in the higher reaches; and we are conscious of a craving, and do not find that the craving reveals to us the source from whence its satisfaction can be derived. Therefore, "broken cisterns that can hold no water" are at a premium, and "the fountain of living waters" is turned away from, though it could slake so many thirsts. Like ignorant explorers in an enemy's country, we see a stream, and we do not stop to ask whether there is poison in it or not before we glue our thirsty lips to it. There is a great old promise in one of the prophets which puts this notion of the misinterpretation of our thirsts, and the mistakes as to the sources from which they can be slaked, into one beautiful metaphor which is obscured in our English version. The prophet Isaiah says, "the mirage shall become a pool," the romance shall turn into a reality, and the mistakes shall be rectified, and men shall know what it is that they want, and shall get it when they know. Brethren, unless we have listened to the teaching from above, unless we have consulted far more wisely and far more profoundly than many of us have ever done the meaning of our own hearts when they cry out, we, too, shall only be able to take for ours the plaintive cry of the half of this first utterance of the psalmist, and say, despairingly, "My soul thirsteth." Blessed are they who know where the fountain is, who know the meaning of the highest unrests in their own souls, and can go on with clear and true self-revelation, "My soul thirsteth for God." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *In a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.*—*A wilderness cry*.—Chrysostom tells us that amongst the primitive Christians it was ordained that this psalm should be sung every day. If we do not follow that custom, it is not because it is unsuitable. The psalm may be said or sung all the year round. In all the seasons of the soul, its spring, summer, autumn and winter. By day and by night. But the psalm especially belongs to those who, through any cause, feel themselves to dwell in a desert land. The stages of Israel in all their history, in Egypt and out of it, and onwards, are gone over in our spiritual history. And even when we are in Canaan, we may, like David, be driven out of our home, and find ourselves in the wilderness again. I. TRUE SAINTS ARE SOMETIMES IN A DRY AND THIRSTY LAND, where no water is. For—1. All things are changeable, and living things most of all. A man of stone changes not, but the living man must sorrow and suffer as well as laugh and



rejoice. 2. And in some senses, to a Christian, this world must always be a dry and thirsty land. We are not carrion crows, or else might we float and feed upon the carcasses which abound in the waters around our ark. We are doves, and when we leave the hand of our Noah we find nought to rest upon. Even when the world is at its best, it is but a dry land for saints. 3. And we carry an evil within us which would cause a drought in Paradise itself if it could come there (Rom. vii.). We may have been so unwatchful as to have brought ourselves into this condition by actual faults of life and conduct. 5. Sometimes it is brought about by our being banished from the means of grace. Poor as our ministry may be, there are some Christians who would miss it more than their daily food if it were taken from them. It is a sore trial to such to be kept away from sanctuary privileges. 5. And by denial of the sweets of Christian intercourse. David had poor company when he was in the wilderness, in the days of Saul; his friends were not much better than freebooters and runaways. And sometimes God's people are shut up to similar company. 6. Sometimes a man may be treated with gross injustice, and endure much hardship as the result. David did; so may we. 7. Domestic conditions, and health, and physical conditions, may grievously depress the soul. Thus, there are many reasons why the best of saints are sometimes in a dry and thirsty land. II. BUT GOD IS THEIR GOD STILL. "O God, Thou art my God." Yes, he is as much our God in the dry land as if we sat by Siloa's softly flowing brook. God is the God of the wilderness. Was He not with His people there? III. WHEN WE ARE IN A DRY AND THIRSTY LAND, OUR WISEST COURSE IS TO CRY TO HIM AT ONCE. When you feel least like praying, then pray to Him the more, for you need it the more. Do not, any of you, practise the sinner's folly: he declares that he will tarry till he is better, and then he never comes at all. Seek the Lord at once. Practise the Gospel principle of "Just as I am." Say, "I must have a sense of His love, and I must have it now." Make a dash for it, and you shall have it. Therefore, do not be afraid to cry out to God. Our heavenly Father loves to hear His children cry all the day long. Rutherford says, "The bairn in Christ's house that is most troublesome is the most welcome. He that makes the most din for his meat is the best bairn that Christ has." You may not quite agree with that as to your own children, but it is certainly so with our Lord. Desire, then, and let those desires be vehement. Jesus will joyfully hear you. Only be thou careful that thou be not content to be in a dry and thirsty land, away from God. Do not get into such a state, and certainly do not stay there. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 2. To see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary.—*The power and glory of God, the believer's attraction to the sanctuary:—* Desires are, in some respects, better evidences of real religion than actions themselves. You may be compelled to act,—you cannot be compelled to desire. Desires are free-born; they spring forth, spontaneously, from conviction and disposition. Good desires are proofs of something good, pledges of something better, and parts of something the best of all. Now, of the desires expressed in the text, let us note—I. THEIR CHARACTER. They are distinguished by—1. Their object, which is God. The natural man desires not God, but the regenerate must have the Lord. He seems to say, "Lord, I must have Thee." 2. Their intensity. See the terms by which they are expressed—"early," "thirsteth," "longeth." All this expresses no ordinary desires; Herod would see our Lord perform miracles, but would not step abroad for the purpose. Pilate asked, "What is truth?" but did not wait for an answer. Balaam said, "Let me die the death of the righteous," while he showed no concern to live their life, or to walk in their ways; for, as an old writer remarks, "There are certain trees which produce double blossoms, but which, nevertheless, bring forth no fruit." But as religion is the one thing needful, absolutely needful—needful on all occasions and in all circumstances, so its exercise and the feelings pertaining to it are all peculiar and supreme. It matters not what the feelings be, whether of self-abasement, of sorrow for sin, or of hope, or joy. It deeply affects the heart, it is not a mere subject of speculation, or a creed or a ceremony, but a life. Is it thus the Scripture speaks of religion? Does it not tell us that it is not a name to live, but life itself?—that it is not the form of godliness, but the power thereof? If religion be anything, it is everything; if it be important at all, it is all-important. What can equal the grandeur of the soul and eternity? II. THEIR ENHANCEMENT. This arose from the fact that the psalmist was now an exile and a wanderer, shut out

from the sanctuary and the sacred worship of God. Hence, he envied the very birds who could build and feed and lay their nest near the house of God. Absence sharpens affection; and want, desires. Indeed, we seldom know the worth of a thing till we are made to feel the want of it. Then take heed how you use God's grace now, for if you do not use and improve His gifts he will remove them from you, or you from them, as He can so easily do. By any one of many changes you may be plunged into spiritual barrenness, and have to cry, "My soul thirsteth for Thee," etc. III. **THEIR AIM.** Observe—1. What David wishes to see—God's power and glory. He means not alone the manifold proofs of God's power, but the glory that belongs to the purposes for which this power is exercised. See this in the glory and power of our Lord Jesus Christ in all His works of grace so mighty and yet so merciful. 2. The place of its display: it is "the sanctuary." Not that it is seen there only. God is everywhere, and everywhere God. He was found visibly and sensibly in the temple of old; but He is now really in our Christian assemblies. Though He is not obviously there to the natural eye, faith can realize Him there; faith can reckon upon the undeniable fact; we perceive His agency there. And this glorious power is seen not only in conviction, but in conversion. And it is seen, too, in the consolation of believers. 3. David's actual experience of these displays—"I have seen Thee," says he, "in the sanctuary." He was certain of the reality of the thing. A believer can come to this conclusion, and is not to be ridiculed or reasoned out of it. He can, and does, say, "I sat under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste." 4. The usefulness of this experience. It stimulated him to seek after yet more of what he had already enjoyed. "To see Thy power . . . so as I have," etc. Now, such experience not only stimulates to seek more, but it tends to preserve the soul in the love of God, and also to recover him when he has been led astray. The unregenerate man knows nothing of all this. You will never hear to purpose till you so hear that your souls may live. You singers! if you do not sing with melody "in your hearts to the Lord" here, you will not be found among the blissful number of those who shall celebrate His praises in the courts above. And you hearers, if you are only that, what will the Gospel be to you? But you believers, rejoice. (W. Jay.) *The duty, object and results of a devout and diligent attendance upon sanctuary worship:*—The desire of David was to see the power and glory of God; but he desired more than the manifestation thereof which the works of nature could afford; he would know God as revealed to his soul. We learn, therefore—I. **THAT THE DESIRE OF EVERY CHRISTIAN IS, OR SHOULD BE, TO KNOW MORE AND MORE OF THE GLORY OF GOD.** II. **THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THIS DESIGN IS TO BE SOUGHT BY DILIGENT ATTENDANCE UPON THE WORSHIP OF THE SANCTUARY.** III. **THE EFFECTS OF SUCH INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF THE POWER AND GLORY OF GOD.** 1. Deliverance from the power of the world. 2. And from doubts caused by the aspect of providence. 3. Strength renewed to go on our Christian course afresh. 4. The crucifixion of our lusts and corruptions. 5. Increase of humility. 6. Courage for our conflict with our last enemy, death. (J. A. James.) *The desire to see God's power and glory in the sanctuary:*—I. **HIS DESIRE ITSELF.** 1. He desired the ordinances. That which carnal and worldly spirits count a burden and tediousness to them, the children of God look upon as a privilege, and do reckon it as their greatest advantage; and so should we, and rejoice in it, and much desire it, as David here does, who is herein a pattern unto us. 2. He desired the glory and power of the ordinances. There is a double power and glory in the ordinances. The one is as to the performance of them; and the other is as to the success and effect. (1) As to the performance, when there is a life and vigour and activity, which does put forth itself in them. It is not the mere *opus operatum*, so many duties performed as a task, and there's an end of it, which makes the ordinances glorious; but when there's a gracious and heavenly spirit, which runs along in them, which accordingly is that that every Christian should especially look after in the undertaking of them. This is obtained especially in this way. Namely, first, by preparation to them. We must be careful to remove all hindrances and impediments from us. Now, these they are of two sorts. First, all sinfulness and defilement. Secondly, all worldliness and earthly entanglement. (2) The like also as to the effect, when they do work effectually and powerfully afterwards. This is also to be looked after by us; and which David without all doubt did look after, that his heart might not only be warmed by the ordinances in the very time of performance, but even then also when he was gone from them; so as the strength and lustre of them might appear, and show itself

forth in his life and conversation. II. THE LIMITATION OR AMPLIFICATION OF THIS DESIRE. "As I have seen Thee in the sanctuary." Which words may admit of a double reference and interpretation in them. Either thus, That I may see Thy power and Thy glory in the sanctuary, so as I have seen Thee. Or else thus, That I may see Thy power and glory now in the wilderness, as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary. According to the former sense, it is an earnest desire of the restoring of him to the opportunities of the public ordinances which he had formerly enjoyed. According to the latter sense, it is the like desire for a supply of the public ordinances, by God's gracious presence with him in private, now that the public were denied and kept from him. Which way soever we take it, there is matter of observation in it. 1. That I may see Thy power and glory in the sanctuary as I have seen Thee. And so he desires to be restored to the public ordinances, and to his temper enjoyment of them. He would have communion with God in public; and he would have that communion which he had formerly with Him. 2. That I may see Thy power and Thy glory here in the wilderness as I have seen it sometimes in the sanctuary. And so it is a desire of a supply of the public ordinances, by God's gracious presence with him in private instead of it; where, supposing his desire (as it was) to be rational and regular in him, there is this exhibited to us in it, that God, in the necessary want and restraint of the public ordinances, is able to make it up to us another way; He can make a wilderness or prison, or sick-chamber, or bed to be a sanctuary, if He so please; yea, He pleases sometimes so to make it; upon which ground David here does desire it as otherwise he could not have done in faith and good assurance of obtaining it. Look, as the presence of a prince is that which makes the court, so the presence of God is that which makes the sanctuary, where God will express Himself after a more full and gracious manner, that is, indeed, His temple, and so to be accounted by us. Now, this He can do, and often does, even in deserts themselves—(1) By the bringing to our remembrance those truths which we have formerly heard. As it is with some salve or medicine which we lay up and keep by us, we know not the virtue of it till such time as we come to use it, and to stand in need of it; even so it is likewise with many doctrines and truths in religion. This is, therefore, one work of the Holy Ghost, and that whereby he does supply the defect of the public dispensations, by bringing home to our consciences in private those truths which have heretofore in public been imparted and communicated to us. (2) By the giving of new experiences occasionally from the present condition, in which we are both of the temper of our own hearts, as also of His own grace, and strength, and assistance of us. In times of freedom we learn what we should be, but in times of restraint we learn what we are. (3) By working in us a greater longing and desire after the public ordinances. (4) By His own more immediate applications of Himself to us. The ordinances are nothing else but the conveyances and transmissions of Christ and His Spirit to us in an ordinary way. Now, God, if He please, can do it more immediately, and does in such cases, as He denies them. He expresses His own love, and good-will, and favour, and acceptance of us; stirs up good thoughts, and gracious and holy desires and inclinations in us; sheds abroad His love in your hearts, and becomes all in all unto us; and what He will be one day perfectly in heaven, He is now in part, and imperfectly already here. (T. Horton, D.D.) *The saint longing to see God in the sanctuary*:—I. CONCERNING THE SANCTUARY. 1. The place of presence. The Lord is there. 2. The place of friendship. Let us wonder and praise. God glorious in holiness, and people defiled with sin, meeting in friendship and love! 3. The place of converse. 4. The place of audience. The throne of grace, where the poor and needy in every nation are supplied according to his riches in glory. 5. The place of worship. The ordinances in our sanctuaries are not the inventions of priests, as the scorner calls them in his sport, but the institutions of wisdom and mercy. 6. The place of communion. II. CONCERNING THE POWER AND THE GLORY OF THE DEITY SEEN IN THE SANCTUARY. Power is the energy of the Deity, which worketh all things. Glory is the splendour on the face of His energy, which renders it mighty, and effectual, and exceeding great. Both are recognized and praised in His sanctuary by the worshippers in spirit and in truth. 1. By the worshippers the power or energy of the Deity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is recognized and praised in the sanctuary. 2. The splendour or glory on the face of the energy of the Deity is recognized and praised in His sanctuary. Every voice in it, every harp, every psaltery, sounds the high praises of His energizing word, who spake and it was done, who commanded and it stood fast. III. CONCERNING SEEING THE POWER AND

GLORY OF THE DEITY IN THE SANCTUARY. 1. The sensible administration in the sanctuaries attracts the eyes of worshippers. We behold our teachers and rulers, hear the sound of their voice, and unite ours with theirs in thanksgiving and praise. We behold a table sanctified with the Word of God and prayer, and covered with memorials of the body and blood of the Lord. In one ordinance we behold the sprinkling of water, and in another the breaking of bread, which are sensible actions appointed, and designed to aid our minds in commemorating, magnifying, and praising redeeming love. 2. The glorious beauty in the sanctuaries feeds and satisfies the understandings of worshippers. IV. CONCERNING LONGING TO SEE THE POWER AND GLORY OF THE DEITY IN THE SANCTUARY. 1. Longing to see and enjoy the Lord our God in the sanctuary appears to be a reasonable inclination, from the glory in Him that is seen. 2. This strong and fervent inclination appears reasonable from the pleasure in seeing the power and the glory of God in the sanctuary. When the pleasures of imagination disperse; when the tree yields no fruit, the stalk no meal, the stall no herd; when mirth and humour blow every way, as the smoke of the chimney, and philosophy holds out its hand to the empty soul in vain, an eye-glance of the power and the glory in the sanctuary discovers a fund of pleasures, which satisfy, enrich, ennoble, and exalt the rational and renewed mind. 3. This longing of the new heart to see God in the sanctuary appears to be a reasonable inclination, from the gain to the new creation in seeing the beauty of His power and glory. Its gain is better to them than gold, yea, much fine gold. (*A. Shanks.*) *The Christian longing to see God in His temple*:—David's heart must have been in a happy state when he wrote this psalm. Note—I. HOW HE SPEAKS OF GOD. "O God, Thou art my God." It tells of his great joy in God. And this when he was in great distress. So did our Lord on the cross call upon God, as, "My God, My God." II. HOW HE SAYS HE WILL ACT TOWARDS GOD. "Early will I seek Thee." There shall be practical results from his calling God, his God. These, often wanting. But had he not found Him already? Yes, but the more we have of God the more we desire. And he will seek Him early—in the first morning hour; and first of all, without waiting to seek others first, as we too often do. III. HOW HE DESIRES GOD. "My soul thirsteth," etc. Only those who really know God can speak in this intense way. But they can and do. IV. WHERE HE SEEKS GOD. "In a dry and," etc. There are places where we are tempted to sink down in wretchedness and despair. But not so David. God often sends His people to such dry places to quicken their thirst after Him. V. WHAT HE SEEKS FROM GOD. "To see Thy power and," etc. We should have thought that deliverance from his troubles would have been the object of his prayer; but no, only that he may see God. And God's people do, often, now, in the sanctuary, behold God's power and glory. The Gospel preached, the sacraments we observe, all help herein. Oh, what blessedness this Gospel can give. But we shall never know it until we intensely desire it; until we seek early and thirst and long after God we shall not see Him. The psalm tells us that we may be happy, for God will abundantly satisfy the soul, and you shall feel that His lovingkindness is better than life. (*C. Bradley.*) *Sanctuary longings*:—We may judge of ourselves by our desires, and if the stream does not rise so high as we could wish, let us observe the direction in which it flows, and if it be towards God let us be comforted. Natural men live without God in the world. But such as David long supremely after Him, and so after the revelations of His grace and power as seen in His sanctuary. David's desire was excited—I. BY HIS PRESENT CONDITION. He was "as in a dry and thirsty land, where," etc. We never know the worth of blessings till we know the want of them. "How mercies brighten as they take their flight." Thus sickness endears health. Upon this principle the Lord acts, and it will account for many of His dispensations. II. HIS FORMER EXPERIENCE. He had met with God in the sanctuary as His people yet do. Others know not such experience. And yet they come there led by all manner of motives. But such coming will not avail before God. May David's experience be ours. (*W. Jay.*) *God sought in the sanctuary*:—It is not enough to make use of ordinances, but we must seek if we can find God there. There are many that hover about the palace and yet do not speak with the prince; so possibly we may hover about ordinances and not meet with God there. To go away with the husk and shell of an ordinance and neglect the kernel, to please ourselves because we have been in the courts of God, though we have not met with the living God, that is very sad. A traveller and merchant differ thus: a traveller goes from place to place only that he may see; but a merchant goes from port to

port that he may take in his lading and grow rich by traffic. So a formal person goes from ordinance to ordinance, and is satisfied with the work; a godly man looks to take in his lading, that he may go away from God with God. A man may make a visit only by constraint and not by friendship; it is all one to him whether the person be at home or no; but another would be glad to find his friend there; so, if we from principle of love come to God in the duties, our desire will be to find our living God. (T. Manton, D.D.)

Ver. 3. **Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee.**—*The saint's estimate of God's lovingkindness*:—This psalm is called "A psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah." What prayers have been prayed by men in the wilderness,—by men in the darkness and mystery of life,—by men in their perplexity seeking for guidance,—by men whose "souls were discouraged because of the way." What prayers from men in dungeons,—from men in darkened homes,—from men who said "that all God's waves and billows had gone over them." Men pray better in darkness than in light, in adversity than in prosperity; they pray then with their whole heart—they mean what they say. If you had written your prayers, and had affixed the titles, you would find the heading of one, "A prayer after I had fallen into some great sin." It would contain the wail and lament of the heart, it would breathe the truest contrition and reveal the sorrow of a broken heart. It would be your penitential psalm. You would find another headed, "A prayer after backsliding." In it you would see the shame and humiliation which marked your return to God, and the fresh and earnest consecration of yourself to His service. There would be singular tenderness about it, for its words had been baptized with tears. Another prayer would have this title, "A prayer after I had lost my child." There are men who have a conscious thirst for God. "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth," etc. Now, do you thirst for God? Can you say that the lovingkindness of God is better to you than life? Life stands to us for all that is valuable and precious, and if we wish to express our estimate of something that is all the world to us, we say—It is dear as life. "What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Life is valuable not only in its highest, but its lowest forms, without its accessories and its ministration. I do not speak of the life that is "clothed in purple and fine linen, and that fares sumptuously every day," but life in toil and penury. Let a man be stript of everything—like a tree on an eminence, which has been scathed by the lightning, which bears the marks of many a storm, and tosses its bare branches in the bleak wind—and he will cling to life as much as if full of strength, as if he were crowned with verdure and fruitfulness. Take life in its best estate, surround it with all that can meet its needs, and even its imaginings—life in a palace rather than a cottage—there is something better, grander—something without which life is not worth living. "Thy lovingkindness is better than life." Why is lovingkindness better than life? Because it meets all the needs of life. Man has a physical nature, and its needs are met in the outward world, or it could not live. Light is for the eye—music for the ear—a thousand influences minister to the senses. Man has a higher nature; he has mind, he has capacity for thought; he has an emotional nature, a heart with boundless wealth. What is mind without culture, education, converse, literature? What is the heart without friends, relatives, love? Without lovingkindness how little is known of life! God can come to man; He can dwell in man; He can reveal His love to man. The mind has life only in receiving truth. The heart has life only in love. You have life only in God. There is a sense in which the lovingkindness of God is so much better than life that it even reconciles us to the loss of life. We are delivered from the fear of death. "To die is gain." So shall we, divesting ourselves of the mortal, become immortal. (H. J. Bevis.) *God's lovingkindness better than life*:—I. THE PROPOSITION. 1. To take it literally; God's lovingkindness is better than life; that is, than life properly so called, namely, this temporal life which we lead here below. (1) It is better than life, by taking life in the perfections and excellencies of it; if there be anything more than ordinarily desirable or commendable in this natural life, there is that in the favour of God which does transcend it and go exceedingly beyond it. (2) It is better than life, by taking life in the imperfections and defects of it; if there be anything wanting in this life, which does fail and come short of our desires, there is that again in the favour of God which does abundantly supply it,

and make it up. Now, the improvement of this point by way of application comes to this—(1) It seems to teach us what we should chiefly look after and pursue. Let us with Mary choose the better part, let us not forsake the better, and give ourselves wholly to the worse. (2) This gives us a hint of the excellency of a Christian's condition above all other men in the world. All the happiness of others is confined only to this life; if they be miserable here they are the miserablest creatures that are, they have nothing in the earth to sustain them, and uphold them. Yea, it is otherwise now with the children of God, if they should miss of these earthly comforts and their cheerings of this natural life here below; yet they have somewhat better to refresh them, and to keep up their hearts. If their hopes were only in this life, they were of all men most miserable, as the apostle speaks. But now this is their comfort, that they have hope of better than life, even of the favour and lovingkindness of God. God's favour is better than life, because it brings us to a better life. It is better than life temporal, because it brings us to life eternal (2 Cor. v. 1). 2. We may also take it in the moral, according to that which it implies and holds forth to us; and that is this, That God's favour is better than all. The lovingkindness of the Lord is the greatest happiness and advantage of a Christian. And here again, for our further explication and enlargement of this truth in hand, we must know, that by God's lovingkindness we may understand two things especially: either first of all, the affection; or secondly, the expression of the affection, either as it is immanent in Himself, or else as it is transient upon us. You know that in parents and friends there are both of these considerable. There is the favour in the thing itself; and there is the breathings of this favour in regard of outward manifestation of it towards the person whom it is fastened upon. Now, both of these from God to a Christian are exceeding beneficial and comfortable; God's favour, as ye may take it for His love; and God's favour, as ye may take it for His embracements and love expressed. Now, the application of all to ourselves will run out in a fourfold question. How shall we know whether we have it? How shall we get it if we want it? How shall we keep it when we have it? How shall we recover it when we have lost it? 1. How shall we know whether we have it? This is known divers ways. (1) By His countenance. God looks otherwise upon us, as Jacob to his wives about Laban (Gen. xxxi. 5). (2) By His presence and communion. Can two walk together and not be agreed? God converses with those which are His favourites (Gen. xvii. 22). Talked with Abraham. And so with Moses (Exod. xxxiii. 11). (3) By His love-tokens and sprinklings of favour. The hidden manna (Rev. ii. 17). The earnest of the spirit (2 Cor. i. 22), etc. 2. How shall we get it if we want it? (1) By labouring to be acquainted with those which are about Him. Thus men get to be acquainted with great ones. (2) Circumspect carriage and behaviour, walking exactly (Ephes. v. 15). (3) Industry and diligence in a man's place. (4) Study the temper and disposition of Him whom we seek to. 3. How shall we keep it when we have it? (1) By universal compliance; indulge no one lust whatsoever. (2) By sobriety and humility of enjoyment; not proud and lifted up. (3) By shunning of all occasions of offence. 4. How shall we recover it when we have lost it? (1) By an ingenious acknowledgment of our miscarriages past. (2) By doing our first works (Rev. ii. 5). (3) By double diligence and zealousness for time to come. II. THE INFERENCE. "My lips shall praise Thee." When it is said here his lips, we must not take it exclusively, his lips and nothing else; but effectively, his praise should break forth at his lips; this he promised. As where the inward man is rightly qualified, it will show itself in the outward. The connection seems to be double; either referring to the former verse, "Early will I seek Thee, because Thy lovingkindness is better," etc. And so here's an account of his importunity. Or else referring it to the latter, "My lips shall praise Thee, because Thy lovingkindness is," etc. And in this latter we now take it. David praises God for the excellency of His lovingkindness. First, what it was in itself, in its own nature, considered in God Himself; God is to be praised for that which He is (Ps. xcii. 12). Secondly, for what he was to David; because I do enjoy this lovingkindness of Thine, which is better than life. David did not bless God only for a notion, but for an experiment, and the sense of God's love to Himself. And here now comes in the second notion of God's lovingkindness in the expression of it. First, out of a principle of joy which is communicated and full of diffusion. Secondly, out of a principle of love, as desiring to make others which were his brethren sensible of the same favour. Thirdly, out of a principle of thankfulness and ingenuity. Here's the difference

betwixt the saints and the world. The world thinks the favour of God not worth the observing; God's people do much rejoice in it, and bless Him for it. (T. Horton, D.D.) *God's lovingkindness*.—The wisdom of the human mind is manifested by the estimate which it forms of principles and of things. But, as it requires a good ear to be a judge of music, and a good eye to be a judge of colours, so it requires an enlightened and spiritual mind to form a just estimate of things eternal. We often estimate things by comparison; we draw our conclusions of their importance and value from their different natures, use, and duration. Thus we compare gold with silver, and jewels with gold; and we say gold is better than silver, rubies are better than gold; but "skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life." Such is the estimate which men form of life, that they will give gold and silver, and all that they have for food, when they are likely to perish without it. But David rises still higher in his estimate, and says, "Thy lovingkindness is better than life." I. WE HAVE AN INTERESTING SUBJECT. The lovingkindness of God. 1. The excellence of the principle. Its want the cause of all misery; its presence, of all joy. 2. Its comprehensive import. It includes all the attributes of God. All are of His love. We sometimes speak of water as conveying to our minds an idea of that one element; but to vary it, we speak of the ocean; and for limitation, we speak of the Atlantic, the Pacific, the German Ocean; to limit ourselves still more, we speak of the sea; and then we name the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, the Baltic Sea; sometimes we speak of the shores it washes, as the Ganges, the Mississippi, the Thames, or we name some of its various forms, as rain, dew, snow, etc. But we are still speaking of water; it is still the same element we have in view. On the same principle we speak of the subject in the text. When God pities the miserable, we call it compassion—when He shows favour to the unworthy, we call it grace—when He exercises it in a way of pardon, we call it mercy—when He fulfils His promises, and accepts the penitent, and justifies him, we call it faithfulness: still it is only lovingkindness—it is so many various means of making us happy. "Thy lovingkindness is better than life." 3. Its powerful and beneficial influence. The power of love has often been evinced. "God so loved the world," etc. 4. Its duration. It is immutable, it is "everlasting love." Those who are delivered from guilt and depravity by it shall be preserved by it for ever. II. AN IMPORTANT TRUTH AFFIRMED. "Thy lovingkindness is better than life." 1. It makes up all the deficiencies of life. 2. It alleviates life's sorrows. 3. It adds blessedness to the blessings of life. III. THE RESOLUTION HERE FORMED. "My lips shall praise Thee." For the manifestation and the application of Thy love. My lips shall do this, by commending Thee to others. (J. Griffin.) *Lovingkindness better than life*.—This utterance is somewhat extraordinary, for—1. What is lovingkindness without life? Had we no existence, though lovingkindness flooded the universe, it would be nothing to us. Life is necessary to discern and appreciate lovingkindness. 2. What would life be without lovingkindness? A desert unrelieved by a single blade, a midnight without a ray. Certainly "lovingkindness is better than life" in such a state. In truth the language implies that life in itself, life even apart from lovingkindness, is a good thing. To be is better than not to be. In many respects the text has a meaning. I. Lovingkindness is INDEPENDENT of life. Had no creature existed, had the Eternal existed alone, without one solitary existence in any part of immensity, lovingkindness would have been as full and complete as now. It would have been the life and consciousness of the Infinite. "God is love." II. Lovingkindness is the CAUSE of life. The universe is a tree rooted in the river of love, ever growing, ever green, ever fruitful. From love it sprang, by love it grows. As clouds to the ocean, so is all life to lovingkindness, they rise from its boundless billows and break into their fathomless depths again. III. Lovingkindness is the REDEMPTION of life. Lovingkindness expressed, embodied, and administered by Christ redeems the fallen race. What lovingkindness there is here, "God so loved the world," etc. "He that spared not His only son," etc. IV. Lovingkindness is the HEAVEN of life. It is the beauty of every leaf, the fragrance of every flower, the brightness of every star, the life of every breeze, the music of every sound, the charm of every scene, the flavour of every fruit in Paradise. (Homilist.) *Something better than life*.—I. THE TEXT REFERS TO SOMETHING THAT IS GOOD—"Life." Life is a mystery which no subject of it can understand, any more than a machine can understand the force that propels it. God understands it, because He is its Author. Life in man is threefold: animal, moral, intellectual. In these there are degrees. This trinity of life

in man lifts him up to supremacy among all earthly living existences. Man, with his threefold life, has accomplished marvellous things for himself and for humanity, looked at only as an inhabitant of earth. But good as life may be, as a gift from God, and used by man in the spheres of his present being, there is something better. Hence—II. LET US NOTICE IN THE TEXT WHAT THAT SOMETHING is: "Thy lovingkindness is better than life." 1. The lovingkindness of God is better than life in its nature. What is life but a dream, a vapour, a shadow, a tale that is told, subject in its brevity to numberless vicissitudes? But the lovingkindness of God is a substantial reality. It comes to us in ten thousand ways of good things, both in providence and in the Gospel. 2. It is better in its promises. What are the promises of life but few and feeble? But the lovingkindness of God comes to us not only with promises of present good, but with "exceeding great and precious" promises of good things in the future. 3. It is better in its pleasures. The pleasures of life are carnal, fickle, superficial, unsatisfying. But the pleasures of God's lovingkindness are spiritual, real, enduring, satisfying. God's lovingkindness is a "feast of fat things." It is a river. It is the fulness of God. 4. It is better in its pursuits. The pursuits of life, how low, how little, how transitory! But the pursuits of God's lovingkindness, as it influences us, are prayer, praise, obedience, and heaven; spiritual, noble, eternal. 5. Better in its issues. The issues of life are often disappointment, mortification, loss, and inevitably death. But the issues of God's lovingkindness are the realization of our hopes, answers to our prayers, increase in every good thing, and at last everlasting life.

III. THE REASON FOR PRAISING GOD, AS CONTAINED IN THE TEXT. 1. To praise God for His lovingkindness is good. It is pleasant. It is comely (Ps. cxlv. 1). 2. It is in harmony with all His works: "All Thy works praise Thee"; with the angels; with the saints glorified. 3. It is a becoming return for God's lovingkindness. If a father does well for his child, does not the child praise him? If you give a charity to a beggar of an unusual kind, does he not praise you? Then, how much more ought we to praise our God for His unmerited, abundant, and unparalleled lovingkindness bestowed upon us! "My lips shall praise Thee." In the congregation of Thy people. In my family. In my private life. In all times and places. (*J. Bate.*) *God's lovingkindness.* I. How IT IS MANIFESTED. 1. In the gift of Christ. 2. In affliction. 3. In providence. 4. In the promise of the future life. II. ITS VALUE. "It is better than life," because—I. Not brief as is life. 2. It fully satisfies. III. THE EFFECT IT SHOULD HAVE UPON US. "My lips shall praise Thee." This should be—I. A life work. 2. A heart work.

IV. CONCLUSION. 1. We all receive of God's lovingkindness. 2. Do we all praise Him? (*Frederic Bell.*) *Gratitude and devotion.*—I. THE FAVOUR RECOGNIZED. "Thy lovingkindness." 1. Its source. "Thy." The fountain of wisdom, love, and power. 2. Its quality. "Lovingkindness." Not kind acts merely, but the kindness of love. 3. Its constancy. 4. Its comprehensiveness.

II. THE ESTIMATE FORMED. It "is better than life." The second death consists not in the destruction of being, but of well-being. Sin destroyed man's eternal well-being, but the "lovingkindness" of God restores it. 1. It harmonizes man with his surroundings. 2. It extracts the sting of death. 3. It sanctifies life's sorrows. 4. It endears and sweetens life's comforts. III. THE RESOLUTION MADE. "My lips shall praise Thee." 1. Piety is intensely personal. "My lips." If "my lips" have no praise, my heart has no love. Internal life must find external expression. 2. Piety is joyous devotion. "Shall praise." 3. Piety is personal, joyous devotion to a personal God. (*Thomas Kelly.*) *The saint celebrating the lovingkindness of God.*—I. CONCERNING THE LOVINGKINDNESS OF THE LORD. It appears—I. In the constitution of the Mediator between God and man. 2. In the establishment of the covenant with His own Son in the office of mediation. 3. In the mission of His only-begotten Son to do the work of mediation in our nature. 4. In reconciling sinners to Himself by the death of His Son. 5. In drawing men to Christ. 6. In crowning men in Christ with all spiritual blessings. 7. In the work of providence. This work is long, and exceeding broad. Hold the glass to the right eye, and look through it on these pieces or dispensations which seem to have a dark ground, and praise the lovingkindness of the Lord, and magnify the work that is after the counsel of His own will. II. CONCERNING THE COMPARATIVE EXCELLENCE OF THE LOVINGKINDNESS, which is a glory in the face of God reconciling the world to Himself through the mediation of His beloved and only begotten Son in our nature. Comparing it with life, the psalmist pronounces it better. 1. Lovingkindness appearing in the face of God toward us in Christ Jesus is



earlier than life. 2. Longer than life. In its duration is neither beginning nor end of days. 3. Richer than life. Lovingkindness is the fountain of redemption, reconciliation, pardon, acceptance, holiness; of the earnest, the seal, the anointing of the Spirit; and of all the streams of grace, and mercy, and goodness, which enrich the valleys of Zion, and make her wastes to shout and sing. 4. Sweeter and more pleasant than life. 5. Gives seasonings and relishes to the blessings and comforts of life. III. CONCERNING OUR PRAISING THE LOVINGKINDNESS OF THE DEITY. This includes—1. The perception of His lovingkindness in Christ Jesus by the understanding. Christ dying for sinners is the commendation of lovingkindness. 2. The belief of His lovingkindness with the heart. If we believe, we will praise; and when we praise, we will believe. 3. The exercise of our affections toward the lovingkindness which is a glory of the face of God in Christ Jesus. The lovingkindness of God is transcendently amiable. When He lifts up the light of it upon the new creation, their affections are aloft, and mount up in joy and praise with wings as eagles. Their affections are fruits of His Spirit, dwelling and working by His Word in their heart. 4. A conversation becoming His lovingkindness. 5. Offering thanksgiving continually for the kindnesses of His love in Christ Jesus. Let the praises of it be founded with the voice of thanksgiving in His courts, and around His holy hill, in our chambers, and houses, and villages, and in all the forests and wastes where we sojourn. (*A. Shanks.*)

Vers. 4-7. **Thus will I bless Thee while I live: I will lift up mine hand in Thy Name.**—*David blessing God and praying to Him:*—In this verse we have David engaging himself to God in two particulars. First, to the blessing of God, "Thus will I bless Thee while I live." And secondly, to praying to Him, "I will lift up my hands," etc. I. DAVID'S ENGAGING HIMSELF TO BLESSING, "Thus will I bless Thee," etc. 1. The thing itself promised is blessing; David promises to bless God. This at the first hearing may seem to carry some kind of difficulty in it. The apostle's rule (Heb. vii. 7) is, that without contradiction the less is blessed of the greater; if so, how can we be said to be blessers of God, who is so infinitely superior to us? For this we must, therefore, know that there is a double kind of blessing; the one imperative, or by way of authority; the other declarative, and by way of publication. According to the first sense, so God blesses man, namely by making him blessed. According to the second sense, so man blesses God, namely, by declaring Him blessed, and by acknowledging that blessedness which is in Him. This is that which lies upon us all as a duty to be performed by us, and accordingly we shall find often mention made of it in Scripture, in sundry places—as for instance Ps. ciii. 1, 2. It is exquisite upon a twofold ground. First, the goodness which is in Himself. And secondly, the overflowings and communications of this goodness to us; each of these call for this our blessing, and do engage us thereunto. There are two ways especially in which God is blest of His creatures. The one is objectively by way of representation; and the other is significatively by way of publication. According to the first sense, so all His creatures bless Him (Ps. xix. 1; Ps. cxlvii. 3). But according to the second sense, so He is blest only by angels and men, who are, therefore, to do it with so much the greater intention. 2. What is it to bless God thus? We may take it in these explications. (1) Sincerely, in the uprightness and integrity of our hearts. (2) Affectionately, as having our hearts much enlarged in us. As God loves a cheerful giver, so He loves a cheerful thanksgiver; that is, such an one as is thoroughly apprehensive of the greatness of the mercy itself, and which accordingly has his spirit much advanced and enlarged about it. (3) Spiritually. This is another thing which belongs to this "thus"; when we bless God by the assistance of His Spirit, and in the name of His Son, that is, to bless Him as we should do for the manner of it. 3. The extent, and that is in these words, "While I live"; whereby he signifies that it was not only a sudden fit or mood in him, but an habitual frame and disposition of spirit. This is thanksgiving in those which are God's servants, it is a constant and settled thing in them; that mercy which they receive but once, yet they are thankful for always, and they do more or less remember it all their lives long. This there is very good ground and reason for, if we examine it, and search into it. (1) God's dealing with us in regard of His mercies, which He does extend unto us all our lives long. His goodness runs through the whole course of our lives, and every moment of them we have some touch and sprinkling of it; therefore it is but requisite that our praises should be so likewise. (2) If we consider the nature of God's mercies in them-

selves, not only for the continuance, but the quality, they are such as nothing less than a life is sufficient for the celebrating of them; a few days, or years, are too little and scanty for such a performance; especially if we speak of the great mercies of all, which is the love of God in Christ, and those spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Him; they are such as call for a life indeed for the publishing of them. (3) Do but consider how much we provoke God by our sins. We offend Him while we live, and therefore while we live we should praise Him, that so we may in some measure make amends for those offences. So, then, every day will I praise Thee, because every day I sin against Thee. II. DAVID'S ENGAGING HIMSELF TO PRAYER. "I will lift up my hands," etc. 1. The duty itself. (1) An expression of homage and obedience to God. They hereby signify that they are at His disposing, and stand in need of His owning of them. (2) An opportunity of converse and communion with Him. (3) A means for the diverting of evils from us, and the obtaining of blessings. 2. The manner or carriage of it. "In Thy Name." This does include divers things in it. (1) The Person to whom the prayer is made, and that is God, and He alone. (2) It shows the manner in which it is done, and that is according to the will of God, with His allowance and approbation of us; we must not ask anything of God loosely and carelessly, we do not care how, but with reverence and awfulness, and humility, and submission to His good pleasure. (3) By Thy assistance, by Thy Spirit helping of me (Jude 20; Rom. viii. 26, 27). It must be the voice of God's Spirit in us, this is to pray in His Name. (T. Horton, D.D.) *Praising God while we can*:—I went one day with Billy Bray, says the Rev. F. W. Bourne, to see a dying saint whose character had been unblemished for many years, but whose natural disposition was modest and retiring almost to a fault. His face wore a look of ineffable dignity and repose, lit up with a strange unearthly radiance and glory. He was just on the verge of heaven. He could only speak in a whisper. He said, "I wish I had a voice, so that I might praise the Lord." "You should have praised Him, my brother, when you had one," was Billy's quiet but slightly satirical comment.

Vers. 5, 6. *My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips.*—*A taste for devotion*:—I. WHAT WE UNDERSTAND BY THE PIETY OF TASTE AND SENTIMENT. Suppose two pupils of a philosopher, both emulous to make a proficiency in science; both attentive to the maxims of their master; both surmounting the greatest difficulties to retain a permanent impression of what they hear. But the one finds study a fatigue like the man tottering under a burden; to him study is a severe and arduous task; he hears because he is obliged to hear what is dictated. The other, on the contrary, enters into the spirit of study; its pains are compensated by its pleasures; he loves truth for the sake of truth; and not for the sake of the encomiums conferred on literary characters and the preceptors of science. So he who has a speculative piety, and he who has a piety of taste and sentiment, are both sincere in their efforts; both devoted to their duty; both pure in purpose; and both alike engaged in studying his precepts, and in reducing them to practice; but oh, how different is their state! The one prays because he is awed by his wants, and because prayer is the resource of the wretched. The other prays because the exercise of prayer transports him to another world; because it vanishes the objects which obstruct his divine reflections; and because it strengthens those ties which unite him to that God whose love constitutes all his consolation and all his treasure. II. WHAT JUDGMENT WE SHOULD PASS UPON OURSELVES WHEN DESTITUTE OF THE HEARTFELT PIETY WE HAVE JUST DESCRIBED. 1. When the privation is general; when a conviction of duty, and the motives of hope and fear are ever requisite to enforce the exercises of religion; when we have to force ourselves to read God's Word, to pray, to study His perfections, and to participate of the pledges of His love in the Holy Sacrament. It is not very likely that a regenerate soul should be always abandoned to the difficulties and duties imposed by religion, that it should never experience those comforts conferred by the Holy Spirit, which make them a delight. 2. The privation of divine comforts should induce us to pass severe strictures on ourselves, when we do not make the required efforts to be delivered from so sad a state. III. THE CAUSES WHICH DEPRIVE US OF THE PIETY OF TASTE AND SENTIMENT. 1. With the exception of those called heroes in the world, mankind seldom sacrifice their ease, their sensuality, their offminacy, to high notions, to ambition, and the love of glory. And how often have the heroes themselves sacrificed all their laurels, their reputation, and their trophies to the charm of

some sensible pleasure? 2. The imagination captivates both the senses and the understanding. A good which is not sensible; a good even which has no existence, is contemplated as a reality, provided it have the decorations proper to strike the imagination. 3. A present, or at least, an approximate good, excites, for the most part, more vehement desires, than a good which is absent, or whose enjoyment is deferred to a remote period. 4. Recollection is a substitute for presence; I would say, that a good in the possession of which we have found delight, produces in the heart, though absent, much the same desires, as that which is actually present. 5. A good, ascertained and fully known by experience, is much more capable of inflaming our desires, than a good of which we have but an imperfect notion, and which is known only by the report of others. 6. All things being equal, we prefer a good of easy acquisition, to one which requires care and fatigue. 7. A good beyond our reach, a good that we do not possess, and that we have no hope so to do, does not excite any desire. 8. Avocations fill the capacity of the soul. (*Jas. Saurin.*) *The saint assuring himself of satisfaction in God:*—

**I. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING SATISFYING THE NEW CREATION.** 1. Their souls need to be satisfied. 2. That which satisfies the soul comes from above. 3. There is enough in God to satisfy the soul. 4. The Lord hath satisfied the soul. 5. The Lord promises to satisfy the soul (Ps. cxxxii. 15; xxxvii. 19; xxii. 26; Isa. lviii. 11; Ps. xxxvi. 8). These, and all the promises of God, are faithful sayings, and pleasurable at the foot of His throne. In believing and pleading them, the race of new creatures, who exercise themselves unto godliness, will be forward to confess, where it is proper to tell their experience, that their souls have been satisfied as with marrow and fatness. **II. SHOW WHAT IS IN THE GOODNESS AND LOVINGKINDNESS OF GOD TO SATISFY THE SOUL, AS WITH MARROW AND FATNESS.** "Marrow" is an oily substance which is enclosed in some of the bones of certain animals. It strengthens them, and promotes their growth, and the health and vigour of the whole body. "Fatness," in the language of Scripture, is used to signify the best of anything. "The fatness of the earth" is a soil which, under the influence of the heavens, bringeth forth abundantly. "The fatness of the olive" is a tree that bears the best and greatest abundance of fruit. And "the fatness of the house of God" is the abundance of grace, which enriches and satisfies the souls of His people. 1. The glory of the attributes of God satisfies the soul. 2. The soul is satisfied with the truth of the Word of God. 3. The beauties in the works of God satisfy the soul. 4. The richness of the gifts of God satisfies the soul. 5. The variety of blessings in the fulness of God is satisfying to the soul. **III. SHOW ON WHAT GROUNDS NEW CREATURES ASSURE THEIR HEARTS OF THE SATISFYING OF THEIR SOUL, AS WITH MARROW AND FATNESS, IN GOD EVERYWHERE.** 1. The excellence of His lovingkindness. 2. The richness of His goodness—a treasury that is never shut, and never empty. 3. The freeness of His mercy—an attribute which is satisfying to the souls of the poor and needy everywhere. 4. The might of His power. 5. The glory of His holiness. 6. The truth of His faithfulness. The regular and uninterrupted succession of summer and winter, cold and heat, day and night, is a demonstration of the faithfulness of God in ruling the heavens according to His own establishment; and ground to our faith to assure our hearts, that His establishment with Christ is firm and sure. 7. The uncertainty of His unchangeableness. 8. The prevalence of mediation. The promises of God in Christ the Mediator are all yea and amen, and pleasurable in His name. On this ground we assure our hearts that His promises in Him shall be performed, and our souls satisfied in their performance as with marrow and fatness. (*A. Shanks.*) *Satisfaction found in God:*—We can have as much of God as we desire. There is a quest which finds its object with absolute certainty, and which finds its object simultaneously with the quest. And these two things, the certainty and the immediateness with which the thirst of the soul after God passes into a satisfied fruition of the soul in God, are what are taught us here in our text; and what you and I, if we comply with the conditions, may have as our own blessed experience. There is one search about which it is true that it never fails to find; the certainty that the soul thirsting after God shall be satisfied with God results at once from His nearness to us, and His infinite willingness to give Himself, which He is only prevented from carrying into act by our obstinate refusal to open our hearts by desire. It takes all a man's indifference to keep God out of his heart, "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being," and that Divine love, which Christianity teaches us to see on the throne of the universe, is but infinite longing for self-communication. God's love is an infinite desire to give Himself. If only we open our hearts—

and nothing opens them so wide as longing—He will pour in, as surely as the atmosphere streams in through every chink and cranny, as surely as if some great black rock that stands on the margin of the sea is blasted away, the waters will flood over the sands behind it. So, unless we keep God out, by not wishing Him in, in He will come. The certitude that we possess Him when we desire Him is as absolute. As swift as Marconi's wireless message across the Atlantic and its answer, so immediate is the response from Heaven to the desire from earth. What a contrast that is to all our experiences! Is there anything else about which we can say, "I am quite sure that if I want it I shall have it. I am quite sure that when I want it I have it"? Nothing! There may be wells to which a man has to go, as the Bedouin in the desert has to go, with empty water-skins, many a day's journey, and it comes to be a fight between the physical endurance of the man and the weary distance between him and the spring. Many a man's bones, and many a camel's, lie on the track to the wells, who lay down gasping and black-lipped, and died before they reached them. We all know what it is to have longing desires which have cost us many an effort, and efforts and desires have both been in vain. Is it not blessed to be sure that there is One whom to long for is immediately to possess? Then there is the other thought here, too, that when we have God we have enough. That is not true about anything else. There is always something lacking in all other satisfactions. They address themselves to sides, and angles, and faces of our complex nature; they leave all the others unsatisfied. The table that is spread in the world, at which various longings and capacities seat themselves as guests, always fails to provide for some of them, and whilst some, and those especially of the lower type, are feasting full, there sits by their side another guest, who finds nothing on the table to satisfy his hunger. But if my soul thirsts for God, my soul shall be satisfied when I get Him. (*A. McLaren, D.D.*) *The saint delighting in praise*.—I. THE THEME OF PRAISE. 1. The Lord Himself. 2. His name. 3. His power. 4. His mercy. 5. His lovingkindness. 6. His holiness. 7. His goodness. 8. His faithfulness. 9. His word. 10. His wonders. II. THE EXPRESSION OF PRAISE. 1. By words. 2. By voices. 3. By actions. III. THE CHEERFULNESS WHICH ENLIVENS THE EXERCISE OF GODLY MEN IN PRAISING THE LORD. 1. Cheerfulness arises from God and the things of God, which are themes of our praise. 2. Cheerfulness in praise arises from the anointing and sealing of the Holy Spirit. 3. Cheerfulness in praise arises from the blessings with which it enriches experience. The Lord is good and kind to His people in their glorifying Him with praise, and shows them His salvation. 4. Cheerfulness in praise arises from hope of acceptance in the beloved. This hope is lively and joyful, founded in the mediation of the great High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, and confirmed with promises sprinkled with His blood. In conclusion, observe—1. The mouth of the man of piety is his organ of praise. Regeneration renews the whole man after the image of God, but creates no faculties and members. By this grace the faculties and members are renewed, and fitted to the dignified uses for which they were originally created; and in these uses are, or ought to be, employed by pious men, every day, and everywhere. 2. In using their mouth as their organ of praise, the lips of men of piety are anointed with oil of joy. 3. The exercise of pious men on earth is continued in heaven. (*A. Shanks.*) *Praising God with joyful lips*.—There are three things which do here open the mouths and lips of such as David was—1. Joy; that is a spreading affection, which does not keep within its bounds, but does dilate and expatiate itself, that others may joy with it; and so here, it is joyful lips. David did so please himself in the expectation of those gracious opportunities which he now prays for, as that he promises himself a great deal of joy and rejoicing from them. 2. Love, and that to others with whom he conversed. This, it made him to speak likewise, that having found this sweetness in his own soul, he might make others likewise in some degree partakers of it. Now, while he was in the wilderness, he was solitary, and all alone by himself, he wanted the opportunity; when he came into the sanctuary, he hoped to have the mutual benefit of the communion of saints; and so in this respect should come with his mouth to praise God with joyful lips. 3. Thankfulness likewise to God. This it does also vent itself here. "My mouth shall praise Thee," that is, celebrate Thy goodness towards me. It is the best recompense which we can make to God for all His favours and kindnesses to us, even to praise Him, and bless Him for them. (*T. Horton, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. **Have I not remembered Thee in my bed, and thought upon Thee when I was waking?**—*The saint devout by night*:—Night piety is—1. Commanded (Deut. vi. 7; Josh. i. 8; Lam. ii. 19). 2. Exemplified (Ps. cxix. 55, 147, 148; Luke vi. 12). 3. Profitable (Ps. xvi. 7; lxxvii. 6; i. 2). I. **THE OBJECT OF NIGHT PIETY.** 1. Jehovah. 2. Our God. 3. One who is awake at every hour of the night. At any of the watches, there is access by Christ into the secret of His presence. 4. One who makes the night a season of visiting some of His chosen with the kindness of His love (Ps. xvii. 3; xlii. 8). II. **THE EXERCISES OF NIGHT PIETY MENTIONED IN THE TEXT.** 1. Remembering the Lord upon our bed is first mentioned; remembering what He is, what He hath done, what He hath promised, what He hath commanded, what He hath given, and what way He hath led us through life by His providence. 2. The other exercise mentioned in our text is, meditating on the Lord in the night watches. This also includes several particulars; as thinking on Him, believing in Him, hoping in Him, praying to Him, and glorifying Him with praise. III. **THE PROFIT OF NIGHT PIETY.** They minister—1. To the satisfying of the soul. 2. To the filling of the mouth with praise. 3. To the sanctifying of the lips to express the praises of the Lord with joy and gladness. 4. To the preventing of the intrusions of evil thoughts upon us, which often disturb and spoil the exercises of our night piety. (*A. Shanks.*) *Remembrance of, and meditation on God*:—I. **REMEMBRANCE OF GOD.** 1. The thing itself. There are three sorts and several kinds of God's dispensations to us, in reference whereunto especially we are to remember Him. (1) As to His work of creation, His making and framing of us. Not to remember the Lord which is our Maker and Creator, is very gross and incongruous. This deserves our remembrance especially, it is very useful to us for several purposes. As first, to strengthen our faith; He that made us He will also preserve us. To commit our souls to Him as to a faithful Creator. He that created us will raise us again. And as to strengthen our faith, so likewise to quicken our obedience, and to teach us to give up our souls and bodies, as a living sacrifice to Him, it is very pertinent to remember God thus, namely, in reference to this His first work of creation. (2) In reference to His work of sanctification, as our Redeemer; His new making us, and framing us again, remember Him so; and that both as to the work of grace itself in us, as also in reference to all good means, for the strengthening of it. (3) In reference to His work of providence. God has many thoughts of us (Jer. xxix. 11; Ps. cxxxvi. 23; Gen. viii. 1; xix. 20; xxx. 22; Mal. iii. 16). Now, forasmuch as God does thus carefully remember us, there is all the reason that may be why we should also remember Him. To help and strengthen our memories in this particular, let us be careful of these directions. First, get into ourselves strong apprehensions of God, and of that goodness and excellency which is in Him. Apprehension is a great help to memory; that which is deeply fastened and settled, and rooted in us, it will not so easily be forgotten of us; it is so with things, and it is so with persons, they are all there easily remembered where they are well apprehended. Secondly, let us labour to have good affections toward Him. If we love God we shall not forget Him, but we shall often have thoughts of Him; He will come into our minds, even in some absence and remoteness from Him, wherein we do not, perhaps, enjoy Him in His ordinances as formerly we have done. Thirdly, let us view His tokens and pledges, and remembrances of Himself, which He has left with us, as the Word and Sacraments, and the like. These are remembrances of Him, and accordingly we should apply ourselves to them under this notion; we should make use of them to such a purpose as this is. 2. The circumstance of place, for the performing of it. "On my bed." The bed may be looked upon as a place for the remembrance of God in it according to a threefold notion. Either first of all, as a place of choice; in the bed to choose rather than anywhere else, where I am left to my liberty. Or, secondly, as a place of necessity; in the bed at least, where I cannot anywhere else, as having restraints upon me. Or thirdly, as a place of indifferency; in the bed as well as anywhere else besides, as it happens, and falls out unto me. And here again there are two things further considerable. First, a Christian's privilege. And secondly, a Christian's duty upon this privilege. The privilege of a Christian is this, that he may remember God in his bed where he can nowhere else. A Christian's duty is this, that he ought to remember God on his bed, where he hath nowhere else to remember Him; he is not to neglect such an opportunity as this is. Here is a third now which we may add to the rest, not only a Christian's privilege, and a Christian's duty, but likewise his practice in the example of the prophet

David; he did it for his particular, and hereby shows us what is likewise the nature and disposition of many others besides in this respect, even to remember God in their beds; where they are restrained from the more public enjoyments, yet to think of Him even in those restraints (Ps. xlii. 4). II. MEDITATION ON GOD. 1. The thing itself. Meditation is beyond remembrance, for that may be only transitory and fitting, this is fixed and settled, and does signify a further fastening and continuing of our thoughts upon that which they are pitched upon. (1) The attributes of God; His goodness, and wisdom, and power, meditate on them; they are such as are very worthy of our choicest thoughts, and we cannot think too much of them, so far forth as they are revealed unto us. (2) His works which flow from His attributes, do much call for our meditation. (3) Also the Word of God (1 Tim. iv. 15). It is meditation which makes us to profit and thrive by that which we hear, which without this is very much lost. As it is not the meat while in the stomach, but digested and thoroughly concocted, and altered and changed, and so dispersed into the several parts of the body, which causes nourishment and increase; even so is it also here in spirituals. 2. The amplification of it from the circumstance of time, "in the night watches." This was the time which David took for this performance. As for the place, on his bed; so for the time and season, in the night. He brake his sleep to think upon God (Ps. lxxvii. 4). But why then, of all other times? Why does David choose to meditate on God in the night? Or why should any other do so in imitation of him? Surely there is very good ground and reason for it, as will appear to us in sundry regards, which we may take notice of. (1) As freest from distraction, and the cumbiances and troubles of the world. (2) As it is most subject to temptation and assault from Satan. We have never more need to betake and apply ourselves to God, than then, when we are in greatest danger of the devil, who is our spiritual enemy. Now, this we are at such a time as this is. He is a spirit of darkness, and so watches for a time of darkness, especially for the laying of his snares, and making his onsets upon us, as robbers they wait for the night; so then does this spiritual robber of souls. Then he may here work upon the fancy as he hath opportunity for it. (3) As the time when conscience most works, and God Himself does usually draw near and apply Himself to us (Ps. xvi. 7; xvii. 3; Job xxxv. 10). These things laid together, do make very much for such a performance as this is; and not only for meditation, but prayer, as the Hebrew word *Hagah* will bear it. We have herein the example not only here of David in the text, but also of some others in Scripture. Thus our Lord spent whole nights in prayer (Luke vi. 12). Anna served God with fastings and prayer night and day. Paul had his labours, and fastings, and watchings (2 Cor. vi. 5; xi. 27). And so for others. We know how in the primitive times they had their vigils and meetings in the night, which though at first had a good ground for them, in regard of the persecution by heathens; yet afterwards upon as good ground for their abuse were taken away. But, however, the moral and analogy holds good, and is in force still, which is this, To watch unto prayer, and not to omit such seasons as the night for ejaculation and lifting up our hearts to God in it, as David professes here of himself. (*T. Horton, D.D.*)

*Influential meditation*.—I. IT IS DIRECTED TO THE MOST INFLUENTIAL SUBJECT. Meditation on God.—1. Serves to rouse the intellectual faculties to their highest effort. 2. Serves to prostrate the soul in humility. 3. Serves to spiritualize all the sympathies of our nature. 4. Serves to assimilate the character to the Perfect One. II. IT IS EMPLOYED IN A MOST INFLUENTIAL SEASON. "In the night watches." Night is pre-eminently the season for solemn thought. 1. It gives the mind an inward direction. As all outside of him is thus entombed in silence and sable, his soul becomes solemnly conscious of itself and its responsibility. 2. It gives the mind a solemnity of mood. Night is the emblem and minister of seriousness. A thought which heaves the whole nature with solemn emotions in the night, has often but little influence over us in the day. (*Homilist.*)

*Meditating upon religion*.—The life of God in the soul of man, the Christian life, is marked, amongst other things, by religion gradually gaining possession of the thoughts. It has been said that if we thought about religion as it deserves, we should never think about anything else. Nor can we, with strictness, deny this. For religious concerns do so outweigh all others in their importance and value. The wonder is not that men think so much but so little of it. The cast and turn of our infirm and fleshly nature lean all on the side of our thinking not enough of spiritual things. I. OUR NATURE IS AFFECTED CHIEFLY BY WHAT WE SEE: the unseen has, therefore, but little

power. II. AND WE REGARD THE THINGS OF RELIGION NOT AS NEAR TO US, BUT AS DISTANT. Like children we are affected only by what is present and near. But though this delusion be so general it has no foundation in reason. We do not so act in regard to our worldly affairs. III. THE SPIRITUALITY OF RELIGION ALSO HINDERS OUR THINKING OF IT. All religion which is effectual must be spiritual. But our nature cares not for that which is purely spiritual. Therefore we need to pray for the help of the Spirit of God. (*Archdeacon Puley.*)

Vers. 7, 8. **Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice.**—*The remembrance of past mercies an inducement to present confidence in God:*—This psalm is not one of complaint or sorrow, nor of settled joy, but of the transition from the one to the other. David has just recovered his confidence in God, and feeling assured that his soul will soon find rest and confidence in Him. Believers, now, are often in this state of mind, in this transition state. Oh, let us see to it that we go forward, as David did, and not backward into deeper gloom; for this is possible: we may sink down as well as rise. That we may rise, note how David acted in such case. I. HE STATES A FACT—"Thou hast been my help." And surely we can say this; indeed, we must say it, for the Lord has been our help. When in our sin, He became our Saviour, and by His Holy Spirit turned us to Himself. We have had other helpers, but none such as He. And every true believer recognizes this. Others practically regard themselves as their own real helpers, not God. II. A RESOLUTION FOUNDED ON THE FACT. "Because . . . therefore in the shadow of," etc. "The shadow of Thy wings" signifies the parental protection of God, His watchfulness, love and tenderness. The whole sentence expresses—1. The most assured safety in God. As the chickens deem themselves safe while under the wing of the mother-bird, so are God's people safe under His protection. And not only safe from danger, but hidden from it: it cannot find them. 2. A determination in the psalmist to fly to God for safety. When he says he will rejoice in the shadow of God's wings, he plainly intimates that he will betake himself there (Ps. lvii. 1; cxliii. 9). We are not to look for God's mercy without seeking it. "The name of God is a strong tower," but "the righteous" will, must, "run into it," would he be "safe." The everlasting wings are spread out for us, we must run and keep beneath them would we be safe. 3. An anticipation of pleasure and joy in God's protection. "I will rejoice," not merely be safe, but be happy. He is not going to a shelter he is driven to, but to a home he loves. These two ideas of safety and comfort in God are ever kept together in David's mind (Ps. xxiii. 4; xc. 1). And—4. This resolution is grounded on the fact the psalmist set out with. "Because Thou hast been," etc. It is a poor use to make of God's mercies to get only a present comfort from them; the memory of them ought to be treasured up for use in future trials. III. THE EARNESTNESS WITH WHICH THE PSALMIST CARRIES HIS RESOLUTION INTO EFFECT. "My soul followeth hard after Thee." In affliction we are apt to be languid and wanting in all energy. It seems to say, "If I am to have comfort, the Lord must come and bring it to me, I cannot turn to Him and seek it." But how different David's thought. Oh, let us rouse ourselves, determine to use a holy violence with ourselves when we are in affliction. What we want is such an enjoyment of God as will leave us neither time nor inclination to dwell upon our troubles. Let all remember, there is rest and happiness in God, and especially for every penitent contrite soul. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *The sheltering wing:*—I. WE HAVE A GRATEFUL RECORD. "Thou hast been my help." 1. God awakened us from our folly and sin. 2. God helped us when we sought pardon and deliverance from the burden of sin. 3. And when we have been in despair God has been our help. 4. And when we were without strength, sick, or in peril of ruin. And to render us this help Christ died on the cross. II. IT IS A SAFE SHELTER. "In the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." Likewise the Christian, remembering that God has been his help up to the present time, shelters himself from temptation, trouble, and trial, knowing that He who has delivered him in the past will not leave him in the toils of the present or the hardships of the future. God shelters us from the allurements of this world. We need a shelter from the darkness and trouble of the present life. III. AN EXPRESSION OF JOY. "I will rejoice." O, ye Christians, rejoice, likewise, for God is your Keeper. (*W. Birch.*) *The argument from experience:*—The rejoicing told of here is—I. REASONABLE. "Because"; none can deny this basis of consolation. It is not founded on God's promise—though that could never be broken—but upon past

experience. God has been our help. II. PERSONAL—"My help." III. REAL. It is far more than rest or quiescent peace. The psalms are full of the gladness of the Lord. Much joy is superficial. What depths of melancholy there are in hearts that know not God. IV. RESTFUL. V. PROPHEPIC. What can the future bring for which Christ cannot prepare us? This, then, is to be written on our banners, "In the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." (*W. M. Statham.*) *Experience and assurance*.—I. EXPERIENCE. 1. David had experienced Divine help. The Roman used to speak of *Deus ex machinâ*; God appearing in an unexpected manner in the midst of a history to rescue the hero, and change the scene. This is no figure of speech in the life of faith. Every now and then we have witnessed a distinct interposition, a stretching out of the Divine hand, an inroad of the supernatural. To us has it been true, "He bowed the heavens also, and came down." Others might think our experience fanatical, if we were to tell it as we see it; but this we cannot help. To us it has been a real manifestation of the Divine thoughtfulness on our behalf. Looking back upon our lives, we cannot help saying deliberately, and as cool statement of fact—The Lord has been our help. 2. David had often experienced this help. He does not make this statement in reference to one solitary incident in his life, or he would have said, "Thou wast once my help"; but he sees a continuity in the lovingkindness of the Lord his God. He means, "Thou hast all along been my help." In doing his duty as patriot and king, God was his help, and enabled him to walk uprightly in his government. In his sufferings the Lord was his help, and enabled him to be calm and brave. In the time of danger God was his help, and kept him from the hand of the enemy. And now, in this psalm, though David is in the wilderness of Judah, and probably hunted by his own son, yet he sings unto the Lord, "Thou hast been my help." I do not want you to stop with David any longer. I beg you, now, to come nearer home, and review your own lives. 3. These helps rendered to David had been very choice ones. He had often been helped in special ways. God had taken great care of him. He was the favourite of Providence, and the darling of Heaven. Has it not been so with some of you? Have you not enjoyed choice morsels of experience? Are there not incidents in your life which you could scarcely tell, lest the hearer should smile at your credulity? 4. God's help has also been continuous to us. In the time of our darkness we could not see the link; but, looking back, we can see it now. 5. Observe also that the Lord has granted us educative mercy. David says, "Because Thou hast been my help." He says not, that He has wrought everything for us, but He has set us working also. You see, if you do a thing for a man, it is well; but if you help him to do it, it may be better for him, for thus he learns the way. II. EXPECTATION. 1. What we have experienced of God's goodness is a revelation of Himself: God's actions are Himself in motion. If, then, we have experienced God's power, He is powerful; and we know that anything is possible to Him. If I have experienced His acts of faithfulness, I conclude that He is always faithful, and that He will keep His promise and His covenant, and will be true to all those who trust in Him. 2. This reasoning is good, since you have to do with an unchanging God. If you have changeable man to deal with, there will be no logic in your reasoning; but when you think of Jehovah who changeth not, then you may infer great things, and the severest logic will support you. He was my help, He is my help, and therefore He will be my help, even to the end. 3. This kind of argument is very sure to a man's own self, and he is the person most concerned. We know whom we have believed, and we are persuaded that He will not fail us. We know what we do know; and if we cannot tell it to others, we are none the less sure of it ourselves. 4. It is clear that this is an accumulating argument. The young man who has known the Lord twelve months, and experienced a great deliverance, is sure that the Lord is to be trusted. But when he has passed twenty, thirty, or forty years of the same experience, his assurance will be doubly sure. To a believer in Christ every day teems with providences and mercies. This tree beareth its fruit every month, and the fruit feeds faith wondrously. III. ASSURANCE. 1. Contented assurance. David, grateful for past help, holds himself still, and happily awaits the purpose of the Lord. He manifests no fear, no fret, no hurry, no worry. Neither does he cast his eyes towards man. "Thou hast been my help," saith he; and he looks that way. 2. Patient assurance. It is not ours to hasten the Divine vengeance, nor to wish for a personal triumph; but it is ours to feel the bliss of safety in nearness to God. 3. The assurance of faith. "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore"—what? "In the light of



Thy countenance will I rejoice"? No: he had then but little light; he was "in the shadow." The wilderness cut him off from beholding God in the sanctuary. If you cannot see the face of God, His shadow may give you peace. Lord, I will pray to Thee to lift up the light of Thy countenance upon me; but if Thou dost continue to hide Thyself, I will still trust Thee, and be sure that Thou art the same God of grace. Knowing that Thy shadow is full of defence for me, I will rejoice therein. 4. Continued assurance. We read not, in the shadow of Thy wings have I rejoiced, but, "I will rejoice." He is rejoicing, and means to go on rejoicing. His joy no man taketh from him. He will rejoice so long as he has a God to rejoice in. 5. The best of all is, this is rejoicing assurance. The text does not say "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I trust," but, "in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." That is going further than silent submission, or humble trust. David is in the dark; but, like the nightingale, he sings in it. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *David's experience of God's help*:—I. DAVID'S EXPERIENCE. "Thou hast been my help." 1. This implies his necessity. First, as having much work. Secondly, as having many enemies. Thirdly, as having but little strength. Those which are in these circumstances have need of help to be administered unto them. And this is the case and condition of all Christians. (1) They have much work, a great deal of business to be despatched by them, which they are not able very well to run through of themselves. Take the meanest Christian that is, and in the lowest rank and order amongst men, yet he has work enough to do if it be but to save his own soul, to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world. But if he be anything higher, then it is so much the more; in the family as a master, or in the church as a minister, or as a magistrate in the commonwealth. Here, now, the greater occasions and opportunities that there are of doing good, the greater is the work itself, and the more need of help in it. (2) They have many enemies. These two they do usually and commonly go together. Much work to be done, and many enemies to oppose themselves against it (1 Cor. xvi. 9). (3) They have but little strength, or, indeed none at all. 2. He hath help afforded him by God Himself. (1) He is a strong helper. (2) He is a ready helper. He is a God at hand, and not a God afar off, as the Scripture often expresses Him. When trouble is near, He is near too; which is a matter of very great comfort and encouragement to all those that depend upon Him. (3) He is the only help also. There's none can help without Him, nor, indeed, none besides Him. The improvement of this point to ourselves, in a way of application, comes to this purpose—1. As a word of comfort and consolation to the people of God in all those difficulties and distresses which they are surrounded and encompassed withal; that they have such an One as this to help them, and to relieve them, and to be assistant unto them. 2. We may make use of this point also in a way of excitement, and that to a threefold performance, which is very rationally consequent hereupon. (1) If God help us, let us then also help Him. (2) If God help us, let us then also help ourselves. (3) If God help us, let us then also help one another. II. THE IMPROVEMENT OF THIS EXPERIENCE. 1. David's purpose or resolution, which he takes up to himself. (1) By the shadow of God's wings we are especially to understand His providence and fatherly protection; and we find mention of it often in Scripture (Ps. xvii. 18; lvii. 1; xxxvi. 7). It is an expression of safety. Look, as the chickens are safe while they are under the wings of the hen, even so are God's people safe while they are under His providence and protection; and there is nothing which is such a defence and safeguard and security to them as this indeed is. Those which are kept by Him, they are kept safely, neither shall they need anything to fear in the days of evil and trouble which are upon them. It is an expression of secrecy. The wing hides and conceals those which are kept under it; as it preserves them from danger, so it likewise keeps them from discovery. Thus does likewise this wing of God (Ps. xci. 4; xvii. 8; xxxi. 20; Jer. xxxvi. 28). It is an expression of tenderness and singular affection (Deut. xxxii. 11, 12). (2) While he says that herein he will rejoice, there are these things implied in it, as considerable and pertinent unto it. Recourse unto them. Complacency and contentment in this condition. Thanksgiving and outward expression. 2. The occasion or ground of his resolution; and that is, the experience of God's former goodness to him. This is signified in the connection of these latter words with the former, because, therefore; because Thou hast been my help hitherto, therefore will I rejoice in Thy protection for time to come. Here's the force of David's reasoning; and the reason it holds good upon a twofold consideration. First, in a way of confidence.

Secondly, in a way of acknowledgment. I will trust in Thee, and still wait upon Thee in a way of dependence. And again, "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." That is, I will publish this protection which I have from Thee in a way of thankfulness. According to the first notion so there is this in it, that good Christians do improve former experiences to future dependence. According to the second notion, so there is this in it, that good Christians, where they do receive mercies from God, will be there careful to acknowledge and to be thankful for them. (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *A joyful syllogism*:—I. THE CAUSE. 1. A grateful memory. One glad necessity of the new life is, "Thou shalt remember all the way," etc. Unbelief, on the other hand, has a bad memory (Ps. cvi. 13). 2. A personal possession. "My God." The soul lifts its hand, not to grasp abstract truth, nor a doctrinal system, but a personal God. Mix in holier company, rise to higher employments, the Christian may and shall; but to rise to higher rank is impossible, for here and now we are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. 3. A present joy. How precarious the present life of man! Riches fly, comforts die, friends fail, thrones reel, crowns fall, death levels; but those things which cannot be shaken remain (Heb. xii. 27). II. THE EFFECT. 1. Refuge—ample, accessible, friendly. 2. Rest. The helpless leaning on the helper; the sinful on the sinless; the aching, guilty head, resting on the bosom of Christ. (*Homilist.*) *The saint rejoicing in Divine help*:—I. THE HELP WHICH THE LORD HATH GIVEN AND EXPERIENCE RECORDED. II. THE SHADOW OF THE WINGS IN WHICH THOSE TO WHOM THE LORD HAS BEEN THEIR HELP, HOPE HE WILL BE THEIR HELP IN ALL TIMES TO COME. Here is all that favour, and mercy, and kindness, and good-will toward men, which the cherubims with their wings covering the mercy-seat prefigured. III. THE JOY AND GLADNESS WHICH HOPE OF HELP IN GOD RAISES IN THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS. This arises—1. From what pious men see in the shadow of His wings. In all events and occurrences, they see not instruments, but perfections; not men, but God, sanctifying Himself, and magnifying Himself in exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. This view of His administration, under covert of which they have sheltered themselves, raises and enlivens their joy, and creates and confirms their hopes of all things issuing in His glory and their good. 2. From what they hear (Ps. lxii. 11, 12). 3. From what they believe. Under the wings of the overshadowing providence of God is an eminent seat where His people sit and rejoice in His salvation. 4. From what they receive. The Lord is kind to His people in the shadow of His wings, and lets them want for nothing (Ps. lxxxiv. 11). (*A. Shank.*) *What the Lord is to His people*:—1. A place of refuge. "The shadow of Thy wings." 2. A fountain of joy. The mercy-seat shadowed with the wings of the cherubims brought to his remembrance God, whom he believed to be gracious and merciful, and filled him with joy in committing himself to the care and protection of His overshadowing providence. The same sacred symbol reminds us that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself," and should fill us with all joy and peace in sheltering ourselves under His care and love. 3. A very present help. In believing, in praying, in doing, in suffering, were ye not helped? and it is your duty and honour to acknowledge it to His praise. 4. A quiet and sure habitation. 5. A treasure which faileth not. (*Ibid.*) *Ways in which God helps us*:—This verse, like an old Roman deity, has two faces, one looking backward and the other forward—the backward look of testimony and the forward look of trust. To the Romans, Janus presided over all beginnings; he opened the year, and the first month is called "January" after him. They represented him with two faces because every door looked two ways, and he was the opener. It would be well if we could in our soul-life put this text where the Romans saw Janus. I propose, therefore, to remind you of some of the common, usual ways in which we receive help for life, and to give these facts the religious interpretation, to regard such help as help from God. It is evident, is it not, that we could not start life without help, that we begin in utter dependence? And what is the fact, then? The fact, then, is that other lives are at our service, that when we can do nothing for ourselves everything is done for us. The mother did not make her own heart; the God who gave it her I will adore as One who plans to help me in the most wonderful of all ways. And when you come to do what men call "helping yourself," "making your own way," even then you are only using the various helps which are provided for you. Do you start life on the level on which a child started, say 100,000 years ago? If not, what makes the difference? That difference is made by the upward struggle of humanity from that time to

this, and you are a debtor to every one who contributed to that progress. Every individual has a certain inheritance, a certain capital from the experience of the race. The gains which the ages have won are in some measure worked into the very constitution of your being. Primitive man could not, by any effort, have used his hand for purposes for which you can use yours without difficulty. You have an immense advantage there, and you got it how? Through the gradual growth of skillful manipulation during thousands of years. Natural evolution is the manifestation of mind in method; it is God's way of doing things; it is upward creation. And further. The victories which others have won, the achievements of the past, are not only in some measure worked into the very make of our being, but they also constitute the environment of our life. Do you ever think of the help you get to live through the great privileges of a free press, of free institutions, of freedom in religion? What are all these? Are they not the purchases of the martyr spirit in bygone times? Men went down to death in order to win freedom to worship God. Again. Think of the help you may get from the lessons of personal experience; from your contact with and observation of things and men. There is scarcely a limit to what we can learn in this world. Some lessons we learn in the sunshine and some in the shadow; some in the thousand glories of a summer morning, and the deep eternal peacefulness of a cloudless sky, and some from the scowl of a tempest amid the barren desolation of the wintry blast; some we learn over the cradle in laughter and song and prophecy, and some at the graveside, in mourning and with tears. Now, I want you to think again that in all the lessons you have learned from your joys and your sorrows, from your defeats and your victories, from your hard struggles as well as from your sojourn near the still waters and in the green pastures—in all these God is the one Helper. He gave you a mind to think, a heart to feel, a world to live in, and a spirit greater than the world, able to look out over its boundaries into another. But is there still no other way in which God helps us? I think there is. It is the way which made the old Hebrews speak so much about angels; which made Paul speak of the Lord appearing to him in the night; which makes some men believe in spirits, and others talk of "being struck with an idea," or "having an impression." The great fact behind all these is that man often finds help arising within his soul. He may be quite alone, away from friends; he may not be aware of having been helped by any word or counsel from any one, and yet there in solitude he rises to master his trouble. Could that have happened if that man had been really a mere unit, absolutely cut off from the Universal Life? The question itself is absurd. It is only by virtue of his relation to that Universal Life that the man is a man at all. And that power which rises in him, unmediated so far as he knows, wells up from the eternal fountain of Divine life. (F. R. Williams.)

**Ver. 8. My soul followeth hard after Thee, Thy right hand upholdeth me.—**  
*Endeavour and support:*—I. THE EFFORT WHICH THE CHRISTIAN MAKES. "My soul followeth hard after Thee." This seen in his—1. Uniform obedience to God. This obedience spiritual, of the heart; and universal. 2. Lively faith in the promises. 3. Communion and fellowship with God. Hence he follows hard after God as his guide, his refuge and his portion. Are we doing this? II. THE SUPPORT WHICH THE CHRISTIAN RECEIVES. 1. God delivers their feet from falling, His right hand upholds them. 2. Their hearts from fainting. Learn, then, to love the ordinances of the sanctuary and to improve them; and to ascribe all our good to God. (W. Touse.) *The saint following hard after God:*—I. FOLLOWING AFTER GOD IS THE MOTION OF THE SOUL—1. In knowledge (Hos. vi. 3). The knowledge of the only true God, as God and our God, is the principle and root of piety (John xvii. 3). Lift up thy voice and cry for it. Follow hard after it. Search for it as for silver. Dig for it as for hid treasures. Read daily. Pray fervently. Think seriously. 2. In faith. "Believe in God," saith our Saviour, "believe also in Me." If we believe firmly, we will follow hard after Him. Following hard and believing firmly, is following and believing with vigour, and ardour, and constancy. 3. In love. The love of God shed abroad in the heart kindles in it love to Him; and the love which it kindles, impatient lest it lose sight of Him, follows Him with ardour. It cannot bear the thoughts of distance. It wishes to be near Him, and to enjoy the comfort of His presence. 4. In hope. Are we in prosperity? Let us follow Him in hope of its continuance. Are we in adversity? Let us follow after Him in hope of its removal. Are we in darkness? Let us

follow after Him in hope of light. Are we in danger? Let us follow after Him in hope of salvation. 5. In desire. Desire is the stepping of the soul in the way toward God, the fountain of our blessedness and glory; and the stronger and more lively desire is, our motion in following after Him will be quicker and faster. 6. In obedience. New obedience is the motion of the soul after God in the way of His commandments. 7. In communion. God looks down on His chosen following hard after Him, and they look up to Him. In speaking and hearing. He speaks, and they hear. II. **THE ARDOUR OF THE SOUL FOLLOWING AFTER GOD** which the text expresses by the word "hard," includes—1. Keenness in respect of desire. 2. Diligence in respect of means. 3. Vigour in respect of exertion. With all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. 4. Perseveringly in respect of continuance. 5. Affectionately in respect of complacency and delight. This is ardour in piety. What more concerning it can we say? Alas! it is above our experience. O that the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord were shed abroad more diffusively in our heart by the Holy Ghost! (John vii. 37). III. **THE ENDS AND PURPOSES FOR WHICH PIOUS SOULS FOLLOW HARD AFTER GOD.** 1. That they may see Him in His beauty and glory. 2. That they may be near Him. 3. That they may hear Him. 4. That they may be helped. They have weights to carry which are too heavy for their weakness, and exertions to make in obedience and self-denial which are above their strength. Of themselves they are nothing, and can do nothing but as succoured from above. Believing and feeling their own insufficiency, they would be always near their help. 5. That they may be enriched. God is rich, rich in mercy, rich in goodness, rich in grace; and in following after Him His people are enriched and filled with His goodness. The riches of His glory is their treasury; and Christ having the key that opens it, and authority and power over all it contains, their wants are supplied, and their souls filled with all the fulness of God. 6. That they may be preserved. Their adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour. The world is a numerous and formidable party, devising their hurt. Yet are they in safety, because they follow hard after God their preserver. 7. That they may be brought to His kingdom and glory. He is the breaker up of their way before them, and that they might not err, or go wrong, and come short, He hath appointed the Captain of Salvation their leader and commander. (A. Shanks.) *Holy ardour*:—I. DESCRIBE THIS STATE OF EXPERIENCE. It implies—1. A renunciation of the world. This results from a conviction of its vanity. 2. A deliberate choice of God, as the only adequate good of the soul. 3. A vehement and intense desire after Him. 4. The exercises of faith and hope. II. INVESTIGATE THE REASONS WHY IT IS SO RARE. It is obvious how Christians enjoy this experience. The principal causes of their languor are—1. Inattention to the state of their own hearts. They are not recollected; they do not examine themselves closely. Hence they are ignorant of their real condition, and do not keenly feel their wants. 2. Permitting the objects of sense to make too deep impressions. These naturally tend to blunt the edge of holy desire, and to divide and weaken the soul. 3. Neglect of the instituted means. 4. The indulgence of wrong dispositions, etc. Unbelief, pride, vain curiosity, levity, censoriousness, uncharitable or useless conversation, etc.; all these, like cold water, tend to damp and weaken, if not wholly to extinguish, the desire for God. III. REPRESENT IT AS THE MOST DESIRABLE EXPERIENCE. 1. It is the best security against the allurements and troubles of the world. A heart earnestly pursuing God has no leisure to gaze on the seductive charms of temporal good, and no disposition to pierce itself with the thorns of worldly solicitude. 2. It renders every duty delightful. In this state nothing is done through custom, formality, or any other inferior motive—but every duty is performed with the highest views. 3. It prepares us for the largest communication. We always receive from God what we earnestly and faithfully seek from Him (Luke ii. 9, 10). By this holy fervour the soul throws itself open to receive all the fulness of God—the shoreless, fathomless ocean of good. 4. It advances our sanctification, and consequently qualifies us for glory. (Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.) *The divinity of a true life*:—I. God is the SUPREME OBJECT of a true life. "My soul followeth hard after Thee." 1. As the centre of my affections. I want to fix, settle my heart, with all its varied sympathies and affections, in Thee. Thou art the original centre of my soul; but I have lost Thee, and now my intense desire is to come back to Thee. 2. As the guide of my life. I want a guide; I have lost my way; the path is intricate, perilous, and very dark. 3. As the companion of my heart. I want a friend, some one who understands me, can sympathize with me, calm my agitated nature. My sense of

desolation sinks me like lead, saddens me as a thunder cloud. II. God is the SUSTAINING POWER of a true life. "Thy right hand upholdeth me." 1. "Thy right hand" in the blessings of material nature. 2. "Thy right hand" in the beneficent influence of Providence. 3. "Thy right hand" in the moral forces of the Gospel. It is God's power alone that can sustain the soul in its strugglings after life. (*Homilist.*) *The Christian's pursuit*:—I. WHAT IS IMPLIED. Following hard after God supposes—1. A previous acquaintance with Him. Holy affections are not heat without light, but light and heat combined; the mind is both illuminated and sanctified. 2. Ardent and intense desires. 3. Laborious exertion. 4. Perseverance in seeking. His seeming slights shall only increase their importunity. II. WHY DAVID THUS FOLLOWED HARD AFTER GOD. 1. Guilt and distress followed hard after him. 2. His enemies followed hard after him. 3. He had followed hard after other things to no purpose. 4. We may add, the powerful attractives of divine grace. The reason why David followed after God was, that goodness and mercy followed after him. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *David following God, and upheld by Him*:—I. DAVID'S CARRIAGE TO GOD. 1. The inclination of a Christian's heart to God, and his simple propensity towards Him. There are three notions in which we may look upon God, according to either of which the soul of a Christian is inclined and carried after Him. First, as the Author of nature. Secondly, as the Giver of grace. Thirdly, as the Bestower of glory and eternal life. All these three are considerable in God, and in reference to all of them are a Christian's desires after God, and his soul does propend towards him. 2. A Christian's importunity. A good Christian, if he be in some distance and separation from God for a time, yet cannot long be content to be so. This may be made good unto us according to a twofold explication; whether ye take it of a distance and separation in regard of spirit, a state of spiritual desertion; or whether ye take it of a distance and separation in regard of the means; a deprivation of the public ordinances and ministerial dispensations. A good Christian cannot long content himself in either of these estrangements from God; but while it is thus with him, his soul does follow hard after him. Let us therefore so carry ourselves that we may not provoke God to deal thus with us. It is a great deal better for us, and more kindly, and more to be wished for, that our desires should be carried after these things for the excellency which is in the things themselves, and our own closing with them, than from want and deprival of them. For which cause it concerns us to prevent God, that He may not be forced to deal so with us. 3. A Christian's adherence, "My soul cleaveth to Thee"; so some translations render it; and indeed it is most agreeable to the original text, which signifies to adhere (*Gen. ii. 24; Prov. xviii. 24*). This cleaving implies three things: union as the foundation of it; fastening as the progress of it; perseverance as the accomplishment. Now, to quicken us so much the more to the practice of this present duty, which is here in David's example commended to our imitation, let us further consider this with ourselves, that there is nothing else which is, indeed, fitting for our souls to cleave unto but God alone. II. GOD'S CARRIAGE TO HIM. "Thy right hand," etc. 1. By the right hand of God, we are in one word to understand, His strengthening and confirming grace; which is called His right hand, in regard of the powerfulness of it, and dexterity for the preserving of His people. This is that which (as David here signifies) is extended and stretched forth to this purpose, as to himself, so to all other Christians, "who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation" (*1 Pet. i. 5*). This upholding of God's right hand, thus explained, is often mentioned to us in Scripture (*Ps. cxxxviii. 7; cxxxix. 10; Cant. ii. 6*). And many such places as these, all coming to this purpose, to show unto us God's almighty power and grace in the supportment of His servants. This is seen, and does discover itself especially in two particulars. (1) As to matter of sin, upholds me that I fall not into that. (2) As to matter of affliction, upholds me that I sink not under that. 2. But why is the power of God in His establishing and assisting grace expressed by the name of His "right hand," here and in other places? We may conceive for three reasons especially: (1) As it is a hand of strength, the right hand is such, it has more strength than the other hand has. And so is it with the grace of God. "The right hand of the Lord hath the pre-eminence," as we find it twice there repeated (*Ps. cxviii. 15, 16*); hence, also, called a right hand of power in others (*Matt. xxvi. 64; and Mark xiv. 62*), etc. (2) As it is a hand of readiness, it is more expeditious and ready to be used than the other is, and therefore we express all expediteness by a word taken from hence, which we call dexterity. So is God's

grace where it puts forth itself, it is very ready and expediting, and He Himself is ready presently to use it upon any occasion, for the good of His servants. (3) As an hand of success. It is the right hand so, forasmuch as whatever it takes in hand prospers to it, and does infallibly obtain its effect. (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *The saint upheld by God's right hand*.—I. **THE COURSE OF PIETY**.—1. Begins in reconciliation. 2. Goes along the way of God's commandments. 3. Ends in everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. II. **THE UPHOLDING OF THE SOUL IN FOLLOWING HARD AFTER GOD IN THE COURSE OF PIETY**. 1. The dominion of grace in the soul is maintained. Upheld by almighty strength, it lives and reigns. 2. The dominion of grace in the soul is extended. Under this influence faith increases, hope expands, holiness brightens, and the cross becomes light and easy. 3. The purposes of the heart under the dominion of grace to follow hard after God in the course of piety are accomplished by His upholding the soul with His right hand. III. **THE RIGHT HAND WITH WHICH DAVID BELIEVED HIMSELF TO BE UPHELD**. 1. His power. Upheld by this attribute which is omnipotent, no weight can crush, no calamity can overwhelm, and no enemy can break the purposes of the pious heart, and turn it off the way of God's commandments. What can He not do? what will He not do? what is He not ready to do for those who are upright before Him, and keep the way of His testimonies? 2. His mercy. In the upholding of power, mercy shines; and in the upholding of mercy, power exerts itself gloriously. What upheld you when your foot slipped? was it not mercy? What kept you out of the gulf of despondency? was it not mercy? What succoured you in the hour of temptation? was it not mercy? What strengthened you under burthens and vexations? was it not mercy? Conclusion. 1. In the practice of unfeigned and lively piety there is reward. 2. Pious souls are upheld in their course. 3. Pious souls are sensible of their being upheld by the right hand of power and mercy. 4. Pious souls acknowledge their upholding by the right hand of the Lord to His praise (*A. Shanks*.)

### PSALM LXIV.

**VERS. 1-10. Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy.**—*Man's enmity towards man*.—We see this enmity here in three aspects. I. **PIOUSLY DREADED**. David prays against it. He prays for his own protection. Self-preservation is a natural instinct, and it is right that it should have a religious expression. II. **CHARACTERISTICALLY WORKING**. How does enmity work generally? 1. Clandestinely (ver. 2). Enmity in the heart, like poison in the serpent, has within it the instinct of cunning. 2. Slandrously (vers. 3, 4). "Slander, whose edge," says Shakespeare, "is sharper than a sword." It strikes at the reputation of the foe, and reputation is as dear as life. 3. Plottingly (ver. 5). It lays traps and snares for the foe everywhere—snares by which a man may lose his commercial credit, his domestic peace, his social reputation. 4. Diligently (ver. 6). Enmity is not dormant or lazy, nor a spasmodic agent, it is systematically and persistently active: it pursues its victim, tracks him until it finds him out, however labyrinthian the course. III. **DIVINELY THWARTED**. "God shall shoot at them with an arrow." 1. Unawares (ver. 7). Divine judgment will strike at the malignant man when he least expects it. 2. By its own agency (ver. 8). The malicious man must destroy himself. This is God's law (Job v. 12, 13). 3. In such a way as shall make an impression upon all (vers. 9, 10). What David here predicates of his enemies applies to all malignant men. Divine retribution will overtake them; they shall be baffled, thwarted, confounded, ruined. (*Homilist*.)

**Ver. 5. They say, Who shall see them?**—*Omniscience ignored*.—I. It is a fact that this notion has great influence upon the conduct of man. They like to cherish such notion, finding it convenient. Because they sometimes escape the eye of man, they think it possible to escape the eye of God. The sinner persuades himself that he has gained his end, escaped observation and avoided the punishment. II. It is a fact that this notion is utterly untruthful and delusive.

If God exist, this must be so. The spirituality of His nature makes possible His omnipresence and omniscience. III. GOD HAS OFTEN EXPOSED THIS DELUSION, and the time is fixed for the complete demonstration. 1. Character is often seen through by man. 2. Retribution often follows men's deeds here and now. 3. The future state will show that God saw all. (*Homiletic Magazine.*)

Vers. 9, 10. **And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of His doing.**—*Preservation from enemies*:—I. AN ACT OF GOD. His enemies were strong and powerful, but God was omnipotent, and in Him was his help and trust; they designed his utter ruin, but God turned their mischief upon their own heads. 1. The suddenness of their destruction. 2. The manner of the discovery, and prevention of his danger. II. ITS EFFECT UPON MEN IN GENERAL. 1. Fear, which naturally arises in men's minds upon the apprehensions of God's irresistible power and greatness; for whom has an arm like God? or who can thunder with a voice like Him? yea, who can hear His voice and not tremble? or see His hand stretched out and not be afraid? "All men shall fear," but fear alone will not profit us; for the devils tremble before the power they hate, and wicked men may dread God's vengeance, where they are unwilling to see His hand; and therefore here follows another effect, which such signal actions have upon men. 2. "They shall declare the work of God." And this is an effect as general and large as the other, though upon different accounts; for even they who are unwilling to own it shall be forced to acknowledge it, and they for whose sake it is done shall rejoice to publish it. 3. "They shall wisely consider of His doing." That is, they shall better understand the method of God's proceedings, and the reasons of His dealings in the world; for these things make it plain that God takes care of the affairs of His people, and that the enemies of His Church shall not be able to prevail against her. III. A DUTY RESULTING FROM ALL THESE CONSIDERATIONS, AND CHIEFLY INCUMBENT ON GOOD MEN. 1. "The righteous shall be glad in the Lord." A duty no less easy than pleasant, and that which we all seem to covet most; that which we eagerly pursue as the best of this world's satisfaction, joy and rejoicing. 2. "The righteous shall trust in Him." And good reason indeed to trust in Him, of whose favour and lovingkindness we have had so large experience; well may we rely on that power which is so able to protect us; well may we depend on that providence which so remarkably takes care of us. 3. "All the upright in heart shall glory." They shall glory in His strength, and triumph in His favour. But that is not all; they shall glory in the confusion of the wicked, and rejoice in the continual disappointment of such treacherous designs. (*H. Dove, D.D.*) *Providential deliverance*:—I. The necessity there is of attention and CONSIDERATION, to discover the hand of God, and the manner of its working, in those events of which we are informed either by history, or our own experience.—"They shall consider of His doing." II. THE WISDOM OF thus considering—"They shall wisely consider of His doing." III. CERTAIN MARKS WHEREBY WE MAY AT ANY TIME DISCERN AN ESPECIAL PROVIDENCE. Diligently to mark, and carefully to treasure up in our minds, the special providences of the Almighty, is the way to preserve and nourish our faith and hope in Him; it furnishes the grounds of our thankfulness and praise; it stirs up our finest feelings and very best affections toward Him; holy joy, humble reverence, and hearty love; it supports us under all our sufferings; and affords us comfort in all our sorrows. (*Bishop Horne.*) **All the upright in heart shall glory.**—"All the upright in heart shall glory":—I. THE DISPOSITIONS OF THE PERSONS. "All the upright in heart," and then, THE RETRIBUTION upon these persons, "They shall glory," or, they shall be celebrated, they shall be praised. In the first, the qualification of the persons, we shall pass by these steps; first, that God in His punishments and rewardings proposes to Himself persons. God does not begin at a retribution, nor begin at a condemnation, before He have persons, persons fit to be rewarded, persons fit to be condemned. God did not first make a heaven and a hell, and after think of making man, that He might have some persons to put in them; but, first for His glory He made man, and for those, who, by a good use of His grace preserved their state, heaven; and for those who, by their own fault fell, He made hell. And, in the qualifications of these persons, He proposes first a rectitude, a directness, an uprightness; declinations downward, deviations upon the wrong hand, squint-eyed men, left-handed men (in a spiritual sense), He meddles not withal. They must be direct, and upright; and then, "upright in heart"; for, to be good to ill ends (as, in many cases, a man may be), God accepts not, regards

not. But, let him be a person thus qualified, "upright," upright because he loves uprightness, "upright in heart"; and then, he is infallibly embraced in that general rule, and proposition, that admits no exception. All the upright in heart shall be partakers of this retribution; and in these branches we shall determine our first part, first, that God proposes to Himself persons; persons thus and thus qualified; He begins at them. Secondly, that God had rather dwell Himself, and propose to us the considerations of good persons, than bad, of His mercies, than His judgments, for He mentions no other here, but persons capable of His retributions; and then, the goodness that God considers, is rectitude, and rectitude in the root, in the heart; and from that root grows that spreading universality, that infallibility. All such are sure of the reward. And then, in our second part, in the reward itself, though it be delivered here in the whole bar, in the ingot, in the wedge, in bullion, in one single word, *Gloriabuntur, Laudabuntur*, they shall glory, yet it admits this mintage, and coining, and issuing in lesser pieces, that first we consider the thing itself, the metal in which God rewards us, glory, praise; and then, since God's promise is fastened upon that (we shall be praised), as we may lawfully seek the praise of good men, so must we also willingly afford praise to good men, and to good actions. And then, since we find this retribution fixed in the future (we shall be praised, we shall be in glory), there arises this consolation, that though we have it not yet, yet we shall have it; though we be in dishonour, and contempt, and under a cloud, of which we see no end ourselves, yet there is a determined future in God, which shall be made present, we shall overcome this contempt, we shall glory, we shall be celebrated; in which future the consolation is thus much farther exalted, that it is an everlasting future; the glory, and praise, the approbation which we shall receive from good men here, shall flow out and continue to the hosannas in heaven, in the mouth of saints, and angels, and to the "Well done, good and faithful servant," in the mouth of God Himself. (*John Donne, D.D.*) *Gladness in God*:—It is only where there is much faith and consequent love that there is much joy. If there is but little heat about the bulb of the thermometer, no wonder that the mercury marks but a low degree. If there is but small faith, there will not be much gladness. The road into Giant Despair's castle is through doubt, which doubt comes from an absence—a sinful absence—in our own experience, of the felt presence of God, and the felt force of the verities of the Gospel. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

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#### PSALM LXV.

**VERS. 1-13. Praise waiteth for Thee, O God, in Zion: and unto Thee shall the vow be performed.**—*A harvest hymn*:—This is a psalm of thanksgiving for plentiful rain, falling at the critical time in a year of drought and ensuring a plentiful harvest. To an agricultural people this was a memorable mercy. **I. THE ATTITUDE OF THE WORSHIPPERS** (vers. 1-4). The opening words, "Praise is silent for Thee, O God, in Zion," describe the hush of a multitude just ready to burst forth in song. The air is full of an intention which has not yet expressed itself, but it will utter its thought immediately, because the nation has assembled to perform the vows made during the drought, when dearth was feared. The worshippers acknowledge their dependence on the Hearer of prayer: they are part of frail humanity ("all flesh"), which can never be equal to its own requirements, but must ever be dependent on a higher Power. But there is a still deeper cause for humility, which ought always to be kept in mind when an approach is made to God: "Iniquities," says the psalmist, "prevail against me." What mortal has ever existed who did not require to say so? Iniquities press in from without and they press outwards from within; and man is not able to withstand their force. Yet the psalmist has discovered the secret: "As for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away." God can overcome this terrible force, by blotting out the guilt of past sin and breaking the power of present sin. And the next verse supplies a description of the blessedness of those who, thus liberated, have free access to the throne of the Divine grace and full enjoyment of its privileges. **II. THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP** (vers. 5-8). He is not a God unknown, but in all the



centuries of the history of Israel has shown Himself mighty on behalf of His people, by acts of salvation which have struck terror into their enemies. And not only in the events of history has His power from time to time been shown; it is exhibited continually in the great aspects of nature. III. A PICTURE OF PLENTY (vers. 9-13). After weeks of rainless weather, when the hearts of the husbandmen were quaking with fear, the showers, earnestly prayed for, had come at last. In the clouds sweeping over the landscape the happy inhabitants saw the footsteps of the passing Deity dropping fatness as He went. Hill and dale and wilderness had all partaken of the benefit. The flocks were full of life on the mountain sides and the fields and the valleys stood in all the bravery of healthy and abundant crops; till it seemed to the poet as if a great shout of joy were going up from all the revived objects in the landscape to the heaven from which the blessing had come. (*J. Stalker, D.D.*) *God as He appears in human history*:—I. GOD AS HE APPEARS IN HUMAN HISTORY. 1. As a prayer-answering God (ver. 2). That this title belongs to Him as He appears in human life is—(1) Suggested by universal consciousness. (2) Proved by the universal experience of the good. (3) Declared by the mouth of God Himself. "Call upon Me," etc. "Ask, and ye shall receive," etc. 2. As a man-needed God. Sooner shall the Mississippi keep away from the ocean or the earth from circling round the sun, than your soul keep away from your Maker. 3. As a sin-removing God (ver. 8). 4. As a world-trusted God (ver. 5). (1) All men require some object to trust in. They must lean on something. (2) Their condition, whether happy or otherwise, depends on the object they trust. The great misery of man is, that he rests on the unworthy, the changeable, and the insecure. (3) The only safe object of trust is God. II. GOD AS HE APPEARS IN HUMAN HISTORY, WORSHIPPED. 1. The kind of worship. "Praise waiteth for Thee, O God, in Zion." Are we to understand "waiteth," in the sense of silence? Then the essence of worship is silent—it is in the profoundest thoughts, the deepest feelings, the strongest aspirations, which are independent of language or sound. The deepest things of the soul are unutterable. 2. The blessedness of worship (ver. 4). The idea is, fellowship with God, going into His courts, dwelling in His temple. (1) The fellowship is chosen. "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest." What a distinction is thus put on man! No other creature in the world can hold fellowship with the Infinite. (2) The fellowship is permanent. "Dwell in Thy house." Not a mere visitant for a terminable period. But a resident so long as existence endures. (3) The fellowship is satisfying. "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house." This is, and nothing else, the satisfaction of the soul. "In Thy presence is fulness of joy." (*Homilist.*) *Praises and vows accepted in Zion*:—Upon Zion there was erected an altar for the offering of sacrifices. Burnt offering was only to be offered there. In fulfilment of this type, "we have an altar whereof they have no right to eat that serve the tabernacle." There is but one altar, Jesus Christ our Lord. I. THE HOLY OFFERING OF WORSHIP WHICH WE DESIRE TO PRESENT TO GOD. There is—1. Praise. It is the chief part of the worship of heaven, and therefore should be much regarded upon earth. It is to be rendered only to God. "For Thee, O God." For Thee only, and for Thee all. Not to virgins, or saints. And our praise is not to be formal, of lips and sound, but of the soul. And let it be continual—"waiteth for Thee." And humble; let it wait as the servants wait in the king's palace. And let it be expectant: on the look-out for more of God's blessings. What abundant reason we have for praise. Mercies temporal and spiritual. 2. The vow. "Unto Thee shall the vow be performed." We are not given to vow-making in these days. But there have been some we have made. At our conversion, at our uniting ourselves to the Church of God; when we entered on our work as Christian ministers; and, perhaps, in times of affliction. Let us keep them. II. THE BLESSED ENCOURAGEMENT. 1. God hears prayer. "O Thou that hearest prayer." 2. And all prayer, if it be true. "Unto Thee shall all flesh come." 3. Let none of us exclude ourselves. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Zion's praise ready for her Lord*:—If not always soaring we may be as birds ready for an instant flight, always with wings, if not always on the wing. Our hearts should be like the beacons made ready to be fired. When invasion was expected in the days of Queen Elizabeth, piles of wood and combustible material were laid ready on the tops of certain hills, and watchmen stood prepared to kindle the piles should there be notice given that the ships of the enemy were in the offing. Everything was in waiting. The heap was not made of damp wood, neither had they to go and seek kindling; but the fuel waited for the match. The watch-fire was not always blazing, but it was

always ready to shoot forth its flame. Have ye never read, "Praise waiteth for Thee, O God, in Zion"? So let our hearts be prepared to be fired with adoring praise by one glimpse of the Redeemer's eyes. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

**Ver. 2. O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come.**—*God's hearing of prayer:*—What avails prayer if it be not heard? But the text comforts us by the title it ascribes to God, and by the effect that the belief of it shall have upon all flesh. God in Christ is the hearer of prayer. I. **WHEREIN GOD'S HEARING OF PRAYER LIES.** This involves—1. His accepting of our prayer (Ps. cxli. 2). But some prayer God hates (Prov. xxviii. 9). 2. His granting the request (Ps. xx. 1, 4; Matt. xv. 28). 3. His answering of prayer (Ps. cii. 2). Prayer heard in heaven comes back like the dove with the olive branch of peace in her mouth. II. **THE IMPORT OF GOD'S BEING THE HEARER OF PRAYER.** It imports—1. God in Christ is accessible to poor sinners (2 Cor. v. 19). 2. He is a sin-pardoning God (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7). 3. He is an all-sufficient God. 4. Bountiful and compassionate (Ps. lxxxvi. 5). 5. Omnipresent and omniscient, and—6. Of infinite power. III. **WHAT PRAYERS THEY ARE THAT GOD HEARS.** 1. Those of His own children. 2. Such as are agreeable to His will (1 John v. 14). 3. Made by the aid of the Holy Spirit. None else are acceptable. And—4. Prayers offered to God through Christ. IV. **CONSIDER MORE PARTICULARLY THIS DOCTRINE.** 1. The instinct of prayer in all God's people shows that He will hear prayer. 2. And so does the intercession of Christ (Rom. viii. 34). 3. Promises (Matt. vii. 7; Isa. lxv. 24; Ps. cxlv. 19). 4. Invitations to prayer (Cant. ii. 14; Hosea v. ult.; Ps. l. 15; Isa. xli. 17). 5. The gracious nature of God (Exod. xxii. 27). 6. The experiences of the saints in all ages. 7. The present ease and relief which prayer gives (Ps. cxxxviii. 3; 1 Sam. i. 18; Micah vii. 7). V. **IN WHAT MANNER GOD HEARS PRAYER.** 1. A thing prayed for may be obtained and yet the prayer be not accepted (Ps. lxxviii. 29; 34–38). So that a thing prayed for may be given in downright wrath (Hos. xiii. 11). Or in uncovenanted condescension. As Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 29; also Hos. xi. 3). 2. Whether answers come in the way of grace or not may be discerned. They do not when there is a wilfulness and unhumbleness of spirit in asking (1 Sam. viii. 19). Or when men's lusts are strengthened and fed by them when received (Ps. lxxviii. 29, 30). Or when men ask on the ground of their necessity more than on the intercession of Christ. The heart loves the gift more than the giver. But a prayer may be accepted and yet not granted. So was it with our Lord (Matt. xxvi. 39). And David (2 Chron. vi. 8, 9). And such prayers are ever submissive to God's will (Matt. xxvi. 39); they contain in the denial of them an unseen greater mercy; and even aim at the glory of God. And though unanswered we may know they are accepted when the heart is brought to meek submission (Ps. xxii. 2, 3); and we are supported under the denial, as our Lord was (Luke xxii. 42, 43; Ps. cxxxviii. 3). And helped to go back to God with new petitions in faith and hope of hearing (2 Sam. xii. 20). Let us remember that delay is not denial. Abraham prayed for an heir, yet fifteen years passed before the answer came (Gen. xv. 3, 4; xvii. 25; Exod. ii. 23, 24; Dan. ix. 23). There is a difference between the granting of a petition and our knowing that it is granted. They may come together, as in Matt. xv. 28. But, as with Abraham, they may not. The hearing and granting of prayer is an object of faith; the answer, of sense and feeling (1 John v. 14, 15; Matt. xv. 28). But the two are generally at a distance from one another. And the reason of this is manifold. 1. To keep us at the throne of grace (Prov. xv. 8; Cant. ii. 14). 2. To try our graces (Jas. i. 12; Joh. xxvii. 10; Luke xviii. 7). God delights in our faith. 3. To prepare and fit us for the answer (Ps. x. 17). 4. That we may have them at the fittest time, and when they will do us most good (John xi. 14, 15; ii. 4). (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *Encouragements to prayer:*—I. **FROM ITS NATURE.** 1. It is a spiritual thing; not any mere outward form, but the soul seeing the invisible, grasping the intangible and linking itself by sacred affinities with things eternal. 2. Consider also its dignity, it holds correspondence with the court of heaven. 3. And how important. For how unspeakably great is our need, and we can only gain supply for them as we seek it from God. II. **FROM THE PLIGHTED FAITHFULNESS OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER TO HEAR AND ANSWER IT.** How, in face of all God's promises to hear us, can we doubt the success of our prayers? Objections against prayer lie equally against all human endeavour. God will give good things to them that ask Him, but only He can say what things are good. They may be such as we deem anything but good. Many have been laid on beds of languishing to save

them from a bed of everlasting burnings. And when the time for the blessings we ask for may be, we cannot know, nor fix the rate of their progress towards us.

III. THE SUGGESTING AND CONTROLLING INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE ACT OF DEVOTION. IV. THE CO-OPERATING INTERCESSIONS OF OUR ASCENDED SAVIOUR, and the security we have in the use of His all-prevailing name. Oh! could the recording angel give you back an exact copy even of this morning's prayers—a copy in which all the thoughts which passed through your mind while in the act of devotion should be translated into words,—how shocked would ye be at the intermixture of piety and profaneness, of reverent expressions and solemn trifling, with which ye insulted the majesty and provoked the patience of the holiest and best of beings. Wherefore was it, then, that ye were not consumed? Oh! it was that Jesus, "touched with a feeling of our infirmities," stood in the gap between us.

V. THE REFLECTIVE BENEFIT WHICH, APART FROM DIRECT ANSWERS TO OUR PRAYERS, COMES TO OUR SOULS. If a man do not move God he is sure to move himself. (*Daniel Moore, M.A.*) *The answerableness and the inevitableness of prayer.*—I. THE ANSWERABLENESS OF PRAYER. Hearing, here, means answering. He hears millions of prayers He never answers. The grand reason is, that the prayers are selfish.

1. The mind in this state looks upon God's universe in new aspects. 2. Turns all events to new accounts. II. THE INEVITABLENESS OF PRAYER. "Unto Thee shall all flesh come." "Flesh" here means mankind. As all waters must find their way into the ocean, so all souls must find their way to God, sooner or later. Two things necessitate this.

1. Internal instincts. In all sentient existences there would seem at times to be something like an instinct of prayer. 2. External circumstances necessitate prayer. Men suppress the instinct, and sometimes make it well-nigh numb as death. But in the presence of a great danger, a great sorrow, a great grief, it bounds into earnest life. (*Homilist.*) *On prayer.*—1. The nature of prayer supposes, in the first place, that we have a just sense of our own wants and miseries, and of our dependence on God for relief. We live in a world where everything around us is dark and uncertain. When we look back on the past, we must remember that there we have met with much disappointment and vanity. When we look forward to the future, all is unknown. We are liable there to many dangers which we cannot foresee; and to many which we foresee approaching, yet know not how to defend ourselves against them. We know that we are the subjects of a supreme righteous Governor, to whom we are accountable for our conduct. How soon the call for our removal may be given, none of us know. Who amongst us can say, that he is perfectly ready to appear before his Creator and Judge, and to give an account to Him for all the actions of his life? 2. Thus it appears that there is a just foundation for prayer, in all its parts, naturally laid in the present circumstances of man, and in the relation in which he stands to God. (1) With regard to temporal blessings, though men may lay a restraint upon themselves in the expressions which they utter in prayer, yet it is much to be suspected that the inward wishes of their hearts for such blessings are often the most fervent of any. To wish and pray for the advantages of life is not forbidden. Our Saviour hath so far countenanced it, as to command us to pray that God would give us our daily bread. (2) With regard to spiritual mercies, we are unquestionably allowed to be more fervent and explicit in our requests at the throne of grace. God can never be displeased in hearing us implore from Him those graces and endowments of the soul, that beautify us in His sight, that are good for all men, good at all times, indeed, the only certain and immutable goods. (3) Intercessions for the welfare of others form a material part of prayer. When we bow our knee to the common Father, let it be like affectionate members of His family, desiring the prosperity of all our brethren. 3. In order that prayer may produce its proper effect, there are certain qualifications necessarily belonging to it, which come next to be considered. (1) One of the first and chief of these is seriousness, or an attentive and solemn frame of mind, in opposition to thoughts that wander, and to words that drop forth unmeaning from the lips. (2) To seriousness, we must join affection in prayer; I mean that devotion of the heart which is inspired by gratitude and love, in distinction from forced prayer, or what is unwillingly preferred from servile fear, or mere regard to decency. (3) Faith is another qualification required. We acknowledge our guilt; we disclaim all trust in our own righteousness; and implore grace from God on account of what His Son has done and suffered for us. 4. Having thus pointed out the chief qualifications of prayer, it remains that I show the importance and advantages of it. (1) Prayer is one of the most powerful means of

recalling our minds from the vanities of life to serious thoughts; to a proper sense of God and our duty; and to all the high objects with which we are intimately connected as rational and immortal beings. (2) Prayer is useful, not only as a corrective of our natural levity and forgetfulness of God, but as an actual exercise of the best affections of our nature, which are thereby confirmed and strengthened. It implies the highest sentiments of reverence and adoration, of love and gratitude to God, of trust in His mercy, and of faith in our blessed Redeemer, all animating the heart. (3) Prayer is important, not only as a means of high improvement in religion, but as an instrument of consolation and relief under the distresses of life. (*H. Blair, D.D.*) *The prayer-hearing God*:—God not only hears prayer, but glories in so doing. He derives His fame, His character from it. For, think how constantly, readily and certainly He hears prayer. Hence, the psalmist declares, "Unto Thee shall all flesh come." It speaks not of God on the judgment-seat; all shall seek unto Him. Let us then make known God as the prayer-hearing God, and let us, more and more, come to Him ourselves. (*W. Jay.*)

Ver. 3. *Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away.*—*Sin overcoming and overcome*:—There is an intended contrast in these two clauses, between man's impotence and God's power in the face of the fact of sin. The first clause might be translated, "iniquities are too strong for me"; and the "Thou" of the next clause is emphatically expressed in the original, "as for our transgressions" (which we cannot touch), "Thou shalt purge them away." Despair of self is the mother of confidence in God; and no man has learned the blessedness and the sweetness of God's power to cleanse who has not learnt the impotence of his own feeble attempts to overcome his transgression. The very heart of Christianity is redemption. Only he who knows the cruel bondage of sin understands and appreciates the meaning and the brightness of the Gospel of Christ. He was called Jesus because He should "save His people from their sins." So here we have our own hopelessness and misery, but also our confidence in the Divine help. I. THE CRY OF DESPAIR. "Too strong for me," and yet they are me. Me, and not me; mine, and yet, somehow or other, my enemies, although my children—too strong for me. The picture suggested by the words is that of some usurping power that has mastered a man, laid its grip upon him so that all efforts to get away from the grasp are hopeless. But some of you say, "We were never in bondage to any man." You do not know or feel that anything has got hold of you which is stronger than you. Well, let us see. Consider for a moment. You are powerless to master your evil, considered as habits. You do not know the tyranny of the usurper until a rebellion is got up against him. As long as you are gliding with the stream you have no notion of its force. Turn your boat and try to pull against it, and when the sweat-drops come on your brow, and you are sliding backwards, in spite of all your struggles, you will then know the force of the stream. Did you ever try to cure some trivial bad habit, some trick of your fingers, for instance? You know what infinite pains and patience and time it took you to do that, and do you think that you would find it easier if you once set yourself to cure that lust, say, or that petulance, pride, passion, dishonesty? Any honest attempt at mending character drives a man to this—"Iniquities are too strong for me." And so also it is with sin regarded as guilt. You cannot rid yourself of it. What is done is done. "What I have written I have written." Nothing will ever wash that little lily hand white again, as the magnificent murderess in Shakespeare's great creation found out. You can forget your guilt; you can ignore it. You do not take away the rock because you blow out the lamps of the lighthouse. And you do not alter an ugly fact by ignoring it. I beseech you, as reasonable men and women, to open your eyes to these plain facts about yourselves, that you have an element of demerit and liability to consequent evil and suffering which you are perfectly powerless to touch or to lighten in the slightest degree. II. THE RINGING CRY OF CONFIDENT HOPE. Jesus Christ, when trusted, will do for sin, as habit, what cannot be done without Him. He will give the motive to resist, which is lacking in the majority of cases. He will give the power to resist, which is lacking in all cases. He will put a new life and spirit into our nature which shall strengthen and transform our feeble wills. The only way to conquer the world, the flesh, and the devil, is to let Christ clothe you with His armour. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Iniquities*:—I. THE LANGUAGE OF COMPLAINT—"Iniquities prevail," etc. They may do so—1. In the growing sense of our

guilt. As light increases, we see them more and more. 2. In the power of their acting. This prevalence cannot be entire, for sin shall not have dominion over the believer in Christ. He may be bruised, but he is not enslaved. II. OF TRIUMPH. The Lord purges away our transgressions. 1. By His pardoning mercy. 2. By His sanctifying grace. And that He will do this the Christian is confidently persuaded. (W. Jay.)

Ver. 4. **Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts.**—*Worship*:—This psalm includes a thanksgiving for God's bounties in Providence, for the beauties of spring, and the natural supply of man's wants; but the privileges of the sanctuary are here made a special subject of grateful acknowledgment. I. THE PSALMIST HERE COMMENDS PUBLIC WORSHIP.—1. As a peculiar privilege. "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest and causest to approach unto Thee." The opportunity of enjoying such an approach is not given to all, but brings special responsibility to those to whom God grants it. 2. As an approach unto God. God is never far from us, but when we meet in His courts we are able more distinctly to realize His nearness to us. We often have a deep and glad sense of His presence. 3. As the finding a new home. "That he may dwell in Thy courts." There may be a reference here, as in other psalms, to the Levites who literally dwelt there that they might attend to the performances of the services; but the latter part of this verse implies that David claimed for himself a share in the privilege. The thought is—"we, as dwellers in the courts of the Lord, shall be satisfied." 4. As an abundant provision. Here the wants both of the mind and of the heart are met. 5. As a holy service. II. GENERAL REMARKS ON PUBLIC WORSHIP. 1. It is valuable for testimony. Christians thus witness for Christ, and confess their faith. 2. For its associations. What memories cluster round the sanctuaries where we have worshipped! 3. For communion with one another. Thus we are helped by association one with the other in the various acts of worship. 4. For the worship itself in its various parts—prayer, instruction, praise. Then, let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and let us seek to make the highest use of the ordinances of religion. (Anon.) *The blessedness of approaching to God*:—Who is the happiest man? The miser says, Blessed is the man whose corn and wine are increased. The sensualist says, Blessed is he who has no Lord over him, and who walks after the ways of his heart, and the sight of his eyes, without the least control from any laws, human or divine. The ambitious man says, Blessed is he who is highest in favour at court; who is admitted to the confidence of his prince. But, "Blessed is the man," says David (and so says every Christian), "whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee." I. EXPLAIN THE NATURE OF THIS APPROACH TO GOD. 1. Consider what it is not. It is not bowing the knee, and saying a prayer, and putting on an appearance of seriousness at particular times; it is not going often to the house of the Lord, and coming and sitting before Him as His people; the humble, self-condemned publican, that stood afar off, approached nearer to God than the Pharisee, though he confidently pushed forward to the holy of holies. To approach Him is an act of the mind, not of the body. God is a spirit, and they that worship Him acceptably, must do it not merely with a bended knee, and a loud voice, and an uplifted eye, or a head hanging down like a bulrush. These things are comparatively indifferent; if unaccompanied with sincerity, they are worse than indifferent; they are offensive and abominable to God, who will be worshipped in spirit and in truth. II. IN WHAT DOES THE BLESSEDNESS OF APPROACHING TO GOD CONSIST? In the honour, the pleasure, the profit we enjoy. III. THE HINDRANCES TO SUCH APPROACH. 1. Sin, this destroys our communion with God until we repent and return to Him. 2. The world. 3. Satan. (S. Lavington.) *The happiness of saints*:—The saints of God are blessed—I. IN FEELING THE JOYS OF DEVOTION. II. IN OBTAINING THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN. III. IN FINDING A RETREAT FROM AFFLICTION. IV. IN THE ANTICIPATION OF A BETTER WORLD. As the mariner who has been long tossed on a troubled ocean, or detained in a foreign country, is desirous to revisit his native shore, and, when he first discovers the hoary rocks of the green isle rising with rugged grandeur above the waves, his eye beams with joy; so the saint who has been sojourning many a tedious year in a waste howling desert, pants to behold the beauty of paradise, and darts his eye radiant with rapture towards the delightful abode. (T. Laurie, D.D.) *The blessedness of approaching to God*:—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY APPROACHING TO GOD. There was a time when the Lord came down and con-

versed with man, as one friend does with another, when no thunder, and lightning, and tempest accompanied him, and when no conscious guilt inspired the human breast with terror; and a time will come again, dark and disconsolate though our condition now be, when the veil shall be removed, and we shall so behold the glory of the Lord, as to be completely changed into the same image. Now, sin interposes a dark cloud betwixt us and our God, so that we can have but a very imperfect view of His glory and majesty. "We see as through a glass darkly." There are seasons, however, when the Christian is admitted, as it were, within the veil, when he sees the King in His beauty, and enjoys that delightful communion with Him, which is a foretaste of the heavenly bliss. II. WHEREIN THE HAPPINESS OF APPROACHING TO GOD CONSISTS. 1. It is the highest honour; far superior to every dignity, an honour compared to which all the pomp and splendour of earthly greatness dwindle into insignificance. 2. It is a pleasure. God is the chief good. He is the source of life, and joy, and happiness. To go, therefore, to Him, and draw our enjoyments pure from the fountain from which they flow, must be peculiarly gratifying to every person who can properly distinguish between good and evil. 3. It is highly profitable. III. OBSTACLES THAT PREVENT OUR APPROACHING TO GOD. 1. The corruption of our own heart. This may be regarded as the first and greatest of all, because while this continues unsubdued, we cannot advance a single step in our journey to heaven; whereas, if this be overcome, none of the rest will be able to obstruct our progress. 2. The world. (1) How many, oppressed with the cares of this life, are wholly unconcerned about the joys of the life that is to come! (2) How many are the slaves of unhallowed lusts! The world holds out to them the intoxicating cup of forbidden pleasures; they drink it, and the luscious draught diffuses its baneful influence over the soul. (3) How many are deterred from the service of God by the fear of suffering! They would willingly serve God if they could do it with safety; but they cannot think of submitting to difficulties and trials in His service. 3. Another obstacle in the way of our approaching to God, is Satan. He is the deceiver and the destroyer. Lessons—1. They who do not approach to God will perish. 2. The value of the privilege we possess, of approaching to God in the ways of His appointment. 3. It is only through the mediation of Jesus Christ that we can approach to God. (*John Ramsey, M.A.*) *Delight in the presence of God*:—A nervous clergyman, who could only compose to advantage when absolutely alone and undisturbed, left his door unlocked, and his little three-year-old child softly opened the door and came in. He was disturbed, and a little impatiently asked, "My child, what do you want?" "Nothing, papa." "Then what do you come in here for?" "Just because I wanted to be with you," was the reply. To come into God's presence and wait before Him, wanting nothing but to be with Him—how such an hour now and again would rest us.

**Ver. 5. By terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us, O God of our salvation.**—*God's terrible things*:—Now, it is here we are to ponder such things, and to seek a solution of these mysteries. We have all had to do with them at one time or another. Holy men of old have known them (Isa. xxvi. 8–11; Ps. xlv. 4; Isa. lxiv. 1, 3, 4). I. GOD HAS HERE AND NOW HIS TERRIBLE THINGS, NOT THEY ARE ALSO RIGHTEOUS THINGS (Ps. xcvi. 8; Prov. xvi. 4). If God has terrible things, as the exhibition of His righteousness and His power, so also men become sometimes terrible things, objects of terror, and I know of nothing so terrible as a hard, and impenitent, and proud heart. But God is love! I feel that, but few arguments have convinced me of it; it is in my own consciousness, it is affirmed to me; but nature is so cruel I know not how to hang much consolation upon the compensations and kindnesses of natural theology, and Paley's celebrated assurance that "it is a happy world, after all!" But, alas, the world is one great calamity, and the contradictions to the assurance that God is love meet us in every age. It is thus I am often compelled to say, how perfect things are, how perplexing and cruel events are. What do you see? In one age a city ablaze beneath the calm and beautiful mountains and skies. I remember, years since, visiting, one bright mocking day, a village on the coast, near the scene of the horrible tragedy of Hartley; you come to it as you walk along that fine coast from Tynemouth; a quiet little village, called Cullercoats. I forget how many boats had been lost in the wild tempest, a night or two since; there was a sob of agony in every house. I did not think of Paley's selfish aphorism, "It's a happy world, after all!" just then, although the sea was bright, and birds were sailing

peusively overhead: rather should I have said, "By terrible things dost Thou answer us, O God." Natural theology has little to say in reply to such scenes as these. II. **THE TERRIBLE THINGS OF GOD ARE NOT ONLY RIGHTEOUS THINGS, BUT NOT LESS THAN THESE, MAY BE AN ANSWER TO PRAYER.** "I believe you are a child of God, and I believe you will never now be prosperous in your outer life again," said an old patriarch to a new convert; and the prophecy was fulfilled. The old man spoke from some instinctive perception of spiritual means and ends; and, undoubtedly, shadowy and dark as the prophecy seems, it was far more prescient and wise than that which supposes that all pain, and adversity, and affliction, and disappointment retire from the circle in which the child of God moves. This is not invariable, but we must believe the plan and the order of our life require it. "By terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us." And thus, at last, we learn that all the ends of God, in us and with us, have relation to our final coronation in the palace of His love. The terrible things, all of them, "work out for us," as Paul said (2 Cor. iv. 17). And the explanation is that—III. **GOD, IN THE MIDST OF HIS TERRIBLE THINGS, IS NOT THE LESS THE GOD OF SALVATION.** "Salvation belongeth to our God." The Bible grapples with this practical difficulty of our existence and experience—this dark and perplexed state of human affairs; and by innumerable images it labours to reach the heart, and to teach the heart that life and time are a seething furnace through which souls are passing, and over which God watches till the trial is complete. (*Paxton Hood.*) *God's employment of the terrible:*—Plutarch affirms that the cruel wars which followed the march of Alexander introduced the civility, language and arts of Greece into the savage East; introduced marriage, built seventy cities, and united hostile nations under one government. The barbarians who broke up the Roman Empire did not arrive a day too soon. Schiller says, "The Thirty Years' War made Germany a nation." Rough, selfish despots serve men immensely, as Henry VIII. in the contest with the popes; as the infatuation no less than the wisdom of Cromwell; as the ferocity of the Russian Czars; as the fanaticism of the French regicides of 1789. The frost which kills the harvest of a year saves the harvests of a century by destroying the weevil or the locust. Wars, fires, plagues, break up immovable routine, clear the ground of rotten races and dens of distemper, and open a fair field to new men. (*R. W. Emerson.*) **Who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth.—God:—I. RECOGNIZE THE BEING AND ACTIVITY OF GOD.** This is a necessary call; for it is questionable how far in the average we have assimilated first principles, and in the rush of life we often slight the essentials that lie behind the activities of faith. We have yet to recognize how fully Christ's life, and teaching, and mission centre in God, how natural was His own attitude of complete submission to God, how persistently He directed men through Himself to God, and the significance of these facts. Rather than weakening it, the revelation of Christ ought to intensify our sense of God; for He lived to give man the highest conception of God it was possible for him to receive, and to safeguard his thought from the many errors to which it had always been exposed. Christ conserves in its integrity the idea of a personal God and of a paternal God; of One who feels, and thinks, and wills; who is distinct from all the world as we are distinct from each other; and yet who is as essentially akin to us as we are to each other. II. **RECOGNIZE THAT THE WORLD IS GOD'S WORLD AND MAN GOD'S CARE.** This also is a necessary call. There are dark facts in nature and in life that seem to belie the "loving wisdom" of the Creator, and that have made men doubt the gracious providence of the Father. They press themselves in upon us with a pertinacity that wearies us and often forms a severe trial to our faith. Even Wordsworth finds that the "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" that came to him from his delight in woods and hills, and all beautiful sights, pass, are left behind as the hours of thoughtless youth; and in their place the sounds of nature sob with a human cry; he is chastened and subdued because he hears in them the still, "sad music of humanity." Thomas Hardy finds a verdict of pessimism in nature confirming his verdict of pessimism on life. R. H. Hutton in an essay on Cardinal Newman, writes: "Now, the more earnestly Newman embraced the doctrine that the universe is full of the types and instrumentality of spiritual things unseen, the more perplexing the external realities of human history and human conduct, barbarous or civilized, mediæval or modern, seemed to him. His faith in the sacramental principle taught him to look for a created universe from which the Creator should be reflected back at every point." But Newman kept his faith in God and its corollary, faith in redemption. The light within him was not turned into dark-

noss, and he saw that his faith in God demanded faith in redemption also. The human race was implicated in a "great aboriginal calamity," and that calamity he saw could only be rectified by "some equally great supernatural interference." We believe this; it is our only way; it is the faith of the psalmist, and it is the faith that has been at the root of all human progress. The outgoings of morning and evening, the surety of seed-time and harvest, are our pledges of Divine faithfulness. God is not defeated, nor has He forsaken either His creation or His children. He is the God of our salvation; His tokens are in the uttermost parts; and in Him is the confidence of all the ends of the earth. (*J. J. Leedal.*) **And of them that are afar off upon the sea.**—*A sermon to seamen*.—I. **WHAT GOD IS TO US WHO ARE HIS PEOPLE**—"God of our salvation." Salvation is of the Lord in every point. Not a bit of it is of us. All of Him from first to last, and all the points between the first and the last. Have any of you got a salvation that you have manufactured of yourselves? Then lay it down and run away from it. It will be of no use to you. The only salvation that can redeem from hell is the salvation that comes from heaven. II. **WHAT GOD WILL DO FOR US.** He will answer us. This shows that we must all pray. There is not a believing man in the world but what must pray, and we shall never get into such a state of grace that we have not need to pray. III. **WHAT THE LORD IS TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.** He is the confidence of all the ends of the earth. I am going to spiritualize that—Who are the ends of the earth? 1. Well, the people that live in the frozen regions, or, taking the other end, the people that live in the equatorial regions, beneath the burning sun. All that live at the extremes of heat or cold, we may liken them to the ends of the earth. They are furthest off from us. Well, and God is worthy to be the confidence of those who are furthest off from His Church, from Himself, from the Gospel, from hope, from anything that is good. 2. The people least known. We know those round us, but not those far away. 3. Those least thought of. 4. Those most tried. 5. Those hardest to reach. IV. **WHAT GOD IS TO SEAFARING MEN.** What should He be to them? He is "the confidence of all them that are afar off upon the sea." I have often likened the life of a seafaring man to what the life of a Christian should be. Hundreds of years ago, when man went to sea at all, the boats always kept within sight of shore. Your Tyrian or your Greek might be quite the master of his vessel, but he could not bear to lose sight of the headland. And it is a wonderful thing, common as it is now, that a ship should lose sight of land for a month together, seeing nothing that belongs to land. It is just like the life of a Christian, a life of faith. We ought not to see anything, we ought not to want to see anything. We walk by faith, not by sight. We take our bearings by the heavenly bodies. We are guided by the Word of God, which is our chart, by the movement of the blessed Spirit within, which is our compass. We have bidden farewell to things below, we seek a heaven that we have not seen, we are sailing across a life of which we know nothing. Trusting in Him, we shall come to our desired haven without fear of shipwreck. Sailors live on the sea—an unstable element, full of danger. Now, you and I are often brought into difficulties. We have not any strength left at all. We look up to God and cry, "I am lost." Oh, then, let God be your confidence. I exhort all believers here to have more confidence in God. The sailor is often brought where, if God does not keep him, he will be swallowed up. You and I ought not only to be brought there sometimes, but keep there, feeling that God is all, and we rest in Him without any other help. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

**Vers. 6-18. Which by His strength setteth fast the mountains: being girded with power.**—*God as He appears in material nature*.—I. God in material nature working. 1. Settling (ver. 6). He keeps all things in their place. There is a principle of dissolution in every part of nature. All things that are settled in nature are settled being "girded" by His "power." 2. Tranquillizing (ver. 7). (1) How tumultuous is the sea at times! When the stormy winds lash it into fury; then its billows rise high as the hills, roar like thunder. Who can quiet them? God, and He only. (2) The excited passions of men, of mobs or nations, are even more furious and terrible than the ocean in a tempest. He "stilleveth" them also. This is a slow work, but a work possible to God, a work which He alone accomplishes. 3. Cheering (ver. 8). He sets the whole day to music. At dawn the strains are jubilant with hope, and at eve they swell into the rich deep notes of thankful memories. 4. Fruclifying (ver. 9). The rich harvest is the



coronation of heavenly goodness, and all the antecedent and preparatory mornings and evenings are so many sparkling jewels in the diadem. II. God in material nature WORSHIPPED. 1. His presence is discoverable in nature. God is in nature in a higher sense than the engineer is in his machine, or the author in his book. The personalities of men are not in their works; but God is personally in nature. He is here—not merely His influence, His works, but Himself. It is because we are spiritually blind that we do not see Him. 2. His adorable character is discoverable in nature. You cannot worship the mere presence. Worship implies character, and the worshipful character must be benevolent. You cannot worship stolid indifference. Still less can you worship malice. In nature you see Divine goodness everywhere. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 7. Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people.—*God's providence displayed in the suppression of popular tumults*.—I. THE BODY OF THE PEOPLE, LIKE THE BODY OF WATERS, IS NEVER ABSOLUTELY AT REST; AND WHEN IT IS MOST SO, IT IS ALWAYS DISPOSED TO BECOME OTHERWISE. 1. Dissatisfactions with measures of government are most easily conceived; and, when they begin to operate, are extremely productive of those murmurs and rumours amongst the people, which are the forerunners of troubles, and sure signs of approaching tempests in the State. 2. They are further subject to be moved either by affluent, or by desperate, circumstances in their private fortunes. It should seem strange that two so directly opposite causes should concur in producing the same bad effect; but so it does happen, that the very prosperity of those who mistake the use of it, instead of begetting in their minds that content and thankfulness which one should expect as its most natural consequence, is apt to excite in them those turbulent and unruly passions, from whence wars arise. 3. It must be confessed with regret, since it cannot be denied with truth, that the sacred name of religion, which one might have hoped would have contributed to allay these troubles, has but too frequently conspired to foment them. 4. The discontents which arise from these different causes are excellent instruments in the hands of factious and ambitious men, who, under the profession of seeking public interest, are better able to promote, while they conceal, their own. 5. A very superficial view of human nature may serve to convince us, that any one passion adds wings to a man in the progress he makes towards accomplishing his end. It is natural, therefore, to suppose, that when all these different and even contradictory impulses to action, like so many boisterous and contrary winds, have raised the ferment in a people, it must be "like the troubled sea when it cannot rest." II. AND THIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN, MUST INEVITABLY HAVE BEEN, OUR CASE; IF THE ALMIGHTY, WHO ALONE CAN GOVERN "THE RAGE OF THE SEA, AND THE MADNESS OF THE PEOPLE," HAD NOT PROVIDENTIALLY PRESCRIBED THE SAME RULE TO ONE, WHICH HE HAS, NATURALLY, PRESCRIBED TO THE OTHER. "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." 1. Let us learn to distinguish, as much as we can, between our own preservation and the destruction of our enemies; and though we cannot ever be sufficiently thankful for one, let us not show an unmanly triumph in rejoicing over the other. 2. Since, by the good providence of God, we are now entirely free from the danger, let us not be weak enough to imagine that we never were in any. 3. As we now commemorate a day which "the Lord hath," undoubtedly, "made, we ought," indisputably, "to rejoice and be glad in it"; but let not that gladness be shown in a giddy round of mirth and wantonness, in successive scenes of intemperance and excess and riot; but in a sober and modest complacency, in the consciousness of having had God for our protector; in contemplating His adorable power; in addressing our thanks to Him for His unmerited goodness, and in supplicating the continuance of His protection to us. 4. Let not our gratitude end with the day; let it live as long as we have hearts to conceive, and breath to express it. (*T. Ashton, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice.—*God's favours*.—The psalmist recognized a close relation between nature and nature's God. He saw all the beauty and blessedness of nature as divine. I. THE INCOMPARABLENESS OF GOD'S FAVOURS. The matchless phenomena of the dawn and sunset are unique in nature. When God sows the "earth with orient pearl," and the fragrance of a thousand flowers exhales upon the morning air; or when eve, all clad in sober grey, comes forth, the "firmament with living sapphire

glowing." We have a hint, too, of the kingdom of grace in our text. There is probably an allusion to the morning and evening sacrifice, a God-appointed ordinance, and therefore an allusion to Christ and His atonement. II. **THE FRESHNESS OF GOD'S FAVOURS.** Each new morning and evening is as much a new thing as if just created. The beauty of dawn and sunset never pale. It is not only our lives that He crowns with lovingkindness and tender mercies, not only the year that He crowneth with goodness, but each morning and each evening He visiteth us. Day unto day uttereth speech. Night publisheth to night His mercies. III. **THE FITNESS OF GOD'S FAVOURS.** "Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice." Just the time when we most need a fresh supply. The issues of the day are taken at their fount and the results of the day are blessed at their fruition. Some of the outgoings of the morning are—1. Forebodings. Bright mornings often usher in sad thoughts, 'tis well to be met at the threshold of the day by God's benison and smile. 2. Duty lies before us every morning. The law of duty transformed to blessed personal service, if we meet Jesus at the door of the day, His statutes then shall be our "songs in the house of our pilgrimage," and "the joy of the Lord shall be our strength." 3. Uncertainty. We never know what a day may bring forth, but if God bless its outgoings we shall not be afraid of evil tidings nor of sudden fear, our heart is fixed. IV. **THE FULLNESS OF HIS FAVOURS.** From outgoing to outgoing, He fills up the whole day with the light that comes in the dawn, and the whole night with the sweet peace and protection that comes at eve. V. **THE UNIVERSALITY OF GOD'S FAVOURS.** Once in twenty-four hours each hemisphere of the world is alternately bathed in light, or rests in the peaceful shadow of night. This is true also of His grace and Gospel. VI. **THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD'S FAVOURS.** The covenant of day and night was made with Noah. Every dawn and sunset is a pledge of His unchangeable fidelity to His promise (Gen. viii. 22; Jer. xxxiii. 20, 21). The morning fails not by the thousandth part of a second, nor shall God's Word ever fail. (*F. A. Trotter.*) *Blithe childhood, and blither old age:*—I. **LIFE BOTH IN PROSPECT AND RETROSPECT IS BEAUTIFUL.** To look on at the start, to look back at the close, are both a delight. Old age corroborates childhood, evening renews the morning; and whoever fails to enjoy life, both these succeed. 1. First, the glorious days of childhood, the sweet hours of early life. We often speak of youth's power of prophecy, of the young soul's anticipation of the future, the expectation of what life is going to be; oh, enchanting first days! But that is not what I mean. I speak of a time that comes before even that—of youth's pure enjoyment of life. You believe in life; you open out your souls trustfully to it; you have not begun yet to be suspicious; you do not imagine every cup which life sets to your lips to be poisoned; you dare smell every fragrant flower; you believe in to-day as well as yesterday, and you are not afraid of to-morrow with any fresh truth which it may bring. You never feel inclined to suspect every new prophet to be a traitor, and every new book to have the inspiration of the evil one in it. You are willing to hear every new call that comes; the charm has not disappeared for you from the work of the Lord, and you could know no shame so great as to be dismissed from His service. No prophecy has ever failed to you—"the Word of the Lord standeth sure"; you discount nothing which God has promised, and the fulfilment will be richer than the promise itself. Welcome, life! Hail, blessed future! "The outgoings of the morning . . . rejoice." 2. The retrospect will be blither still. Believe me, the brightest season is yet to be. "And the evening to rejoice." The surging process through which your faith may be passing will be over, and your faith will be richer than ever. The scares which many of us have through criticism; through the testing fires into which the Word of God is cast; through the rapid succession of books that come questioning the authority of the Bible, absolutely denying its right to the deference it has always received; through the breaking up of old forms of thought, the recasting of old theories, the new terms in which we have got to speak of the Atonement and future retribution;—this scare will have ceased. The confusion and uncertainty in which you feel as if everything were breaking up and you were losing every truth you had treasured most, will have passed into a firm hold of all absolute verities. II. **THE PROSPECT AND THE RETROSPECT ARE BOTH MADE BEAUTIFUL BY GOD.** Youth and old age—it is God touches both into beauty. Not one word of what I have said is true apart from God. Youth possesses no power of joy but in Him, old age is ugly severed from Him; the morning opens with the mutterings of a storm, evening closes in blackness and hopelessness. God puts into both the lines that constitute their charm. You have climbed

through a narrow mountain-pass. Morning was radiant when you started, and every foot you climbed the scene became more enchanting, and your spirits rose with every step. But presently the prospect narrows, the mountains close in upon you, the sun is hidden, and a cold wind sweeps through the defile; your spirits droop, and you can only doggedly plod along. But by and by the mountains open out again, the pass is over, and far away under your feet stretches a fairer scene than that which thrilled you in the early morning. Many of you, perhaps, are to-day in the pass. Youth is a memory which you find it hard to realize; you have left it far behind you. But you will be out of the pass soon. The prospect will open out again, and the sun will set upon a fairer world than you have ever seen. The best of life is yet to come. "Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice." (*J. Morlais Jones.*) *The song of morning and evening*:—Nature is here conceived of as rejoicing before her God, and uttering her joy, in glad and grateful song, praising Him whose power sustains her, and whose wisdom guides. It is not strange, if the psalmist found song in nature at all, that he should have found it in the phenomena of the day's dawn and decline, "The breezy call of incense-breathing morn," and "the balmy sigh which vernal zephyrs breathe in evening's ear"; for of all that is impressive, inspiring and suggestive of high thought in nature's scenic effects, surely it is the phenomena of morn and even; and whatever else is such in itself the light of opening and closing day gives it most transcendent revelation. Thus should it be with man. Our best performance, our highest reaches of thought, and our noblest forms of expression should be divine worship, and the song of our life be evermore a psalm of praise to God. The text conveys a hint also as to the seasons for prayer. This song of dawning and declining day is nature's matin and vesper service of worship to her God. That which is a sentiment in nature's heart, all day and all the night, attains the tuneful gladness of a song at morn and even. Thus should it be with man. When morning calls him from the realm of slumber to the world of conscious life, and the activities of the day are about to begin, he should make his first business worship. Before he opens the door to the world and gives it audience he should open the window that looks heavenward, and himself seek audience with his God, nor let the world's cares and toils descend again upon him until he has refreshed himself by communion with the Father of lights. Each new dawn lights man to a new life, which should be hallowed in its inception by prayer and praise. And so when the daylight hours have sped, and the day's toils are over, in the still hour "when hopes and memories meet and join, and in the light of suns gone down we wait the unveiling of the quiet stars, those suns which shine upon us from afar," the human spirit should again uplift itself to God, and the day close, even as it began, with prayer and praise. But the text has yet deeper suggestiveness. Morning and evening may fitly represent the beginnings and ends of things, and in this construction what great truths the text brings to our thought. It is in the beginnings and ends of things that we see most of God. "He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." His presence pervades even as His power sustains all things. He fills all time as all space. But we recognize Him most in the inception and culmination of fact and event. In the intermediate stages we see more of law and less of God. We trace a development in which we note the play of finite agencies, and the factorship of finite force and will. But in the beginnings and ends of things the finite is less apparent, and the infinite absorbs the view. Thus "He maketh the outgoings of the morning and evening to sing." Creation as it sprang from the forming hand of God and stood in its unsullied beauty, unstained by human sin, was "very good." And not less so shall be that new creation, the new heavens and the new earth, which shall appear when the first heaven and the first earth are done away. At creation's dawn "the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Nor shall creation's evening song be wanting; for o'er the final consummation ten thousand times ten thousand tongues, untuned when the creation was being celebrated, shall blend in song with those who raised the earlier strain. (*J. W. Earnshaw.*)

**Ver. 9. Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it.**—*The Divine visitations*:—I. GOD'S VISIT TO THE EARTH IN HIS PROVIDENCE. It is to this visit that our text immediately refers: "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it." It was not to cast fire upon it that the Lord came. It would not have been strange had He done that; but there is enough of fire in the composition of the globe to burn it to

a coal, only the Lord waters it from His chambers, and keeps down the flames by casting showers of water upon them. 1. He visits the earth to soften its heart towards man. 2. He visits the earth to bring down the blessings upon it. 3. He visits the earth to assist it to serve man. The Lord blesseth the increase of the earth, so that one man can raise enough of corn to support scores of others, who in their turn serve him in some other way. The earth is full of His riches. II. GOD'S VISIT TO THE EARTH IN HIS SALVATION. This is the great visit to us. But for this visit it would have scarcely been worthy of the God of love to visit us in His providence. 1. He comes on this visit without being invited. 2. The earth was armed against God when He came on this visit. 3. The earth is the only place that He visits in the character of a Saviour. 4. Of all God's visits, this is the one that cost Him most. 5. Of all the visits God has ever made, this is the one that will redound most to His glory. III. GOD'S VISIT TO THE EARTH IN JUDGMENT. 1. Although there are many things concerning this visit which have not been revealed to us, we know that He will come with terrible majesty. He will not humble Himself, neither will He be humbled by any one else "at that day." He will be accompanied by a glorious throng. "Ten thousands of His saints." "All the holy angels with Him." 2. His object in coming will be to "reckon" with His servants. We know not whether He will "reckon" with the sun when giving it liberty; but I know that He will reckon with me, and that He will reckon with you. 3. The chief thing in view to be done then, will be to gather His subjects together, to glorify them openly, and to take them home with Him. He, too, will be for ever glorified in His saints. (D. Roberts, D.D.) **Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God.**—*The river of God*:—A stream whose sources are hidden in the bosom of the eternal hills, which is fed with the pure snows of heaven, a simple mountain rill first, then an impetuous torrent gathering volume as it descends foaming and eddying, and sweeping trees and rocks down in its course; then a broad river, rolling, now through wooded meadow land or sandy desert, now forced into a narrow and deep channel by jutting rocks, and leaping down in cataracts; holding its course now straight towards its goal, and now meandering and returning upon itself, seeming even to retrograde to the unobservant eye, receiving ever and again on the right hand and on the left fresh tributaries which drain the far-off hills on either side; fertilizing the pastures and corn lands, purifying and watering towns and villages, bearing on its bosom the precious merchandise of many peoples, giving life and vigour and joy to men; but with all this, whether flowing by crowded cities or desolate wastes, whether spreading into shallow marshes or imprisoned between barriers of rock, whether winding its flooded way over level plains, or rushing impetuously onward and forming a straight channel through all interposing obstacles, still pressing forward, ever forward with its growing volume of waters, with its increasing freight of treasures and of men, to the far-off distant, boundless ocean, there to lose itself and be absorbed into its kindred element. In this description I have not used a single word which might not apply to one of the great rivers of the earth, flowing from the Alps, or the Andes, or the Himalayas; yet throughout I have had before my mind, and perhaps I may have suggested to your minds, a heaven-descended river far mightier than this, rising from beneath the throne of God, flowing down, not without many vicissitudes, but still in triumphant progress and with ever-increasing volume, through the ages, till at length it shall lose itself in the ocean of eternity, when the knowledge of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Such a stream is the Church of God, the Church of the Patriarchs, the Church in Egypt, the Church of the Wilderness, the Church of the Promised Land, the Church in Babylon, the Church of the Restoration, the Church of the Dispersion, and last of all, when the fulness of time has come, the Church of Christ. I. **THE CONTINUITY OF THE STREAM.** The missionary spirit, like everything God-like in man, presses forward, acts for the future, hopes for the future, lives in the future, but it draws strength and refreshment from the experience, the examples, the accumulated power and wisdom of the past. Nay, just in proportion as we are animated by this reverence for the past, as we acknowledge our obligations to it, as we feel our connection with it; in short, as we realize this idea of continuity in the Church of Christ, in the same degree will the true missionary spirit—wise, zealous, humble, self-denying, enlightened, enterprising, innovating, in the best sense—because conservative in the best sense—prevail. The Church of Christ is a tree soaring upward to heaven, spreading its branches far and wide, but its roots are buried far below the surface in a dark antiquity. Christian men, above all, Chris-

tian missionaries, are the heirs of all the ages. II. THE COURSE OF THE RIVER IN ITS VICISSITUDES. The present time is confessedly a crisis fraught with manifold anxieties. If there are many bright gleams—and are there not many?—it is no less true that dark clouds overhang the horizon, threatening at any moment to deluge the Church of Christ. At such a crisis, what lessons does the image of the river, interpreted by the history of the past, suggest? Do they tend to dismay or to encouragement, to despair or to hope? To this question there is one clear and decisive answer. The river has its eddies and its back currents; it has its retrograde movements and its meandering channels, when it seems to recede even from its goal; it buries itself perhaps underground, or it loses itself in marshy swamps; it is hemmed in amid rocky heights, intrusive boundaries, which threaten to close in upon it and obstruct its course for ever. If we saw only one reach of the river, we should prophesy its failure in reaching its ultimate destination; but we know that despite all obstruction, despite all treacherous appearances, it must flow onward and downward and empty itself into the ocean. Whatever partial aberrations there may be, its general course is the same. This is the law of its being, and so also with the Church of God. We ought to know, and we ought to feel, independent of history, that the truth cannot perish; that the Church of God cannot fail. This is a spiritual law as the other was a physical law. It must survive, it must flow ever onward and onward till it reaches the ocean of the eternal truth. III. HOW IS THIS STREAM FED? What accessions does it receive? What are its tributaries? From all quarters of the heavens the streams fall into the main channels, fall direct from lofty mountain heights, draining here broad tablelands, there flowing amid barren rocks and rolling meadows and extensive plains; from the right hand and from the left they issue to swell the bulk of the rolling tide. But, as they joint the main stream, they betray their separate sources; they have their own colour, their own swiftness, and they seem almost to keep their own channel. At length the fusion is complete, they have mingled their waters in the main stream, they are lost in it; but meanwhile, and this is what I ask you specially to mark, they have communicated to it their own characteristics, their purifying or fertilizing qualities, and thus, strengthening and strengthened, giving something and receiving more, they roll down in one broad, irresistible, ever-flowing stream, bearing on their breast the natives of diverse climes and the products of many soils, sweeping their rich argosies of men and treasure onwards towards the one far-off ocean which is their common goal. The tributaries of the mighty river—are we not reminded by these words of another image under which the same truth is prefigured by psalmist and prophet, when the nations of the earth gather together from the four winds of heaven to the Holy City and pour in, each its special products, its choicest gifts as a tribute to the treasury of the God of Israel? One offers its finely woven fabrics, another its elaborately chased vessels and its rich carvings, another its costly perfume, another its ivory, its rare woods, its precious metals. Do we ask what is the counterpart to all this in the history of the Christian Church? Has not each Christian nation on its accession, as it was gathered into the fold of Christ, given some fresh cause of strength to the Church, emphasized some doctrinal truth, or developed some practical capacity, or fostered some religious sentiment, and thus contributed to the more complete understanding, or effective working, of the faith once delivered to the saints? And can we suppose that this mighty stream, this river of God, has no more great tributaries to receive, that all the literary streams which might swell and purify and fertilize its waters, have been dried up? Has the Hindoo, with his calm resignation and quiet endurance, with his quick, subtle intellect; has the Chinese, with his stubborn pertinacity and utter fearlessness of death—have these no rich offering, think you, to present at the altar, no new contribution to the fulness of the Gospel of Christ? (*Bp. Lightfoot.*) **Thou preparest them corn, when Thou hast so provided for it.—Corn:**—The harvest-time is the most delightful of all the seasons of the year. It is the time of fulfilled hopes and realized expectations. Of all the many beautiful sights of this season, the most beautiful and interesting are the cornfields rippling in light and shade, like the waves of a sunset sea, away over valley and upland to the purple shores of the distant hills. They are the characteristic features of the season—the illuminated initials on Nature's autumnal page, whose golden splendour is variegated here and there with wreaths of scarlet poppies, corn blue-bottles, and purple vetches. The landscape seems to exist solely for them, so prominent and important are they in it. Wherever they appear they are the pictures for which the rest of the scenery,

however grand or beautiful, is but the mere frame. No one can gaze upon these golden cornfields without being influenced more or less by the pleasing associations with which they are connected. They strike their roots deep down into the soil of time; they are as old as the human race. They waved upon the earth long before the flood, under the husbandry of the "world's grey fathers." The sun in heaven has ripened more than six thousand of them. Progress is the law of nature, and everything else obeys it, but the harvest-field exhibits little or no change. It presents nearly the same picture in this Western clime and in these modern days as it did under the glowing skies of the East in the time of the patriarchs. We see the same old familiar scene now enacted under our eyes in every walk we take, which Ruth saw when she gleaned after her kinsman's reapers in one of the quiet valleys of Bethlehem, or which our blessed Saviour so frequently gazed upon when wandering with His disciples in the mellow afternoon around the verdant shores of Gennesaret. The harvest-fields are the golden links that connect the ages and the zones, and associate together the most distant times and the remotest nations in one common bond of sympathy and dependence. They make of the earth one great home. But the most delightful association which the harvest recalls is that of the great world-covenant which God made with Noah and symbolized by the bow in the cloud. And now, whenever we see that gorgeous blossom of light expanding its seven-coloured petals from the dark bosom of the cloud, we know that the storm, however long-continued and violent, will not always last; that the waters of Noah will no more go over the earth; that seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, day and night, summer and winter, will never cease. Our cornfields grow and ripen securely under that covenant-arch, whose key-stone is in the heavens, and whose foundations are upon the earth. They afford to us the most striking evidence, season after season, of the integrity and stability of the covenant-promise. There may have been no harvest in Canaan, but there was corn in Egypt, though the application of this compensation was sometimes rendered difficult by natural or moral obstructions. But whether the harvest be local or general, whether we be dependent upon the produce of our own fields or upon the surplus supplies of commerce, in either case it is to the covenant faithfulness of God that we are indebted for the blessing. Corn is the special gift of God to man. All the other plants we use as food are unfit for this purpose in their natural condition, and require to have their nutritious qualities developed, and their nature and forms to a certain extent changed by a gradual process of cultivation. But it is not so with corn. It has from the very beginning been an abnormal production. God gave it to Adam, we have every reason to believe, in the same perfect state of preparation for food in which we find it at the present day. We cannot regard it as an accidental, but, on the contrary, as a striking providential circumstance, that the corn-plants were utterly unknown throughout all the geological periods. Not the slightest trace of vestige of them occurs in any of the strata of the earth, until we come to the most recent formations, contemporaneous with man. They are exclusively and characteristically plants of the human epoch; their remains are found only in deposits near the surface, which belong to the age of man. There is another proof that corn was created expressly for man's use in the fact that it has never been found in a wild state. The primitive types from which all our other esculent plants were derived are still to be found in a state of nature in this or in other countries. The wild beet and cabbage still grow on our sea-shores; the crab-apple and the sloe, the savage parents of our luscious pippins and plums, are still found among the trees of the wood; but where are the original types of our corn-plants? Corn has never been known as anything else than a cultivated plant. The oldest records speak of it exclusively as such. Wheat grains have been found wrapped up in the cerements of Egyptian mummies, which were old before history began, identical in every respect with the same variety which the farmer sows at the present day. Moreover, it is a universal plant. It is found everywhere. By striking adaptations of different varieties of grain, containing the same essential ingredients, to different soils and climates, Providence has furnished the indispensable food for the sustenance of the human race throughout the whole habitable globe; and all nations, and tribes, and tongues can rejoice together as one great family with the joy of harvest. Corn is the food most convenient and most suitable for man in a social state. It is only by the careful cultivation of it that a country becomes capable of permanently supporting a dense population. All other kinds of food are precarious, and cannot be stored up for any length of time; roots and fruits are

soon exhausted, the produce of the chase is uncertain, and, if hard pressed, ceases to yield a supply. It is an annual plant. It cannot be propagated in any other way than by seed, and when it has yielded its harvest it dies down and rots in the ground; self-sown, it will gradually dwindle away, and at last disappear altogether. "It can only be reared permanently by being sown by man's own hand, and in ground which man's own hand has tilled." (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. **Thou waterest the regions thereof abundantly; Thou settlest the furrows thereof: Thou makest it soft with showers: Thou blessest the springing thereof.**—*Spring thoughts:*—1. Spring follows winter and ushers in summer according to an appointed order. This fact teaches the continuous control and government of God. The regular succession of the seasons seems to declare that "the Lord reigneth." In some respects, during winter, God seems like a man travelling into a far country. Darkness and barrenness and coldness suggest absence on the part of God. The spring looks like His return. 2. The spring season is a time of resurrection to life throughout the vegetable kingdom. This suggests the continued life-inspiring power of God. There is not only infinite life in God, there is also an immeasurable life-giving power in God. 3. The great and various changes which the spring season involves show forth the unchangeableness of God. 4. The loveliness of the spring season is a reflection of the beauty of God. Every living thing is a thought of God expressed. What a glorious nature that must be which could devise and originate all that is beautiful in the spring! 5. The joyousness of spring speaks to us of the happiness of God. Beauty and joy are not always combined, but they exist together in God. God is happy, and His happiness is of a Godly sort. 6. The combination and co-operation of influences in the spring season are illustrations of the wisdom and power of God. "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it,"—in the margin, "after Thou hadst made it to desire rain." The dryness of the early part of spring works together with moisture and with spring rains to promote the fruitfulness of the earth. 7. The provision made in spring for a present and future supply of food exhibits the benevolence of God: "Thou providest them corn, when Thou hast so provided for it." Sustenance of some kind or other would seem on some grounds to be the due of man. In this case, however, the quality, and abundance, and character of the provision may all afford scope for the display of goodness. The support of a prodigal child, however, is a matter not of debt, but of grace. God made man for himself, and when man began to live for his own self, he forfeited all claim upon God's bountifulness. Conclusion—1. Praise God for the spring season. And let no scientific or philosophical view of the changes involved in the spring at all exclude God from your minds and hearts. Whatever may be the law of these changes, God makes them. 2. Let the spring teach you the folly of anxiety. See, at this season, how God clothes the grass of the field and the flowers of the field. The grass of the field chides and reproves us for our careflessness, and exhorts us, saying, "Neither be ye of anxious mind." 3. Let the spring encourage you in broad and unrestrained prayer. He who gives to us so bountifully in the spring season, is not likely to withhold any good thing. 4. Make all the sights and sounds of spring occasions of communion and intercourse with God. 5. God is renewing the face of the earth; let us seek the renewing of the Holy Ghost. We may be conscious of declension in the inward spiritual life. There is a power which can renew our spiritual life, and to that power let us turn with holy longing for its manifestation within us. 6. Let us learn from the spring season the firm foundation we have for hope. Time more or less is still before us. Cheered by the spring let us sing, "Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want." We may be forewarned of a passing through fire and water; aroused by the spring, let us listen to His voice who saith, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee." The religious state of mankind is most gloomy and depressing. Cheered by the spring, let us expect the day when the wilderness shall become a fruitful field, and when the desert shall rejoice and blossom as a rose. Let this spring season give to us all a lesson in hope, and let it teach us to hope in God. (*S. Martin, D.D.*) *Spring in the heart:*—1. NOTE THE WORK PREVIOUS TO THE SPRINGING. 1. The ploughing, God's preparing the soul by conviction. The law with its ten black horses drags the ploughshare of conviction up and down the soul till it is all furrowed over. And then comes—2. The sowing of the good seed. 3. The harrowing, the praying over what has been sown; this must by no means be neglected. But—4. There is a work beyond our power. "Thou visitest the

earth and waterest it," says the psalmist. In vain are all our efforts unless God shall bless us with the rain of His Holy Spirit's influence. Three effects are spoken of. First, we are told He waters the ridges. As the ridges of the field become well saturated through and through with the abundant rain, so God sends His Holy Spirit till the whole heart of man is moved and influenced by His divine operations. Next, it is added, "Thou settlest the furrows," by which some think it is meant that the furrows are drenched with water. Others think there is an allusion here to the beating down of the earth by heavy rain till the ridges become flat, and by the soaking of the water are settled into a more compact mass. Certain it is that the influences of God's Spirit have a humbling and settling effect upon a man. He was unsettled once like the earth that is dry and crumbly, and blown about and carried away with every wind of doctrine; but as the earth when soaked with wet is compacted and knit together, so the heart becomes solid and serious under the power of the Spirit. Yet again, it is added, "Thou makest it soft with showers." Man's heart is naturally hardened against the Gospel; like the Eastern soil, it is hard as iron if there be no gracious rain. How sweetly and effectively does the Spirit of God soften the man through and through.

II. DESCRIBE THE SPRINGING THEREOF. It is gradual. Remember the Lord's words, "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." Some of our friends are greatly disturbed because they cannot see the full corn in the ear in themselves. They must learn to wait. What, then, is the springing up of piety in the heart? We think it is first seen in sincerely earnest desires after salvation. The man is not saved, in his own apprehension, but he longs to be. That which was once a matter of indifference is now a subject of intense concern. "The springing thereof" shows itself next in prayer. It is prayer now. Once it was the mocking of God with holy sounds unattended by the heart; but now, he really prays. There will also be manifest a hearty love for the means of grace, and the house of God. The Bible, long unread, which was thought to be of little more use than an old almanack, is now treated with great consideration. And then there comes faith in Jesus Christ; it may be small, but it is real.

III. THERE IS ONE WHO SEES THIS SPRINGING. Thou, Lord—Thou blessest the springing thereof. I wish that some of us had quicker eyes to see the beginning of grace in the souls of men; for want of this we let slip many opportunities of helping the weaklings.

IV. WHAT A MISERY IT WOULD BE, IF IT WERE POSSIBLE, TO HAVE THIS SPRINGING WITHOUT GOD'S BLESSING! "Thou blessest the springing thereof." Think of how the springing would have been without the blessing. Suppose we were to see a revival amongst us without God's blessing. It is my conviction that there are revivals which are not of God at all, but are produced by excitement merely. If there be no blessing from the Lord, it will be all a delusion, a bubble blown up into the air for a moment, and then gone to nothing.

V. THE COMFORTING THOUGHT THAT GOD DOES BLESS "THE SPRINGING THEREOF." Let me tell you what that blessedness is; you have probably now a greater horror of sin than professors who have known the Lord for years; they might wish that they felt your tenderness of conscience. You have now a graver sense of duty, and a more solemn fear of the neglect of it than some who are further advanced. You have also a greater zeal than many; you are now doing your first works for God, and burning with your first love; nothing is too hot or too heavy for you; I pray that you may never decline, but always advance. Lessons: 1. Let older saints be very gentle and kind to young believers. God blesses the springing thereof—mind that you do the same. Do not throw cold water upon them. 2. Fulfil the duty of gratitude. If God blesses the springing thereof, we ought to be grateful for a little grace. 3. If God does so much for you now at "the springing," what will He not do in after days? Trust Him, then, always. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The season and the service*:—I. SPRING IS THE SEASON OF RENEWAL—such is the aim of the Church—to renew by God's grace spiritually, the face of the earth. And to do this, first, by a prior change within. No outward work without that can avail. II. SPRING IS THE SEASON OF SEED TIME, of preparation, of promise. But what is all our Church work but simply the casting in of seed. Now is not harvest. Are we wondering that after nearly two thousand years, the Church should be still almost at the beginning of her sacred enterprise, and that we still have to wait? Perhaps it is not wonderful if we think what the preparation means, and how it has had to be carried on. III. SPRING IS A SEASON OF DELAYS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS. And so it is in our spiritual work. But be of good cheer; the harvest will, must, come. (J. G. Rogers, B.A.) *The springing of the corn*:—Every season of the year utters



a voice, and every succeeding day proclaims knowledge; yet, if any one of the revolutions of time speaks more clearly and distinctly than another, it is that which rapidly clothes and covers barren land with verdure and abundance. Then everything is vocal. I. AN INTELLIGENT RECOGNITION OF DIVINE INTERFERENCE. Let this fact, which is so readily admitted, produce the proper practical effects on your heart and conduct. 1. Diligence will then result, under the powerful conviction that it is not the earth uncultured which God blesses, but that which has been furrowed by the plough, and sown with the valuable grain; this He smiles upon, there He "causes the bud of the tender herb to spring forth." 2. Faithful dependence. II. A CLAIM ON YOUR GRATITUDE. To whom are you indebted for the refreshing verdure of your fields, for the tender herb which appeareth? That which we hope to gather, God giveth. "I beseech you, therefore, brethren," etc. (Rom. xii. 1). And has God blessed those other fields which you have cultured with a solicitous and parental care? When you are permitted to see your sons growing up as plants in their youth, to witness the domestic regularity of your children; and at the same time observe some neighbouring households, like the field of the slothful, grown over with the thorns and thistles, the nettles and briars, of unholy tempers and conduct; when you notice these things, and consider the inadequacy of your talents and toils to effect these pleasing prospects, can you refrain from praising God even with a loud voice, in that He has been mindful of His promise that "He would pour out His spirit from on high, so that the wilderness should become a fruitful field"? III. AN ANTIDOTE TO YOUR APPREHENSIONS. When God begins any good work, the commencement is the best pledge of its completion. As farmers watch over their rising corn, but God alone preserves it from danger, and brings it to its destined maturity,—as fathers are solicitous about the health and support of their families, but find that it is vain to rise early, or sit up late, unless God giveth them the needful supply,—as mothers tenderly nourish their offspring, and dandle their little ones on their knees,—so will the Great Author be also the Finisher of their faith. He will watch with care the rising grain, He will support the life He has imparted, He will cherish the endeared resemblance of Himself; He will, in fine, bless the springing of the precious seed, will not let one grain be lost, but gather all into His garner. Conclusion.—1. Although God is the great Agent, He works instrumentally. 2. Is it not a painful consideration, that the promised benediction of Heaven shall prove to some the heaviest calamity? 3. The springing of the corn is frequently employed as an emblem of the resurrection of the body; the subject may therefore profitably lead our thoughts to that great day of decision—delight or despair. (W. Clayton.) *Spring a Divine visitation*.—See how the characteristics of spring testify to the presence of God. And there is—I. CHANGE. This tells that God is here, visiting the earth, and that He is at work. II. LIFE. All really scientific experience tells us that life can be produced from a living antecedent only. All life is from God. III. BEAUTY. IV. PROMISE. (W. W. Sidney.) *A May homily*.—Nature in all her moods and phases is always ministerial, if we will have it. One may speak, for instance, of the opening of the spring, as a kind of annual Divine Sacrament, by attending upon which with wise and meek surrender, the better man in us may be awakened and stimulated. We speak of our Sundays, our religious services, our daily tasks and difficulties as means of grace; and the vernal advent and encompassment is no less really a means of grace, to be utilized to profit, or neglected to loss and condemnation. I. WHO IS THERE WHO HAS NOT FELT AND ACKNOWLEDGED THE SOFTENING, EXPANDING, GENIALIZING INFLUENCE OF THE SPRING; ITS SWEETENING EFFECT UPON THE MENTAL MOOD AND TEMPER? It is a Divine means of grace. What you have to do is, just to seize the vernal feeling that has risen in you, and cherish and go forth with it: namely, by starting from the height of it, under the impulse of it, with new resolves and endeavours to cultivate the genial and generous temper; and by seeking to put it at once, before it fades, into some corresponding deed. II. DOES NOT THE PRESENT SEASON TEND TO EXCITE IN US, AT TIMES, STRANGE, VAGUE, MYSTERIOUS YEARNINGS—YEARNINGS AMOUNTING OFTEN TO PAIN? . . . I recall vividly a sketch I once saw—a slight but very striking sketch—a lone evening shore, with the sun slowly sinking into the sea, and a woman sitting gazing at it from the beach, her hands clasped round her knees, a far-off, weary, wistful look in her eyes, her face as the face of one who listens for something that is unheard, and longs for more than is seen. It was as though the dying sun were drawing her to himself; as though presently she must arise and seek him through the waves, aching to find with him—she knew

not what—but the larger, the brighter, the happier that seemed to be calling her. Now, that is an illustration of what I mean; when nature lays her hand upon us, and sees us dreamily yearning, as she is especially apt to do in her annual springing. Turn the feeling before it dies into a prayer—a prayer to be filled and satisfied from the Lord; a prayer to be made willing to seek and do in harmony with His will. . . . It is an accepted time, a day of salvation; do not lose it. III. HAS NOT THE LOVELINESS OF SPRING, AND THE BEAUTIFUL ORDER WHICH IT EXPRESSES AND REVEALS, BROUGHT HOME TO US NOW AND AGAIN, BY THE FORCE OF CONTRAST, THE UGLINESS AND DISORDERS THAT ABOUND IN MAN'S WORLD, AND CONSTRAINED US TO PONDER AND DEWAIL THEM AFRESH? . . . Whenever the spring leads you to lament thus, what is it but a fresh Divine call to you to philanthropic labour and effort; a fresh Divine impression upon you of humanity's sore needs and woes; that you may be awakened to increased sympathy with them, and urged to attempt more towards their relief? Seek, then, to waken and urge yourselves with it. Go, with the tears for the miseries and evils of man's world which the musical groves and the fine order of nature may have started in your eyes, to weep helpfully with them that weep, and to strive with renewed endeavour against the works of the devil. So shall the springing which the Lord blesses be blessed indeed. (S. A. Tiptle.)

Ver. 11. *Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness: and Thy paths drop fatness.*—*Thanksgiving and prayer:*—Nothing can be more right than that Christian people should publicly render thanksgiving to the God of the harvest. And let there be thankofferings likewise. I. CROWNING MERCIES CALLING FOR CROWNING GRATITUDE. All the year round God is richly blessing us; both when we sleep and when we work, His mercy waits upon us. 1. If we begin with the blessings of the nether springs, the joyous days of harvest are a special season of favour. The psalmist tells us that the harvest is the crowning of the year. What would it have been for us as a nation had there been a total failure of the crops? Or even a partial scarcity. We none of us can fully estimate the amount of happiness conferred by a luxuriant yield. How shall we give praise? By inward gratitude; by words of thanksgiving in psalms and hymns; and by our gifts. 2. And there have been heavenly harvests. In ancient days there was Pentecost. And we have had revivals where spiritual life has been awakened and quickened. How the Lord has blessed us in this respect. As for conversions, has not the Lord been pleased to give them to us as constantly as the sun rises in his place? Scarce a sermon without the benediction of the Most High. We must not forget this. And we are looking for greater things still—the conversion of the whole world to God. II. PATHS OF FATNESS SHOULD BE WAYS OF DUTY. The paths of war, how terrible are they, but the paths of God—they drop fatness. It is so in providence. Do but trust the Lord. Yet more in things spiritual. In the use of the means of grace. If you come to them desiring to meet with Jesus, you shall do so, and you shall find our text true. And so is it with the path of prayer, and of communion, and of faith. Let the Lord come into our congregations by His Spirit, then would His paths drop fatness. This is what we want: let us pray for it. III. SUGGESTIONS AS TO OUR DUTY. Yield yourselves to Christ. What a harvest for you that would be. Serve Him more. As Churches let us pray more. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The first Sabbath in the New Year:*—Let us note that goodness of God—I. As to our COUNTRY. II. As to our FAMILIES. III. As to our PERSONAL EXPERIENCE. IV. As to THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH. (R. Watson.) *Crowning blessings ascribed to God:*—I shall use our text not in reference to the outside world and to the husbandry of man, but we shall see how true it is within the Church, which is the husbandry of God. I. THE DIVINE GOODNESS ORDERED. "Thou crownest the year," etc. Now, praise must be for God alone: not for any man, however helpful to your souls he may have been. And in this spirit of praise every action of the Church ought to be performed. We shall be helped to praise by remembering how God has answered our prayers; and this in spite of our sins; and what sacred privileges He has admitted us to. II. THE ENCIRCLING BLESSING OF THE DIVINE GOODNESS IS TO BE CONFERRED. "Thou crownest the year," etc. See it in the history of our own Church. III. AND THIS, ALSO, IS OF GOD. Again, we look back on the same history for those last twenty-five years, and we see the goodness of God everywhere. In conversions, in consistent character maintained, in triumphant departures to heaven. Let more come to Him now. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The crown of the year—A harvest sermon:*—I. HOW THE HARVEST, THE CROWN OF THE YEAR, DISPLAYS THE GREAT GOODNESS OF OUR GOD. For think—1. Of the perils

that beset the harvest. 2. How God demands man's co-operation, yet reserves to Himself the sole efficiency. 3. The manner of conducting the whole to a successful issue—so slow, still, imperceptible, and yet so all at once. 4. Its fulfilment of the ancient promise. 5. The universality of the blessing. II. WHAT RETURN IS DUE FROM US TO GOD? Praise, for—1. We celebrate the bestowment of forfeited blessings. 2. Harvest blessings serve purposes higher than themselves. They minister to life, and that may lead to salvation. 3. They are pledges of yet greater blessings which God will give. (*Isaac Vaughan.*) *Thoughts on the harvest*:—I. LIVELY GRATITUDE. The ravages of famine have been averted, suspense has been relieved, anxious forebodings dissipated, and a rich recompense has crowned the husbandman's toil. Surely a world so full of God's goodness should be vocal with His praise. II. ADORING WONDER. Instead of assuming a stolid indifference and unconcern, as many do, or taking the laws of nature and arrangements of Providence as things of course, in presence of processes whose operation, repeated from year to year, testifies to a Power before which all the achievements of human skill are utterly insignificant, let us go through life finding each day new cause for intelligent wonder and admiration, and fresh reason for declaring to all around "the wondrous works of God." Nor, while cherishing feelings of adoring wonder in contemplating the wonders of nature and of Providence, ought we to forget the more amazing things in God's character and in God's law, in the person and work of Him who is "Wonderful," in the operations of the Holy Spirit on the hearts and lives of men. III. HUMBLE DEPENDENCE. And, while cherishing feelings of humble dependence for the bounties of Providence, let us be daily constrained to acknowledge ourselves debtors to Divine grace. IV. RESTFUL CONFIDENCE. Men may alter their intentions or be defeated in their purposes; their promises are precarious, being dependent upon many contingencies; but the laws of nature reflect the immutability of their Author. As the seasons revolve fresh proof is afforded of God's faithfulness which anew should strengthen confidence and call forth praise. After we have done our part we can repose our faith in the constancy of nature and experience the satisfaction and comfort which proceed from committing the result to Him who giveth the increase. Besides, our confidence is based not only on the high attributes of a God whose nature is unchangeable, and on the covenant into which God was pleased to enter with Noah and his seed, but specially on the securities of that covenant which cannot be broken into which God has entered with Jesus as our representative and Saviour. We may well trust in the Lord. V. ENLARGED BENEVOLENCE. The world's harvests are for the world's inhabitants. We are all children of the common Father, members of the same great family, and if some perish from hunger or are stinted in their supply of bread, this is due, not to want of the precious commodity in the world, but to the thoughtlessness and improvidence of men. Let us imitate the Divine example by devoting of the gifts of His bounty as He may prosper us for the relief and help of those whose necessities are greater than our own, and who have, therefore, a claim on our sympathy and assistance. "Freely ye have received, freely give." (*T. B. Johnstone, D.D.*) *God's crowning of the year*:—God is from everlasting to everlasting, and there are no limits of days, or seasons, or years, in His boundless existence. The diurnal rotation of our earth on its axis never glooms Him in shadows; nor does its circuit round the sun affect Him by the successive alternations of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. And yet the guiding hand of God is ever present with all His works, moulding and fashioning them to sublimer ends. God has been working through all eternity, and God's labour is always being crowned with God's harvest. By all the slow processes of Divine growth, by all the convulsions of internal elements and external commotions, God has perfected, and beautified, and crowned our world with His goodness. We have reached the season when we should thank Him for the harvest crown that He has placed upon our year. We should realize our dependence on the harvest, and then we should feel more grateful for the exquisite harvest weather with which He has blessed our year. In former times, before the means of distributing were so greatly multiplied, each country had to subsist largely on its own harvest. Then drought was followed by famine, and multitudes perished of hunger. Now, we are so linked with other people in interdependence that we share in their harvests and they in the fruits of our labours, and the powers of carrying by land and sea are so complete that the world's harvests are for the world's inhabitants. To-day, then, we thank Almighty God for crowning the great world's industry with the great world's harvest. God is always crowning

the year with His goodness. He crowns the ermined winter with a "diadem of snow." He decks the spring like a bride, clothed in emerald and wreathed with lilies. He floods the summer with light and heat, and fills it with sweet scents and sweeter songs. He poises the sun and smites the autumn into gold, and crowns it with yellow harvests and rosy fruit. But God not only crowns the harvest as a whole with His goodness. He crowns it in all its parts, and in all its stages. In early spring He silvers the fields with daisies, or makes them gleam like a cloth of gold with yellow buttercups. And the crowns that God bestows with such regal bounty are as lovely in form as they are exquisite in colour. As we study the tiniest flower that lifts to heaven its chalice of flame, we see with what marvellous wisdom and beauty God decks the little things which He has caused to grow. But when we lift our minds from the unit to the whole, we see God all the world round crowning the year. Not only every tree in its grace and beauty, but every forest in which it waves. Not only the little flowers in our gardens and in our fields, but every growth in garden, field, or prairies throughout the world. God's crowns are placed on the results of labour. God works and man works, and the Divine crown adorns the outcome of their efforts. The laws of nature and the processes of grace run so closely on parallel lines that they have been considered by some identical. And just as God has crowned with glory the prodigious work of redemption, so He crowns with salvation the faith that worketh by love. (*W. Wright, D.D.*) *The goodness of God*.—To teach man of God is Nature's greatest work. She tells of His attributes, the nightly panorama of the starry heavens speaks His power, the tiny floweret His skill. But if there is one chord in Nature's song sung sweeter than the rest it is the "goodness of God." I. GOD'S GOODNESS IS MANIFESTED IN THE HARVEST. Certain seasons speak to us and teach us lessons; and it is necessary, in the hurry and scurry of modern civilization, that something should remind us of the hereafter, or we might think, with the secularist, that this life only demands our attention. And in contemplating the harvest we are led to think of the goodness of God. The harvest is, as it were, the crowning point of God's goodness. "Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness." As if the psalmist would say that the goodness of God in preparing the ground and in blessing the springing of the seed reached its highest manifestation in the ingathering of the earth's increase. God's promise to Noah still stands secure, although our friends the farmers, with their usual characteristic, have prophesied with lugubrious faces the failure of the harvest. The goodness of God is further exhibited in the bountiful provision which He has made for all His creatures. So ample is it that even birds know how to get their food. He provides for man physically, intellectually, and spiritually. In the physical world man's wants are supplied, both for food and clothing, from the lower order of animals and from plants. In the intellectual sphere man finds food for his intellect in the realms of agriculture, astronomy, physics and metaphysics, arts and sciences, and in the more humble, and yet, perhaps, more useful occupations of the home life. But does God's goodness stop here? Oh, no. God has provided in His Word for all man's requirements in the spiritual world. II. NOTE SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD'S GOODNESS. It is continuous. "The goodness of the Lord endureth continually." God's goodness is satisfying. "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house." Nothing short of God and His goodness can satisfy the soul's deep longings. "None but Christ can satisfy." We cannot understand the soul's yearnings, but we know they are there. But, says somebody, God's goodness does not satisfy me. Then be assured that you are out of harmony with goodness and with God. A man who has no soul for the beautiful will spend a miserable half-hour if taken to the Royal Academy. One with no soul for music can see no beauty in the production of the "Elijah." God's goodness is universal. "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." Why, then, so much misery and starvation in our streets? Because man has placed himself outside the pale of God's goodness by sin. If we could dig down deep into the very cause of misery, we should find this true. III. GOD'S GOODNESS DEMANDS MUCH OF US. What are we going to give Him? An adequate return? We cannot. At best we can but pay a few shillings in the pound. Shall we give Him our intellect, to think for Him, and use the best means of building up His kingdom? Shall we give Him our possessions, our riches, our wealth, to be used in His service? Shall we give Him our hearts, that He may rule and reign as Lord of every motion there? Shall we give Him our life—aye, and before the best of it is gone? (*H. M. Draper.*) *Great Britain's present joys and hopes*.—I. EVERY YEAR IS

CROWNED WITH GOD'S GOODNESS. 1. The annual revolutions of the heavenly bodies, and the benefit we receive by their light and influences, in the several seasons of the year. 2. The annual fruits and products of the earth, grass for the cattle, and herbs for the service of men, with these the earth is every year enriched for use; as well as beautified and adorned for show. The harvest is the crown of every year, and the great influence of God's goodness to an evil and unthankful world. II. SOME YEARS ARE, IN A SPECIAL MANNER, CROWNED WITH THE GOODNESS OF GOD MORE THAN OTHER YEARS. 1. God and His providence must be owned in all the blessings of the year. Whatever has been or is our honour, our joy, our hope, comes from God's hand, and He must have the praise of it. 2. The goodness of God must in a particular manner be acknowledged, as that in which all our springs are, and from which all our streams flow. 3. These blessings which flow from the goodness of God have crowned this year; He in them has crowned it. That word shall lead us into the detail of those favours, which we are this day to take notice of, with thankfulness, to the glory of God. A crown signifies three things, and each will be of use to us. (1) It dignifies and adorns. (2) It surrounds and encloses. And—(3) It finishes and completes. And accordingly this year has been dignified, surrounded, and finished with the blessings of God's goodness. III. APPLICATION. 1. Has God thus crowned the year? Let us cast all the crowns of it at His feet, by our humble, grateful acknowledgments of His infinite wisdom, power, and mercy. What we have the joy of, let God have the praise of. 2. Has God thus crowned the year? Let not us then profane our crown, nor lay our honour in the dust, by our unworthy walking. Let the goodness of God lead us to repentance, and engage us all to reform our lives and families, to be more watchful against sin, and to abound more in the service of God, and in everything that is virtuous and praiseworthy. 3. Let God's goodness to us engage, and increase, our goodness to one another: it is justly expected, that they who obtain mercy should show mercy, and so reflect the rays of the Divine goodness upon all about them; being herein followers of God as dear children; followers of Him that is good, in His goodness. (*M. Henry.*)

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PSALM LXVI.

VERS. 1-20. **Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands.**—*Providence*:—The real theme of this psalm is in the last section: it is a psalm of thanksgiving for a special mercy experienced by an individual. But the account of this special providence is prefaced by two sections descriptive of the providence of God in general. This is in accordance with a law of the spiritual life. Those who enter into real experience of their own are thereby united with the entire religious experience of the race. There is no influence so broadening and refining as that of a living Christianity. I. THE PROVIDENCE OF POWER (vers. 1-7). God is in the midst of His people like a watchman on the watch-tower, not only observing all that is taking place within the city of God, but keeping a keen outlook upon the enemies by whom the city is surrounded, lest the rebellious should exalt themselves (ver. 7). Of this protecting care an instance never to be forgotten was the scene at the Red Sea, when the flood was turned into dry land, and His people, who had been in mortal terror, had their apprehensions turned into rejoicings. Another was the passage of the Jordan, when they entered Canaan. These may be called the stock examples of Hebrew poetry. We have better instances supplied by subsequent history; but the great lesson is that all history belongs to us, and we are selling our birthright if we do not know how to travel through the tracts of the past and discern in them the footsteps of our God. II. THE PROVIDENCE OF DISCIPLINE (vers. 8-12). When God is celebrated merely as the Champion of His people, who discomfits their enemies, there is danger of boasting. But the psalmist is well aware that God sustains a more delicate relation to His people. He does not always prosper them; He does not always spare them disappointments and defeat. On the contrary, adversity is one of the gifts of the covenant. And in this psalm the sufferings of God's people are described in a series of touching images (vers. 10-12). They have been tried like silver; they have been brought

into the net like a bird which is in the grasp of its captor and cannot escape; they have been yoked to oppression like the ass to its load, and the oppressor has lorded it over them like the driver riding above the head of the camel; they have been brought through fire and through water. Yet for these experiences the psalm calls for praise. The old poets used to say that the nightingale sang with its breast resting against a thorn; and it is certain that the mellowest notes of the religious voice are never heard till suffering has been experienced. The distinction of God's people is not that they have less to bear than others, but that they get the good of their affliction, and, when they trust God, He always at last brings them out, as is said here, into a wealthy place. III. THE PROVIDENCE OF GRACE (vers. 13-20). There are those who have never had anything done for their souls. They can speak about their bodies, their properties and their fortunes, but their soul has no history. If a man's soul has a history in which God is concerned, and of which he himself is glad, we know a good deal about him. It is a great thing to be able to say, "Come and hear" (ver. 16), "Come and see" (ver. 5). Have you seen any sight and heard any message which you feel to be worth the attention of all the world? I should not like to live and die without having seen and heard the greatest and best that the world contains. Perhaps a further biographical feature is indicated in the saying that if he had regarded iniquity in his heart God would not have heard him. At all events, we have here one of the profoundest remarks on prayer to be found in the whole Bible. God will not hear the prayers of a man who is cherishing known sin. But the psalmist does not ascribe the glory of his answered prayer to his innocence. He finishes with a humble ascription to the God of Grace. (*J. Stalker, D.D.*) *Worship*:—I. It is EXULTINGLY DELIGHTFUL (vers. 1, 2). It is a cheery, jubilant exercise of the mind; the whole atmosphere of the soul breaking into sunshine, all its vocal powers going out in rapturous music. Worship is the soul losing itself in the infinitely kind, the supremely beautiful and good. Self-obliviousness is the highest happiness. II. It is BINDING ON ALL. "All ye lands." It is more rational, more right, for men to neglect everything else than to neglect this—neglect their physical health, their social advancement, even their intellectual culture, than to neglect worship. It is the "one thing needful." It is that one thing which, if lacking in any character, damns the man. III. It has a DIRECT RELATION TO GOD. "Say unto God, How terrible art Thou," etc. It speaks not about Him, but to Him. It may be said that genuine worship has to do with everything—it mingles in all the services of the man, makes the whole life one unbroken psalm. True, but it only does so by the conscious contact of the soul with God. As the fields that are sown with grain must turn themselves to the sun before there will come germination, growth, maturation, so the soul must put itself into conscious contact with God, its Sun, before its spiritual powers can be brought out into true worship. IV. It will ONE DAY BE UNIVERSAL. "All the earth shall worship Thee." (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 4-7. All the earth shall worship Thee, and shall sing unto Thee.—*The world's conversion*:—I. THE GLORIOUS AND AUSPICIOUS PROSPECT WHICH IS HERE OPENED TO OUR VIEW. All the earth shall worship Jehovah, and shall sing unto His name. II. ALL OBJECTIONS TO THE FULFILMENT OF THIS DECLARATION ARE TRIUMPHANTLY REPELLED. The politicians of this world tell you plainly that your object can never be accomplished. The world is against you. "The carnal mind, which is enmity against God," is against you. The glorious Gospel of the grace of God must come in contact with much that is contrary to its own nature. I am fully aware, too, that Satan, the god of this world, has long kept the minds of men in subjection to his vassalage, and held his captives in an almost universal submission. But with all these appalling circumstances put in array, and leaving you room to put in a thousand more, I see something in my text which excites you to go forward, in sure and certain hope of complete and glorious victory. "Come," and instead of looking on the works of men, till your hearts grow feeble, and your hands hang down, "come and see the works of God." Here are two grounds of encouragement—1. The consideration of what God has done for His ancient Church, in fulfilling His promises, and in overcoming her foes; and—2. What He will yet do for His Church, in fulfilling all for which He has encouraged you to hope. Consider these things; and declare if God has spoken anything which He has not fulfilled. (*J. Stewart, D.D.*) *Worship*:—It is a man's duty to worship God; therefore—I. MAN CAN ATTAIN A TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. Not, indeed, if left unaided. The instinct which prompts the heart to bow down before an

invisible Power is one of the last to disappear in the ruin of our nature. In the absence of everything else which gives dignity to human life it still survives. The first idea of God is awakened by the words and acts of our fellow-men, but when the idea is once ours, we can verify and ennoble it for ourselves. It has been maintained that man cannot have any real knowledge of what God is; that there are impregnable barriers to every attempt of the human soul to attain the real truth about the Divine attributes. But if "I am informed that the world is ruled by a Being whose attributes are infinite, but what they are we cannot learn, nor what are the principles of His government, except that 'the highest human morality we are capable of conceiving' does not sanction them; convince me of it, and I will bear my fate as I may. But when I am told that I must believe this, and at the same time call the Being by the names which express and affirm the highest human morality, I say in plain terms that I will not. Whatever power such a Being may have over me, He shall not compel me to worship Him." As a Christian, as a Christian minister, I take my stand with those strong words of the philosopher against the theologian. Language has no meaning save the ordinary ones for the words, just, merciful, good; and if they do not mean this when applied to God, why do we use the words? Worship becomes impossible on such a theory. If the soul is to worship God, it must know what God is. II. GOD FINDS SATISFACTION AND DELIGHT IN HUMAN WORSHIP. If I speak to Him, it is because I believe He listens. His heart is moved in response to ours. As I sat a Sunday or two ago on the sea-shore, and thought of the thirty millions of people around whom the waters on which I looked were softly and gently rolling, I had present to my mind the twenty or thirty thousand assemblies which were met that morning in the depths of manufacturing towns, to which the Sunday had brought a brighter, clearer sky, and a welcome interruption of toil; in ancient cities, which have been famous through all the stormy years of our country's history; in scattered villages, where the life becomes more animated rather than more still on the weekly day of rest. I thought of venerable cathedrals, where vast and solemn spaces were filled with the music of ancient chants and exulting anthems, and the mighty harmonies of majestic organs, and of rude, unshapely buildings on the edge of lovely commons, and amongst the poorest and most wretched courts and streets of our populous districts, where, with loud cries and noisy hymns, poor labouring men whose hearts God had touched, were violently and passionately imploring His pardon, or thanking Him for deliverance from sin. I felt that at that moment the gates of heaven were thrown wide open as for some high festival, that before the day was over thousands of my countrymen would be regenerated by the Spirit of God, and receive from God's own lips absolution from all sin; and that tens of thousands would be baptized afresh with the Holy Ghost and with fire, and be gentler in their words, kinder in their deeds, purer in their thoughts all the week through as the result of that day's worship. I thought of all these, and I was thankful and glad. (R. W. Dale, D.D.)

Vers. 5-12. *Come and see the works of God.*—*The Eternal Ruler of the universe*.—I. As an object for human study. "Come and see the works of God." 1. The highest study of man is God. All other studies, unless they lead up to Him, are worse than useless. (1) The study of God is the most quickening. It stirs the profoundest fountains of sympathy, and sets all the wheels of the mental machine to work. (2) It is the most humbling study. As the mind directs its attention to God, all egotism vanishes—the particular is lost in the universal, the temporary in the eternal. (3) It is the most elevating study. That on which a man centres his mind has a mystic power to draw him to it, either up or down, according to its nature. The study of God alone has the power to draw man up into the higher grades of being. 2. The writer here directs attention to two things in relation to God. (1) His special interpositions (ver. 5). (2) His transcendent rulership (ver. 7). II. As an object for human praise (vers. 8-12). He suggests three reasons for praising God. 1. Preservation (ver. 9). 2. Chastisement (vers. 10-12). "Afflictions," says Lord Bacon, "plough the heart and make it fit for Wisdom to sow her seed in, and for Grace to bring forth her increase." Could we see things as they really are, we should often see greater reason for praising God in our afflictions rather than for our health and prosperity. 3. Success. "Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." A place of refreshment. This was compensation for all the trials. What if our scorching and exhausting journey lead us to a delicious resting-place? What if our frail bark is beaten by

the tempest to a golden shore? What if the loathsome medicine work off the disease, and establish health? In all such cases there should be praise for all the trials. (*Homilist.*)

**Ver. 7. He ruleth by His power for ever: His eyes behold the nations.**—*The nature and design of moral government.*—Everything around points us to a law or rule, by which creation is governed, and this implies a mind that cannot work in vain. But against this, "the rebellious exalt themselves." And they do this because they are rebellious; atheism is of the heart more than of the reason.

**I. OF THE NATURE AND DESIGN OF MORAL GOVERNMENT.** And this government is—

1. Sovereign. This essential to the prevention of confusion.
2. Of irresistible power.
3. Universal in its extent.
4. Is, and must be, essentially benevolent.

Many object to this, and deny it. But let them remember the vast scale of God's works, and how little we know. The next thing to be borne in mind is the tendency and purpose to bring all to a happy issue. This is an essential point in considering the moral government of God. All will end in the rectification of present disorders and in the bliss of creation.

**II. INFERENCES FROM THE FOREGOING.**

1. Sin is the source of all misery.
2. The greatest benevolence consists in making God known.
3. We are unspeakably indebted to God for the revelation of His will, that in Christ all can have life eternal. (*F. A. Cox, D.D., LL.D.*)

*The government of God.*—**I. THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD IS SUSTAINED BY OMNIPOTENCE.** When revolutions rise, and changes take place in the empires of the world which affect the condition of millions now living, and which shape the destiny of coming generations, it is sheer folly to ascribe them solely or chiefly to the restlessness of the peoples, to the despotism of monarchs, or to the policy of statesmen. They are signs that the Divine power rules over, and that the Divine hand works out the destinies of men. He can curb the impetuous passions of men, or turn them into a channel in which they shall work out His great designs in complete, though unconscious, subservience to His will; He can put a hook in leviathan's jaw, and cast down Antichrist from his seat; He can control the whirlwind in its stormy path, and check the mad fury of a long-oppressed people; He can arrest the lightning in its rapid flight and hush to silence the deep-voiced thunder; and He can stop the deadlier bolts of war and bid the angry nations be at peace.

**II. THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD IS ONE OF UNIVERSAL OVERSIGHT.** There is nothing, however great or trivial, which can transpire in His wide domain unobserved by Him. All events pass under His eye. All objects, the vast and the minute alike, are present to His view. "He telleth the number of the stars." "The very hairs of our head are all numbered." God is everywhere, omnipresence as well as omnipotence "belongs" to Him.

**III. THERE ARE REBELS AGAINST THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT.**

1. The exaltation of the creature may be through pride, through ambition, through vain desire, through unholly presumption, but whatever may be the secret feeling that prompts it, or whatever the form which it takes, the eye of God sees it, and His power can crush it when He will. It is vain for any of us, even in our most secret soul, to set ourselves against Him, for He tracks the rebellious thought to its remotest hiding-place within us, nay, He knows it in its first formation in the chambers of the heart.
2. Man's opposition to His Maker is as unreasonable as it is futile and hopeless. Why should we set ourselves against His law? Is He not our best Friend, our constant Benefactor, our loving Father? Is not His rule the rule of righteous love? Is not His throne the throne of grace? Is not His law a law of liberty, and in keeping of it is there not great reward? (*F. Stephens.*)

*God and the nations.*—The God of individuals is the God also of nations; the law of righteousness which applies to individuals applies also to nations; and nations are accountable to God, and must be judged by Him just as surely as individuals. Men are slow to believe this truth. They seem to think that there is one law for the individual and another law for the nation, and that it is vain to expect that a nation should be ruled by the teaching of the New Testament and the Sermon on the Mount. Great statesmen are not ashamed, even in Christian England, to go in direct opposition to that teaching, to appeal to the lowest, the most brutal, the fighting instincts of the people; to urge them to cherish and practise the spirit of retaliation, and to encourage them to hurl defiance against all the nations of the world. But surely the teaching of our Lord should rule nations as well as individual men; and nations should seek to be guided not by the old law, which says, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," but by the new and diviner law, which says that men should do unto others whatsoever they would that others



should do to them. God sits on the throne of the universe. The sceptre of universal dominion is in the hands of righteousness. The eyes of the Lord keep watch on the nations, and nations must be judged by the righteous judgment of God. (*G. Hunsworth, M.A.*)

Ver. 9. Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved.—*The safety of the saints*:—Now, in these words we notice—I. **THE LIFE**. "He holdeth our soul in life." This is—1. A life of purity in opposition to sin. 2. Of plenty in opposition to a life of poverty. 3. Of godly exercise, or exercise unto godliness. 4. Of pleasing discovery. II. **THE PRESERVATION**. "He holdeth," etc. This applies to all the four ideas adverted to. III. **THE FIXATION**. "He suffereth not our feet to be moved." Now, how is it our feet cannot be moved finally? Why, because we have, in salvation matters, "a covenant ordered in all things and sure." (*James Wells.*)

Ver. 10. For Thou, O God, hast proved us; Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.—*The soul's purification by suffering*:—A most natural question—one asked by tried hearts in every age since the world began—is, Why, if there be a God, a merciful God, does He permit all these repeated and accumulated sufferings to afflict us? What are the Divine uses and purposes of sorrow? For we are compelled to admit that, if there be no ultimate design in and issue from sorrow, there is a fearful waste of tears and agony in the world. Some men have asked the question and received no satisfactory reply, and consequently have hastily and foolishly concluded, "There is no God; there can be no God, or this could not have been." Even those who do believe in the existence of a merciful God, who do believe that He has the ordering and governance of all our lives, are yet confronted by the great mystery of suffering. They want an explanation; they want to know how it can all be reconciled with the existence and oversight of a merciful God. Thoughts like these are very old to most of us. How are they to be met? Well, I candidly confess that as yet the reason why God permits so much suffering in the world is wrapt in the same darkness as still surrounds that other mysterious question—Why has God permitted sin to enter into the world? There is no light; no effort of thought or imagination, no wide-reaching speculations have been able to solve the problem. But our text suggests several important thoughts. I. **THE PLACE OF GOD IN OUR TRIALS**—they may be sent by God. I say, may be sent, and thereby I mean to imply that all trials are not the effect of the immediate interposition of God. There are evils and sorrows which befall men which none would dare to say are of God's sending, because it is evident that they are the fruit of wrong-doing. For instance, if a man has been extravagant and reckless, and has thus reduced himself to poverty, it would be a libel upon God if he were to declare that God had made him poor, since he only reaps the harvest of his own folly. There can, however, be no doubt, if we are to accept the testimony of Scripture, and to believe in the Fatherly providence of God, we must believe that He permits and sends affliction. We cannot, we dare not, forget that God has to do with us every day, and we cannot take any comfort in the cold conception that we have stern, unbending laws to deal with, and not the tender, compassionate heart of a loving Father. The human heart craves a personal and present God. Then, further, if we can see God's hand in our troubles, does it not make our troubles easier to bear? II. **THE TESTING CHARACTER OF LIFE'S TRIALS**. Men in their ordinary connections are constantly applying tests to prove the character and the ability of those with whom they have to do; seeking to discover whether there is weakness or strength, falsehood or truth. Creditors test their debtors, masters test their servants, parents test their children, and friends often prove by ingenious stratagems the faithfulness of friends. So the world, by persecutions, and flatteries, and snares, is always testing the Christian Church; demonstrating to its own superficial satisfaction the honesty or hollowness of the profession its members make. Every man having the courage to avow himself on the side of Christ is immediately put on trial by his relations and his neighbours, who will entangle him in positions of temptation, simply to ascertain what his Christianity is worth. Little is taken on trust in this world, and we are never entirely content with any object or any pretension until it has undergone some fierce heat of trouble. Adversity is the great test. A cobweb is as good as the mightiest chain cable when there is no strain upon it. It is trial that proves one thing weak and another strong. This is true of our spiritual life, our professed

faith. III. **THE PURIFYING POWER OF LIFE'S TRIALS.** The words, "Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried," would express the thought here intended more clearly if read, "Thou hast purified us, as silver is purified." (*W. Braden.*) *Tested for hardships*:—When Scoresby was selecting his men to accompany him in Arctic explorations, he needed sailors that could stand the severest exposure, and had nerve to bear the worst trials. So every man who applied to accompany the expedition was made to stand barefooted on a great block of ice while the surgeon examined his body and Scoresby inquired into his past history. Scores were rejected at once, as they had not nerve to endure the test. The men who stood the trial made up a band of brave heroes. So sometimes God tries us when He has in store for us some great undertaking. Many faint and excuse themselves from the start; some endure, and make the heroes and leaders of the Church.

Ver. 12. **Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads.**—*The rage of oppression*:—God hath another intent than man hath, even in man's work. The Chaldeans steal Job's wealth to enrich themselves; the devil afflicts his body in his hatred to mankind; God suffers all this for the trial of his patience. Man for covetousness, the devil for malice, God for probation of the afflicted's constancy, and advancing His own glory. Here are cruel Nimrods riding over innocent heads, as they would over fallow lands; and dangerous passages through fire and water; but the storm is soon ended, or rather the passengers are landed: "Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." There is desolation and consolation in one verse: a deep dejection, as laid under the feet of beasts; a happy deliverance, "brought out into a wealthy place." In both these strains God hath His stroke; He is a principal in this concert. He is brought in for an actor and for an author; an actor in the persecution, an author in the deliverance. "Thou causest," etc.; "Thou broughtest," etc. In the one He is a causing worker, in the other a sole-working cause. In the one He is joined with company, in the other He works alone. He hath a finger in the former, His whole hand in the latter. Hereupon some wicked libertine may offer to rub his filthiness upon God's purity, and to plead an authenthical derivation of all his villainy against the saints from the Lord's warrant: "He caused it." We answer, to the justification of truth itself, that God doth ordain and order every persecution that striketh His children, without any allowance to the instrument that gives the blow. God works in the same action with others, not after the same manner. And whom doth the world think to ride over but saints? (Ps. xlv. 22). Who should be appointed to the slaughter but sheep? The wolf will not prey on the fox, he is too crafty; nor on the elephant, he is too mighty; nor on a dog, he is too equal; but on the silly lamb, that can neither run to escape nor fight to conquer. Those whom nature or art, strength or sleight, have made inexposable to easy ruin, may pass unmolested. The wicked will not grapple upon equal terms; they must have either local or ceremonial advantage. But the godly are weak and poor, and it is not hard to prey upon prostrate fortunes. A low hedge is soon trodden down; and over a wretch dejected on the base earth an insulting enemy may easily stride. But what if they ride over our heads, and wound our flesh, let them not wound our patience (Heb. xii. 1). The agents are men: "Thou hast caused men to ride," etc. Man is a sociable-living creature, and should converse with man in love and tranquillity. Man should be a supporter of man; is he become an overthrower? He should help and keep him up; doth he ride over him and tread him under foot? O apostasy, not only from religion, but even from humanity! Lions fight not with lions; serpents spend not their venom on serpents; but man is the main suborner of mischief to his own kind. Our comfort is, that though all these, whether persecutors of our faith or oppressors of our life, ride over our particular heads, yet we have all one Head, whom they cannot touch. Indeed, this Head doth not only take their blows as meant at Him, but He even suffers with us (Acts ix. 4). Saul strikes on earth; Christ Jesus suffers in heaven. Let but the toe ache, and the head manifests by the countenance a sensible grief. The body of the Church cannot suffer without the sense of our blessed Head. Temptations, persecutions, oppressions, crosses, infamies, bondage, death, are but the way wherein our blessed Saviour went before us; and many saints followed Him. Behold them with the eyes of faith, now mounted above the clouds, trampling all the vanities of this world under their glorified feet; standing on the battlements of heaven, and wafting us to them with the hands of encouragement. They bid us fight, and we shall conquer; suffer, and we shall reign. (*T. Adams.*) **We went through fire**

and through water; but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.—*The victory of patience*.—First, "We went." They went, so conveniently as they might, and so conscientiously as they durst, from the hands of their persecutors. Secondly, the hard exigents they were driven to, when to pass through fire and water was but a less evil compared with that they eschewed. 1. From the former, observe, That it may be lawful in time of persecution to fly. This was granted, yea, in some respects, enjoined by Christ. But must be warily understood; and the rule, in a word, may be this: When our suffering may stand the Church of God in better stead than our flying, we must then lose our lives, to save God's honour and our own souls. So that suffering for Jesus is a thing to which He promised an ample reward. 2. Prayer. This was the apostles' refuge in the time of affliction (Acts ii. 24). Bernard, in a fiction, doth excellently express this necessity, enforce this duty. Whilst these two opposites, Fear and Hope, stand debating, the Christian soldier resolves to appeal to the direction of sacred Wisdom, who was chief councillor to the captain of the castle, Justice. Hear Wisdom speak: Dost thou know, saith she, that the God whom we serve is able to deliver us? Is he not the Lord of Hosts, even the Lord mighty in battle? We will despatch a messenger to Him with information of our necessity. Fear replies, What messenger? Darkness is on the face of the world; our walls are begirt with an armed troop, which are not only strong as lions, but also watchful as dragons. What messenger can either escape through such a host, or find the way into so remote a country? Wisdom calls for Hope, and chargeth her with all speed to despatch away her old messenger. Hope calls to Prayer, and says, Lo here a messenger speedy, ready, trusty, knowing the way. Ready, you cannot sooner call her than she comes; speedy, she flies faster than eagles, as fast as angels; trusty, what embassy soever you put in her tongue she delivers with faithful secrecy. She knows the way to the court of Mercy, and she will never faint till she come to the chamber of the royal presence. Prayer hath her message, away she flies, borne on the sure and swift wings of faith and zeal; Wisdom having given her a charge, and Hope a blessing. She knocks at the gate, Christ hears her knock, opens the gate, and promiseth her infallible comfort and redress. Back returns Prayer, laden with the news of consolation. She hath a promise, and she delivers it into the hand of Faith: that were our enemies more innumerable than the locusts in Egypt, and more strong than the giants, the sons of Anak, yet Power and Mercy shall fight for us, and we shall be delivered. Pass we, then, through fire and water, through all dangers and difficulties, yet we have a messenger, holy, happy, accessible, acceptable to God, that never comes back without comfort—Prayer. (T. Adams.)

Vers. 13-15. **I will go into Thy house with burnt offerings; I will pay Thee my vows.**—*Religious individualism*.—Here is a deep conscious selfhood; the speaker is concerned with his own feelings and his own obligations to God. It is all "I." Men can never feel too deeply their religious selfhood, feel that they stand alone in relation to God, detached from all, occupying a position which no other can take. Here is a personal resolution to worship and to worship publicly, faithfully, and heartily. I. PUBLICLY. "I will go into Thy house." Public worship is no arbitrary institution; it is founded in the reason of things, it grows out of the religious nature of man. There are two instincts that urge to it. 1. That of self-satisfaction. We are so formed that strong emotions urge expression. The sublimest satisfaction of a man is to tell to his fellow-men what a glorious thing personal religion is. The other instinct that urges to public worship is—2. That of social love. The principle of social sympathy is implanted in every man; in some by nature it is stronger than others, in some by sin it is transmuted even into antipathy. Still the principle is there. Religion quickens it, strengthens and develops it. As sunbeams go forth to bless the world, the happiest sentiments in man yearn to pour themselves into other souls. II. FAITHFULLY. "I will pay Thee my vows," etc. 1. Great trouble has a tendency to excite men to make religious vows. 2. The godly man will ever be faithful to these vows. III. HEARTILY. "I will offer unto Thee," etc. Nothing is a better test of a person's love for you than the sacrifices he is prepared to make on your behalf. The love that cannot give the best things it has to its object, is of little worth. (Homilist.) *Religious vows a help to godliness*.—I. DAVID'S UTTERING WITH HIS LIPS RELIGIOUS VOWS. Where I observe that it is commendable in religion to make solemn vows unto God. By these I mean no other than this, a voluntary obliging ourselves, by promise made unto God, to do some good and holy thing for the future, as namely,

to bid adieu to such and such vices, to enterprise such and such virtuous actions, to undertake and perform this or that pious work. This is the general account of a religious vow. And it is necessary that I superadd this, that it is a solemn promise made to God of such things as are in our power: for we must not promise that which we are not able, by the Divine assistance, to perform. Moreover, a religious vow is a more solemn thing than a bare purpose or promise, because there is a particular invoking of God. If you find in yourselves an averseness to your duty, bind yourselves to it by solemn vows. Make serious promises before God that you will not forget and slight His laws, as you have formerly done, but that for the future you will be very observant of them, and make conscience of walking in the ways of holiness and righteousness, and let the world see that you perform the vows you made. II. DAVID'S PAYING THOSE VOWS WHICH HIS LIPS HAD UTTERED. As vows are to be made, so they are no less religiously to be performed. I doubt not but some of you have solemnly vowed and promised that if God would spare you from going down to the pit, when you laboured under such sickness as threatened death; if He would relieve your necessities, when you were in great straits and dangers; if He would dispel your fears as to this or that calamity which you were under; then you would for the time to come forsake your former sins, and devote yourselves to the service of God more entirely than ever. And in the discharging of these your promises, and paying your vows, observe these three plain rules. 1. Do it willingly and cheerfully. We are taught by reason and philosophy that no act is moral, and consequently cannot have the tincture of virtue, unless it be free and voluntary. The Christian institution also hath no regard to forced performances, to actions that proceed from violence and compulsion. These cannot be genuine, and then they cannot be acceptable. 2. See that you speedily perform your vows and promises. And truly, if you do it cheerfully, you cannot but do it speedily. The direction given for performing of vows under the law must be applied to our evangelical vows (Deut. xxiii. 21). 3. Pay your vows fully and completely. Remember that Heaven will not be served by halves, God will not accept of lame and imperfect sacrifices. If thou hast at any time made vows and promises, see thou fulfillst them to the utmost. Erasmus tells us of a passenger at sea, who, being in no small danger by the fury of a great tempest, and now expecting every minute to be a sacrifice to the incensed ocean, after the fashion of that religion which he had adopted, he solemnly vowed to the Virgin Mary, that if she would be pleased to rescue him from his present danger, and make the sea calm, and set him safe on shore, he would offer to her, and burn out at her altar a great taper as thick as the mast of the ship wherein he was then in danger. But when this man was got safe to shore, and had escaped all danger, he was neglectful of his promise, and instead of a great massy taper he put her off with a farthing candle, and thought that that would serve her turn. This in some measure represents to us our dealings with the God of heaven. We promise great things, but perform very little ones. We profusely make vows, but very niggardly keep them. But this ought not to be so. You must be careful above all things to call to mind the past circumstances you were in, and to reflect on your behaviour at that time; you must remember the promises and engagements which you then made, and the mercies which you have since received; and you must offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay your vows unto the Most High, as He hath expressly commanded. (*J. Edwards.*)

Vers. 16–20. **Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul.**—*Godliness*.—I. IN SOCIAL TALK. "Come and hear," etc. 1. The subject of a good man's talk. What is it? The kindness of God to him. "What He hath done for my soul." He hath enlightened me, renovated my nature, removed my guilt, brightened my prospects, etc. 2. The desire of a good man to communicate. Why does he wish to inform others of the blessings which God has conferred upon him? That he may do them good, inspire them with the desire to seek similar blessings. 3. The audience that a good man seeks. "All ye that fear God." All ye that are reverent and religious, and that are in sympathy with me. *Godliness* is not ascetic. It does not shun, but craves for society. II. IN EARNEST PRAYER. "I cried unto Him with my mouth." The expression "cried" indicates earnestness. Prayer is not words, but burning desires, "uttered or unexpressed." 1. This earnest prayer was unobstructed by iniquity. "If I regard (in purpose) iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Where the heart is full of worldly thoughts, corrupt desires, and iniquitous purposes, there

can be no true prayer. True prayer can no more spring from such a heart than vegetation from marble just polished by the sculptor's hand. 2. This earnest prayer was answered by God. "Verily God hath heard me," etc. True prayer is always answered—answered in the increased buoyancy, vigour, and joyousness of the soul. Every pure desire of the heart brings with it satisfying good. Virtue is its own reward. III. IN DEVOUT THANKSGIVING. "Blessed be God," etc. God has heard me, and therefore blessed be God. What we win by prayer we must wear with praise. Mercies in answer to prayer, do in a special manner oblige us to be thankful. (*Homilist.*) *The experience of a godly man:*—I. THE GODLY MAN IS ANXIOUS TO IMPART HIS EXPERIENCE TO OTHERS. "Come and hear." 1. His confession is volunteered, not enforced. 2. Spiritual experiences should be told at suitable times. "Come and hear." Many have brought religion into disrepute by preaching when they ought to have simply and unostentatiously practised its precepts. 3. Spiritual experience should be addressed to congenial hearers. "All ye that fear God." Some preachers err greatly by discoursing of the deep things of experimental religion to those who need to be taught the first principles of the Gospel. 4. Spiritual experience should be strictly personal. "What He hath done for my soul." Much that has obtained currency for "experience," has been either fiction, or religious scandal. II. THE GODLY MAN'S EXPERIENCE INCLUDES BOTH PENITENCE AND PRAISE. 1. He has to tell of sin mourned over. "I cried unto Him." This is just the language that would describe the outburst of a penitent soul. 2. He has to tell of trouble endured. The trouble has been greater than he could bear; it has been more than he could fight against; hence he has cried to One higher than he. 3. He has to tell of mercies received. "He was extolled with my tongue." This He has done for my soul: I sinned, and He forgave me; I was in trouble, and He helped me. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard," etc. III. THE GODLY MAN'S LOGIC. "If I regard," etc. The Christian's argument is this: If I cherish sin in my heart, God will not hear my prayer. But God has heard me. Therefore it is clear that His grace has been effective in my heart in subduing the power of sin. The answered prayer is the proof that I have been enabled by grace to overcome sin. IV. THE GODLY MAN'S EXPERIENCE ALWAYS CULMINATES IN A SONG OF PRAISE. Even when he has most plainly established his innocence, he ascribes the glory to God, whose mercy has not been withdrawn, and who still hears and answers prayer. This closing song implies three things—1. That God's mercy is continuous; else iniquity would prevail, and be cherished in the heart. 2. That God hears prayer unweariedly. 3. That the disposition to pray is also God's gift. (*Homiletic Magazine.*) *The psalmist's invitation:*—I. THAT GOD HAD DONE GREAT THINGS FOR HIS SOUL. 1. God had done great things for him, in a temporal point of view—making a king of a shepherd. 2. He here speaks, however, not as the King of Israel, but as a citizen of Zion. The soul, and not the body, the subject. Worldly riches and spiritual poverty are often combined. 3. What God did for the soul of David, He does for the soul of every believer. (1) He decreed its salvation. (2) He gave it to Christ. (3) He sent it His Spirit. (4) He renews and sanctifies it by His grace. (5) He has arranged in subserviency to it, the events of His providence. (6) He has made present grace, the earnest of future glory, already prepared. 4. Has God done any of these things for you? If so, He has done them all. II. THAT DAVID NOTICED AND RECORDED THE THINGS WHICH GOD DID FOR HIS SOUL. 1. Unless David had marked and treasured up God's dealings with him, he could not have told them. 2. The whole of his psalms show that this was his practice. 3. David's example is worthy of imitation—if we keep not a journal, let us at least recollect. (1) Such is the only course, dictated by respect for God, in His procedure towards us. (2) Such is the way in which we may be enabled intelligently to co-operate with God. (3) Such is the only way in which the answer to prayer can be perceived. (4) Such is the only way in which a song of thanksgiving can be learned. 4. Is the past a blank to you? Then you are not prepared to imitate David. III. THAT HE FELT THE OBLIGATION OF DECLARING TO OTHERS THE DEALINGS OF GOD WITH HIS SOUL. 1. The general tendency and practice is to conceal God's dealings—though silence on the subject of experience is often necessary from ignorance. 2. The motives which influenced David might be various. (1) He would have others to learn what he had been taught. (2) He would have others to unite with him in praising the Lord for His mercies. (3) He would, in a practical way, acknowledge the unity of the Church. (4) He yielded to present and strong feeling: out of the abundance of his heart his mouth spake. IV. THIS INVITATION IS

ADDRESSED ONLY TO THOSE WHO "FEAR GOD." 1. Had he been preaching salvation to the lost, he would have addressed all. 2. But he is to speak of the experience of a living soul in its intercourse with God. 3. In such a case, believers only are addressed. (1) Because they only will listen from actual interest in such a subject. (2) Because they only can understand such a subject—these things must be felt to be known. (3) Because they only will make a right use of such communications. (4) Because David was seeking for Christian fellowship. (*J. Stewart.*) *The communication of Christian experience.*—I. SUCH AS FEAR GOD TAKE AN INTEREST IN HIS DOINGS TO THE SOULS OF MEN, and are those, therefore, to whom such communications will be made. They cannot but be interested therein. But the godless, or the formal, will feel no such interest; that which the believer has to tell will be an unknown and unwelcome truth to them. But those who sincerely fear God will welcome the experience of others, knowing that whatever stage of the Christian life be told of, the communication cannot but be profitable and helpful.

II. THOSE TO WHOSE SOULS GOD HAS BEEN GRACIOUS DESIRE TO TELL OF WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR THEM. Not for the sake of ostentation or pride, still less from hypocrisy, but from irrepressible gratitude to God. And with the view of honouring God, to whom they are so much indebted. Also that they may do good to those to whom they tell of what God has done. It does do them good, for practical and experimental statements are well suited to help others in the heavenward way. And the telling does good to his own soul likewise. He receives sympathy, awakens delight, so that he and they to whom he speaks are comforted, and rejoice together.

III. AND THOSE WHO THUS COMMUNICATE THEIR RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE HAVE MUCH TO TELL. Not merely of God's general goodness to sinful men, but of what God has done specially for them—calling them, pleading with, converting, accepting, sustaining, helping them in every way. Let us then take this conduct of the psalmist as a model. Let no shyness or timidity hinder. But with seriousness, and sincerity, and simplicity do this. It is not essential to salvation, but it is greatly helpful thereto, for yourselves and for others. But what of those who have no such experience to tell? Should not this lead to serious thought? If you cannot talk of God's saving mercy here, how can you hope to enjoy it hereafter? (*A. Thompson, D.D.*) *The good man grateful for deliverances.*—I. EVERY DELIVERANCE OF OUR LIFE OUGHT TO BE ATTRIBUTED TO GOD. II. EVERY DELIVERANCE FROM TEMPORAL, STILL MORE FROM SPIRITUAL TROUBLE AND DANGER, WILL SO AFFECT THE GOOD MAN'S MIND AS TO EXCITE HIS GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF IT. III. WHILE THE DEVOUT MAN WAS ANXIOUS TO STIR UP THE WHOLE NATION TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE DELIVERANCE GOD HAD GIVEN TO IT, HE WAS MOST DESIROUS TO ADDRESS HIMSELF TO THOSE WHO POSSESSED THE FEAR OF GOD. 1. What has God done for our souls?—anything? Oh yes! he has given us a distinguished mode of being, and has often put us, as it were, into a new life, after dreadful sicknesses, dangers, etc. He has also given to some of us a better, even a divine, life, and has often renewed it to us. Surely gratitude should actuate us. 2. But in what manner have these expressions of God's goodness affected us? Have we acknowledged them openly, ingenuously, and piously? or have we in an ungrateful and cowardly manner kept silent for fear of man? 3. So far as any of us have walked unworthy of the divine goodness of God, in not having published it to others; and so far as we have trampled on this goodness, in neither having sought nor suffered ourselves to be put in possession of the divine life: so far ought we to be ashamed and abased before God, to pray to Him, etc. 4. It is our mercy that a due improvement of the present opportunity may yet lead to the most glorious results, as Jehovah will not turn away the prayer of the penitent, nor yet hide His mercy from him. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Christian experience.*—I. WHAT HAS GOD DONE FOR THE SOUL OF EVERY CHRISTIAN? The Christian's God has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Each of this Divine Three has done many things for his soul, and whatever is done by either of them is done by God.

II. WHY DOES THE CHRISTIAN WISH TO DECLARE WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR HIS SOUL? 1. If we have seen or met with anything wonderful, we naturally wish to speak of it. That God should do such things for a sinful soul is beyond measure wonderful. It is by far the most wonderful of all His works. He Himself represents it as such. Well, then, may every one for whom He has done such wonders of grace and mercy, wish to declare it. 2. Regard for God's glory prompts the Christian to speak. 3. Further, he wishes to declare what God has done for his soul, in order that others may assist him in praising the bountiful Benefactor.

III. WHY DOES HE WISH TO MAKE THIS DECLARATION TO THOSE ONLY WHO FEAR GOD?

1. Because they alone can understand such a declaration. 2. Because they alone will really believe him. 3. Because they only will listen with interest, or join with him in praising his Benefactor. IV. IMPROVEMENT. Permit me to ask you, in view of this subject—1. Whether the returns which God requires of you in the Gospel are not most reasonable? 2. Learn from this subject how inexcusable is your ingratitude, how much reason you have for sorrow, shame, and self-abasement. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *Gratitude and generosity*.—Let each one put to himself the question, "What hath God done for my soul?" and may God, as we proceed, enable us so to answer the question, that our gratitude to Him may be kindled to a greater warmth, and bear fruit abundantly in generosity to man.

1. First of all, then, we declare with thankfulness what God hath done for our souls in the act of redeeming us. God sent His Son to bless us in turning every one of us from his iniquities. But salvation is not a mere momentary act, ending in itself. God's plan is so to lay hold of our mind and heart that there may be continual growth and improvement. His desire is that we should advance in all spiritual knowledge, "understanding what the will of the Lord is," and comprehending more and more with all saints what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of His love. 2. To this end He has given us the Holy Scriptures for our perpetual possession. Let us consider how great a blessing it is to have revealed knowledge laid up in store for us in a book. This gift to our souls is not a mere transient message, the impression of which may gradually fade away and in time be totally forgotten, or the tradition of which may be corrupted and distorted without any power of correction; but God has so made His communication to us that we can keep it always fresh, can have it always ready at hand, can refer to it, can consult it again and again, can commit large portions of Divine truth to memory, can renew our impressions as they fade, can compare the different parts of the record together with care and deliberation, can study it more and more closely, and make it more and more our own every day that we live. But it is not merely as separate persons one by one that God has furnished us with blessings made ready to our souls. 3. We are members of a great society. The Holy Catholic Church is a part of the system of our religion. Not only does Christianity contain doctrines but likewise institutions. We are abundantly supplied with what may be called social ordinances in the Church. We have sacraments, and common prayer, and public instruction, and mutual help. 4. If, now, we are to single out a fourth thing which God hath done for our souls, I think it ought to be the blessing of providential care. How our life has been sheltered at dangerous times! What good directions have been given us by the word and example of others—what invitations to make ourselves well acquainted with Christ and His service, and with the peace which His faithful servants are permitted to possess! Whatever the result may have been, surely no thoughtful mind can hesitate to regard with thankfulness such providential care as one of the highest benefits which God hath conferred upon the soul. And especially let the mind dwell upon this providential care as intended for the discipline and training of the character for some real usefulness in life—as something intended to make us more thoughtful, more watchful, less frivolous, less selfish—something to give us the rare blessing of a right and well-balanced mind, so that we may be helpful to our friends, and that they may learn from us the lesson which we ourselves have been taught. But now we must advance one step further, and here we enter the inner circle of all. At this point especially the words of the psalm are addressed to those who fear God, and it is only they who can thoroughly enter into their meaning. "O come hither and hearken, all ye that fear God; and I will tell you what He hath done for my soul." This desire to help others is a certain mark of a true conversion. If, indeed, there has been experience like that which I have just described, its practical result will take this form. Gratitude to God will find its natural development in generosity to man. (*Dean Howson.*) *What Christ has done for me*.—I. LET US TRY AND TELL THE TALE. "What He hath done for my soul." What has He done? 1. He has done that which no one else could have done. From first to last the work is of His own right hand, and infinitely beyond the power of any other. No angel, nor any number of angels, could have done for me what He has done. They may, indeed, "excel in strength," but the work required as far exceeded their strength as their might exceeds a gnat's. Angels have done great things—see Egypt and Sennacherib—but they could not do this. He has done that which no minister, nor any number of them could do; and what I could never have done for myself. 2. He has done that which requires many words

to describe. Saved! Ah, that is a grand word worthy of being written in letters of gold. A saved soul includes many things. A saved soul is a God-pardoned soul; a God-reconciled soul; a sin-delivered soul; a heaven-entitled soul. 3. He has done that which can never be more completely done. 4. And which can never be undone. 5. He has done that for my soul which brings more glory to His name than all His other works. See Paul. 6. He hath done that for my soul which I am able to know is done. If a man does not know what God has done for his soul, there is some reason to believe that nothing has yet been done. Is conversion so minute a matter, so small a change that it can only be detected by the most delicate tests, and then never to a certainty? Nonsense. That is a poor kind of conversion that only remains a trembling hope and never develops into a conscious fact. 7. He has done for my soul that which will bear the test of eternity. II. A FEW REASONS THAT WARRANT TELLING THE TALE. 1. Saints in all ages have done the same. See Paul. Throughout all his epistles the same thing shines. He never forgets his own salvation. Glistening like little gems in a setting of gold are those personal allusions. "I obtained mercy." "Of whom I am chief." "By the grace of God I am what I am." Too often we forget that we have been purged from our old sins; the day of our conversion grows dim in the distance, and our heart's love loses its fervour and intensity. The fire becomes caked over and gives out but little heat. Tell the tale, and in telling it, old memories spring into fresh life. The fire is stirred, its hardening crust is broken, and the flames leap out as bright as ever. Oh, it is a grand thing for one's own soul to live over again the day of conversion. Tell it, it is the best argument with sinners. The world can understand a fact far better than a theory. (*Archibald G. Brown*.) *Christian experience*:—I. SOME OF THOSE THINGS WHICH THE LORD HAS DONE FOR THEIR SOULS, WHICH CALL FORTH THEIR FEELINGS OF GRATITUDE AND LOVE TO HIM. 1. What He has done for their souls in the gift of Christ (John iii. 16). 2. In enabling them to appropriate to themselves by faith the blessings of that salvation. 3. In the privilege which He gives to them, of drawing near to Him in prayer through Christ, and in the communications from Himself which are imparted to them frequently in the exercise of that privilege. 4. In their preservation from falling into open sin to the dishonour of His name and their own everlasting ruin (1 Pet. i. 5). II. IT IS GOD'S WILL CONCERNING HIS PEOPLE THAT THEY SHOULD LIVE IN THE LIVELY APPREHENSION OF THESE BENEFITS WHICH HAVE BEEN THUS CONFERRED UPON THEM. There are many who think lightly of Christian experience—who are ready to treat as enthusiastic, everything connected with it, and exclaim against it either as hypocrisy or delusion; but the operations of God's Spirit do not consist in mere notions, but in his lively actings within the soul; where there is no experience of what God has done for the soul, there can be no real work of God's Holy Spirit. Let none of us then be satisfied with mere notional religion, but see that we be able to rejoice in what our God, in His mercy and grace, has done for our souls. III. WE HAVE HERE REPRESENTED TO US ONE OF THOSE EFFECTS WHICH WILL EVER BE PRODUCED BY THAT TRUE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE WHICH IS THE RESULT OF THE OPERATION OF GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT IN THE SOUL. It is, that it will produce the humble acknowledgment of the mercies which have been received—and that from the simple and sincere desire to glorify God and to benefit the souls of others. 1. To win the unconverted people of the world to the consideration of those subjects from which their hearts are alienated and with which they only associate ideas of gloom and melancholy. 2. For the consolation and encouragement and edification of the people of God. (*Denis Browne, M.A.*) *Tell others of Jesus*:—Dr. Valpy, the author of a great many class-books, wrote the following simple lines as his confession of faith:—

"In peace let me resign my breath,  
And Thy salvation see;  
My sins deserve eternal death,  
But Jesus died for me."

Valpy is dead and gone; but he gave those lines to dear old Dr. Marsh, the Rector of Beckenham, who put them over his study mantel-shelf. The Earl of Roden came in and read them. "Will you give me a copy of those lines?" said the good earl. "I shall be glad," said Dr. Marsh, and copied them. Lord Roden took them home and put them over his mantel-shelf. General Taylor, a Waterloo hero, came into the room and noticed them. He read them over and over again, while staying with Earl Roden, till his lordship remarked, "I say, friend Taylor, I



should think you know those lines by heart." He answered, "I do know them by heart; indeed, my very heart has grasped their meaning." He was brought to Christ by the humble rhyme. General Taylor handed those lines to an officer in the army, who was going out to the Crimean War. He came home to die; and when Dr. Marsh went to see him, the poor soul, in his weakness, said: "Good sir, do you know this verse that General Taylor gave to me? It brought me to my Saviour, and I die in peace." To Dr. Marsh's surprise, he repeated the lines:—

"In peace let me resign my breath," etc.

Only think of the good which four simple lines may do! Oh, tell the good news! Never mind how simple the language. Tell it out.

**Ver. 18. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.**—*The petitions of the insincere unavailing*.—I. CONSIDER WHAT IS IMPLIED IN REGARDING INIQUITY IN THE HEART. The words do not point to open, profane and scandalous sinners. But there are many who maintain a fair character before men, who, before God, shall be found wanting indeed. They are deceiving themselves, and say they have peace when they have none really. But—1. These regard iniquity in their hearts who secretly practise it, fearing the world, but not God. They forget Jer. xxiii. 24. 2. Who indulge the desire of sin though they may be restrained from the actual commission of it. Many do this in regard to impurity, sensuality and malice. But see the words of our Lord (Matt. v. 27, 28, 21, 22). And—3. They who reflect upon past sins with delight, or without sincere humiliation of mind. Perhaps our real disposition, both towards sin and duty, may be as certainly discovered by the state of our minds after, as in the time of action. For sudden temptation may sweep a man away; but the question which determines what the man is, is what are his thoughts and feelings in regard to his sin afterwards (Job xiii. 26; Ps. xxv. 7). 4. Those who look upon the sins of others with approbation or without grief. Not as in Ps. cxix. 136, 158; Jer. xiii. 17; 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8. Some there are who find mirth in other's sins (Prov. xiv. 9). And—5. They are to be suspected who are loth to bring themselves to real searching of heart, or that God should try them (Ps. xix. 12). Now, all such do more or less regard iniquity in their hearts. But—II. GOD WILL NOT HEAR THEM. This means—1. When they cry for deliverance from affliction. God does hear the cry of His children (Ps. xci. 15; l. 15). There are three different objects of desire to a good man while in affliction—the Divine presence to support him under it; the sanctified use of it for the improvement of the spiritual life; and, in due time, complete deliverance from it. The two first, he that regards iniquity in his heart will hardly ask; and the last he shall not be able to obtain (Hos. vii. 14). 2. He will not hear them when they intercede for others (John ix. 31). It is the prayer of the believing righteous man that availeth (James v. 15, 16). How terrible not to be able to intercede for others because we are of those whom God will not hear. How diligent we should be, who have to pray for others, to see to it that we walk with God. 3. When they draw near to Him in worship (Isa. i. 14, 15; Prov. xv. 9). Nor—4. When they cry for mercy at the last (Gal. vi. 7; Matt. vii. 22, 23; Prov. i. 24, 28). CONCLUSION. 1. Let the ungodly be alarmed: if only regarding iniquity in the heart cause men to be rejected of God, how shall you appear who are living in open and gross sin? 2. Let us each and all examine ourselves whether we be of those spoken of here. Do we mourn over secret sins, and grieve because of the sin of others? Ask God to search and try your ways. Guard against your besetting sins and live continually as in the presence of God. (*J. Witherspoon.*) *The evil of regarding iniquity in the heart*.—I. A SUPPOSITION STATED. When may it be said that iniquity is regarded in the heart? 1. When it is permitted to reign in the life. 2. When we offer apologies for its existence. 3. When we evince no solicitude for its destruction. 4. When we make provision for its desires. II. A CONSEQUENCE DEDUCED. "The Lord will not hear me" (vers. 19, 20). This supposes—1. That prayer may be offered to God, even when iniquity is regarded in the heart. Sinners pray when they are in trouble; Pharaoh confessed his sin (Exod. ix. 27, 28); the Pharisee stood and prayed in the temple, but his language evinced the pride and haughtiness of his heart. 2. That where iniquity is regarded in the heart, the prayer is unacceptable to God. 3. That the man whose prayer God will not hear is in a most pitiable state. INFERENCES. 1. How utterly impossible it is to deceive God (2 Chron. xvi. 9). 2. That there may be a fair show of religious profession, even where iniquity is regarded in the heart. 3. That the

most effectual way to secure success in our prayers, is to hate iniquity and put away our sin, and beseech God to prove us, etc. 4. That if God has not answered our prayers, we should be solicitous to know the cause, and find out the hindrance. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *When God will be found:*—There is a great deal of praying that is merely a form, and of the lips only. And a great deal that is "abomination to the Lord," because the heart is not right. God will not hear prayer that does not fulfil the conditions of prayer. They are—I. OBEEDIENCE. So long as I knowingly refuse obedience, no amount or vehemence of prayer will avail. I must lift up "clean" hands, or He will turn away in righteous anger. II. WHOLEHEARTEDNESS. They that seek Him with "the whole heart" will find Him. None other. God is a jealous God. Therefore half-heartedness will find no favour with Him. How often does God find it necessary to try His people and keep them waiting, till their hearts wax warm and in dead earnest, and their whole being goes out to Him in prayer. III. A CLEANSSED HEART. See the text. An evil heart—of unbelief, of cherished sin, of impure desire, of malice, envy, worldliness—may spoil all our prayers and make them a very snare and a cursing. Oh, it is a fearful thing to come before God in prayer! By our very prayers we shall be judged, both now and at the day of judgment. What wonder, then, that so many prayers are unanswered? (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *Prayer answered only when offered in sincerity:*—I. WHAT IT IS FOR A MAN TO REGARD SIN IN HIS HEART. 1. It is to have a constant and habitual love of it. This true of all the unregenerate. It is born with him and he loves it (Ephes. v. 29). 2. An unmortified habit or course of sin. Even a child of God may have this: David had (Ps. xxxviii. 5). 3. An actual intention of the mind upon sin. II. WHAT IT IS TO HAVE OUR PRAYERS ACCEPTED WITH GOD. It is to prevail with God for the obtaining of what we desire. III. HOW IT IS THAT SUCH REGARD OF SIN BINDERS OUR PRAYERS. 1. Because in such case we cannot pray by the Spirit, and no other prayers find answer. 2. We cannot pray in faith. 3. Nor with fervour. IV. APPLICATION. Let all seek when they pray to have sincere hearts, free from hypocrisy and the love of sin. For otherwise our prayers cannot prosper, and, moreover, we incur the danger of a heavy curse (Gen. xxvii. 12). Therefore, before prayer, let us examine ourselves. This, if anything, will clear the coast. Sift yourselves by examining as Satan does by tempting. (*R. South, D.D.*) *The hindrances to acceptable prayer:*—I. THE BLESSING DESIGNED—that the Lord will hear us. This supposes—1. That our prayer be rightly endorsed and presented, which can only be through the atonement of Christ. True, when men, like Balaam, are set on their iniquity, God will at times let them have their way. But the text speaks of a right answer to a right prayer. 2. That our prayers are for permitted things. II. THE DECLARED HINDRANCE to prayer—"If I regard iniquity in my heart." Now—1. This is not sin in the life so much as in the heart which is contemplated. The blind man's reasoning was right (John ix. 31). And yet men will keep up the form of prayer though purposing to sin. 2. And it need not be some definite sin that is designed, but if the desires of the mind be turned to sin, then prayer is hindered. III. THE REASON OF THIS DECLARED CONNECTION between sin and disregarded prayer. Because in such state of heart we cannot pray. We may recite words, but we cannot pray. Let us deal honestly with God in our prayers. (*Daniel Moore, M.A.*) *Prayer with iniquity in the heart:*—If iniquity is regarded in the heart—I. PRAYER MUST BE INSINCERE. 1. For the most part, when men engage in prayer, they ask those things for which they are taught to pray. 2. If they regard iniquity in their heart, they cannot be sincere. 3. For they cannot really desire such blessings. II. PRAYER MUST BE FAITHLESS. 1. Without faith, there is no prayer. 2. Faith, if it exists, is one of many graces, and itself purifies. 3. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, we cannot have faith, and, therefore, God cannot hear us. III. PRAYER CANNOT BE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE DIVINE WILL. 1. Supposing that the man who regards iniquity in his heart be sincere, his prayer must be for what, etc. 2. He must be rejected. IV. GOD WILL SHOW HIS DISPLEASURE BY REFUSING TO HEAR. 1. Supposing that the man, etc., is offering a prayer for promised blessings, and—2. That he is sincere, yet—3. God has a controversy with him. V. THE ENDS OF WHICH WE SEEK THE ACCOMPLISHMENT, THROUGH THE BLESSINGS ASKED, MUST BE DISCOUNTENANCED BY GOD. 1. The man asks what is right. 2. He asks sincerely. But—3. He asks right things for an improper end. We plead the glory of God—the name of Christ. (*J. Stewart.*) *When may iniquity be said to be in the heart?*—I. THERE WOULD BE INIQUITY IN THE HEART, IN PROFESSING TO BE PENITENTIALLY

HUMBLED ON ACCOUNT OF ANY COURSE OF ACTION, WITH WHICH WE HAVE HAD NOTHING TO DO, OR THAT IS RIGHT IN ITSELF. II. THERE WOULD BE INIQUITY IN THE HEART, IF WE COMMITTED OURSELVES TO ANY ENTERPRISE, WITHOUT CONSULTING GOD'S WILL AT THE OUTSET. III. THERE WOULD BE INIQUITY IN THE HEART, IN IMPLORING THE ALMIGHTY TO BLESS MEANS ESSENTIALLY INADAPTED TO THE END. IV. THERE WOULD BE INIQUITY IN THE HEART, IN SUPPLICATING THE ALMIGHTY TO ENABLE ONE CLASS OF HIS SINFUL CREATURES TO INFLICT INJURIES UPON ANOTHER. V. THERE WOULD BE INIQUITY IN THE HEART, IN ENTREATING HIM TO BLESS ANY INSTRUMENTALITY WHICH HE HAS PROHIBITED. If Christianity expresses the will of God, and if Christianity is embodied in the life of Christ, then war is prohibited. And to ask Him to bless it, is to ask Him to promote rebellion against Himself. (*Homilist.*) *Iniquity in the heart a hindrance to prayer:*—Is there any difficulty in seeing why the utterances of one that cherisheth sin can never be wafted thus on high? How comes it that we weak men can ever engage in a work so lofty, so hard, as prayer, a work requiring the putting forth of all the powers of mind and soul? Is it not because there is a Spirit who helpeth our infirmities? Shall His voice be heard from the chamber of a heart in which the love of sin reigns? Will He, the Spirit of purity, work with a heart which is the willing slave of corruption? Again. As the man who regards iniquity in his heart cannot pray in the strength of God the Holy Ghost, so he cannot pray in faith. It is only when our heart, honestly questioned, carefully examined by the rule of God's commandment, does not condemn us, that we can have confidence towards God. As the Spirit will not inspire, nor faith give wings to the prayer of the lover of sin, so neither can the prayer of such have any glow of life. In such prayers there can be none of that "violence" to which alone the kingdom of heaven will yield; none of that seeking, knocking, striving, without which we can never find, never have heaven open to us, never enter by the strait gate. A great teacher of the Early Church, one who by God's grace was rescued from a sinful life, and was enabled when he was converted to strengthen his brethren; confessed that at one time he had been in the habit of praying against a foul sin, nursing all the while a secret hope that his prayer might not be granted. Let those whose first thought on hearing this is one of incredulous horror diligently ask themselves whether, were they as honest as he in the task of learning to know themselves, they would not have to fall under the same condemnation. "I dread to sacrifice to the gods with unwashed hands," said a grand old heathen warrior, "nor is it comely to present my supplication besmeared with blood and strife." Besmeared with blood and strife we surely are as often as we come into God's presence by our bedside or in His House of Prayer with thoughts and deeds of cruelty, of pride, of selfishness, of meanness and unkindness unrepented of; unwashed our hands surely are when our spirits are defiled with the stains of sin which we do not loathe; and in which we acquiesce, instead of being unwilling to rest until they be blotted out. Forgiving, tranquil, pure must his breast be who would worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; he that would take upon him the name of Christ must see to it that his steps depart from iniquity; he that would pray aright must sift his heart ere he kneel, lest he offer the sacrifice of fools; he that would rise from addressing God and joyfully cry with the psalmist, "Blessed be God which hath not cast out my prayer, nor turned His mercy from me," must first approach God's awful presence with fear and trembling and a reverent heed that the hands which he lifts up be holy hands, that the heart whose desires his lips are to declare be one that regardeth not iniquity. (*G. H. Whitaker, M.A.*)

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#### PSALM LXVII.

VERS. 1-7. *God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us.—Illumining the life:*—Let us mark the two extremes of the psalm. It begins with "God be merciful unto us," and it ends with "Then shall the earth yield her increase." There is some mysterious but very real connection between the fertility of nature and the character of man. Nature is not to reach her consummation until man himself is at his best. "God be merciful unto us." That is where human possibility begins, in the mercy of God. But this word

"morey" has grown very thin by common usage, and in ordinary currency it has lost much of its essential worth. We too often interpret it from the standpoint of the magisterial bondage, and it becomes significant of the summary dismissal of an action, and the release of the prisoner. We shall never really understand the inner content of the Scriptural word until we get far away from the court of law. It is infinitely more than a cold acquittal. The innermost element of the word is suggestive of "stooping," the stronger bending toward the weak. "And bless us." And what shall we say of this great word? There is no commoner word to be found in the speech of prayer. Now, perhaps I can best suggest the inconceivable wealth of the word if I say that it includes all the many significances of the English words beginning with "bene." Let my hearers take these words, and apply every one of them to the ministry of the Almighty, and they will obtain a glimpse and a hint of the manifold meaning of the blessing of God. Take the word "benevolence," and the word "benediction," and the word "benefaction," and then let the single colours mingle, and the result will give us some faint conception of the benefits of the Lord. "Cause Thy face to shine upon us." It is a plea for the light of God's presence. It is a prayer that He would "countenance" our goings out and our comings in. It is "to walk all day beneath Thy smile." It is more than that. When the light of the Lord's countenance falls upon us we, too, become illumined. "They looked unto Him and were lightened." That is to say, they were lit up! Their faces caught the glory of the Lord, as I have seen a cottage window shining with the reflected radiance of the sun. These, then, are the three great preliminaries in the making of a noble life, which shall witness to the power of the King. We are to receive the mercy of God, and the blessing of God, and the shining presence of God. And what is the purpose of it all when these gifts have been received? "That Thy way may be known upon earth." That is the purpose of it. All these earlier phrases have described the making of the Lord's witness, and now we are told what is to be the ministry of the witness. We are lit up in order that we may reveal the Lord. We are to be illumined in order that men may see our God. "That Thy way may be known upon earth." We are to make known the Lord's beaten tracks, His manners, His modes of action, His course of life. Men are to see our beauty, and through it discern the Lord's habits. "And Thy saving health among all nations." Our healed life is to be the witness of the Great Physician's power of healing. If I may reverently say it, the radiance of our character is to advertise the glory of the Lord. What are the signs that the witness is effective, and that the saving health is become pervasive? "Let the people praise Thee, O God." That would be the first token of an effective ministry. Thy people will begin to praise. They will fall into the attitude of reverent worship. "Let the nations be glad." That is to be the next step in the noble sequence. The people are to be brightened, cheered up, made merry! They are to become optimistic in their hopes, and full of encouragement in their speech. "Then shall the earth yield her increase." I do not wonder at it. As I have already said, in the opening of this meditation, we shall have finer gardens when we are finer men. The field will put on richer garments when we are clothed in white robes. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The greatest need of foreign missions*:—The psalm was intended, commentators tell us, for some great temple festival, possibly the Feast of Tabernacles, in a year of exceptional increase. But what strikes me as I read it is its universal note. There is nothing local, particular, or Jewish about it. The psalm is as much at home in the Christian Church as in the Jewish Temple, as much at home centuries after Christ as it was centuries before He came. I. The first remark I wish to make is that this psalm, in the scope and sweep of its petitions, supplies us with a PATTERN AND EXAMPLE FOR OUR PRAYERS. "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us." That is how the psalm begins. The psalmist's first thought is for his own people, for his own kindred, according to the flesh. But that is not where the psalm ends. In the very next verse the horizon recedes, the outlook broadens, the national need gives way to the universal need. He has scarcely offered up his prayer for his nation before his compassions are running out to the countries beyond, and in the very next breath he is interceding for all nations and for the wide earth. There is nothing local, there is nothing exclusive about this prayer. The psalmist overlaps all national boundaries, and brings the wide world before God. He has all Christ's passion for those other sheep which are not of the Jewish fold. He has all Paul's desire that the Gospel may be preached to those who have not heard it. True prayer is always world-wide and universal.

It is right to begin where this prayer begins—at home; it is not right to finish there. You must enlarge the scope of your petitions, and you must not rest till you have brought the “ends of the earth” before God. I pity the man who in his prayers never gets beyond “God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us”; for he has simply not learned the elements of prayer. For that is a marred prayer, a narrow prayer, and a selfish prayer. And whatever Christianity is or is not, it is the very antithesis of selfishness. “Let this mind be in you,” said the apostle, “which was also in Christ Jesus.” What was the mind that was in Christ Jesus? It was an unselfish mind. Our Lord was always thinking about other people. His thought travelled far beyond His own kindred to those peoples lying in ignorance and sin; to all the millions who lived without God and without hope. Am I wrong in thinking that, speaking generally, Christian people do not possess our Lord’s wide-world outlook, that our affections are cramped by national and racial differences, that we do not realize that men everywhere are the loved of God, the redeemed of Christ, and that we do not pant and yearn for their enlightenment and salvation as our Lord did? Some do, I know. David Brainerd—his enthusiastic spirit had no rest in his passion for prayer for his Indians. This lack of concern for the salvation of the world results in parochial and narrow and selfish prayers. “God be merciful unto us, and bless us”—we begin there, and there oftentimes we finish. None of Christ’s melting passion for the “other sheep” creeps into our prayers. The psalmist’s prayer, while beginning with himself, expands till he embraces the whole earth. II. But notice **EVEN IN HIS PERSONAL PRAYER HE HAS GOT THE UNIVERSAL GOOD BEFORE HIS EYES.** “God be merciful unto us, and bless us”—what for? “That Thy name may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations.” He does not ask for personal blessing for merely selfish ends. He asks for it that it may serve the universal good. He asks God to bless Israel in order that through Israel, so blessed, God’s way may be known upon earth, His saving health amongst all nations. The psalmist has grasped this truth, that Divine favours and blessings are never bestowed upon men or nations for merely selfish enjoyment, but they are always bestowed upon them for service. Our Lord appointed twelve, “that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach.” He chose these twelve men that they might be with Him to be His friends and associates, to accompany Him in all His journeys, to share His intimate fellowship. He conferred upon these twelve the highest privilege ever bestowed upon mortal men. The high privilege conferred upon the twelve was meant for the enriching of the world. “He appointed twelve that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth.” That illustrates a law. God’s blessings are never for selfish ends, they are always meant for the benefit of the wide world. For instance, God reveals to a doctor, let us say, some secret that makes for the health and well-being of mankind. He reveals it to him, not that he may hug it to himself, but that he may share it so that the whole world may be the better for it. The manifold religious privileges that this land of ours enjoys were never meant for England’s sake only. They have been conferred upon England in order that through England they may become the possession of the wide world. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God which you and I enjoy is not for our own personal gratification merely. It has been given to us that we may share it and diffuse it. You have the light. Have you shared it, diffused it, spread it abroad? Or have we, like some stagnant pool, tried to keep that which we have received? My brethren, the Christian ought never to be represented by the pool; he ought always to be represented by the stream. The pool takes all it can get and gives nothing; receives everything, parts with nothing; and reaps the penalty of its own selfishness in putridity and stagnation. The stream is always giving itself away. It runs down the hills, and as it runs down it gives greenness to the fields, cleansing and refreshing to the dwellers in the towns. Starting in the mountain, where all is at its sweetest and loveliest, it does not linger in its mountain home. It says, “There are thirsting people crying out for me; there are parched lands crying out for me,” and so it hurries down the mountain slope, past the village, into the valley, through the town, on and on, so long as there is a single yard of land to be blessed by it; on and on until the great sea is reached. III. And now, just for a moment or two further, let me ask you to notice **THE WORDS WITH WHICH THE PSALMIST DESCRIBES THE BLESSINGS THUS GIVEN TO THE WORLD THROUGH THE AGENCY OF ISRAEL.** It is really the blessing of salvation, but he uses two figures that describe it. He first speaks of it as “God’s way,” and in the second place as

"God's saving health." Just look at these two figures for a moment. First, he asks that Israel may be blessed in order that "God's way" may be known upon earth. Now, you see that the psalmist uses a figure which is familiar to all Old Testament writers—the figure of a man as a traveller, a wayfarer, a pilgrim; a traveller, as John Bunyan has put it, from the City of Destruction to the City Celestial. Or, if you like to put the same truth in a rather different form, let us say man is a traveller whose goal is happiness and peace, and there is a certain way along which he must travel if he is ever to reach that goal, if life is to be ever happy and peaceful in its course and triumphant at its end. Enoch walked with God—that is the way. He is the only successful traveller who walks with God. When the psalmist looks around him he sees multitudes of people out of the way. Like sheep they have gone astray, they have turned every one to his own way. That means misery, wretchedness, despair. God's way is the only right way. There has been no other way discovered. But as I look out upon the world to-day I see millions of people out of the way, turning every one to his own way and reaping misery and unrest as the result. Now, did you never feel any desire to bring these wandering people back? He has blessed us just in order that His way may be known upon earth. And the second figure the psalmist uses is this—"God's saving health." "Thy saving health among all nations." And if the first figure of "the way" suggests a lost and wandering world, this figure of "saving health" suggests a sick world. Here is the world from the Bible standpoint—"The whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint; from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and festering sores." And it is not the Bible only that says it. Modern literature says it in equally plain and emphatic terms. Listen to this from Thomas Hardy: "Did you say that the stars were worlds, Tess?" "Yes." "All like ours?" "I don't know, but I think so. They sometimes seem to me like apples on our tree, most of them seem splendid and sound, but a few blighted." "Which do we live on, Tess?" "A blighted one." A sick world, that is what the Bible says, that is what literature says, that is what experience says. And this is how God's salvation comes to us—it comes as "saving health." God's purpose is wholeness for every man. God's end for you and me is to make us morally sound. God's salvation restores unto perfect soundness and complete health. Life becomes absolutely normal. It is "saving health." The evangelist Matthew emphasizes the healing work of Christ again and again. "He healed all manner of diseases and all manner of sicknesses." But it was not bodily sickness alone that Christ healed. He healed the broken and the sick soul. To the sick of the palsy He said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." It is for the Christian Church still to make God's "saving health" known among all nations. Wherever the missionary goes you find a hospital. Jesus can give what no doctor can give—He can give healing to the soul. There are people who preach in these days a religion of healthy-mindedness. They tell us to ignore sin and evil and death. But sin and evil and death are here. They will not be ignored. An ostrich policy of that kind does not get rid of these things. "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." "He that believeth on Me shall never die." Well, ought we not to get the good news about God's "saving health" known amongst all nations? The world to-day is full of sick souls. India, China, Africa, are full of men and women burdened and troubled and oppressed with sin, haunted by the fear of death. Ought we not to tell them to come to Jesus Christ? Pass on the good news. Do you not think that we ought to tell every stricken soul about Him who is able to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease? Now, I lay the case of these sick souls upon your consciences—blighted by sin, and you and I know about the blood that can cleanse from it; all their lifetime in bondage through fear of death, and you and I know who can give them the victory over it. I lay the case upon your consciences. God has blessed us and caused His face to shine upon us and been gracious unto us simply in order that His way might be known upon earth and His saving health among all nations. May He help us to spread the news, that we may share thus in the joy of the Cross that makes Christ's kingdom come. (*J. D. Jones, M.A.*) *A universal new year's prayer*:—I. **THAT FRESH SUPPLIES OF DIVINE GOODNESS ARE CONSTANTLY NEEDED BY MAN.** "God be merciful unto us," etc. The benediction which the Almighty Himself put of old into the mouth of the high priest, to be pronounced on Israel, is the spirit and model of these words (Num. vi. 24-26). Hence our text is Divine, and may be used with reverent and

unbounded confidence. It invokes fresh communications of His love. "Bless us." Has not God always blessed us, through the whole of our life? Verily. Still we need a continuation. A rest in the flow of His beneficence would be our ruin, would terminate our being in black extinction. The words invoke also a fresh assurance of His love. "Cause His face to shine upon us." The face is the symbol of the soul and the expression of its deepest things. Hence the meaning of the prayer is, Assure us of Thy love. This conscious dependence of the soul upon God is the very essence of religion.

II. **THAT THE UNIVERSAL DIFFUSION OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE TO MAN.** "That Thy way may be known," etc. What are the things relating to God, a knowledge of which is so devoutly sought for the race? 1. His general method of action. "Thy way." God has a method by which He gives His harvests: the farmer must practically recognize and follow it, if he would have his labour rewarded by abundant crops. God has a method by which He restores exhausted energies and impaired health; the physician must follow that method, if he would succeed in his profession. God has a method by which He imparts knowledge to mankind; the inquirer must follow it, if he would obtain intelligence and wisdom. And He has a method by which fallen souls may be redeemed; and this method must be followed before salvation can be reached. 2. His special method of salvation. "Thy saving health among all nations." God has a method of moral restoration. He has salvation, He has health for the diseased, liberty for the captive, knowledge for the ignorant, pardon for the guilty, and immortality for the dying. And He has a method for imparting this salvation. What is that? (John vi. 40).

III. **THAT GOD'S CONNECTION WITH THE WORLD IS THE GREAT HOPE OF MAN** (ver. 4). 1. God judges the nations righteously. 2. God leads the nations on. "And govern the nations upon earth." Margin, "lead." God does not drive men, but leads them. He leads them, as a commander does his army, against the mighty hosts of evil principles, institutions, and habits.

IV. **THAT SPIRITUAL EXCELLENCE IS CONDUCTIVE TO THE TEMPORAL INTERESTS OF MAN.** "Then shall the earth yield her increase." The language implies that it is when "all the people praise God," that all the people shall have temporal plenty, that "the earth shall yield her increase." It is not difficult to see how spiritual excellence is conducive to temporal prosperity. Let the people be industrious, then they will put forth those efforts by which worldly good is generally obtained. Let them be temperate and economical, then self-indulgence and extravagance, which are the prolific sources of poverty, will cease.

V. **THAT TRUE WORSHIP COMPREHENDS THE SUPREME GOOD OF MAN.** The whole psalm implies this. (*Homilist.*) **That Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations.**—*The missionary prayer.*—I. **THE RIGHT MORAL CONDITION OF THE CHURCH IS OF SUPREME IMPORTANCE.** II. **THE CHURCH BEING MORALLY RIGHT, SHE IS TO BE THE MEDIUM OF MAKING KNOWN THE SUPREME KNOWLEDGE TO OTHERS.** III. **THE VITAL POSSESSION OF THIS KNOWLEDGE GIVES EXISTENCE TO THE SUPREME JOY.** 1. The joy of Divine satisfaction. 2. The joy of a new experience. 3. The joy of melody and praise. What a change this knowledge produces! It turns night into morning, sadness into songs. Being the supreme knowledge, it creates the supreme joy.

IV. **THE PREVALENCE OF THIS KNOWLEDGE, AND THE PRESENTATION OF THIS PRAISE, WILL ENSURE A GOLDEN HARVEST OF PROSPERITY.** (*J. O. Keen, D.D.*) *Our duties in regard to missions.*—I. **THINK OF THE GREAT THINGS THAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US, AND SURVEY OUR PRESENT CONDITION.** 1. The duty of a Christian congregation to aid in sending the Gospel to Jews and heathen is not a matter of indifference or choice; it is essentially and inseparably, as it were, a part of our existence. 2. The graces of the Spirit cannot remain inactive within us. If we have love, it shows itself in the Saviour's cause. 3. It is by His Church that His Church will be completed. 4. As the Lord has appointed His Church as the channel to supply the waters of grace, so He has honoured those churches and congregations especially who have been the most forward to fulfil their office; for the congregation that scattereth is that which increaseth; and they that water shall be watered also themselves.

II. **THE BEST METHOD OF FULFILLING OUR DUTY IN THIS MATTER.** 1. Let us endeavour to have it wrought into our minds as a Christian principle, as a part of our Christianity, as a matter of course, to be concerned and interested in promoting the Redeemer's glory by the extension of His Kingdom. 2. That this missionary spirit may be maintained and duly directed among us, I would counsel you to make yourselves acquainted with the progress of the Gospel in the world. 3. Seek to feel more deeply the conviction that that which lies nearest to the Saviour's heart is, that

the Father may be glorified in the conversion of sinners, and the building up of His Church. 4. Watch for opportunities of serving in His cause. (*John Tucker, B.D.*) *The extension of the Word of God abroad, intimately connected with its revival at home:—*I. THAT GOD'S WAY IS NOT AT PRESENT KNOWN IN ALL THE EARTH, NOR HIS SAVING HEALTH AMONG ALL NATIONS. II. THAT IT IS GOD'S WILL THAT HIS WAY SHOULD BE KNOWN IN ALL THE EARTH, AND HIS SAVING HEALTH AMONG ALL NATIONS. This is demonstrable—1. From all those passages of Scripture which teach that all nations are to be blest in Christ. 2. From our Lord's commission to His apostles. 3. From our Lord's parables of the mustard seed and the leaven. III. THAT THIS WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED BY HUMAN INSTRUMENTALITY. IV. THAT THE DIRECT INSTRUMENTS TO BE EMPLOYED IN MAKING GOD'S WAY KNOWN IN ALL THE EARTH ARE HIS OWN PEOPLE. Other instruments are frequently employed as their harbingers. Such are war and commerce. These remove obstructions, level mountains, fill valleys, drain marshes, and build bridges. They have been the precursors of the Gospel in many places, particularly in the East. But the direct instruments of making the way of the Lord known, are His own people. 1. By an enlightened, pious, and zealous ministry. 2. By the consistent piety of Christ's people. 3. By their individual and united exertions to promote the cause of Christ. CONCLUSION. 1. If piety be necessary to usefulness, let us pray for an increase of it in ourselves and others. 2. If many of our own countrymen are yet strangers to God's way, let us labour to instruct them. 3. If hundreds of millions in other lands are perishing for lack of knowledge, let us cheerfully contribute our mite to the support of pious missionaries, and pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth more labourers into the harvest. (*Outlines of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *The Church's missionary psalm:—* Whatever other thoughts there may be in this comprehensive prayer, we cannot be mistaken in regarding the following as standing prominent among the blessings which it implores—the continued enjoyment of God's forgiveness and friendship, and especially the increased experience of His love in quickened graces and enlarged spiritual strength; that the spring of His Church might ripen into summer; that the dawn might brighten into the perfect day; that, having life already, His people might have it more abundantly; and all this the effect of mercy, free and unforced, far-reaching as the firmament, and fathomless as the sea. I. There is a prayer for the REVIVAL of the Church. II. There is a prayer for the INCREASE of the Church. III. The connection between the revived life of the Church and ITS BENEFICENT INFLUENCE UPON THE WORLD is indicated in the words, "That Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations." 1. Such Church will be most secure against error and unbelief. 2. Will be most chosen of God to extend His Kingdom. 3. In such Church there will be a spirit of dependence leading to abounding prayer; great moral power; much brotherly love, and a spirit of unreserved consecration. Seek, then, above all else the Spirit of God. (*Andrew Thomson, D.D.*) *A plea for missions:—*I. We may regard these words as THE PRAYER of BRITISH CHURCHES IN REFERENCE TO THEMSELVES. The text involves—1. The avowal of conscious unworthiness. It is the prayer of the publican, God be merciful unto us, sinners. 2. The acknowledgment of dependence on God for His blessing. 3. The desire of unusual and extraordinary manifestations of Divine grace and favour. II. THE AVOWED FAITH of BRITISH CHURCHES IN REFERENCE TO THE WORLD. "That Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations." We may regard this part of our text in a threefold light: as the language of prayer; as the subject of prophetic anticipation; and as the recognition of a system of legitimate means. 1. True revival will remove many obstacles which now impede the way. By the augmentation of Christian principles it will prove the death-blow of party zeal, in all its subtle or more revealed forms. 2. It will purify all the passions of our nature. It will be the destruction of everything worldly in principle, of everything unholy in affection. 3. And will multiply agents also for the conversion of the world. (*J. Morison, D.D.*) *Conditions of spiritual growth:—*One of the most striking characteristics of the religion of the Bible is its universality. It is designed to, and does, meet the wants of all. 1. TRUE RELIGION IS EXPANSIVE BOTH IN ITS NATURE AND EFFECTS. The highest form of life is exhibited in the most complex organization. In lower types we find that comparative simplicity of structure is sufficient to maintain and manifest vitality. But when we come to man, and examine the human organism, we see the highest type of life on earth. And so in the history of civilization. In the rude ages of the past little organization was



needed. But how different now. The human life of man only reaches its perfect type when men are bound together with strong ties of mutual interest and dependence, sympathy and love. And so the true spiritual life of the soul seeks its growth by spreading its life-inspiring influence in every direction; by working in every possible way for the good of others, and by striving to bring the whole race into the brotherhood of the Kingdom of God. II. IN SEEKING GOD'S GRACE AND BLESSING FOR OURSELVES, WE SHALL HAVE REGARD TO THE INFLUENCE TO BE EXERTED FOR THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE WELFARE OF MEN. We are mindful of these high motives when we are seeking to stimulate others and ourselves in preaching and teaching the Gospel, but we are not so when we pray for blessings upon ourselves. III. ALL EFFECTIVE WORK FOR GOD MUST BE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL LIFE AND PROGRESS IN OUR OWN SOULS. Christian life, like the light, radiates from a centre, and the brighter the light the farther its rays extend in every direction. Have, then, life in your souls. (*Harvey Phillips, B.A.*) *The conversion of the world*:—I. THE PRINCIPLES THAT PERVADE THIS BEAUTIFUL PRAYER. 1. Humility: here is no claim for justice, no word of merit, but a cry for mercy. 2. Patriotism. It is a prayer by Jews for Jews. And we may take the words for ourselves. 3. Mercy, regard for others. 4. Piety. II. THE OBJECT OF THIS PRAYER—the conversion of the world. The world for Christ. This is what we are bidden seek, and for which provision has been made. There must be room for the world in your hearts, your prayers, your purses. Sink not down into a littleness which belongs not to the missionary enterprise. But for the unfaithfulness of the Church the world would have been converted ere now. III. THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS OBJECT IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED. This country must be blessed in order that it may bless the world; our Churches must be blessed, in order that they may bless the country; we ministers must be blessed, in order that we may be a blessing to the Churches. (*J. A. James.*) *Saving health*:—1. Our Lord graciously purposes for each of His children perfect health. He would have every power and faculty in our being working in holy vigour. Our health is our only safety. (1) To be in any way sickly or weak is to offer welcome hospitality to the evil one. He seeks out our weak points, and at the undefended place he makes his entrance. Fulness of health is fulness of resistance. The healthy soul by its very vigour is fortified against the invasions of evil and night. Indifferent spiritual health is exposed to incessant peril. The city of Corinth abounded in evil. Epidemics of worldliness and vice pervaded every grade of social life. The Christian needed to be in perfect health if he were not to be smitten by the ill contagion. Men of weakly wills and indifferent consciences and lukewarm affections fell before the invader, and became the victims of the prevalent vanity or lust. And you will remember that the Apostle Paul, looking at the little Corinthian Church, was filled with anxiety concerning some of its members. "Some are sickly!" He felt that their sickness was a friendly condition to the worldliness that besieged the gates of the Church. Their weakness exposed them to its attacks. Now, the Lord purposes that we should be in perfect health. He yearns to destroy our easy susceptibility to sin, and to place the whole bias of our life in the direction of holiness. When all our powers are perfectly healthy, our very health will be our resistance to the encroachments of the devil. (2) But spiritual health is more than self-protective; it is contagious. Common thought and common speech have made us familiar with the contagion of vice. I wish that we were equally familiar with the conception of the contagion of virtue. An evil effluence proceeds from the life of the sin-possessed; an invigorating and purifying effluence proceeds from the life of the sanctified. "Out of Him shall flow rivers of living water." We impress and influence one another not only by what we say and what we do, but even more deeply still by what we are. Our presence itself is vitalizing if we are possessed by vigorous moral and spiritual health. In the home, in the workshop, in society, in the place of worship, our presence counts for something, counts for much, and "virtue" is going out of us as a river of operative energy in all the many relationships of our varied life. Our health is not only self-protective, it acts as a saving ministry in the lives of others. (3) But spiritual health is not only self-protective and contagious, it is actively aggressive. "Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him." The God-possessed exercise a repressive influence over the vices and passions of men. Everybody knows that we can create conditions that incite another man's temper and lust, and we can create conditions by which these fires and cravings can be suppressed and destroyed. Our medical men sometimes provide medicated atmospheres to help to heal the ailments of their patients.

They can soften and moisten the air, and so give comfort to the struggling and help to regain them to health. The Christian man supplies a medicated atmosphere to his brother. His very presence helps in the creation of conditions which are unfavourable to vice and friendly to virtue. 2. As for the secret of this "saving health," it is to be found in the first verse of this psalm. The psalmist is a suppliant; he is kneeling in the presence chamber of the King. "God be merciful unto us, and bless us!" He is pleading with the good Lord to stoop in pity, and to lay upon him the forgiving and liberating hand. "Cause Thy face to shine upon us!" But that means that the suppliant's face is turned towards the face of the Maker! We are renewed into the same image. Our countenances catch the light and life that we contemplate. He is the "health of my countenance." We become possessed of the saving health of God. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*)

**Ver. 6. Then shall the earth yield her increase.**—*The influence of Christianity on the temporal future of mankind:*—The universal knowledge and service of God are connected with more abundant material prosperity. The earth is to yield her increase; the grapes are to hang in heavier clusters; the oil is to flow in richer streams; the corn is to yield a more golden harvest; the pastures are to be covered with more numerous flocks; man's temporal life is to be happier, nobler, more beautiful, when the whole race is brought back to the love and worship of the Creator. For this psalm, apt as the Jews were to forget it, and think only of themselves, foretells God's bounty to the whole race, and not to any one part of it. There is a golden age for men in this world, in which the dreams of reformers, philanthropists and fools shall be more than fulfilled. Christianity, conversant as it is with the realities of the unseen, the spiritual and eternal, is not, as some say, without interest for the wealth, the learning, the refinement, the beauty, belonging to this transitory life. Human life, though brief, is worth our care and culture. Christ cared for this life and blessed it. He healed the sick and fed the hungry, and looked at the lilies of the field, and observed that their beauty was richer and fairer than the robe of a king. They are perverted conceptions of the Christian life which have led many good men to shrink from the touch of every secular interest and to devote themselves to a life of solitude and meditation. They forget that we are put in this world to prepare for eternity, not to be always thinking about it. True, great saints have been indifferent to the common occupations of life, but in them—the few elect souls—the Divine fire burned with such intensity as to consume their interest in all inferior things. But Christianity is not, therefore, to be censured as hostile to man's temporal welfare. Though John Howard cared for nothing but the sorrows and injuries of the outcasts of society, philanthropy is not, therefore, charged with indifference to commerce, art and the various occupations and pursuits of men. We believe, then, that the triumph of the Christian faith will be marked by a vast uplifting of the material, intellectual, and social condition of our race. (*R. W. Dale, D.D.*) *Harvest sermon:*—Apply these words—I. To **THE MATERIAL OR PHYSICAL INCREASE OF THE EARTH.** How varied and great is this increase. But at present it is only partial. Hereafter it shall be full and complete. II. To **THE EARTH'S SPIRITUAL INCREASE.** There will be—1. Reverent acknowledgment of God's majesty (ver. 7). 2. The reverence of praise which is God's due (ver. 5). 3. The prevalence of God's kingdom upon earth (ver. 4). 4. The joy and gladness of the people (ver. 4). 5. The harvest of redeemed souls (ver. 2). (*J. Bennett.*) **God, even our own God, shall bless us.**—*God's blessing:*—I. **CONTEMPLATE HIM WHO BLESSES HIS PEOPLE.** "God, evon," etc. God. Our God. Our own God, for He has chosen us, and we have chosen Him. II. **THE NATURE OF THE BLESSING.** Forgiveness, grace, joy, hope. III. **THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD BLESSES HIS PEOPLE.** Seasonably, bountifully, through Jesus Christ, eternally. IV. **REASONS WHY GOD DOES THIS.** Because He loves them, would further the cause of Christ and His own glory. (*T. Lewis.*) *The minstrelsy of hope:*—"God, even our own God." What an exceedingly sweet title! What a loveliness and liveliness of heart must have been in the man who first applied that name to God. That word "own," or "our own," seems always to throw an atmosphere of delicious fragrance about anything with which it is connected. If it be our country,

"Lives there a man with soul so dead,  
Who never to himself hath said  
'This is my own, my native land?'"

Whether it be a land of barren heath, or shaggy wood, or a far extended plain—all men love their own fatherland. And so with regard to our homes, our friends, our books, etc. But what shall we say of "our own God"? Words fail to express the depth of joy and delight which this name contains. They seem to be used here as a kind of argument and assurance of the blessing which is foretold—"God shall bless us." But we propose simply to keep to the words, "God shall bless us, God shall bless us." They have been sounding in my ears like far-off bells, singing their way with a march of music into the deeps of my soul. Three personified passions will now speak to us, and we with them. I. FEAR. Fear lodges with some as an abiding guest, and is entertained as though she were a dear, familiar friend. She is ever inquiring, "Will God bless us?" and she is full of misgivings and forebodings. But our text makes answer, "God shall bless us, God shall bless us." II. DESIRE. Quick of step, bright of eye, warm of heart, Desire saith, "Ah, God shall bless us, but oh, that we had the blessing! We hunger and thirst after it." The reply to her is, that it will come through the revival of the Church. Then the longed-for conversion of sinners will be seen. God will give us His blessing in measure correspondent to our faith. And it will come when the Church is filled with intense desire for it, and sets herself to pray for it. To the more spiritual there are certain signs which assure them that the blessing is coming. As to Elijah, the signs of abundance of rain were evident; and to Columbus, of land not far off by the sight of land birds and floating pieces of sea-weed, and broken pieces of wood. So to the spiritually minded there are sure signs of coming blessing. III. HOPE. Behold her—the sweet, bright-eyed maiden, Hope. Have you never heard the story of her matchless song? She learned in her youth a song which she sings evermore to the accompaniment of a well-tuned harp. Here are the words of her enchanting lay, "God will bless us, God will bless us." She has been known to sing this in the midst of tempests, and calms have followed the soothing song. She has been often heard singing this in the night, and lo! stars have suddenly shone out of the black sky. Once on a time, certain strong labourers were sent forth by the great King to level a primeval forest, to plough it, to sow it, and to bring Him the harvest. They were stout-hearted and strong, and willing enough for labour, and well they needed all their strength, and more. One stalwart brother was named Industry—consecrated work was his. His brother, Patience, with thews of steel, went with him, and tired not in the longest days, under the heaviest labours. To help them they had Zeal, clothed with ardent and indomitable energy. Side by side, there stood his kinsman Self-denial, and his friend Importunity. These went forth to their labour, and they took with them, to cheer their toils, their well-beloved sister, Hope; and well it was they did, for the forest trees were huge, and needed many sturdy blows of the axe ere they would fall prone upon the ground. One by one they yielded, but the labour was immense and incessant. At night when they went to their rest, the day's work always seemed so light, for as they crossed the threshold, Patience, wiping the sweat from his brow, would be encouraged, and Self-denial would be strengthened, for they heard a sweet voice within sing, "God will bless us, God, even our own God, will bless us." They felled the giant trees to the music of that strain; they cleared the acres one by one; they tore from their sockets the huge roots; they delved the soil, they sowed the corn, and waited for the harvest, often much discouraged, but still in silver chains and golden fetters by the sweet sound of the voice which chanted so constantly, "God, even our own God, shall bless us." They never could refrain from service, for she never could refrain from song. They were ashamed to be discouraged, they were shocked to be despairing, for still the voice sang out clearly at morn and eventide, "God will bless us; God, even our own God, will bless us." You know the parable, you recognize the voice; may you hear it in your souls always. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

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PSALM LXVIII.

VERS. 1-6. Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered: let them also that hate Him flee before Him.—A good prayer:—This was what was always said by

Moses, when the ark set forward afresh in the wilderness. Enemies were in the path of its progress, and if the ark was to advance, God must scatter them. Advance of all kinds is accompanied with the scattering of enemies. The reformer, the teacher, the pioneer emigrant have all to fight. The very sun, as he scatters the darkness, seems to rise in a sea of blood. And God's cause in the world and the hearts of men must fight its way through enemies. I. THIS PRAYER IS TO BE URGED IN REFERENCE TO THE ENEMIES OF THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL IN THE WORLD. Selfishness in all its forms, tyranny, hate, worldliness, and unbelief, must be scattered by God's power. II. THIS PRAYER IS TO BE URGED IN REFERENCE TO THE ENEMIES OF THE PEACE AND SANCTIFICATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE, AND OF THE SINNER'S SALVATION. The Old Testament speaks much about enemies; the New far more about enmity. God's avenging sword of old cut off His enemies; the Sword of the Spirit slays enmity. The reason of the difference is found in the different stages of God's work in the world. God in the old dispensation had to carve out a little space for His garden and vineyard on the earth; now the whole earth is His garden, and He must root out every plant that He has not planted. It is not human beings that are God's enemies; it is sin in man that is the enemy against which God fights. God's enemies and man's real enemies are the same. We do not conquer our enemies, because we do not sufficiently feel that they are God's too. (*Homiletic Magazine*.) *God's interposition invoked, worship enforced, and character portrayed*.—I. THE INTERPOSITION OF GOD INVOKED (vers. 1, 2). 1. An impression of God somewhat general. "Let God arise." The suppliant seemed to regard the Almighty as quiescent, as either unconscious or indifferent to what was occurring in the affairs of mankind. This view of God is unphilosophic, pernicious. God is all consciousness and all motion. He sees all, and is never at rest. 2. A conception of sinners always true. "His enemies." They "hate Him." What is sin? Practical antagonism to what God is. 3. A feeling towards man that is wrong. "Let His enemies be scattered," etc. II. THE WORSHIP OF GOD ENFORCED (vers. 3, 4). 1. Worship is the prerogative of the righteous—i. e. those whose spirit is ruled in everything by the only righteous law, supreme love to God. Such only can worship. Their hearts alone overflow with those sentiments of gratitude, filial reverence, and adoration which enter into the essence of all worship. 2. It is the outflow of the highest happiness. "Let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice," etc. Worship is not a task, it is a gratification; it is not an effort, it is an effluence; it is not a service, it is a spirit; and it is a spirit radiant and jubilant in the conscious presence of the all-loving One. It is the spirit pouring itself out to Him as freely and naturally as the healthy tree pours out its fruit and its blossoms to the sun, or as the overflowing fountain pours forth its waters to the ocean. III. THE CHARACTER OF GOD PORTRAYED. 1. His majesty. "Him that rideth upon the heavens," etc. 2. His mercy. "A father of the fatherless," etc. (*Homilist*.)

Ver. 4. *Sing unto God*.—*The service of song*.—The spirit of holy song is not confined to any denomination. It is given as a precious boon to kings and shepherds, rich and poor, bond and free, men and women, Catholic and Protestant, Moravian, Quaker and Baptist. We are growing in the charity of Christ. There was a time when our hymnology was intensely sectarian. We put our creeds into song, and we would sing only our own poets. We actually argued on disputed doctrines in our sacred songs. Controversy made discord in the songs of Zion. But we see happier days. So then if we have the gift of song consecrate it to the service of God. And let all sing, and sing heartily, in the public assembly. Every heart for God, every life for God, every song for God! This is the sublime sight we long to see, and for which the watching angels wait. (*G. W. McCree*.) *Joyfulness a Christian duty*.—It is necessary for some people to remember that cheerfulness, good spirits, lightheartedness, merriment, are not unchristian or unsaintly. We do not please God more by eating bitter aloes than by eating honey. A cloudy, foggy, rainy day is not more heavenly than a day of sunshine. A funeral march is not so much like the music of angels as the songs of birds on a May morning. There is no more religion in the gaunt, naked forest in winter than in the laughing blossoms of the spring and the rich, ripe fruits of autumn. It was not the pleasant things in the world that came from the devil and the dreary things from God; it was "sin brought death into the world and all its woe"; as the sin vanishes the woe will vanish too. God Himself is the ever blessed God. He dwells in the light of joy as well as of purity, and instead of becoming more

like Him as we become more miserable, and as all the brightness and glory of life are extinguished, we become more like God as our blessedness becomes more complete. (R. W. Dale, D.D.)

**Ver. 6. God setteth the solitary in families.**—*The manifold mercies of God—the family:*—There is a strong disposition on the part of many now to deny the goodness of God as seen in Creation. A great philosopher, recently deceased, assures us, in his last deliverance about Nature, that on the whole this is a very clumsily conducted world. No doubt this pessimistic state of mind has been partly caused by the foolish and excessive optimism of the writers on Christian evidences. These quietly ignored the deeper difficulties and perplexities of the subject, and the philosophers have taken revenge by parading them and deepening their complexion. True, Dr. Watts, for reasons connected with man's depravity, preferred to find this world of ours "not a proper habitation for an upright being: its form is rude, irregular, abrupt, and horrid." It is curious to find Dr. Watts and Mr. Mill in such entire harmony about Nature. Dr. Watts sees a fallen and corrupted in what the other sees an originally ill-constructed and ill-compacted world. But the world has working in it the principle of progress, and this is continually refining, elevating, and developing both man and his world. Nature, like man, is saved by hope. The depreciation which has fallen upon the Order of Creation falls more heavily on the order of the human world. And, no doubt, the signs of strife, struggle, confusion, of waste and wreck manifest in Creation, are yet more so in the human sphere. The signs of dire disorder affront us everywhere. The skeleton stalks abroad; it saddens with its ghastly presence the sunlight of life. It is a great mystery. It is inevitable that these things should perplex us when we consider the large and far-reaching plan on which God has made the world. The key to it is the culture of a free being: his education for a free and noble eternity. No key but this will fit all the wards of Nature and of life. Much of the complaint that is heard is really against man's freedom, and because he is not more of a machine. If men were machines, and all things were the result of a mechanical arrangement; if what looks like freedom were only reflex action, then one would be driven to the conclusion that the machine is extremely clumsy and ill-arranged. We could, in that case, readily conceive that a much more simple one might have been constructed, which would work much more smoothly, and with far less fret and friction. But, judging by the lights of Reason and Revelation, God has chosen to construct the world upon quite another scheme, in which the education of free, moral beings for an immortal life is the deep thought that underlies it. Everything must be judged absolutely by its fitness for this purpose. And if this be the purpose, then it is worth while to study profoundly this great scheme, and to search out all its depths. Contemplate, then, the Divine goodness in the order of human society, which grows out of the social instincts and aptitudes which are the special endowments of man. And at the root of them all lies the institution of the family. Out of that human society grows. We may understand the text as telling both of God's loving care for the solitary, or as indicating the loving provision for man's happiness, solace and development, which the institution of the family secures. Now, the immediate purposes of this order seem to be—1. The drawing forth and the culture of the several faculties of the individual, and—2. The continual elevation and purification of the life of society: its constant progress towards an ideal, the vision of which God has set before mankind. In the family you have, in little, the picture of society. It is there in miniature. It is under your eye and hand; you can study it readily and see how it works. And the pessimist philosophers would tell you that they find in the family constitution just the mischievous blundering of which they complain elsewhere. As the world, so the family is, they say, "capriciously governed." And some speak of it more harshly still. It hands over, they complain, the character and career of each successive generation to individual caprice and will, concerning which you can take and hold no security: it is all blind chance what the parents may be. Plato sought, and communistic ideals seek, to rectify this supposed flaw in the arrangement of society, which is the result of family life. It is said, "What sort of blundering is it which places young children in their formative years, on which everything depends, under the control of those who are tolerably certain to be capricious and foolish? Would it not be better to take possession of the children from the first and place them under the rule of those who will be certain to

train them in wisdom and virtue?" And there does seem something to be said for this. For what awful consequences come from bad parental influences! How many myriads of children are ruined by it! Now, it is not a complete answer to say that man has gone aside from God's intention, because it allows that God made man capable of thus falling. But we must remember that all this is for our education, and is a mighty instrument in it, and we must take eternity into view. Then and there, if not here and now, we shall see God's ways justified. (*J. Baldwin Brown, B.A.*) *The Divine origin and unity of the family*.—The family has been best defined as "the institute of the affections." In its ideal state it is the home of love. It is the place of all others in which the affectionate side of human nature receives its strongest impulse, its freest, fullest development. While the family is first in order of time, having in embryo all the after fruits of civilization, being at the beginning of things, it held also within its limits both Church and State in their primitive condition. "The home is the first Church, and the home is the first State." Historically and germinally there has sprung from the family all that is best in human history, all that we most admire in human life. 1. Every one who takes the Bible as his guide must believe that the family is Divine in its origin. It was instituted in Eden by God Himself for the preservation of the race, for the welfare and happiness of His creatures. It has stood the test of time. Sin has corrupted, but could not destroy it. Christ came to a sinning world to redeem and regenerate it. Sin had polluted all the relations of man and those institutions which God had established for man's happiness and glory, so pure in their first inception. The family had not been exempt from this downward drag of sin. Christ would touch this centre of influence and bring the family back to its original place. He re-emphasized its sacredness. He put Himself in direct opposition to the theories of His age. Nowhere in the literature that preceded Him can you find such exalted views of marriage and the home as were presented by Him. That which by the perversion of sin had become such a power for evil He aimed to transform into a ministry of light and love. Through it He sought to propagate His faith and to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth. 2. Consider next the unity of the family—its oneness of life. The family is treated as a unit in the Bible. The members of it are not so many isolated beings, each one independent and thoughtless of the other. They have a common interest and a common life; what affects one affects the other. This is true not only of every living generation, but of all subsequent generations. Every family has a history distinct from all others. It is a link binding the past and the future. Receiving from its fathers the heritage of their virtues, it is expected to transmit them to those who follow. Just as surely as every Church and nation has its unmistakable tone and spirit, so, surely, is there a common family life. Every household has its marked characteristics, natural aptitudes, its distinctive views, tastes, and ideas. Too much has been made of heredity in certain quarters, but the basis of truth in connection with it we must all recognize. (1) It is interesting to note, even from a physiological point of view, the physical traits which reappear in the same family in successive generations. You take the child of to-day and trace a very close resemblance between him and the pictures of ancestors who lived one hundred or two hundred years ago. You detect the same features, the same colour of the hair and expression of the eye. (2) Mental traits also descend from parents to children. The prominent and remarkable men of the world have, as a rule, had a remarkable mother. Distinguished women have borne the impress of a distinguished father. Say what we will, blood has much to do in deciding what we are to be and do in this short life. (3) If it be generally admitted that physical and mental traits are transmitted, it will not be difficult to show that the spiritual nature of the child takes its direction very largely from the spiritual nature of the parent. Given parents who are gluttonous, intemperate, licentious, who are the slaves of their sensual appetites, what may we expect of the children who partake of their natures, who breathe the air and imbibe the teachings of their home? Who can measure the power of this family spirit? How often it is the very opposite to what it should be! Here it is money, money written on every face; here it is good living; here it is show; here scandal and detraction. Sometimes the sense of religion and of spiritual things will seem to be nearly lost or obliterated. Not that God permits this evil spirit of the household to have full and undisputed sway. He has established remedies and counter forces to resist it. Wicked homes are often broken up. Children whose natural parents will not care for them are gathered into public institutions or private homes by Christian

workers. Families, too, are constantly intermingling. Better influences from without may overcome the wicked spirit at home. But that does not disprove the unity of the family, that oneness of spirit and character which manifests itself in successive generations. It is something more than influence, direct or indirect. Every child is born into the peculiar life of its own family, partakes of its nature, and feels its power. (S. W. Dana, D.D.) *The family*:—I. **THE FAMILY IS A DIVINE INSTITUTION.** In the case of other relationships, such, for example, as those of neighbourhood and partnership, each man has been left, always, of course, under the presiding providence of God, to follow his own inclinations. It is a matter of choice with any one as to whether he shall live in town or country, but unless where God's law has been contravened, every man belongs of necessity to some family. God has instituted the home on earth. What says our Lord on this matter? (Matt. xix. 4). The fitness of the family constitution as God established it at first for securing the end which I have stated will be most convincingly seen by contrasting it with other systems which men have attempted to put in its place. Take, for example, that of polygamy, as seen either in the harem of an Eastern Mussulman or in that of a Western Mormon, and you will at once perceive that the very unity of which I have spoken is destroyed, and that there are few facilities for the training of children into highest nobleness of character. II. **THE FAMILY IS INTIMATELY CONNECTED WITH OUR EARTHLY HAPPINESS.** It is not in the magnificence of your dwelling, or the gorgeousness of your furniture, or the luxuries of your table, or the costliness of your attire that your home happiness depends, for you may have all these and be miserable still. Neither is it the absence of these things that causes discord and division in a house, for you may meet the highest felicity in the humblest abode. The question is, Do you honour God or not? III. **THE FAMILY INTERCOURSE HAS THE MOST POWERFUL INFLUENCE ON HUMAN CHARACTER.** The law of the physical world is that action and reaction are equal, and there is something like that in the moral. We are assimilated to those with whom we come into most frequent and intimate contact. There is a family likeness, in spiritual character, as well as in outward form and feature, between the members of the same household. The husband moulds the wife and the wife the husband, until, as it has been often remarked, they come to resemble each other even in the expression of the countenance, and the one will often anticipate the very expressions which the other was about to utter. John Randolph said to an intimate friend, "I should have been a French atheist if it had not been for our recollection, and that was the memory of the time when my departed mother used to take my little hand in hers and cause me on my knees to say, 'Our Father, who art in heaven.' " The mother of John Newton died when he was but six years old, but during these six years she had stored his mind with Divine truth, and those early lessons, as he himself records, he never could get rid of, even during the wildest part of his career. Oh, mothers, what a power is yours! See to it that you remember your trust, and seek by faith, and prayer, and perseverance to be faithful to it. IV. **THE EARTHLY FAMILY IS NOT A PERMANENT AND ABIDING THING.** (W. M. Taylor, D.D.) *God's love of companionship*:—You will observe that in the margins these words are rendered, "God setteth the solitary in a house." The Hebrew word means literally a house, or a dwelling-place, and figuratively, a family or a race. Now, we find in all parts of Scripture, but especially in the Psalms, short but emphatic descriptions of what God does, which open to us with no common clearness what God is. From brief notices of the conduct, we derive some of the best apprehensions of the character of our Maker. Thus, the sentence which we have brought before you as our subject of discourse discloses what we may call a love of companionship in God. When the garden of Eden had been enamelled with beauty, and Adam placed there as its tenant, the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helpmeet for him." It was thus at the very outset of the creature dispensation that God showed His purpose of associating beings, or bringing them into companionship, in place of allowing the solitary to continue the solitary. And whatever the period at which this spirit of companionship began to be developed, it is unquestionably one which may be traced in the whole course of God's dealings with mankind. We are not at liberty to doubt that it is by Divine appointment that men have been clustered into those various groups which constitute what we designate human society. This human society is nothing more than a system of mutual dependencies, which will not tolerate, for the most part, anything of solitariness. You see that the whole machinery of a kingdom would

quickly come to a stand; yea, that an arrest would be put on all the business of life, and therefore very speedily on life itself, if there were a determination on the part of each individual to keep himself to himself, and to have nothing whatever to do with the surrounding mass of his fellows. There must be the interchange of benefits between man and man. Paul says to the Romans—"As we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." And if once you admit this doctrine of the "communion of saints," you are ready for the full understanding of "God setting the solitary in families." It proves that the very instant a man becomes converted and renewed, there is a bond of the very mightiest union established between himself and countless individuals in different sections of the earth. He is not shut out from the sweetness of domestic worship by the mountain and the forest which surround him, but, participating still in the relationships of brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, what shall he said of him, but that, in his loneliness and desertion, he vindicates the truth that "God setteth the solitary in families"? (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

**Vers. 7-18. O God, when Thou wentest forth before Thy people, when Thou didst march through the wilderness.**—*The progress of humanity*:—I. IT COMMENCES WITH THE DIVINELY TERRIBLE (vers. 7, 8). As a rule, if not always, the very first step of the soul on its moral march is preceded by visions of God that startle and alarm. God seems to enwrap the soul in "blackness" and "darkness" and "tempests," to roll thunders and flash lightnings on the conscience, as on Sinai of old; so that the soul cries out, "Lord, what shall I do to be saved?" (*Isaiah; St. Paul; people on day of Pentecost.*) II. IT PROCEEDS UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF GOD HIMSELF. 1. He supplied Israel's needs (ver. 9). 2. He conquered their enemies (vers. 11, 12). And this is what God is always doing for His people. No moral progress can we make unless He leads us on, supplying our needs and striking down our foes. III. EVERY STAGE CONDUCTS TO HIGHER PRIVILEGES. Three stages in the march of the Hebrews are indicated here. From Egypt they advanced to the wilderness, and the wilderness, with all its trials and inconveniences, was better than the land of despotism. From the wilderness they entered Canaan. Every stage that a man reaches in moral progress is better than the preceding. He moves on "from strength to strength," from "glory to glory." The glories reached are nothing to be compared to the glories yet to be enjoyed. (*Homilist.*)

**Ver. 9. Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance when it was weary.**—*Refreshing showers*:—The language is figurative. There is no mention of any rain in Israel's history. It was a rain of gifts. "He rained down manna upon them," etc. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods," etc. Now, the resemblance to the rain holds good—I. IN THEIR ABUNDANCE; it is a plentiful rain. So is it with God's grace II. IN THEIR REFRESHING, REVIVING NATURE. See it in the fields; so is it in human hearts. III. IN THEIR SEASONABLENESS—when God's inheritance "was weary." They have been weary times which have preceded the outpouring of the grace of God. See this in history; in homes and Churches; in individual hearts. (*E. W. Shalders, B.A.*) *Blessing for a weary heritage*:—I. GOD HAS A POSSESSION IN THIS WORLD WHICH MAY BE PRE-EMINENTLY CALLED HIS OWN. "Thine inheritance." The Church is His—I. By special choice. 2. By right of conquest. 3. By voluntary self-surrender of His believing people. II. THIS HERITAGE UPON EARTH IS OFTEN EXPOSED TO THE EXHAUSTING INFLUENCE OF TRIAL AND DISCOURAGEMENT. 1. The length of the way. 2. Open enemies. 3. False friends. 4. Delay of harvest, and fear of final loss. III. GOD IS AT NO LOSS FOR MEANS AND INSTRUMENTS TO REFRESH AND REPLENISH HIS CHURCH IN CRITICAL SEASONS. 1. These promised influences are timely and seasonable. 2. They are copious and abundant. 3. They are fertilizing and vitally influential. (*Homiletic Magazine.*) *A gracious rain refreshes God's inheritance when weary*:—I. THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE HIS INHERITANCE. This implies that He peculiarly loves, delights in, and cultivates His inheritance; and receives from them, in return, those fruits of righteousness, of worship, and of praise, in which the revenue of His glory consists. II. THIS INHERITANCE, FROM A VARIETY OF CAUSES, IS SOMETIMES WEARY. By too much intercourse with the world; by too close an attention to business; by too free an



indulgence in the enjoyments of life; the people of God become barren and unfruitful. And when they are brought to a sense of their condition, no land parched with drought ever thirsted more for the refreshing rain of heaven than they long for the renewing grace of God. III. WHEN IT IS WEARY, GOD, IN GREAT COMPASSION, SENDS A GRACIOUS RAIN UPON HIS INHERITANCE, AND REFRESHES IT. There is not a more perceptible effect produced upon the face of nature, by the rain which descends from heaven, than in the soul of man, by the rain of heavenly grace. What a verdure; what a freshness, in the one case; and in the other, what a serenity of soul; what a kindness of temper; what a humbleness of mind; what a sanctity of heart; what a blessed hope; what an unspeakable peace; what a reviving like the corn; what a growing like the lily; what a casting forth of roots as Lebanon; what a spreading of the branches of the tree of life; what an olive-like beauty—are the fruits of this gracious rain, this heavenly refreshing! The refreshing of which we speak does not produce feelings and affections merely grateful. The beauty which is imparted is the beauty of holiness. It is a beautifying of the meek with salvation. Ask yourselves, then, this question: Am I refreshed by the Word of God? Does it come to me not in word only, but in power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance? (*M. Jackson.*) *Refreshing influences:*—Trace the analogy between the effects of rain on the earth and the influence of the Holy Spirit on the Church. I. CLEANSING. No rain in March, no rain in April, and no rain till the middle of May; the grass, the flower, the shrub, the bush, and the tree were covered with malarial excrescences, parasites, blight and dust. How long would it take the women of England, with brush and duster in hand, to dust the hedges, the gardens, the forests and the fields? They sadly needed it—months without a wash, their beauty was gone. But the rain came, washed away the dust, drowned the parasites, and removed all hindrances to growth. This is the present need of the Church of God: “showers of blessings”; the washing of regeneration. Conformity to the habits of society, worldliness, talebearing, scandalizing, pride, selfishness, envy, strife, hypocrisy, uncharitableness, assumption of holiness—these are the dust, the excrescences, the parasites, which mar the beauty and retard the growth of the Church of Christ in our day. We need a downpour of the Holy Ghost to wash all away. II. FERTILIZING (Ps. lxxii. 6). The mown field suggests the condition of those who are exhausting themselves in the service of Christ, or, at least, those who are throwing off crop after crop of work and experience for the benefit of others. These Christians are the pillars of the truth; towards them our hearts go forth. They are so busy at work that they cannot find fault with others; and so sensible are they of their own unworthiness that they never sit in judgment upon their fellow-Christians. Their motto is, To spend and be spent for Christ. But human energy is inexhaustible, and it needs replenishing—“rain upon the mown grass.” The rain fills the fibres of the tree, and penetrates the ground to water the roots, so does the influence of prayer water the soul. III. RIPENING. You see the husbandman looking at the cornfield when about ripe. A good shower ripens and fills the grain. The ripeness of the soul is like a shock of corn. God is looking out, and pours His Spirit upon it. (*T. Davies, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. **Then, O God, hast prepared of Thy goodness for the poor.—God's provision for the poor:**—We hold it as altogether one of the most forcible sayings of Holy Writ, that “the poor shall never cease out of the land.” The words may be regarded in the nature of a prophecy; and we think their fulfilment has been every way most surprising. But our great business lies with the fact that poverty is the appointment of God. “The rich and the poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all.” When we have fastened on the truth that God hath appointed poverty, we must set ourselves to show that God hath not overlooked the poor. The Gospel of Christ makes no distinction, whether preached in a palace or in a cottage—whether it addresses itself to ignorant men or to learned men. There is no variation in the message: it speaks to all as being born in sin and shapen in iniquity; and announces to all the same free and glorious tidings—namely, that “God hath made Him sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” But not only has God thus introduced a kind of natural counterpoise to the evil of poverty; in the appointment of the method of redemption He may be said to have especially provided for the meanest and the most destitute. There is nothing in the prescribed duties of religion which, in the smallest degree, requires that the man be a man of learning

and leisure. The Gospel message is one of such exquisite simplicity—the sum and substance of truth may be gathered into such brief sentences—that all which is necessary to know may be told in a minute, and borne about by the labourer in the field, or the soldier on the battle-plain. Nay, we shall not overstep the boundaries of truth if we carry this statement further. We hold unreservedly that the Bible is even more the poor man's book than the rich man's. There is a vast deal of the Bible which seems to have been written for the very purpose of making good our text: "Thou, O God, preparest," etc. But there is yet another point on which we think it well to turn your attention; for it is one which is not a little misunderstood. We know that what are termed the evidences of Christianity are of a costly and intricate description, scarcely accessible except to the studious. It is hard to suppose that the unlettered man can be master of the arguments which go to the proof of the Divine origin of our faith. We think assuredly that, if you take the experience of the generality of Christians, you will find that they do not believe without proof, and that, therefore, they are not unfurnished with weapons with which to repel infidelity. They do not believe without proof; but the proof lies, as Horsley says, in the surprising manner in which the Bible commends itself to their souls—in the inexhaustible stores which they find in Jesus—in the agreement of the doctrines and precepts of religion—in that exemplar of good, and in that fear, which a devout heart carries about with itself. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." And we think there can be nothing far-fetched in the assertion that there is no evidence of the divinity of the Scripture half so strong as that which a man knocks out for himself with the simple apparatus of a Bible and a conscience. So that we think that God hath so ordered His Word that it carries its own witness to the poor man's intellect and to his heart. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Harvest*:—The reference is to God's care of Israel in the wilderness. But God still cares for men. I. *THE NATURE OF HIS GOODNESS*. It is seen in the produce of the ground. The brute creation as well as man share in this, but the corn is especially for man. Judea was famous for its corn. By a bold metaphor, Moses speaks of "the kidneys of the wheat." And as there, so here "the barns shall be full of wheat." We are hindered in seeing the goodness of God herein by its constant repetition and by the means—second causes—which He employs. But if some things hinder our seeing, others may help. Think how easily he could have destroyed all our hopes; and how dreadful if He had; and yet how righteously, for our sins, He might have done this. II. *THE SUBJECTS OF HIS GOODNESS*—"the poor." It is not for them exclusively, but they are spoken of as being the mass of mankind: they would be most affected by deficiency: God would encourage them to trust in Him; and He would have the rich care for the poor, for He does. (*IV. Jay.*) *God's provision for the poor*:—What is God's provision for the poor? 1. He has provided them with a very honourable name. That name has been tarnished and sullied in the course of years. But the name as originally found in the Hebrew contained no idea of shame, guilt, or disgrace. To the poor and weak, not to the rich and self-helping, God's richest promises are made. 2. God has provided the poor with necessary succour. There is ample provision in the world for the entire human family. The provision is God's part, the just distribution is the duty of man. If we could only properly distribute the things which we have at our command every one would be provided for. If any man does not get his share it is the fault of his fellow-man; not God's omission. In one department of individual economics especially there is a special call for the work of the Christian Church. And that is in the region of those numberless casual changes which fall to the lot of man, and, for the time, make him poor. Here is the opportunity for the Christian to go to him and to give him the personal word of cheer. Then again, the Christian, in his dealings with his fellow-man, must adapt the Jewish law concerning not shaking the olive-tree twice, or too nicely gleaning the cornfield. He is ever in his business transactions to set an example of high-souled generosity. He should take a personal interest in those who are dependent upon him. When we turn to the New Testament we naturally expect to find evidence that God has made provision for the poor. Nor are we disappointed. From the time of the founding of the Church the greatest care of the poor was enjoined. An experiment of the Communist system was tried. It early passed, either because there was not sufficient religion to sustain it, or because it was not the method of God's idea. Its place has been taken by the law of Fraternity. Every one is responsible for the welfare of his fellow-believer. (*J. Lorimer.*)

Ver. 11. **The Lord gave the Word: great was the company of those that published it.**—*The proclamation of the Gospel*.—The occasion of this psalm—the carrying up of the ark to Jerusalem; the joyful procession is described. But it has a prophetic import as well as a literal one. It points on to the Ascension of Christ and to the gifts He has bestowed upon His Church. Our text is a glorious promise concerning the proclamation of the Gospel. I. **IT IS AND EVER HAS BEEN THE WILL OF GOD THAT BY MAN THE MESSAGE OF MERCY SHOULD BE PROCLAIMED.** This so ordained in mercy to man and for the glory of God. II. **THIS WORD WILL NEVER BE PROCLAIMED, EXCEPT THE LORD SEND US.** God has ever sent forth the men who preached His Word, and He is sending them forth now. III. **THERE SHALL BE GREAT SUCCESS.** See context. IV. **SHE THAT TARRIED AT HOME DIVIDED THE SPOIL.** Allusion is to Num. xxxi. 25; and for illustration see 1 Sam. xxx. 22. Some must stay at home, though there are many who ought to go forth to labour. But they who rightly stay at home, they shall be blessed through the missionary enterprise. Conclusion: Have we ourselves believed the Word which the Lord hath given? Let us give Him all the glory. What motives are here for fresh exertion! (*F. Close, M.A.*) *The place of preaching, in the past and in the present*.—On the old Glasgow coat-of-arms were the words—"Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the Word and the praising of His name." That has been shortened now into "Let Glasgow flourish"—but the original was as I have said. The fact that that could be taken as the motto of one of the prominent cities of Scotland is a sign of the deep and far-reaching influence which preaching exerted in past days. I. **WHAT PREACHING HAS DONE IN THE PAST.** Both in our own and in other lands some of the mightiest triumphs that have ever been achieved were brought about by the preaching of the Word. Since the days of Elijah downward, it has played an important part in moulding the destinies of the world. Jonah, an old preacher of righteousness, turned a mighty city unto God by means of his summons to repentance. In the Christian Church we can mark the influence of preaching making itself directly felt in the early ages. We have the preaching of Jesus, so original, so full of beauty, so touched with deep love and mercy that it thrilled the heart of multitudes, and paved the way for the future acceptance of His cause. We have the beaming enthusiasm of John; the direct home-thrusts of Peter; the logical grasp and gathering impetus of Paul—all of which have left an indelible mark, not only upon the Christian Church, but upon the whole history of the world. Almost all the great movements of the Middle Ages have been identified with great preaching. One of the greatest and most daring attempts on the part of a preacher to achieve great things is identified with the name of Savonarola. That simple monk threw out the most powerful factions that ever ruled in Florence. For a time he blossomed out as a great leader, and sought to establish a City of God upon earth. He failed ultimately, and partly by his own error, but the extraordinary success that he for a time achieved over prince and people is one of the red-letter days in the history of preaching. In our own country it has achieved great triumphs, and has been reckoned one of the distinctive features of Scottish life. Since the days of Knox the pulpit has been the foremost institution in the country—most powerful for good or evil. The preacher has been listened to as the veritable servant of God, and his message taken as if it came from highest Heaven. II. **THE PLACE THAT PREACHING HOLDS AMONGST US TO-DAY.** There is no question that the pulpit to-day does not occupy the same place of undisturbed authority that it did during the first two centuries after the Reformation, or even that it has done within the last fifty years. It is no longer the social, religious, and intellectual leader of the people. Other influences have sprung up and taken their place amongst us and exercised their authority. A very different set of conditions exists amongst us to-day. Never did cheaper and better books exist. Another great obstacle to the unquestioned authority of the pulpit is the change that has taken place in the public temper. At the days of the Reformation the principle of the right of individual judgment was established. But in these days we have carried that principle to a length that was never dreamt of then. Now every man reckons himself just as good a judge of right and wrong as any other man. III. **WHAT WORK HAS STILL TO BE DONE BY THE PULPIT.** There are many who seem to have so completely despaired of the power of preaching in the future, that they advise us to resort to all sorts of expedients in order to fill the churches. All this shows a genuine distrust of the power of preaching to impress the public. That is not preaching which does not come straight from the Word of God. Lastly, the pulpit has a

great work to perform in helping to solve, in a Christian manner, the social and political problems of the age. (D. Woodside, B.D.)

Ver. 18. *Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove.*—*Among the pots*:—The text has been a sealed passage for ages. Bishop Lowth declared it "unintelligible." Mr. Spurgeon calls it "a hard passage, a difficult nut to crack." But new light is constantly breaking out of the Scriptures. Miss Whately, travelling in the East, observed a fact which gives us the lost key to this text, and unlocks its beautiful imagery. In her work entitled *Ragged Life in Egypt*, she thus speaks concerning the flat roofs of the houses: "They are usually in a state of great litter; were it not that an occasional clearance is made, they would assuredly give way under the accumulation of rubbish. One thing seems never cleared away, however, and that is the heap of old broken pitchers, sherds and pots that are piled up in some corner. A little before sunset, numberless pigeons (or doves) suddenly emerge from behind the pitchers and pots and other rubbish where they have been sleeping in the heat of the day, or pecking about to find food. They dart upward and career through the air in large circles—their outspread wings catching the glow of the sun's slanting rays, so that they really resemble 'yellow gold'; then, as they wheel round and are seen against the light, they appear as if turned into molten silver, most of them being pure white or else very light-coloured. This may seem fanciful, but the effect of light in these regions can scarcely be described to those who have not seen it. Evening after evening we watched the circling flight of doves, and always observed the same appearance." The doctrine unfolded is the promise of God, that a holy character may be maintained in this sinful world, despite unfavourable surroundings. The Christian may be—I. **CLEAN AS A DOVE IN BUSINESS.** Your character is not cheapened because your work is in the kitchen or at the forge, nor is it ennobled because you handle diamonds, write poems, thrill breathless auditors, or sit behind mahogany office desks. There are men in coal mines with souls like the wings of a dove; and there are men in decorated mansions with souls sooty and black with sin as the miner's face with coal-dust. One has the soot on his face, the other on his soul. How beautiful a sight to see a man who has spent the day amid the pots of business, environed by the dust and grime of greed, of selfishness, of fraud and falsehood, fly home at sunset unsoiled and clean as the wings of a dove covered with silver! II. **CLEAN AS A DOVE IN SOCIAL LIFE.** Man has needs which only social life can meet. In this there is a great good, and great evils lie close beside it. "Society" is not loyal to Christ, but is obedient to the spirit of "the world." Its ethical code is not the morals of the New Testament. Here are the pots dusty and grimy. We may mingle in social life only on the plane of our Christian birthright: "Brethren, ye are called unto holiness." To mingle in society and not touch its wines, not patronize its demoralizing amusements, not bow down to its false maxims, customs and conventionalities, not lose the zest and fervour of a holy life, is proof of the constraining love of Christ. III. **CLEAN AS A DOVE IN RELIGIOUS LIFE.** The things impossible with men are possible with God. The things impossible to the unregenerate are possible to the regenerate man. Born again by the Spirit of God, and filled with Divine grace, he can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth him. If the lines fall to him among the pots, still he may emerge "as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." This does not cover presumption and reckless precipitation of oneself into moral dangers. Had Daniel been recklessly roaming around that lions' den, and fallen in, God would not have sent an angel to shut their mouths. We must use all prudence to avoid evil influences: then, if our path of duty lies through a fiery furnace, God will keep us from all harm. (J. O. Peck, D.D.) *A contrast between the spiritual state of the sinner and the saint*:—I. **FROM A STATE OF MEANNESS TO A STATE OF DIGNITY.** The mention of wings, by means of which the feathered tribes soar aloft, so as to reach an elevation, and occupy a field of movement to which the other animals do not, and cannot, attain, naturally suggests the raising of the redeemed from the degradation which they were accustomed to share with their fellow-sinners, and their being placed on high, and in heaven; while the silver and gold represent the splendour and magnificence of their altered circumstances. II. **FROM A STATE OF POVERTY TO A STATE OF AFFLUENCE.** Silver and gold are the emblems of wealth. "Ye shall be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver and with yellow gold." Whatever else these words may mean, they certainly must mean a state with

which poverty has nothing to do. Doubtless they are expressive of those spiritual graces and endowments with which believers are invested, and of that imputed righteousness in which they shine; and which together constitute the ornaments and the robes that they wear as kings and priests unto God. Much has been done to enrich the Church. III. FROM A STATE OF WRETCHEDNESS TO A STATE OF FELICITY. Joy in the room of sorrow; gladness instead of sighing; shouts of rapture for shrieks of pain; life for death! No longer tossed on the sea of adversity and trouble, they shall find themselves safe in the haven of rest, and peace, and external happiness; and, delivered from every vexation and every fear, ages of never-ending sunshine and serenity shall glide over their heads! IV. FROM A STATE OF DEFILEMENT TO A STATE OF PURITY. "Clean water" is sprinkled on them, and they are made clean; from all their filthiness, and from all their idols, does God cleanse them. V. FROM A STATE OF GROVELLING SENSUALITY, TO A STATE IN WHICH THE FLESH, WITH ITS AFFECTIONS AND LUSTS, SHALL BE CRUCIFIED. Sinners, in their natural state, are governed by some one or other of the unhallowed impulses of a depraved heart. But the desires of sinners that are renewed flow not downwards to the earth,—they ascend upwards to heaven. VI. FROM A STATE OF SERVITUDE TO A STATE OF FREEDOM. (*Andrew Gray.*) *Rescued from the brick-kilns*.—Before our conversion Satan is our task-master, and he is worse than Pharaoh. It is drudge, drudge, drudge. But after a while Christ appears, and says, "Let my people go," and then we come out into the largest blessing. We wash off the dust of sin's brick-kilns, and God makes us fairer than doves' wings covered with silver. Now, we maintain—I. THAT THE GRANDEST ADORNMENT THAT ANY YOUNG MAN CAN HAVE IS THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION. But many would say, when they heard of some young man being converted, "Oh, what a pity! he was the merriest of all of us and the most gladsome. What a pity!" And here is a young woman, the pride of her home circle. She becomes a Christian, and people talk of the pity of such a bright light being extinguished. But we maintain that the peace, the comfort, the adornment of such a young person just then begins. The religion of Jesus Christ beautifies the heart, and instead of depressing it lifts up to a higher platform of cheerfulness. Oh the joys and comforts of Christ's religion! What a poor, shallow stream is worldly enjoyment compared with that! It is not the people who seem to be the merriest that really are so. See that roystering, drinking, scoffing young man; how loud he laughs. But is he really happy? Follow him home. See him when he is alone and conscience speaks. He is wretched, as the Christian young man never is and never can be. "I have been trying these three years to serve God," said a man at a great meeting at which I was present, "and I am here to-night to tell you that in these three years I have had more delight than in all the years of my abomination." And that is the universal experience. II. RELIGION FREQUENTLY ADORNS A MAN BY PLACING HIM IN SPHERES OF USEFULNESS. Look at the fashionable fop—how fine he thinks himself! he never thinks of anybody but himself. Here is another young man who has set himself to try and do good to others. He loves Christ and wants others to love Him. He will try to uplift the fallen, to cheer the sad, to do all the good he can. Which is the most beautiful to look upon? Compare Napoleon and Voltaire with Paul. It is a grand thing to be a Christian hero. And what will it be in heaven? If I have persuaded any of you to start on the road to heaven I would like to stand beside him there. Many there are waiting for such to join them. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 17. **The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels.**—*The chariots of God*.—We read much in Scripture about the holy angels, how high and glorious their condition is. And we are told often how these holy angels do their work that we may learn how we should do ours. All God's works teach some lesson concerning Him, and His greatest works are especially rich therein. But in the lives of men we do not always see lessons and examples of what we ought to do and be. Oftener far do we see what we ought not to do and be. Therefore ought we to be glad and to prize it highly and thankfully, when God sets before us the examples of holy beings, such as the angels, who do so unchangeably His will. Now, the angels do what they do, not blindly and helplessly as the earth rolls round and bears her fruits, but knowingly and willingly. In this they are like to mankind. But see how the angels serve God. Take the story of Hagar: what an example for all servants of God in the conduct of the angel told of there—calling back those who have strayed from the path of

duty, and helping those who are in need. Then, in the story of the angel who appeared to Manoah: he would not tell his name and would allow no honour to be paid to him for what he had done. So will the Christian disclaim all merit of his own, all honour to himself. And as the angels' messages, so are ours to men to be, the announcing of the coming of Christ. So did the angel who called to Abraham on Mount Moriah, and thus enabled him to see Christ's day. At times, too, they bring tidings of earthly blessing, as to Abraham: and so we are to assure men that God will reward His servants who give up all for Him. But in order to bear the message of God's glad tidings we must have it graven lovingly in our own hearts. We must have our hearts full of it; and then it will overflow from our lips. The angels are called the chariots of God: they bear His will about to every part of the universe; and then they return to the presence of God. Again, an example for us. And they are part of a great multitude, as we should seek to have part in the Church of God. And they are soldiers of God carrying on the holy war. Let us share with them herein. (*J. G. Hare.*) *Twenty thousand chariots*:—I have seen in this multitude of chariots an emblem of the Divine promises. Some may judge this a fanciful comparison, but it has greatly cheered my heart, and I, therefore, feel disposed to pass it on. I. Let us, then, in the first place, SEE IN THESE CHARIOTS AN EMBLEM OF GOD'S PROMISES. Some one who has taken the trouble to count the promises in God's Word declares that there are about twenty thousand, and I suppose it was this fact that led my mind to connect the promises of God with the chariots of Jehovah. So suppose we paraphrase this sentence thus: "The promises of God are twenty thousand, even thousands upon thousands." We will not limit the number, for almost every verse of Scripture is in a sense a promise. The histories are promises, for what God has done God can do, and even the precepts, from some points of view, bear promises within their bosoms, for God never gives an order without providing the power with which to obey it. The prophecies and the parables are but various forms of promises. All the promises of God bear brightly marked upon them the royal arms; the Divine mark is plainly stamped on every good word of God. Some of them have attached to them, "Thus saith the Lord," lest there should be any manner of doubt as to whom the equipage belongs. Oh, that we had the trust in them that Dr. Isaac Watts possessed when he said, "I believe them enough to venture an eternity upon them." It is related of him that when one spoke of the promises as "plain" promises, he said, "I rejoice in their plainness, for now that I am old I can do little but turn to God's Word, and look out and rest upon the plain promises of God." The best of all is that "the Lord is among them." The Commander-in-chief is in the midst of His host. We stand side by side with the Promiser, when we trust His promises. Dr. Hamilton has said that "one single promise of Christ Jesus accredited in the heart, unites the soul to God." II. LET ME VOLUNTEER SOME ADVICE CONCERNING THESE CHARIOT-PROMISES. If the promises of God are so numerous, if they are so like to chariots, how is it that you sit waiting by the roadside, wondering that you make so little progress in the heavenward way? These chariots are for you; if Christ is yours. His Word is yours, and every syllable that He has spoken speeds forth on your behalf. God's words are "words upon wheels." Mount the chariot, and you also will have free course. (*T. Spurgeon.*)

Vor. 18. *Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive.—Ascension Day*:—This is the "Carmen seculare" of the old Hebrew Church, answering to the "Te Deum" of the Christian Church, and far surpassing it. In martial fervour, and in impassioned intensity of expression, the Hebrew songs excel all other compositions. This song bursts upon us at once. Every note is a nerve, every sentence is sonative, every verse is a picture full of life, and strength, and victory. The inspired bard watches with enraptured gaze the onward march of the Most High. Mighty kings are scattered by a storm of hail, and the hill of Salomon, in the tribe of Ephraim, is white with sheets of ice. The Lord brings His own again from Bashan; His people from the depths of the sea. There comes a pause in this grand hymn of triumph, as though the singers, still gazing on God's glory in the clouds, were altogether lost in admiration, and too happy to sing any more. And so the hymn dies away with an exclamation of astonished rapture—"O God, wonderful art Thou in Thy holy places, even the God of Israel, who giveth strength and power unto His people; blessed be God." The counterpart of all this is related by St. Luke. The evening sun is shining

on the marble palaces of Zion. The disciples are standing on the hill of Olivet. They gaze upon the clouds beyond which their Master has disappeared, until the spirit of the old Hebrew song comes upon them, "Thou art gone up on high; Thou hast led captivity captive." Let us try to catch the spirit of this wondrous hymn. God, the God-Man, has gone up. We are His children. We must go up too. Wherever you are, ascension is your plain duty. Until you get thoroughly, and heartily, and altogether dissatisfied with the dead level of your life, there is no chance of your doing any good, here or hereafter. If you do not care about following Him, you are not His disciple. Nay, less than that, you are not a man at all, if you will not ascend. To get higher, to get more power, more honour, more authority, more wisdom,—to feel more, to enjoy more—all this is the legitimate instinct of your nature as a man. But there is a false ascension, a wrong way of going up. There may be an elevation of a certain part without any ascension whatever. A man may ascend in this world by meanness, selfishness, and fraud. Even in religion there is often a false ascension. The exaltation is purely imaginary. The man goes up too quickly, and with too much noise. The sham saint goes up, but the Saviour goes not with him. All this is very sad, and makes sad work altogether. The sham saint does so much harm. When you ascend, go carefully, and remember that before you can really go up you must go down. You will enjoy heaven when you get there, not before. You have to carry the cross to the crown. You cannot ascend unless you are humble, and the cross will make you humble. Are we so ascending? (*Henry J. Swallow.*)

*The ascension of Christ.*—I. HIS GLORIOUS EXALTATION. The exaltation of our Redeemer is indeed a sufficient ground of thankfulness and praise; for it is an illustrious proof to the universe that God is reconciled; that there is forgiveness with Him and plenteous redemption for all sinners who will implore His mercy.

II. HIS TRIUMPHANT VICTORY. He has vanquished all our enemies—sin, Satan, death.

III. HIS MEDIATORIAL GRACE. He had purchased blessings for us; and He went to receive them at His Father's hands, that He might impart them to us. But what are these blessings so dearly bought and so freely bestowed? 1. The privilege of prevailing intercession. 2. The gift of universal dominion. 3. The Holy Spirit.

Conclusion:—1. Let our affections be where He is. 2. Let us cast away every desponding thought. 3. Let us inquire—Are the designs of His mediation, with respect to ourselves, likely to be answered? Are we maintaining continual regard to Him in all His offices, and so persevering in faith and holiness that we may say with humble confidence, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." (*R. Davies, M.A.*)

*The exaltation of the Saviour.*—I. HIS ASCENSION. It would seem, then, that the two radiant messengers who appeared to the disciples, as they were gazing after their Master with ardent eyes, formed only a small part of His celestial retinue. It would seem that in His train there were thousands and myriads of the chariots or cavalry of God. And may we not presume, further, that His reception in heaven, imperfect as our ideas of it unavoidably are, would yet be such as was befitting the Divine dignity of His person and the unparalleled glory of His achievements?

II. HIS VICTORY AND TRIUMPH. It often happens that the fruits of a victory are very imperfectly perceived at the moment; and that they are more fully manifested in the triumph which commemorates it. Now, what a triumph is to a victory, that the ascension of the Saviour was, to the victory which He achieved at His death over our spiritual foes. The one is the completion or commemoration of the other—the manifestation of its reality, and the proof of its unparalleled magnitude and importance. To the inhabitants of heaven the ascension of Jesus Christ proved conclusively His victory; for when He entered heaven He was seated at the right hand of the Father, invested with unlimited dominion as Mediator and Saviour, "angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." Still further, when He entered into heaven, He entered it in a public capacity, as the forerunner and representative of His people, to take possession of it in their name, and to prepare it for their accommodation.

III. HIS RECEPTION OF GIFTS, AND THE OBJECT FOR WHICH HE RECEIVED THEM. 1. What are the gifts here referred to? (1) Among those gifts may be mentioned first, the extraordinary or miraculous gifts of the Spirit. (2) At His ascension, the Saviour was empowered to dispense the Holy Spirit not only in His miraculous but in His sanctifying gifts and operations. These latter influences, though less splendid and striking in their nature and effects, are far more valuable than those miraculous gifts. The renewing and purifying influences of the Spirit are inseparably connected with a

state of grace and acceptance, and they seal the soul to the day of redemption; for they produce that conformity to the moral image of God which prepares for heaven, and which is the sure presage of admission to it. (3) At His ascension, the Lord Jesus was empowered to dispense not only the gifts and influences of the Spirit, but all the blessings of salvation. "Him hath God exalted with His right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour," etc. 2. How did He obtain these gifts? (1) As a donation from the Father. (2) As a reward due to His previous labours and sufferings. (3) While this arrangement is most wise and equitable in reference to Him, it is fraught with infinite kindness to us. To whom can we go for whatever we need with such freedom as to Him? And if there be any friend on whose kindness we may calculate with confidence, it must surely be that Friend who died for us on the accursed tree. 3. For whom He received those gifts. It is a custom which has prevailed among almost all nations, that princes when ascending their thrones, and conquerors when celebrating their victories, have sent presents to their friends, and distributed largesses among the multitude. But how poor and worthless are the presents and largesses bestowed by earthly princes and conquerors,—such as gold and silver, and costly apparel, and other spoils taken in war,—compared with the gifts conferred by the Captain of our salvation, when He celebrated His victory, and ascended to His resplendent throne at the right hand of the Majesty on high. 4. What the object is for which the Saviour received gifts for men. "That God the Lord might dwell among them." (1) What is implied in God's dwelling among men? Dwelling among them as their God and father and friend, maintaining a gracious and hallowed intercourse with them, by imparting to them the influences of His Spirit, honouring them with the tokens of His love, and accepting of the worship and obedience which they render Him. (2) How did the communication of the gifts committed to the Saviour contribute to the production of the intended result, that is, to God's dwelling among men? The miraculous gifts conferred on the apostles not only enabled them to proclaim the tidings of reconciliation to heathen tribes and nations, but served farther to attest the Divine authority of their message, and to recommend it to the consideration and belief of those to whom it was proclaimed. The other influences of the Spirit, accompanying the Word, were still more effective: for they aroused the stupid and the ignorant as well as the learned and refined, dispelled their prejudices, opened their understandings, and prevailed on them to admit the truth into their hearts, and to submit their stubborn wills to its humbling proposals and its holy requirements. (*R. Balmer, D.D.*) **OUR LORD'S TRIUMPHANT ASCENSION**.—I. **OUR LORD'S TRIUMPH WAS SET FORTH BY HIS ASCENSION.** Dwell on the fact that He, the Son of David, who for our sakes came down on earth and lay in the manger, and hung upon a woman's breast, has gone up on high, into the glory infinite. He that trod the weary ways of Palestine now reigns as a King in His palace. He that sighed, and hungered, and wept, and bled, and died, is now above all heavens. He that was earth's scorn is now heaven's wonder. II. **OUR LORD'S TRIUMPHAL ASCENT DEMONSTRATED THE DEFEAT OF ALL OUR FOES.** Easily may the sheep follow where the Shepherd breaks the way. We have but to follow those heavenly feet, which once were pierced, and none of our steps shall slide. Move on, O soldiers of Jesus, for your Captain cries, "Follow me!" III. **OUR LORD'S TRIUMPHANT ASCENSION WAS CELEBRATED BY GIFTS.** 1. What are these great ascension gifts? I answer that the sum of them is the Holy Spirit. I invite your adoring attention to the sacred Trinity herein manifested to us. "Thou hast ascended on high:" there is Christ Jesus. "Thou hast received gifts for men:" there is the Father, bestowing those gifts. The gift itself is the Holy Spirit. This is the great largess of Christ's ascension, which He bestowed on His Church at Pentecost. Thus you have Father, Son, and Holy Spirit blessedly co-working for the benediction of men, the conquest of evil, the establishment of righteousness. O my soul, delight thyself in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 2. But observe, according to Paul, these gifts which our Lord gave are embodied in men; for the Holy Spirit comes upon men whom He has chosen, and works through them according to His good pleasure. Hence he gave some, apostles, some, evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers. No one may be judged to be given of God to the Church in any of these offices unless as the Spirit dwells upon him. IV. **OUR LORD'S TRIUMPH HAS A VERY SPECIAL BEARING FOR THE UNCONVERTED.** "Thou hast received gifts for men," not for angels, not for devils, but for men—poor fallen men. Does the text particularly mention "saints," or those that have not defiled their garments? No, I do not read of



them here. What a strange sovereignty there is about the grace of God! Truly He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy; for in this instance He selects for special mention those that you and I would have passed over without a word. "Yea, for the rebellious also." V. OUR LORD'S TRIUMPHANT ASCENSION SECURES THE CONSUMMATION OF HIS WHOLE WORK. "That the Lord God might dwell among them." When our Lord Christ came here at the first He was willing enough to "dwell" among us; but it could not be. "The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us," like a Bedouin in his tent, but not as a dweller at home. He could not "dwell" here on that occasion. He was but a visitor, and badly treated at that. After He had risen again, He went home, that from this throne He might direct a work by which earth should become a place where God could abide. Again is the temple of God to be with men, and He shall dwell among them. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Thou hast received gifts for men.—Gifts received and gifts ministered:*—If giving was the one work of the earthly life of Christ, so is it also of the heavenly. Reflect upon the vastness of the work which our Saviour is now carrying on in heaven. Well might He say, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." If we believe the word in the Bible, we must feel that what Christ does in any one believing soul would be enough to occupy all the care, as it would far indeed exceed the capacity, of the wisest and the best of men. The cleansing of one heart, the keeping of one life, the adaptation of a Providence, as minute as it is powerful, to the good of one soul, must be a work of thought, of exertion, of time, of patience, far beyond the reach of our very imagination to conceive. But multiply this work by a thousand times ten thousand, spread it through the length and breadth of the earth, protract it through a thousand generations, vary it by the infinite modifications of care and of circumstance, of disposition, race and age,—reflect on all this, and you will understand as never before how the ascended Christ gave gifts unto men. (Dean Vaughan.) *New Testament donations:*—I. THE HOLY SPIRIT. 1. Before Christ's victory and exaltation the influences of the Spirit had been confined, for the most part, to the seed of Abraham; but now He is to be a "free Spirit" in relation to the whole world. 2. Before Christ's ascension the influences of grace were given in mere drops; but now in New Testament times God "pours out His Spirit" in streams and floods. Now that Jesus has really purchased the Spirit, His influences are given copiously and abundantly, as they never were before. 3. Before Christ's ascension the truth which the Spirit found available as the basis of His operations was comparatively scanty, and only dimly apprehended, even by good men; but now the Spirit has all the testimony of the historical Christ to work with. Now, His definite work is to "glorify Christ," and represent Him in the world and in the Church. II. A FINISHED REDEMPTION. The Gospel of salvation is a finished thing. Its Architect has seen it realized in the complete and glorious pile of the palace of saving truth. "Wisdom hath builded her house;" she hath also "furnished her table." And the magnificent structure and the rich provision is a "gift for men." III. A COMPLETED BIBLE. That man surely wants the seeing eye who looks upon the Bible as a "thing of shreds and patches"—a mixture of fact and legend—an amalgam of truth and myth. He who is taught by the Spirit recognizes it on its Divine side and in its Divine plan to be the most strictly scientific of all books; and he knows that it is strong enough to bear the shock of criticism on its human side. The Lord Jesus has given us the Bible. His work on earth is the nucleus round which all the books of Scripture crystallize; and He had no sooner "ascended on high" than He caused the canon to be completed, and gave the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures to all the ends of the earth—a "gift for men." IV. THE GOSPEL MINISTRY. The Apostolate was a "gift for men." New Testament prophecy was a "gift for men." The missionary commission is a "gift for men." The pastorate is a "gift for men." The ordinance of discipline is a "gift for men." V. ALL THE CHRISTIAN GRACES (Eph. iv. 7). In conclusion, let us ask ourselves, What do we think of these "gifts"? Do we admire them? Have we made up our minds that they are "the best gifts," and do we "covet" them "earnestly"? Do we recognize that it is a nail-pierced hand from which they come? Are we holding out our empty hands to receive them? (C. Jordan, M.A.)

Vers. 19-23. **Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.—God as the Deliverer of His people:**—I. A LIBERAL DISPENSER OF DAILY BLESSINGS (ver. 19). "Daily beareth our burden" (R.V.).

Amongst the many ways in which He helps men to bear their burdens is by kindling within them and keeping burning the lamp of hope. The soul-vessel that is most heavily freighted, and most severely tossed by the tempest is buoyed up by hope. "Day by day." When the day comes that God ceases to impart His strength, the man falls under his weight, and is crushed. II. AS THE EXCLUSIVE POSSESSOR OF MEANS FOR ESCAPING DEATH (ver. 20). 1. God alone has ways by which physical death can be escaped. Enoch; Elijah. 2. God alone has ways by which spiritual death can be escaped. Spiritual death is a thousand times the worst death, it is not the extinction of existence, but the extinction of all that makes existence worth having, and renders it an intolerable curse. III. AS THE EFFECTUAL SUBDUER OF PERSISTENT ENEMIES (ver. 21). He could annihilate His universe by a volition. But the destruction of their enmity is a far more glorious work—a work that requires more time, and that, through Christ, He is prosecuting every day amongst men. Here He literally strikes at "the head of His enemies," the spirit of antagonism to Himself. The ruling spirit of a man is the head of his being. It is at this that God strikes in the Gospel. Of the seed of the woman—viz. Christ—it was said, "He shall bruise thy head." Christianity aims at the head of the evil, which is the governing disposition. IV. AS THE WILLING REPEATER OF NEEDED INTERPOSITIONS (vers. 22, 23). Truly, it is an encouraging thought that the great things that God has done for His people He is willing to do again, should they require it. He will take them through seas of trial and sorrow that threaten to swallow them up, put to flight the armies of their enemies, and make the land red with their blood. (*Homilist.*) *The burden-bearing God.*—The great objection to the rendering which has become familiar to us all, "Who daily loadeth us with benefits," is that these essential words are not in the original, and need to be supplied in order to make out the sense. Whereas, on the other hand, if we adopt the suggested emendation, "Who daily beareth our burdens," we get a still more beautiful meaning, which requires no force or addition in order to bring it out. I. THE REMARKABLE AND ELOQUENT BLENDING OF MAJESTY AND CONDESCENSION. What a thought that is—a God that carries men's loads! People talk much rubbish about the "stern Old Testament Deity": is there anything sweeter, greater, more heart-compelling and heart-softening, than such a thought as this? How all the majesty bows itself and declares itself to be enlisted on our side when we think that "He that sitteth on the circle of the heavens, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers," is the God that "daily beareth our burdens"! II. THE DEEP INSIGHT INTO THE HEART AND WAYS OF GOD HERE. "He daily beareth our burdens." If there is any meaning in this word at all, it means that He so knits Himself with us as that all which touches us touches Him, that He takes a share in all our pressing duties, and feels the reflection from all our sorrows and pains. We have no impassive God in the heavens, careless of mankind, nor is His settled and changeless and unshaded blessedness of such a sort as that there cannot pass across it—if I may not say a shadow, I may at least say—a ripple from men's pangs and troubles and cares. God, in all our afflictions, is afflicted; and, in simple though profound verity, has that which is most truly represented to men, by calling it a fellow feeling with our infirmities and our sorrows. III. THE REMARKABLE ANTICIPATION OF THE VERY HEART OF THE GOSPEL. Ah! it were of small avail to know a God that bore the burden of our sorrows and the load of our duties, if we did not know a God who bore the weight of our sins. For that is the real crushing weight that breaks men's hearts and bows them to the earth. So the New Testament, with its message of a Christ on whom is laid the whole pressure of the world's sin, is the deepest fulfilment of the great words of my text. IV. WHAT WE SHOULD THEREFORE DO WITH OUR BURDENS. First, we should cast them on God, and let Him carry them. He cannot unless we do. One sometimes sees a petulant and self-confident little child staggering along with some heavy burden by the parent's side, but pushing away the hand that is put out to help it to carry its load. And that is what too many of us do when God says to us, "Here, My child, let Me help you, I will take the heavy end of it, and do you take the light one." And, last of all, let us see to it that we render Him praise. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The God of our salvation daily loadeth us with benefits.*—I. WHAT GOD IS: "The God of our salvation." Man is a sinner, and sin exposes him to danger; for "the wages of sin is death," and "the soul that sinneth it shall die." But there is deliverance from this danger; this is attributed to God. 1. The scheme of salvation originated in God (John iii. 17). 2. The means of salvation are afforded us by God. God sends us His Gospel,

containing good news of salvation; His ministers to declare the way of salvation; He affords us Christian sabbaths, religious ordinances, and various means of grace, in order to promote our salvation. 3. The work of salvation is accomplished in the human soul by God's immediate agency. 4. The sole glory of our final salvation will endlessly redound to God. In heaven we shall have clearer discoveries of the greatness, extent, and freeness of our salvation (Rev. vii. 10). II. **WHAT GOD DOES FOR US:** He "daily loadeth us with benefits." 1. The nature of God's gifts. "Benefits," not deserts. 2. Their number. "Loadeth." 3. The frequency of their communication. "Daily." And these benefits flow to us freely, unsolicited, unimplored, unsought. Seasonably, exactly as we need them. Critics state that it should be read "who bears our burdens, or supports us, every day." In the wilderness God bare Israel as a man doth bear his son (Dout. i. 31). Or as an eagle bears her young on her wings (Dout. xxxii. 11). The promise is (Isa. xlv. 4). We have our cares, and burdens, and anxieties, but God invites us to cast them upon Him (Ps. lv. 22). III. **WHAT WE SHOULD DO IN RETURN.** "Blessed be the Lord." To bless signifies to extol, exalt, or speak well of a person; and to bless the Lord is to speak good of His name. 1. We should bless the Lord sincerely. Hypocrisy is hateful to God. 2. We should bless the Lord affectionately. Our gratitude should be the effusion of love. 3. We should bless the Lord constantly. "I will bless the Lord at all times." 4. We should bless the Lord practically. To say, "We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord," while we practically violate His laws, must be abominable in His sight. Let us "praise Him not only with our lips but by our lives," etc. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) **Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death.**—*The royal prerogative:*—Whatever may be said of the Old Testament dispensation, one thing is clear; in it the Lord God of Israel is ever most conspicuous. God is in all and over all. Here in our text, universal action and power over us are ascribed to the Lord—the mercies of life and the issues of death. I. **THE SOVEREIGN PREROGATIVE OF GOD.** "Unto God . . . the issues of death." Kings have been wont to keep the power of life and death in their own hands. The great King of kings does so. "He can create and He destroy." This prerogative of life and death is His in a wide sense. It is true of our natural life, and of our spiritual. For we are under the condemnation of the law. But God determines whether the sentence shall be carried out. And in those "deaths oft" with which Christian experience is familiar, those dyings down of the heart and spirit which are the result of our old nature which still cleaveth to the dust, God's Spirit can revive us again. And when we come actually to die, not to death but to God shall the issue belong. "I am the Resurrection and the Life," saith the Lord: "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." And the resurrection day will make His words good. 2. He has the right to exercise this prerogative. 3. And He has exercised this prerogative in abundant instances. 4. Then let Him have all the glory of it. II. **THE CHARACTER OF THE SOVEREIGN IN WHOM IT IS VESTED.** "He that is our God is the God of salvation." This name means—1. That salvation is the most glorious of all His designs. 2. That His most delightful works have been works of salvation. 3. That we live at this moment under the dispensation of mercy. The sword is sheathed, the scales of justice put by. 4. That to those who can call Him "our God" He is especially and emphatically the God of salvation. We owe it all to Him. 'Twas He passed by and bid us "live." III. **THE SOLEMN WARNING OF THE SOVEREIGN LORD.** A new God has lately been set up, all leniency, gentleness, mildness and indifference in the matter of sin. This God is made of honey or sugar of lead. Justice is not in him, nor the punishment of sin. But it is not so. Our text tells the awful truth to wicked men. God can smite, and ere long He will. The proud may vaunt themselves of their beauty and glory in their strength; their heavy scalp, like that of Absalom, may be their boast, but, as in his case, it may be their ruin. No man is out of the reach of God, and no nation either. Turn ye then, ye that know not God. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 21. **But God shall wound the head of His enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.**—*God's threatenings against incorrigible sinners:*—I. **THE PERSONS THREATENED.** 1. In general, God's enemies; in particular, those who go on still in their trespasses (Lev. xxvi. 18; Dout. xxix. 19, 20; Prov. xxix. 1). In these and other passages of Scripture, God threatens the pertinacious sinner. 2. There is very good ground for it, which may appear

in these following considerations. (1) Because he multiplies sin. (2) Because he aggravates it. (3) Because he confirms it. He makes his sins more numerous. He makes his sins more heinous. He makes his sins more settled, and hardened and difficult to be removed; therefore draws on the punishment of them. II. THE EVIL THREATENED. "Wound." 1. A mollified expression. Not kill, but "wound." Counts it enough for Him to lay His enemies flat. He does not so much care to insult, and to triumph over them, or to do the worst that He can against them. 2. As it is a mollified expression, so it is a peremptory. He shall or will do it, does it not yet it may be, but yet means to do it hereafter, if He be not the better prevented, that He would have understood. III. THE PART WHEREIN THEY ARE THREATENED. "The head." 1. This is not exclusive but specificative; it is not the head so, as if nowhere else besides but the head as therein especially. As for obstinate sinners, they have many wounds inflicted upon them in other respects. (1) In their good names they have a wound oftentimes in them (Prov. vi. 33). (2) In estate. (3) In conscience. 2. But it is especially in the head. (1) In their intellectuals, takes away their brains from them. (2) In their vitals, takes away their life from them. (3) In their principalities, and eminencies, takes away their glory from them. 3. And we cannot wonder at it, if we do but consider how they use their heads oftentimes against Himself; which they do by a double practice. (1) In the contriving of sin. (2) In the defending of it. Wicked men use their heads against God to each of these purposes, and therefore does He wound them in them. 4. There are two principles which do engage Him, and move Him hereunto. (1) His own glory. (2) His Church's good. 5. If we shall ask when He will do it, because He does it not always, nor presently—I answer in these two cases. (1) When the sins of the enemies are thoroughly ripened. (2) When the hearts of the Christians are thoroughly humbled. In these two conditions does God wound the head of His enemies, and not before. 6. But how shall we be kept and preserved from it? what helps are there against persistency in sin? (1) Mortify the principle of corruption in us. The way to be kept from the acts of sin, is to have the habit of it subdued in us. There must be the killing of this viper in the egg, a slaying it in the root; till this be done there is no security at all for us. (2) Stop the beginnings, as we desire not to go on in trespasses, let us not at first venture upon them, for it is like the letting out of waters, as Solomon speaks of strife, which a man knows not where it will end. (3) Have daily, and continual, and fresh, and actual apprehensions in us of the filthiness and dangerousness of it. (T. Horton, D.D.)

Vers. 24-27. **They have seen Thy goings, O God; even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary.**—*The progress of Divine truth in the world.*—I. SOME MEN MERELY WITNESS the progress of Divine truth (ver. 24). What a large class of men there is in Christendom who act thus in relation to the progress of Christianity! They see new churches erected and new adherents gained all around them. They read of the multiplication of copies of Holy Scripture, and the increase of the triumphs of missionaries in heathen lands. They see its literature extending. But in all this they feel no vital interest. Whilst many of these care for "none of these things," some ridicule and others denounce. They laugh at what they consider fanaticism; they thunder at that which they believe is impotence. "They have seen Thy goings, O God," etc. Yes, they have "seen," and that is all. II. GOOD MEN ARE ALWAYS EXULTANT in the progress of Divine truth (vers. 25, 26). Why should we rejoice in the progress of Divine truth? 1. Because, as Divine truth advances, all the evils that curse humanity will disappear. 2. Because, as Divine truth advances, all the virtues that bless humanity will multiply and grow. He is no true philanthropist who exults not in the progress of Christianity. III. ALL MEN SHOULD BE INTERESTED in the progress of Divine truth (ver. 27). Here are different tribes brought together from opposite parts of the country, thus to express their common interest in the services of the day. All men should be interested in the cause of Divine truth. Why? 1. Because all men have a common relation to its Author. He is the Father of them all. 2. Because all men have a common need of its blessings. It offers liberty to the captive—and all are captives; knowledge to the ignorant—and all are ignorant; pardon to the guilty—and all are guilty; life to the dying—and all are dying; heaven to the lost—and all are lost. (*Homilist.*) *The royal procession.*—This verse may be read thus: "They have seen thy marches in procession, O God; even the marches of my God, my King, in the sanctuary." We have brought before us the

jubilant songs of praise arising from the royal procession of Jehovah before the assembled hosts of Israel. Now, there has been a royal procession in London this week, and it has suggested this subject. For to-day there is an assembled host of people crowding our sanctuaries: their main desire is to see their King. I. **THE PEOPLE VIEWING THE PROCESSION.** The vast majority came to see our Queen herself. And their motives were various. 1. Many of them had never seen her before. And in our sanctuaries there are many who as yet have never seen their King, and they greatly desire to. 2. Others long ago had seen the Queen, but wanted to see her again: so with us and our King. 3. Others went simply to see the pageant; as much to be seen as to see. And how many come to our sanctuaries out of mere curiosity! 4. And all grades of society were represented there. 5. Some obtained much better views than others. So is it with those in our sanctuaries. Care and distractions of all kinds hinder many souls. II. **THE PROCESSION ITSELF.** 1. It passed along an appointed way. It is all marked out. Through the sanctuary a main part of its route lies. But in the abodes of sickness, sorrow, death, Christ often comes. III. **THE PURPOSE OF THE PROCESSION.** It was to open a new thoroughfare. And so our King has come to open a new road to heaven. The old road by Innocency has been blocked ever since the fall of Adam. And the road of Jewish ceremonies, and the law, is no longer available. But Christ has opened a new and living way. (*A. G. Brown.*)

Vers. 26-28. **Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, from the fountain of Israel, etc.**—*Public worship*.—I. **EXPOUND THE PASSAGE.** 1. Israel had ordinary congregations every Sabbath and national ones three times a year, and their business was to "bless God." 2. All Israel was to unite in this. 3. All the tribes are supposed to be present. 4. Those tribes which are named had each some speciality belonging to it. 5. Princes and people were together, etc. II. **APPLY THE SUBJECT.** Two things are here exemplified—diligence and brotherly union. Three things are recommended—united praise, acknowledgment of mercies, and prayer. (*Andrew Fuller.*)

Vers. 28-35. **Thy God hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O God, that which Thou hast wrought for us.**—*The moral force of God*.—I. **SUBJUGATING MEN.** 1. Commanding kings (ver. 29). 2. Subjugating enemies (ver. 30). What wonderful changes in man God's moral force in Christ has wrought! Witness the changes in the Corinthians. "Such were some of you," etc. What were our forefathers but beasts? The changes in the South Sea Islanders, etc. Those changes will become universal one day (Isa. xi. 6). II. **ATTRACTING BEATHEANS** (ver. 31). God's moral force is magnetic. It is in the transcendent excellence of His character. When men come to see Him as He is in Christ, they shall "stretch out" their "hands" to Him. Such a God they want, a God whose character more than realizes their highest ideal, in whom they can centre their love and repose their utmost confidence. III. **COMMANDING UNIVERSAL WORSHIP.** 1. His moral majesty is to be recognized (ver. 33). The real heart of humanity can bow to nothing else. 2. His moral strength is to be recognized (ver. 34). Why is not God's moral strength more universally felt? His physical might is felt everywhere; but not His moral, and why? Because it is moral. Because it has to do with mind, which is free, irresponsible, and which is endowed with the faculty to resist, if it wills, all outward appeals. Oh that minds everywhere would open themselves to the influence of God's character as revealed in Christ! This is its "power unto salvation." (*Homilist.*) *The strength of a saint*.—I. **WHAT IS THE STRENGTH OF A SAINT?** 1. It is that of a regenerated man. Not that of the body, for that is far inferior to what is found in many brutes. But "there is a spirit in man," etc. (Job xxxii. 8). 2. It consists in his likeness to God, in his being first made and then renewed in the image of God. II. **GOD HAS COMMANDED THIS STRENGTH.** 1. By what He is and by what He reveals Himself to be. 2. By the relation which God has established between every man and Himself (Job ix. 19). We are all His offspring. 3. By a law of loyalty which He has written in the heart. 4. By verbal law, given in the Scriptures. 5. By the claims of the new kingdom of His grace (2 Cor. v. 19; 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). III. **LET US CONSECRATE IT TO HIM.** Say not that you have no strength. Christ gives that which is asked. It is treason to withhold it. A full blessing will attend the consecration. There is no valid excuse for refusing it. Then yield it in the worship you render and in all your service. (*S. Martin, D.D.*) *Some marks of*

*God's people*:—Many are seeking the Lord. We are glad, but let them make sure work of it. Now, our text describes the people of God, and thus we may discover whether we are of that number. I. **THE LORD IS THEIR GOD.** "Thy God"—so we read. They have got a God: they are not atheists. And they believe in God. Now, do we believe in Him and trust in Him? How does He become my God? I trust Him and receive pardon at His hands and He tells me of it, and then my love goes out to Him in return. The true child of God loves God. And we get to be as conscious of His presence as of the air we breathe: we hold converse with Him and we feel within our spirit that He is listening to us. II. **ALL THEIR STRENGTH IS AT GOD'S DISPOSAL.** 1. They heartily obey His commands. 2. They pray to Him fervently. 3. They praise Him energetically. 4. They labour for Him earnestly. 5. They live wholly to Him. III. **THEY ASCRIBE TO HIM ALL THAT IS GOOD IN THEM, AND IN THEIR FELLOW-MEN.** It is all of grace, from the first even to the last; and they are the true people of God who feel and know this. IV. **THEY PRAY TO HIM FOR THEIR STABILITY:** "Strengthen, O God, that which Thou hast wrought for us." Never trust in yourselves, even though your strength seems more than adequate for the occasion. When you are full of knowledge, and full of wisdom, and full of grace, yet still be nothing, and let the Lord your God be your All-in-all. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake." Let us begin to learn that song now, and let us sing it in life, and in death, and for ever, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The strength of life*:—God has His own wise and good purposes, which will never vary in themselves; but the fulfilment of these purposes in our behalf is conditional. That is to say, our own desire and will must meet God's will, if we are to be truly blessed. For example, generally speaking, God wills our health; but only as we ourselves obey the laws of health shall we be healthy. Again, God would have us undertake successful work; but the success is conditional on our diligence. So, too, while God desires that we should conquer temptation, and that our nature should be regenerate and pure, on our part there must be the earnest resistance of sin, and an intense, a ceaseless craving for the righteousness of God. I. **STRENGTH**—this word has had very various meanings; indeed, we might almost say that the different ideals of strength that have been cherished among the nations have determined the complexion of the world's history. 1. Sheer, naked force has been with some the familiar and favourite type of strength. The tremendous energy of tempest, earthquake, and fire has impressed men's minds with awe. 2. Later in the world's history, a higher type of strength was developed, and chiefly, at first, among the Greeks, who, with their handful of disciplined troops, could put to rout the myriads of the vast horde of Xerxes. For they had learned that it is not sheer force that of itself accomplishes the greatest things, but rather force adapted and adjusted, with nice exactitude, to the required result. Thus discipline and strategy, to say nothing of courage, counted for far more than numbers; and as in war, so in other things, mere force was not of so much account as means and methods which made for the wise direction, and therefore for the economy, of force. 3. Meanwhile the very highest type of strength was preparing in the world (Prov. xxiv. 5; Eccles. ix. 16, 18; Ps. xxxvii. 31; lxxxi. 13, 14). The strength is the strength of righteousness, and the righteousness is the righteousness of God. In the Gospel of Christ we have this Old Testament teaching fulfilled and perfected. To be holy is to be truly strong; and this strength is to be, not for our own sakes alone, but for others—we are to be strong to serve, and save, and bless. And a new inspiration is now in the world for the effectuation of the true strength of life (1 Cor. i. 22-24). II. Our strength is **COMMANDED.** This may be understood twofoldly. 1. It means, in part, that the invincible power of God's will is on our side. In His ordainment of things, our victory is prepared. All the arrangements of His providence, and all the richer ministrations of His grace, are to be contributory to this result—that we shall conquer. If we remember this when the world is adverse, and when our own heart is weak; if we think of it when the forces of evil gather round our soul: that it is God's irrefragable will that we shall conquer—oh, what mighty enthusiasm will be born of this very assurance, and how impotent will seem every opposition that sets itself against the purpose of the Most High! (1 John v. 4). 2. The words are also a stimulus to our endeavour and devotion. God commands that all things shall subserve our strength, and contribute to our victory, if we are faithful; but He likewise commands our fidelity itself, and the putting forth of our utmost effort, without

which, indeed, His purpose in our behalf cannot be fulfilled. Some fourteen years ago our colony of Natal was threatened with great disaster. The Zulus had surprised and cut to pieces one of our regiments at Isandula, and, flushed with their victory, were about to pour into Natal, to devastate and destroy; when a handful of English soldiers, hastily fortifying themselves in their position at Rorke's Drift, set themselves to withstand the whole horde of savage, eager warriors. It was indeed a forlorn hope; but they felt that it was as though the eyes of all the world were upon them, watching whether they would do their duty, and be strong. If ever men were "commanded" to be strong, by all the most sacred claims of country, kindred, and home, it was then; and right nobly did they respond to the call. And, while "all the world wondered," these few dozens of men bent back at last the invading host. So it is with us, in our seasons of sore temptation; for—Isa. lix. 19. And in like manner, when we are discouraged by the overwhelming difficulties of our work, asking in our dismay, "Who is sufficient for these things?" then it is that this same "command" of God stirs the soul like the sound of a trumpet. (T. F. Lockyer, B.A.)

Ver. 30. **Scatter Thou the people that delight in war.**—*A prayer for peace:*—God sometimes does that in which He has no delight. "Surely Thou wilt slay the wicked, O God." But God saith, "As I live, I have no pleasure in . . . wicked." And yet He slays them. God can look at your state of ruin, and say, as the God of truth, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth." Now, we may not delight in that in which God does not delight. God has sanctioned and ordained war. The Bible is full of proof of this. But that does not justify war on our part, unless He commands it, as at times He does. He does not delight in it. This is clear from the miseries which follow from it, and from the promise that in the Kingdom of God war shall be no more. Still, now and here He uses it; but that does not involve our right, whenever we think we have just cause, to declare war. God uses pestilence. Shall man therefore breed and propagate it? Some engage in war who do not delight in it, whilst some who delight in it take care to keep aloof from the field of battle. Men who think war to be right under special circumstances are far from delighting in it. David was one such, for he prays, "Scatter them . . . delight in war." Who are the characters delighting in war? 1. Quarrelsome men, fond of the strife and conflict of war, and of the excitement which that strife and conflict brings. 2. Restless men, weary, strange to say, of the very quietness and repose of peace. 3. Officious men, delighting to meddle with strife belonging not to them, and ready to forward their opinions by war. 4. Ambitious men, who see a path to honour and to fame—a path to their own honour and fame, or to the honour and reputation of some of their kindred—by means of war. 5. Covetous men, who hope to get gain by war. 6. Mistaken patriots, who aim at the extension of empire and increase of national honour by war. 7. Cruel men, who, setting no value upon life, delight to shed blood in war. 8. Envious men, who aim to desolate every land fairer than their own by the ravages of war. 9. Proud and revengeful men, ever ready to take offence, and who see no means of settling differences except by war. 10. Thoughtless men, infected by sympathy with the delight of others in war. 11. All who do not look upon mankind as the children of one Father in heaven, and adopt the law of love as their rule. Intelligence and benevolence (religious intelligence and Christian benevolence—light from the God who is light, and love from the God who is love) will check delight in war; and godliness and Christianity, when perfected and consummated in the human heart, in our homes, and in the high places of authority in the country, most inevitably root up all pleasure in war. Nations cannot make war except by a combination of men. In a despotic government, if one ruler delight in war, this suffices to produce it; but where the power is distributed combination is necessary. And our text is a prayer against those who delight in war. It amounts to a petition against all war, that it may cease for ever. Many are the reasons why we should deprecate it. In order to produce a thorough soldier you must, to a considerable extent, blunt and destroy the ordinary susceptibilities of human nature. Now, just look for a moment at this—just think of taking away from a man that which makes the man nearest to God, and most like God. Then look at the actual struggle—how horrible! and reflect upon all that is involved in it. For those in whose land the war rages: what untold misery is theirs. Think of the arrest of all that is useful and benevolent and religious in a country, and remember that in every case of war bitter animosity

remains, and is transmitted hereafter to future generations. Observe further, that the issues of war, if they decide the might, can never, taken alone, determine the right. So that there is no lawful ground upon which we can delight in war; but on every ground we are bound, as Christians, to pray, "Scatter Thou the people that have pleasure in war." Of course we know that sceptics deride the so-called power of prayer—let none of us be of their number. Struggle against the contagion of contempt for what is religious: it is easily caught, and may lie dormant within you, to show itself only when you really need to pray. But why should we pray this prayer? 1. Because God alone can prevent war. Men used to say that civilization would bring peace. But it has not done so. It is one of our false gods which our true God casts down by showing us how powerless it is to prevent this great evil of war. Nor will international intercourse prevent it. Only the love of God and of one another. Now, God represents Himself as able to do this. "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprises." "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong." And there are many more such words. Guided by these testimonies, oh, pray this prayer, day by day, without ceasing, until peace be restored, and peace reign over the wide earth. Cry to the Lord God of Hosts, "Scatter Thou the people that delight in war." But is there nothing else to be done—to be done, I mean, with this object? Submit yourselves to the Prince of Peace, for the ejection of the war spirit from the heart. And seek to love all men for the sake of God and our Saviour. (*Samuel Martin.*) *War to be deprecated:*—1. Because it has a tendency to corrupt the dispositions and morals of a people. 2. Because it oppresses a people, and renders them more unable to bear the burdens which they are obliged to sustain. 3. Because it occasions great grief and lamentation to a people. 4. Because it spreads ruin and destruction wherever it is. 5. Because it disturbs and interrupts the worship of God. 6. Because it is diametrically opposed to the mild genius of our holy religion. (*John Ralston, M.A.*)

**Ver. 31. Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.**—*Ethiopia's appeal:*—Ethiopia is a woman who, after the manner of the poets, represents the whole race of the Ethiopians, just as Britannia, in our songs, represents all the Britons. By Ethiopia the Jews usually meant the country next to Egypt, Ethiopia proper, the cradle of the African race. Even to this day the Africans bury their dead with their faces towards the north-east, their first home. Fix now your pitying eye upon Ethiopia. She is—I. **HELPLESS.** Hands outstretched are signals of distress, which the weak always use. The other year hundreds were burnt or suffocated in a church at Santiago, and all the dead were found standing with hands outstretched. The veil has just been lifted from the Dark Continent, and lo! there stands before us a woman with the slave-stick around her neck. And like a child in fear, like a weakling imploring help, her hands are heavenwards. Let Livingstone and other African travellers tell the horrors of the slave trade. Africa is dark indeed, and as such is full of the habitations of cruelty. It has been for two thousand years the slave-hunting ground of the world. And white men have had a great share in it. Bleeding Ethiopia, helpless before the cruelty of man, feels equally helpless in presence of the unseen. Through fear they are all their lifetime subject to bondage. To their fear of wild beasts and wilder men is added their great fear of evil spirits. For the Africans are religious in their own poor way; but their whole religion is a weary effort to ward off the spirits of the departed, who, as they think, are full of vengeance, and able to haunt and destroy them. They believe the air to be filled with millions of spirits, all cruel and bent on mischief. Hence they give themselves up to devil-worship. Then their idols are fearful to look upon, and their religion is only a religion of fear. How touching to read of their longings, their lonely helplessness, "their dread of the strange land beyond the dark mountains." The boldest hunter when dying will cry for his mother, though she has been dead for many years. He knows no one else who would be minded to help him in the dark valley. One who knew them well says, "There is nothing more heartrending than their death-wails. When they turn their eyes to the future world, they have a view cheerless enough of their own utter helplessness and hopelessness." Their thoughts often wander through the future. "Do people die with you?" two young cannibals asked Livingstone. "Have you no charm against death?" He spoke to them of the Great Father who hears the cry of His children: and they thought this to be



natural. But—II. ETHIOPIA IS SEEKING HELP. The salt mines in Austria lately illustrated this subject to me. The abundance of salt God has stored there is beyond belief. The miners dig a narrow drain into the rock and let in fresh water. The water sucks the salt out of the rock, which then falls in, and soon the whole rock is melted down. Commerce and exploration are digging their channels through the rocky barriers of heathendom, and letting in civilized ideas, which are quietly penetrating and melting down every heathen system, and creating a vacancy which we should fill with the blessed Gospel. We talk of an open door among the heathen; in many places it is all door together. Even heathens are advertising for a better religion than their own. Hardly one educated young Indian has now any heart-faith in Hinduism. Mrs. Brassey advises all who wish to see Japan to go at once, else they will never see it, as European customs are spreading everywhere. III. ETHIOPIA IS HOPEFUL. Our text prophesies that she shall soon stretch out her hands unto God, soon after the Gospel is brought to her, in the morning of the day of her opportunity. No spiritual sluggard, she shall early and eagerly make her hands run unto God, as the word means. Her hands, turned from idols, shall be opened to receive God's gifts, or, as some believe, shall be filled with offerings of homage and service. "When he came here there were no Christians; when he went away there were no heathen"—these words describe the life-work of a missionary who was only twenty-four years on the island of Aneityum. Some say our text means that Ethiopia's hands will be filled with splendid offerings of gratitude to God. We may expect this. Robert Moffat, famishing and wearied, was once ordered not to enter a heathen village. Under shadow of night a woman brought him a bundle of wood, a bowl of milk, and a leg of mutton, kindled a fire and cooked the meat in silence. As he pressed her to tell the reason of her kindness, the tears stole down her sable cheek as she said, "I love Him whose servant you are, and surely it is my duty to give you a cup of cold water in His name. My heart is full, and therefore I cannot speak the joy I feel to see you in this out-of-the-way place." All was explained by a New Testament which she drew from her bosom, and showed to the delighted missionary. Let your heart go out to Ethiopia, and let your helping hands meet her outstretched hands. Cherish a generous grief over Ethiopia's woes, and believe that God calls you to help the weak He has taught you to pity. Have a full faith in the promise, apparently never so near fulfilment as now, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." (*James Wells, M.A.*) *The heathen brought to the saving knowledge of God:*—I. THE PRESENT MOURNFUL CONDITION OF THE HEATHEN WORLD WITHOUT GOD. 1. Enveloped in gross darkness. 2. Groping in vain and painfully to find happiness. 3. In a state of rebellion against God. 4. Hopeless and helpless in their state of darkness. II. THE GLORIOUS PROSPECT WHICH THESE WORDS HOLD OUT OF THEIR CONVERSION TO GOD. 1. The Word of God shall yet be sent, and the Gospel shall be preached unto them. 2. The power of the Holy Spirit accompanying the Word will render it effectual for their salvation. 3. The ultimate success of the Gospel among the heathen is most certain. 4. The present time affords great encouragement to earnest, energetic and prayerful efforts for the salvation of the heathen. (*John Ritchie.*) *The missionary call:*—1. We appeal to you to scorn any man who is fattening upon the vices of weaker nations. Scorn any man who is amassing wealth, by importing guns and ammunition, or fire-water, into these poor, degraded nations of the world. 2. We ask you to consecrate the great wealth of this great city—which comes from all quarters of the earth—we ask you to consecrate some of this wealth in giving back to these various quarters of the world the Gospel which we rejoice in here. 3. We ask you to give some of your sons and some of your daughters to carry this Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. If there is a grand opening in a mercantile house at Zanzibar, you immediately find numbers taking advantage of it. If there is an opening for a young man on the river Niger, many are willing to go. We ask that there shall be the same readiness to take hold of opportunities in the mission field that there is now to take hold of openings in mercantile enterprise. And so we shall joy to see the kingdom of our blessed Lord and Master extended throughout the world. The last of the triumphs shall be this, when these heathen nations have bowed the knee to Jesus. (*E. A. Stuart, M.A.*)

## PSALM LXIX.

VERS. 1-12. **Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul.**—*Human suffering*.—I. Man's sufferings are SOMETIMES OVERWHELMINGLY GREAT. This shows—1. The abnormal state of man. Was man made to suffer thus? No; man suffers because he has transgressed. 2. The blessedness of Christ's mission. He came to "heal the broken-hearted," and to "wipe away all tears from off all faces." II. Man's sufferings are OFTEN INFLICTED BY HIS FELLOW-CREATURES. The sufferer here ascribes his sufferings, not to God, or accident, or fate, but to men. 1. To the malice, the multitude, and the might of his enemies. These enemies, he says—(1) Compelled him to restore what he "took not away." They extorted from him by violence that which was his, not theirs. He does not say what it was, whether it was his time, his labour, or his property. Men are often doing this, taking from others that to which they have no right. (2) Persecuted him on account of his religion. "For Thy sake I have borne reproach," etc. How often in the history of the world do we find men inflicting sufferings upon their fellows in consequence of their religious convictions! 2. To the alienation of his most intimate relations and friends. 3. To the contempt he received from all on account of his religious zeal. III. Man's sufferings often REVEAL THE MORAL WEAKNESS OF HIS CHARACTER. If, as here, you find a man parading his sufferings, moaning and groaning about his afflictions, he is not a man of strong moral character. Christ, instead of parading His sufferings, seldom even mentioned them. IV. Man's sufferings OCCASIONALLY LEAD HIM TO GOD. They did so now in the case of David. (*Homilist.*) *The good man's foes*.—I. THE GOOD MAN HAS FOES. 1. The devil. 2. Wicked men readily learn the craft of their master. II. THE GOOD MAN'S FOES ARE PERTINACIOUS. 1. They act in concert—take counsel how they may best succeed in their designs; encourage one another, to make their plans most effective. 2. They are never satisfied. Satan, not content to rob Job of his property, must needs seek to destroy his children. The trouble of the Christian, so far from moving his enemies to compassion, do but instigate to fresh deeds of iniquity. III. THE GOOD MAN'S ENEMIES ARE COWARDLY. 1. Slander is one of the commonest weapons by which they seek to destroy. It is referred to several times by David. It is the sharp "sword," the poisoned "arrow," the "bitter words." 2. Misrepresentation is another very common mode of attacking the godly. "They search out iniquities." This seems to suggest that when faults cannot readily be found, they are sought diligently, until some trivial defect is discovered that may be magnified into a deadly sin. Instead of setting a watch upon themselves, they watch others, and looking for faults they will invent them rather than be disappointed. IV. THE GOOD MAN'S ENEMIES ARE LABORIOUS. They are "workers of iniquity." Men who are too idle to do any good thing will toil at an evil one. Many men work far harder to go to hell than would suffice, humanly speaking, to carry them to heaven. If half the diligence devoted to works of evil were but given to the service of God, how greatly would the aspect of the world be changed. (*Joseph S. Exell, M.A.*)

Ver. 4. **I restored that which I took not away.**—*Christ restoring what He took not away*.—I. WHAT IT IS WHICH WAS TAKEN AWAY, AND FROM WHOM. 1. Glory was taken from God. (1) The glory of God shining forth in the holy government of His reasonable creatures, was taken away by sin. (2) That glory which we are tied to give to God, was withheld by sin. 2. There was righteousness, holiness, and happiness taken from man. II. WHEREIN IT APPEARS THAT CHRIST DID NOT TAKE THESE THINGS FROM EITHER. 1. It is plain, as to God, that He never took any glory from Him; for He never did anything dishonourable or offensive to God (John viii. 29). 2. It is also clear, as to man, that He took not away any righteousness, holiness, or happiness from him (Isa. liii. 9; Acts x. 38; Luke ix. 56). 3. The Scripture therefore speaks of Christ's being cut off, but not for Himself (Dan. ix. 26). Though He suffered in His own Person, He did not suffer on His own account (1 Pet. iii. 18). 4. The innocency of Christ was conspicuous in His very sufferings (Acts xiii. 28). III. HOW DID CHRIST RESTORE THOSE THINGS WHICH HE TOOK NOT AWAY? In general, by His active and passive obedience; for both are concerned in this matter, and contribute their joint influence towards the great and blessed work of which I am now speaking. IV. WHY DID CHRIST MAKE IT HIS

WORK TO RESTORE WHAT HE TOOK NOT AWAY? 1. It was a necessary work, a work which must be done, in order to His being a Saviour. 2. It was a work impossible for any mere creature to do; so that if Christ did not, it could not have been done by any person besides Him. 3. Christ was ordained of God to this work, and in that respect there was a necessity of His accomplishing it (John ix. 4). 4. The infinite love of Christ to sinners did sweetly incline Him to this work. (7. *Cruso.*) *A robbery committed, and restitution made, both to God and man:—*

I. PREMISE TWO OR THREE THINGS FOR CLEARING OF THE WAY. 1. When God made man, He bestowed all manner of goods upon him, that were necessary to make him live comfortably here, and to make him eternally happy hereafter. 2. Satan, by this time, having fallen, like a star, from heaven to earth, filled with envy, enters into a resolution, if it were possible, to commit a robbery upon man, and to strike at God's sovereignty through man's side; and accordingly—3. Satan prevailed upon our first parents, and beguiled them; and thereby the covenant of works was broken. 4. The covenant of works being broken, and man having entered into a rebellion against God with the devil, he justly forfeited all the spiritual and temporal goods that God bestowed upon him, and likewise lost his title to a happy eternity. and became the enemy's vassal; and thus the enemy robbed him of all the goods that God bestowed upon him. 5. The eternal Son of God having a delight in the sons of men, and beholding them in this miserable plight, enters upon a resolution that He will take on man's nature, and that He will in man's nature be avenged upon that serpent that hath beguiled our first parents, and spoiled them of their patrimony. And accordingly, in the fulness of time, He comes, and is manifested to destroy the works of the devil, and to recover all the stolen goods. II. INQUIRE INTO THE ROBBERY THAT WAS COMMITTED BY SIN AND SATAN, BOTH UPON GOD AND UPON MAN. 1. To begin with the robbery that was committed upon God. It was the devil's great drift, by tempting man to sin against God, to rob God of His glory. 2. Inquire into the goods that were stolen from man by sin and Satan. Here we may see a melancholy scene. The glory of the human nature was quite marred by sin. Sin hath robbed us of heaven, and made us heirs of hell and wrath. In short, sin hath disordered and disjointed the whole creation. III. MAKE IT APPEAR THAT OUR GLORIOUS IMMANUEL MAKES A RESTITUTION OF WHAT WAS TAKEN AWAY BOTH FROM GOD AND FROM MAN. He restores unto God His due, and restores unto man his loss. IV. INQUIRE INTO THE TIME WHEN CHRIST DID ALL THIS: WHEN DID HE RESTORE THAT WHICH HE TOOK NOT AWAY? (Gal. iv. 4, 5). V. INQUIRE INTO THE REASONS OF THE DOCTRINE. Why was it that our Lord restored what He took not away? Why did He restore these goods that sin and Satan took away both from God and man? 1. Because it was His Father's pleasure. 2. Because it contributed very much to enhance His mediatorial glory. 3. Because of His regard to the holy law of God. 4. Because His delights were with the sons of men. 5. That He might "still the enemy and the avenger," that is, the devil. VI. APPLICATION. 1. Is it so that Christ restores what He took not away? Then, hence see, what a generous Kinsman we have of Him; He never took away anything from us, and yet He restores all to the spoiling of His own soul, and pouring it out unto death. 2. This doctrine serves to let us see into the meaning of (Rom. viii. 3). "He condemned sin." Why, or how did He it? Why, sin is a robber, and is it not just that a robber should be condemned to die? Well, Christ condemns sin, and yet He saves the sinner. 3. Hence see what a criminal correspondence it is that the generality of the children of men have with sin. It is dangerous to haunt and harbour robbers; and yet will you keep a robber in your bosom. 4. If sin be such a robber of God and man, then see how reasonable the command is, to crucify sin, and to mortify the deeds of the body. 5. From this doctrine see what way Christ takes in order to carry on His mediatory work of making peace betwixt God and man. 6. From the doctrine we may likewise see, that the believer in Christ is the wisest man in the world, however the world may look upon him as a fool. Why? because he comes to Christ, and gets restitution of all the losses he suffered either by the sin of the first Adam or his own. 7. See the folly and madness of the sin of unbelief (John v. 40). 8. See the folly of the legalist, that goes about to make restitution to God, and to himself, of what was taken away by sin. But consider, that "by the works of the law no flesh living can be justified"; you will never repair your own losses, nor the dishonour you have done to God, but only by coming to Christ, who is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

(*R. Erskine.*)

Ver. 5. **O God, Thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from Thee.—God's knowledge of sin:—**I. GOD MUST HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF MAN'S SIN. Because—1. He is infinite in knowledge. 2. He is everywhere present. 3. He is everywhere perceiving. 4. He is ever reading the heart. 5. He knows what is yet to be. You are all books, and every page is open to the eye of the great Reader, who reads you from the first letter to the last. There is nothing which any man here can possibly conceal from God. It is so, it must be so; if God be God, He knows my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from Him. II. Now, let us just turn the current of our thought while I ask, concerning God's knowledge of man's sin, AFTER WHAT FASHION IS IT? If God knows, in what particular way does He know? 1. It is complete knowledge; the Lord knows us altogether. I must confess that I cower down beneath that thought. That the Lord should know my public service is sufficiently awe-striking; but that He should know my private thoughts, ah! this sinks me into the very dust! 2. It is the knowledge of a holy being. 3. It is an abiding knowledge. 4. It is an eternal knowledge. III. WHAT THEN? 1. How frivolous must those be who never think about it! 2. What care this ought to work in us! 3. What holy trembling this ought to put in us! (O. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 6. **Let not them that wait on Thee, O Lord, be ashamed for my sake.—Esprit de corps:—**This poet is afraid that if he misbehaves himself people will exalt themselves against God, and say with mocking laughter, These are Thy saints! Even whilst he is sinking he would wish to do it with some grace. Extinction itself may be crowned with a species of honour. Death need not be humiliation. There are men who have so died as to have lived a thousand lives in their last combat. Have we lost esprit de corps? Do you not remember that we are involved in the way in which you bear your troubles? If you do not play the man now the enemy will laugh at the whole Church; he will gladly take you up as a specimen of God's sustaining grace, and say, This is the man who prayed: how chopfallen now! see how that once proud chin hangs on the collapsing breast: this is prayer! If I do not bear myself heroically in the storm, the enemy will have a right to laugh at this pulpit, and to put his foot of contempt upon this whole ministry. If I play the atheist in the darkness, then may men justly mock what I endeavour to say in the light. The mockery will be directed against God, not against men. Moses felt this; he said, If they go back, they will say Thou thyself wert not able to take us forward; and if saints do not play the hero in the time of real combat and desperate difficulty, when everything is going down, when business is dull, when enemies are strong, when health is quaking, people will blame not them only but God, and say, This is the doing of the Lord; why, what advantage is it that we pray to Him? or what profit have we in waiting upon God? the saint and the dog die in the same agony. Thus we recover ourselves, under the blessing of God, by thinking of others. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Vers. 7, 8. **For Thy sake I have borne reproach.—Suffering torture for Christ's sake:—**An echo of the Boxer risings in China was heard in the address of Dr. Whitfield Guinness. In July, 1900, the little party with which he was connected was shut up in Honan, and as the speaker detailed those days of anxiety until deliverance came, many were deeply impressed. After leaving the city, thirteen days were spent hiding in the cabin of a boat. Time after time the boat was examined by the customs officials, who, in the order of God's providence, failed to detect the presence of Englishmen. To indicate the genuineness of the Honanese converts, the speaker told a pathetic story. In a few weeks after one of the converts had been baptized, the Boxers pillaged his home, and securing the man's hands behind him, drew him up by a rope to the roof. While thus suspended the man was asked to recant. On refusing, the poor fellow was subjected to horrible tortures and suffering. Some time afterwards Dr. Guinness put to him the question, "Was it worth while to suffer like that for Jesus' sake?" The man replied, "Worth while! I would go through it all again to-morrow for His sake."

Ver. 9. **For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up, and the reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon me.—A suffering Saviour:—**Nearly all the prophecies of Scripture admit of and require a threefold interpretation. 1. They tell of some event or experience in the life of the writer. 2. Then of like experience in the people of God. 3. And chiefly of what in yet higher degree our Lord

Himself should suffer or accomplish. And these remarks apply to this prophecy. Twice in the New Testament it is applied to our Lord, and we may take the words as those of the Lord Himself. Now, it is good for us oftentimes to stand by our Saviour's cross and to contemplate His sufferings. And this is what the text leads us to do. For it shows us—I. **THE MOTIVE BY WHICH HE WAS SUSTAINED.** "The zeal of Thine house," etc. We must not limit these words to His expulsion of the traders from the temple at Jerusalem, but they tell of the spirit which ever animated Him. And God's "house" does not mean merely a building such as the temple, but the world at large, the race of mankind whom Christ came to save. His "zeal," therefore, means that consuming desire to preserve and save them. For this He became incarnate, and lived, suffered and died. His zeal devoured Him, wore away His vigour so that "His visage was marred more," etc. Hence, also, He became "a stranger to His brethren and an alien," etc.

II. **THE SUFFERINGS THEMSELVES.** "The reproaches of them that," etc. We must not limit our idea of these sufferings to that which was outward, such as is represented in the well-known picture, "Ecce Homo." But it was the soul of our Lord that suffered, could not but suffer. For He was that "holy one," and to such the ever present sight of sin, the infinite dishonour done to God, and the ruin wrought upon men, could not but have been far more terrible than any outward pain. Hence He was consumed with desire to vindicate the honour of God and to save men. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Service here and hereafter* (with Rev. vii. 15):—These passages of God's Word, significant in the several truths they contain when standing apart, but still more significant in their contrast when placed side by side, express and interpret the two most prominent phases of the highest form of Christian life and activity. It is not every servant of God who could use them with propriety, but only that man who has not only lived but died for the Master, whose spirits have been burdened, and whose life has been cut off prematurely by unwonted zeal and unvarying labours for the Saviour. The service which has been in the midst of much imperfection and weariness, death may and must end; but the service which shall be without imperfection and without change, it may not and cannot touch. The words, used in such a light, are eloquent with the simplicity of truth, and full of the hope of immortality.

I. First, look at **THE DEEP UNDERLYING AGREEMENT** amid the differences these words suggest. Both speak of service, yes, and of zealous service, and both speak of service for God.

1. There is a consecration unto God amid the sin and the impurity of earth, even as there is a consecration amid the holiness and beatific blessedness of heaven. It may seem to the angels of God, looking down in wonder, a toil amid darkness, as in some murky mine, in which men grope while there is daylight above; none the less does it yield precious jewels and gold and silver to the crown of the Messiah and to the kingdom of God. And He, the Lord of all, counts it as His work. He has put especial honour upon it. He has taken upon Himself this service of toil, when He became a Man of Sorrows, knowing what weariness was in the midst of labour. And it was when the disciples saw His zeal for God, they remembered it was written, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up."

2. But again, our text carries us on to glance at the occupation of heaven. That also is a service, and a ceaseless service. Not rest, as some would interpret that word, but work—the work which is rest, the balanced activity which brings its own enjoyment and blessedness. To live, "more life and fuller," that is what we want. Heaven would be no heaven unless it gave room to develop, to expand like flowers in the sunshine, in one word, to live. We have had enough of lethargy, enough of sloth, of unused powers in this world; we long to do something in the next. And that conception of heaven is highest which sees it a sphere of loyal service unto God, a realm of ceaseless activities, where they labour amid their rest, and rest in their labours, and find His presence to be, in all, an infinite and everlasting joy.

II. Consider **THE CONTRAST** suggested in the text. The second phrase found here is taken from that gathering around the throne of the Lamb which included the sealed of the twelve tribes of Israel, and a great multitude out of every nation and kindred, and peoples, and tongues. David's tribe was there, for twelve thousand were sealed of the tribe of Judah, and doubtless David was there. The man who had said, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up," who had borne reproach for God until it had eaten, like a canker, into his very soul, stands with that multitude before the throne, serving day and night. Wondrous change! It is the same service, yet how different in all its results. The idea is that it is not merely the persecutions and dangers of Christian life which tire out

these faithful ones; the very enthusiasm and zeal for Christ's service may do this. We have the treasure, says Paul, in earthen vessels, and the heavenly often wears out the earthly. There are not only martyrs for Christ, whose bones bleach upon a foreign shore, unsuccessful and unknown, but yonder in the great city you may find those whose ministry, it may be, has been crowned abundantly, and yet who can say with equal truthfulness, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up." But to all these comes the same consolation of the future. Heaven stands out to give meaning to earth. The Christian who has realized this twofold aspect of Christian service has climbed to some Pisgah height from which he can see both past and future. It is said that when Cortez led his sailors across the vast continent of South America, after months of toil and sickness, they climbed one of the peaks of the Andes, and saw out there in the distance, far away, the glimmering of the sea. And the men wept for joy at the sight. It was their own native element, the love of their life, their home. Toil there was a pleasure in comparison with this journeying through endless forests and wildernesses, and they wept for joy. So it is with God's children when they catch sight of that sea of glass mingled with fire, which is before the throne. There is the desire of their hearts, the hope of their life, their treasure and their home. There is the shout of triumph and the song of victory, the rest that shall never end and the service which cannot weary. But, again, we have a further contrast here. In the former text you have the idea of conflict, the evidence of that struggle which is ever going on in the heart of man; the spirit against the flesh, the flesh against the spirit, the soul cramped and hindered in its progress, as in some prison-house struggling to be free, the body worn out and enfeebled by the restless energy of that which is within. It is a state of intense unrest in which that which is best in the man, his zeal for God, is the disturbing element. And against this, in strong contrast, the text places the calm and composure, the serenity of heaven and heavenly service. On the one hand, it is a sea torn and tossed by every wind and wave, boiling and seething as from some internal convulsion; on the other, it is an ocean quiet and peaceful, in whose every movement there is majesty and grandeur. Or, to change the imagery, here it is a morbid spasmodic activity, a life producing death by its very violence, like some untimely plant which springs up too soon and fast, and is withered ere strength and beauty can be developed; yonder it is a maturity which knows neither change nor decay, but is ever green and fair as the seasons roll round, return, and come again. Here the day of labour needs the night of rest, and even then there is left perchance a weariness which slumber may not remove. In heaven they serve Him day and night in His temple without rest. Lastly, I but emphasize one thought, and that by way of making a practical use of all this. It is the important thought which stands connected with the continuity of the Divine life. For the service here, we must never forget, is the beginning of the service which is yonder. They are essentially one and indivisible, and this is necessary to that. Life is the apprenticeship, the school for heaven, necessary not so much, indeed, in this aspect for the work which is done, and the service which is rendered, as that we may learn how to work and how to serve. (*W. Bazendale.*) *Unquenchable zeal for Christian work*:—When Stanley found Livingstone in the heart of Africa, he begged the old hero to go home. There seemed to be every reason why he should go back to England. His wife was dead, his children lived in England, the weight of years was pressing upon him, the shortest march wearied him, he was often compelled to halt many days to recover strength after his frequent attacks of prostrating illness. Moreover, he was destitute of men and means to enable him to make practical progress. But, like Paul, none of these things moved him; nor counted he his life dear to himself. "No, no," he said to Stanley; "to be knighted, as you say, by the Queen, welcomed by thousands of admirers, yes—but impossible. It must not, cannot, will not be. I must finish my task."

Vers. 13-29. But as for me, my prayer is unto Thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time.—*The compassionate, commendable, and censurable*:—I. THE COMPASSIONABLE. The representation which the author here gives of his sufferings, appeals strongly to our pity. Those sufferings are—1. Great. "Deep waters," "mine," "pit." 2. Varied. Involving reproach, torture, depression. II. THE COMMENDABLE. What does this suffering man do in his suffering? 1. He goes to God in his distress (ver. 13). Who can deliver us but He? What hand but His can lift us from the "mire" into which we are sinking, can arrest the floods that are

rushing on us? Science may mitigate some of our sufferings for a brief period; but it cannot remove any of them, and some it cannot touch. Sainly counsel and sympathy may yield us some succour and support, but God alone can deliver us out of all our sufferings. 2. He pleads His goodness for relief (ver. 16). III. The CENSURABLE. His imprecations (vers. 22-28). "Be bravely revenged," says old Quarles; "he is below himself who is not above an injury." (*Homilist.*) **O God, in the multitude of Thy mercy hear me, in the truth of Thy salvation.—The truth of God's salvation:—**I. GOD'S SALVATION IS A GREAT REALITY. "The truth of Thy salvation." There is a substance in it; it is not a shadow, it is not a myth, it is not a mere type or figure of speech, it is a substantial thing, there is a truth in it: "The truth of Thy salvation." 1. View it in reference to the Lord himself. To God, His salvation is in the highest sense full of grace and truth. If I may venture to speak concerning Him of whom we can know nothing except as He reveals Himself, I may say that the truest and deepest thought of God is for the salvation of His people. This lies in the very centre of His heart; and the drift of His other thoughts and acts is all towards this point. 2. God's salvation is a great reality to ourselves, as well as to Him. That day when I saw Christ as my soul's salvation, the great sacrifice for sin was to my soul the most real thing I had ever seen. II. WE HAVE PROVED IT TO BE SO—1. By our experience of a new life. 2. By our sense of sonship. 3. By our ecstatic joy. 4. We have had Divine support in trouble. 5. God has wrought great deliverances for us. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 14. **Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink.—The believer sinking in the mire:—**Many rivers, and especially the Nile, have on their banks deep deposits of black mud, and it is most perilous for any who have the misfortune to fall into it. The more they struggle to get out the deeper they sink. Travellers tell of such incidents. Had David really witnessed such a scene, that speaking of his spiritual sorrows, he said, "I sink in deep mire where there is no standing"? Now, the prayer of our text suggests—I. THAT THE TRUE BELIEVER MAY BE IN THE MIRE AND VERY NEAR SINKING. 1. In the mire of unbelief. Even the firmest in faith lose their foothold at times. All manner of doubts crowd into the mind. They are compelled to pray this prayer. 2. Through lack of full assurance of his own interest in Christ. 3. The mire of temporal trouble. 4. Of inward corruption. 5. Of Satanic temptations. 6. Various are the causes of this sad condition. Sometimes it is through our own sin. It is a chastisement upon us. Sometimes to try our faith; or that we may the better glorify God, or to show the natural weakness of the creature, that no flesh may glory in man; or to make heaven sweeter when we enter its pearly gates. But all the while, these sinking ones are really God's people, for if they were not, they would have no such trouble. The sinner whose element is sin laughs at the weight by which the believer is borne down. The best of God's saints have known such trouble. Luther did, and John Knox, and many more. II. BUT WHEN IN SUCH A STATE THEY KNOW THAT THEIR ONLY HELP IS IN GOD. The Bible cannot help, for unbelief bars you off from all its precious promises. Other believers cannot aid you. God alone can. III. PRAYER IS THE CHRISTIAN'S NEVER-FAILING RESORT. When you cannot use your sword, you may take the weapon of "all-prayer." That is never forbidden. And it is never futile, it ever has true power. Oh, never let us cease to pray. In asthma you say, "I cannot breathe"; but you must breathe if you would live. And so in the condition told of here you must, though you think you cannot, pray. But let us walk carefully, lest we fall into the mire. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 20. **Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.—My broken-hearted Lord:—**Did it ever occur to you that there is a vivid contrast between Jesus in His death and that of the noble army of martyrs who died for Him? Jesus shrank from death, was perturbed, agitated and dismayed, as the martyrs were not. Their fortitude was such that they extorted from the lips of dark pagans the exclamation, "See how these Christians die." And their bodily agonies were quite as excruciating as were those of our Lord. Rome sharpened all her devices for cruelty in the tortures she inflicted on the Christian confessors. Now, wherefore this difference between the attitude of Jesus and the martyrs, He so distressed, they so dauntless? Compare Paul's exultant word when in near prospect of the bloody axe which was soon to smite his life

down to the ground, "I am ready, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown"; compare that with the agonized cry of Jesus in Gethsemane, "Oh, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." The grass was bedewed with His tears; and flecked with His bloody sweat. The history of man had not witnessed such a dismay. But all this shows that there was some deep mental struggle, some mysterious foreboding, unusual with suffering man. Evidently His sufferings held their seat in the mysterious pavilion of His nature. His death was to be the equivalent for the sins of guilty millions, so that the real tragedy of Calvary was impervious to human scrutiny, and was chiefly enacted in the internal agitations of the incarnated God. Hence this startling passage, "Reproach hath broken my heart." It opens a field of wonders in explanation of the physical cause of our Redeemer's death. He died on the cross but not by the cross. He died of a broken heart. In proof see—I. OUR LORD'S OWN TESTIMONY respecting His death. He said that it was purely voluntary. How could that have been if He had died as the result of His crucifixion? II. THERE WAS NOT TIME FOR DEATH BY CRUCIFIXION. No vital organ of the body was touched by the tortures of the cross. Hence death came with terrible slowness. But our Lord suffered on the cross for fewer hours than others have for days. III. THE SOLDIER'S SPEAR proves that Jesus did not die the ordinary death of the crucified. The highest medical authorities tell us that no other mode of death but rupture of the heart can account for the separation into its primitive parts of the blood which flowed from our Lord's pierced side, while that blood yet continues in the body. Nor could He have died from mental fainting and exhaustion. Our Lord was, evidently, physically strong, and He was in perfect health. IV. WHAT WAS IT BROKE HIS HEART? The text says it was "reproach." No praise is more poignant than that of reproach. To a mind such as that of Jesus it becomes the sorrow of sorrows. But when God inflicts it, in vindication of justice and law, as He did upon Jesus, then what sorrow could be like that? Hence the bitter cry, "My God, My God," etc. Oh, how should we hate the sin which thus broke the heart of our Lord. (*Thomas Armitage, D.D.*) *Self-reproach*:—1. If we are not on our guard, seasons of leisure may easily degenerate into seasons of unwholesome brooding and unprofitable unhappiness. The wakeful hours of the night are specially liable to this peril; the soul then almost involuntarily becomes the prey of introspection and self-scorn. Every foolish thing that we ever did, every foolish word that we ever spoke, comes to light again to mock and threaten us. It is all deeply distressing. It is the hour and the power of darkness; the sins and follies of years flash upon us in a judgment night. 2. Much may be done to check the morbid element of our reflective and introspective hours. It is a wise thing to keep the soul interested in large thoughts and causes, to preserve a general intellectual and spiritual sanity by entering heartily into the facts and interests of practical life. But when these dark moods threaten to prevail, is not the grand specific a profound faith in the reality of the Divine grace and forgiveness? "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." Surely the doleful hours of self-reproach are signs of our defective trust in the Divine promise and faithfulness! If our sins are cast into the depths of the sea, to be remembered against us no more for ever, why are we dredging in the depths, bringing up mire, and dirt, and obscure, slimy things far better left in the land of darkness and forgetfulness? (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Vers. 27, 28. **Add iniquity unto their iniquity; and let them not come into Thy righteousness.**—*Imprecations in the Psalms*:—There are tones in the Psalter which seem to jar upon our feelings, which do not naturally or readily adapt themselves to our Christian sentiment. There is an outburst of vindictive joy and exultation in the punishment of the wicked; there is an almost savage delight in the destruction of oppressors, as in Psalm cxxxvii. 9. There are withering imprecations, so fierce and so elaborately wrought, that it makes one's blood run cold to see them. How are we to account for these, and to take them on our lips and read them in our services? There are some who would persuade us that they are capable of an application to our spiritual struggles, that the enemies which we have to face are not persecutors and tyrants such as the oppressors of Israel of old, that "we wrestle not with flesh and blood," etc. Accordingly, the language of the Psalms may be turned, they say, from its original sense into a spiritual channel. But how is it possible to carry out such a principle of interpretation consistently? How in our spiritual warfare may we adopt with definite meaning such words as these:



"Set Thou an ungodly man to be ruler over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand": "Let him be blotted out of the book of the living"? The unnatural strain which must be put upon the words to make them fit into such a system of interpretation ought to have compelled expositors long ago to abandon it. But let us try to look more carefully at the exact position of the psalmists of old, and then, I think, we may arrive at a more natural and truer explanation. The truth is, these words are a striking proof of that intense reality of which I have been speaking. The Jewish psalmists, remember, are the mouthpiece of injured innocence. These are the natural accents of the martyr Church; the afflicted people of God are, almost in every psalm, crushed, borne down because of the oppression of the enemy. Whether the enemies be foreign oppressors or ungodly men who have risen to high office, in any case they have power, and exercise it unscrupulously against those who love God, and it is this which rouses the indignation of the psalmist, and it is an intolerable thing to see high-handed wickedness triumph. It does seem like an arraignment of the very justice of the Most High when the ungodly ravish the poor, and say, as in defiance of the Eternal Majesty, "There is no God," or "He hideth His face." The true heart rises up against this: the true heart on the side of God longs to see His righteousness vindicated, and so, even in the calmest moments of their lives, when their hearts are full of God's goodness, or when they are lost in the contemplation of nature, they still recur to the same theme, and the 104th psalm, which has won the admiration of so many high intellects for its matchless description of the beauty and splendour of creation, ends with the devout and ardent conviction that sinners will be "consumed out of the earth, and the ungodly shall come to an end." Still, we must ask ourselves, Are we justified in taking these burning anathemas on our lips? Is such language in harmony with our Christian consciousness? Is there no difference in this respect between the Old Testament and the New? I believe there is. Our Lord Himself tells us there is, and warns us against the excess of a fiery zeal. The spirit of Elijah is not the spirit of Christ. Even the spirits of David and of St. Paul are not the same. And this must be so, because the revelations of God in the Old Testament and in the New are not the same. The law given on Sinai was stern and inexorable in its punishment, and the soldiers of God were sent to execute His judgments with a two-edged sword in their hands, and the prayers and praises of God in their mouths. It was their mission to exterminate all ungodliness and idolatry; but Jesus Christ, the incarnate revelation of God, came in lowliness and meekness, teaching and practising forbearance and forgiveness, enduring contradiction of sinners against Himself, giving His back to the smiter, and His cheek to them that plucked off the hair, not hiding His face from shame and spitting, and as He dies on the cross, interceding for His murderers—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Unquestionably there is a progress in Divine revelation, and we ought to bear it in mind. What is it that we really learn in the New Testament from passages like those of which I have been speaking? Is it indifference? Is it calm acquiescence in injustice? Is it tolerance of iniquity? Is it coldness towards God and His truth? Most certainly not. It is stern repression, not of our natural sense of justice, but of hatred of individuals; it is to forego personal revenge; it is to bear with personal injuries and wrongs. That is the temper which the Gospel cultivates. I am sure we cannot love God with all our heart unless we hate sin with all our heart; but it is sin we are to hate, not the sinner. Here we are to draw the distinction which the psalmists of old did not draw and could not draw. But it is wickedness that is to arouse our indignation, not differences of religious opinion. It is the grossest perversion of the psalms when these burning words are turned into a justification of theological hatred and strife. Oh, how sad it is to think that Christian men, knowing that there is all this awful wickedness seething in their midst and around them, can turn aside from the real battle, can so far misunderstand and mistake who their real foes are, that they can give their time and thoughts to angry quarrellings about matters of the most trivial and insignificant importance, about petty questions of ritual and ceremonial and forms of worship, instead of girding up all their energies to go forth into that great battle which is going on in this world between God Himself and all the powers of evil that are arrayed against Him. God give us more of the charity of Jesus Christ our Lord, more of His love in our hearts, a more yearning desire to go forth into the world in order that we may win the world to its true Lord and Master. That is the true charity; that is the true love; that is the true hatred of evil. (*Bp. Perowne.*) *David's imprec-*

tions:—A renowned professor who, as Germany thinks, has done more for New England theology than any man since Jonathan Edwards, was once walking with a clergyman of a radical faith, who objected to the doctrine that the Bible is inspired, and did so on the ground of the imprecatory psalms. The replies of the usual kind were made, and it was presumed that David expressed the Divine purpose in praying that his enemies might be destroyed, and that he gave utterance only to the natural righteous indignation of conscience against unspeakable iniquity. But the doubter would not be satisfied. The two came at last to a newspaper bulletin, on which the words were written: "Baltimore to be shelled at twelve o'clock." "I am glad of it," said the Radical preacher. "I am glad of it." "And so am I," said his companion; "but I hardly dare say so, for fear you should say that I am uttering an imprecatory psalm." (*Joseph Cook.*)

Vers. 30-36. **I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving.**—*Moral states of mind worthy of cultivation*:—I. A NOBLE RESOLUTION (ver. 30). There are many ways of praising God: in our writings, conversations, actions. II. A SOUND DOCTRINE (ver. 31). "To obey is better than sacrifice;" so is praise, which is the essence of obedience. Better—1. Because it is good in itself. Sacrifice is not a virtue, praise is; it is essentially valuable, valuable in all worlds; sacrifice is not. Better—2. Because it is more universal. Praise is everywhere. It is the music of the universe; sacrifice is not. There are no sacrifices amongst the angels; but praise throbs in every pulse of thought and emotion. Better—3. Because it is more enduring. Praise will chime through the ages. III. AN ENCOURAGING ASSURANCE (ver. 32). The man who lives a joyous life of gratitude towards God cannot fail to exert a morally beneficent influence over those with whom he is brought into connection. The accents and actions of a devout life fall on the heart of society as sunbeams and showers. No man can be good without doing good. No man can be happy in the highest sense without brightening the lives of others. The spiritually joyous man wakes his social circle into music. IV. AN EXULTANT DEVOTION (ver. 34). He would have all join him in the great song of praise. True devotion destroys the isolation of the soul. V. A PATRIOTIC HOPE (ver. 35). (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 33. **For the Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not His prisoners.**—*Poor prisoners*:—"The Lord heareth the poor," spiritually poor. Let us notice first what this does not mean, in order to get clearly at what it does mean. I make no hesitation in saying that this consciousness of spiritual poverty is one of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and none can understand it but those who are experimentally led into the secret. First, it does not mean literal, mental nor moral poverty, but it consists in our sense of our natural, internal, spiritual worthlessness of character. You may be as moral as an angel, and still be destitute of spiritual life in the soul. Therefore the soul not united to Christ is not united to that that can give it access to God; it is not united to that that can bring upon it the approbation of God; it is not united to that that can save it. "He died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." Therefore, while we prize good works, yet none of these things are of any use in the salvation of the soul; salvation is altogether a secret and another thing. Now, we go on to the literal prisoner. Some good people have been cast into prison through what other people have said about them;—they have been slandered and reproached, and it has been believed, and they have been cast into prison; but the Lord "despiseth not His prisoners." Joseph was slandered—he was reproached, cast into prison; but the Lord did not despise him; the Lord was with him. And so the Lord turned, in one sense, the dungeon into a paradise; and by and by, when Joseph interpreted the dreams, he was exalted, and realized all that his visions predicted. But there is another class of prisoners, and that is those that get into prison by their own fault. Why, you are never going to say a word in favour of them, are you? Well, if not in favour of them, I can say a word in favour of the Lord; and if He is pleased to say a word in favour of them, I shall not differ from Him. Well, Jonah, you are got into prison, do you think you will ever get out again? You have got there by your own fault. But the Lord watched over him and took care of him, and the sea could not kill him, and the weeds could not kill him. He cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him, answered and delivered him, and made him accomplish his mission. So the Lord despiseth not His prisoners, even when they get into prison through their own

fault. This is a God worth loving, worth worshipping, worth cleaving to. Samson got into prison by his own fault. You are not going to say a word in favour of him, are you? I would rather die Samson's death than I would die the death of the most sleek, the most polished Pharisee under the heavens, because they die in enmity against God; but Samson died in sweet reconciliation to God, and obtained the victory God intended he should. He got into prison by his own fault: did the Lord leave him and despise him? No. When they were making sport of Samson he cried to God, for He heareth the poor; He despised not His prisoner. "Let me be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." He bowed with all his might; the victory was wrought, his soul saved, God glorified; and if we are ashamed of these testimonies of God's mercy, then I believe God will be ashamed of us. They are His prisoners because they are His people. Let us, then, not boast one over the other, but rather bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. (*James Wells.*) *Joy for prisoners*:—With what gratitude and joy should these intimations of hope be received by those who are naturally in so miserable a condition! It is a celebrated story that, when Titus Flaminus, at the public games, proclaimed the liberty of Greece, after it had been conquered by the Romans, the auditors were at first lost in a silent amazement, and then burst out into one continued shout for two hours together, "Liberty! Liberty!" Methinks such joy, and greater than this, should appear amongst miserable sinners when these proclamations for liberty are made. (*T. Doddridge.*)

**Ver. 34. Let the heaven and earth praise Him, the seas, and everything that moveth therein.**—*The creation praising God*:—I. ON ACCOUNT OF WHAT HE IS IN HIMSELF. God is good; intrinsically excellent. His nature is composed of all possible perfections. "God is love," wisdom, intelligence, goodness, truth, righteousness, mercy. II. ON ACCOUNT OF WHAT HE IS IN HIS RELATIONS. 1. To all, He stands in the relation of Creator, Sustainer, and Benefactor. 2. To us, whom He has redeemed, by the sacrificial "death of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ," He stands in the relation of a Father and Saviour. III. ON ACCOUNT OF WHAT HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED. The works of God excel the works of all others. They are, Creation—"He made all things"; Providence—He cares for and governs all things; Redemption—it was God that raised apostate humanity from the ruins of the fall. No works can compete with these. And on their account God will be praised throughout eternity, by an intelligent and redeemed universe. IV. ON ACCOUNT OF HIS WONDERFUL GIFTS. Life, reason, mind, subjects for thought, Jesus Christ, the Holy Bible, the ministry of reconciliation, the Holy Spirit, the comforts and consolations of religion, and a hope—resting firmly and securely upon the atonement of Calvary—of heaven, when this temporary introductory life shall have passed away. V. ON ACCOUNT OF HIS GRAND DISCOVERIES. Man builds a rightful claim to the admiration, praise, and gratitude of mankind, by the discoveries he makes, and the facts he brings to light. What has God made known? That there is an eternal world; that men are immortal; that noble and abundant provisions have been made for our happiness during the ever-revolving cycles of an eternity to come; the way in which we, and all mankind, may be prepared for the full and unending fruition of the bliss He has prepared for us. (*Isaac Evans.*)

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### PSALM LXX.

**VERS. 1-5. Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O Lord.**—*A pattern suppliant*:—It is the "fervent" prayer that is effectual, and "effectual" prayer that "availeth much." Importunity prevails where indifference fails. This prayer not only expresses fervour, but likewise expectation; faith's vision was strong, and confidence was unwaveringly vigorous; so that no sooner had the request gone up from David's soul to the "Court of Heaven," than he expected to see the Lord hastening to his assistance. We have here a pattern suppliant—**J. OPPRESSED WITH NEED** (ver. 5). Prayer is the utterance of want; the cry of distress; the pleading of contrite dependence and weakness; more acceptable to God than the vaunting Pharisee's boast, "I thank Thee that I am not as other

mon." The Christian is pre-eminently a man of prayer. It is the atmosphere in which his soul breathes, moves, and keeps its being. II. **EARNESTLY SEEKING HELP** (vers. 1-3). 1. Help, in deliverance for himself. 2. Help, in confusion and overthrow of his enemies. The more vivid the realization of need, the more fervent the entreaty for help. God, a refuge in time of trouble, and fervent prayer the swift foot to bring us into it. III. **MINDFULNESS OF OTHERS** (ver. 4). A beautiful petition from a beautiful spirit. Though in deep distress himself, yet he remembers others, and seeks for them gladness of heart and usefulness of life. Selfishness is very narrow in its supplications. Piety is magnificently catholic and comprehensive in its appeals. (*J. O. Keen, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. **Let such as love Thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified.**—*Our watchword*:—These words occur at least three times in the Psalms, and therefore we may regard them as especially important. I. **DISCRIMINATE THE CHARACTER.** The individuals here spoken of are those who love God's salvation. Then it is implied that they are persons who are saved, because it is not according to nature to love a salvation in which we have no part. We may admire the salvation which is preached, but we shall only love the salvation which is experienced. But, more than this, to sustain and bring to perfection in the renewed heart an ardent affection towards the Divine salvation of a sort that will continue, and become practically fruitful, there must be an intelligent consideration, and an instructed apprehension as to the character of this salvation. Now, let me show you what it is in salvation that the thoughtful believer loves; and I may begin by saying that he loves, best of all, the Saviour Himself. Often our Lord is called Salvation, because He is the great worker of it, the author and finisher, the Alpha and the Omega of it. He who has Christ has salvation; and, as He is the essence of salvation, He is the centre of the saved ones' affection. But you love not only the Saviour's person, for I am sure you delight in the plan of salvation. What is that plan? It is summed up in a single word—substitution. Oh, then let us always say, "Let God be magnified," since He devised, arranged, and carried out this Godlike method of blending justice with mercy. But we also love God's salvation when we consider what was the object of it. The object of it towards us was to redeem unto Christ a people who should be zealous for good works. The sinner loves a salvation from hell; the saint loves a salvation from sin. II. **MEDITATE ON THE SAYING.** Every nation has its idiom, every language has its shibboleth, almost every district has its proverb. Behold the idiom of gracious souls, listen to their household word, their common proverb—it is this, "Let God be magnified! Let God be magnified!" Observe that this is a saying which is founded upon truth and justice. "Let God be magnified," for it is He that saved us, and not we ourselves. None can divide the honours of grace, for the Lord alone hath turned our captivity. From beginning to end salvation is of the Lord, therefore, let God be magnified. This saying is naturally suggested by love. It is because we love His salvation that we say, "The Lord be magnified." You cannot love God without desiring to magnify Him, and I am sure that you cannot know that you are saved without loving Him. Moreover, this saying of our text is deeply sincere and practical. I am sure David did not wish to see hypocrites multiplied; but such would be the case if men merely said, "Let God be magnified," and did not mean it. Moreover, it must not only be sincere, but it must be paramount. I take it that there is nothing which a Christian man should say continually, except this, "Let God be magnified." That which a man may say continually is assuredly the master-thought of his mind. Listen to the cherubim and seraphim; they continually do cry, "Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Hosts!" And the text tells us this must be continual. How earnest you feel about the cause of Christ when you have heard an inspiring sermon, but how long does it last? III. **THE WISH.** "Let God be magnified." This wish is promoted by an anxiety for God's glory; it is a most holy wish, and it ought to be fulfilled. I shall ask your attention to the reasons of the wish. Why should it be wished? 1. First, because it always ought to be said, "Let God be magnified." It is only right, and according to the fitness of things, that God should be magnified in the world which He Himself created. Such a handiwork deserves admiration from all who behold it. But when He new-made the world, and especially when He laid the foundation of His now palace in the fair colours of Jesus' blood, and adorned it with the sapphires of grace and truth; He had a double claim upon our praise. 2. But, we wish it next, because it always needs saying. The word is dull and sleepy,

and utterly indifferent to the glory of God in the work of redemption. We need to tell it over and over and over again, that God is great in the salvation of His people. 3. And, again, we desire this, because the saying of this continually does good to the sayers. He who blesses God blesses himself. We cannot serve God with the heart without serving ourselves most practically. Nothing, brethren, is more for your benefit than to spend and be spent for the promotion of the Divine honour. 4. Then, again, this promotes the welfare of God's creatures. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

**Ver. 5. But I am poor and needy; make haste unto me, O God: Thou art my help and my deliverer; O Lord, make no tarrying.—Pleading:—**Young painters were anxious, in the olden times, to study under the great masters. They concluded that they should more easily attain to excellence if they entered the schools of eminent men. At this present time, men will pay large premiums that their sons may be apprenticed or articulated to those who best understand their trades or professions; now, if any of us would learn the sacred art and mystery of prayer, it is well for us to study the productions of the greatest masters of that science. I am unable to point out one who understood it better than did the psalmist. I. A SOUL CONFESSING. The wrestler strips before he enters upon the contest, and confession does the like for the man who is about to plead with God. A racer on the plains of prayer cannot hope to win, unless, by confession, repentance, and faith, he lays aside every weight of sin. Now, let it be ever remembered that confession is absolutely needful to the sinner when he first seeks a Saviour. It is not possible for thee, O seeker, to obtain peace for thy troubled heart, till thou shalt have acknowledged thy transgression and thine iniquity before the Lord. If thou wilt condemn thyself, God will acquit thee. But never expect that the King of heaven will pardon a traitor, if he will not confess and forsake his treason. Even the tenderest father expects that the child should humble himself when he has offended, and he will not withdraw his frown from him till with tears he has said, "Father, I have sinned." Darest thou expect God to humble Himself to thee, and would it not be so if He did not constrain thee to humble thyself to Him? Wouldst thou have Him connive at thy faults and wink at thy transgressions? He will have mercy, but He must be holy. He is ready to forgive, but not to tolerate sin. The same principle applies to the Church of God. We must own that we are powerless in this business. The Spirit of God is treasured up in Christ, and we must seek Him of the great head of the Church. We cannot command the Spirit, and yet we can do nothing without him. He bloweth where he listeth. We must deeply feel and honestly acknowledge this. II. A SOUL PLEADING. "I am poor and needy, make haste unto me, O God. Thou art my help and my deliverer; O Lord, make no tarrying." The careful reader will perceive four pleas in this single verse. Upon this topic I would remark that it is the habit of faith, when she is praying, to use pleas. Mere prayer sayers, who do not pray at all, forget to argue with God; but those who would prevail bring forth their reasons and their strong arguments, and they debate the question with the Lord. Faith's art of wrestling is to plead with God, and say with holy boldness, "Let it be thus and thus, for these reasons." Faith's pleas are plentiful, and this is well, for faith is placed in divers positions, and needs them all. Faith will plead all the attributes of God. "Thou art just, therefore spare Thou the soul for whom the Saviour died. Thou art merciful, blot out my transgressions. Thou art good, reveal Thy bounty to Thy servant. Thou art immutable—Thou hast done thus and thus to others of Thy servants, do thus unto me. Thou art faithful, canst Thou break Thy promise, canst Thou turn away from Thy covenant?" Sometimes, however, faith's pleas are very singular. As in this text, it is by no means according to the proud rule of human nature to plead—"I am poor and needy, make haste unto me, O God." It is like another prayer of David: "Have mercy upon my iniquity, for it is great." It is not the manner of men to plead so, they say, "Lord, have mercy on me, for I am not so bad a sinner as some." But faith reads things in a truer light, and bases her pleas on truth. "Lord, because my sin is great, and Thou art a great God, let Thy great mercy be magnified in me." Faith's pleas are singular, but, let me add, faith's pleas are always sound; for after all, it is a very telling plea to urge that we are poor and needy. Is not the main argument with mercy? Necessity is the very best plea with benevolence, either human or divine. Is not our need the best reason we can urge? If we would have a physician come quickly to a sick man, "Sir," we say, "it is no common case,

he is on the point of death, come to him, come quickly!" If we wanted our city firemen to rush to a fire, we should not say to them, "Make haste, for it is only a small fire"; but, on the contrary, we urge that it is an old house, full of combustible materials, and there are rumours of petroleum and gunpowder on the promises; besides, it is near a timber yard, hosts of wooden cottages are close by, and before long we shall have half the city in a blaze. We put the case as badly as we can. Oh for wisdom to be equally wise in pleading with God, to find arguments everywhere, but especially to find them in our necessities. III. A SOUL URGENT. "Make haste unto me," etc. Jesus has said, "men ought always to pray and not to faint." You land on the shores of a foreign country with the greatest confidence when you carry a passport with you, and God has issued passports to His children, by which they come boldly to His mercy-seat; He has invited you, He has encouraged you, He has bidden you come to Him, and has promised that whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. Come, then, come urgently, come importunately, come with this plea, "I am poor and needy; make no tarrying, O my God," and a blessing shall surely come; it will not tarry. God grant we may see it, and give Him the glory of it. IV. Here is another part of the art and mystery of prayer—THE SOUL GRASPING GOD. She has pleaded, and she has been urgent, but now she comes to close quarters; she grasps the covenant angel with one hand, "Thou art my help," and with the other, "Thou art my deliverer." Oh, those blessed "my's," those potent "my's." The sweetness of the Bible lies in the possessive pronouns, and he who is taught to use them as the psalmist did, shall come off a conqueror with the eternal God. Oh, you that are saved and, therefore, love Christ, I want you, as the saints of God, to practise this last part of my subject; and be sure to lay hold upon God in prayer. "Thou art my help and my deliverer." (C. H. Spurgeon.)

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PSALM LXXI.

VERS. 1-24. **In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion.**—A picture of a pious old man:—I. THE ENTREATIES of a pious old man. 1. Against evil. (1) Moral failure (ver. 1). (2) General danger (vers. 2, 4). (3) Divine desertion (ver. 9). 2. For good. (1) Divine protection (ver. 3). I want a "strong" refuge, a "habitation," where I shall feel sheltered from all storms. I want a habitation where I may "continually resort," one close at hand, always open to me. O God, be such a "habitation" to me, shivering on the margin of the awful future, the storms of retribution gathering around me. (2) The spirit of worship (ver. 8). II. THE BLESSED MEMORIES of a pious old man. It is natural for age to turn to the past. What did this aged man remember in the past? 1. His youthful confidence (ver. 5). In the opening years of my life, I rested my soul on Thy love and Thy truth. My young heart went out to Thee, and on Thee it has settled. What a blessed memory is this! What a contrast to the memory of the old profligate who remembers his rebellions, his blasphemies, etc. 2. God's goodness to him from his earliest days (ver. 6). Thou didst take care of me in helpless infancy, and all through life. Thy very love has been marvellous. "I am as a wonder unto many." "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth." Taught me the true theory both of duty and of happiness. III. THE EXALTED CONTEMPLATIONS of a pious old man (ver. 19). IV. THE UNFAILING CONFIDENCE of a pious old man (vers. 20, 21). Though he had been subjected to great and sore troubles—and what aged man has not met with such troubles?—his trust was unabated, and he says, "Thou shalt quicken me again," etc. However feeble I become, though I sink into the depths of the earth, Thou wilt revive me; nay, more, "Thou shalt increase my greatness," etc. I infer from the character of Thy past conduct to me that I shall not be allowed to sink into extinction, dishonour, or misery. Thou wilt raise me, dignify me, and "comfort me on every side." God grant us all this unfailing confidence in old age! "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." V. A NOBLE RESOLUTION of a pious old man (vers. 22-24). (Homilist.) **The vow of faith:**—I. THE LIFE OF FAITH IS A CONSTANT

REALIZATION OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD. The mountain was as full of the chariots of fire when the prophet's servant did not perceive them as when he did. Christ was just as much present with the disciples when their eyes were holden as when they were open. God speaks with men as truly to-day as in the time of Abraham. It is because our minds are preoccupied with other matters that we fail to perceive God. II. THE LIFE OF FAITH IS ENTERED UPON BY A DEFINITE VOW. If such be the life of faith, how few of us have entered upon it! This may be due to some obstacle, such as an unfulfilled duty, or a disregarded command, or a permitted practice opposed to God's will. But if it be none of these, then most likely it is because the attitude of faith has not been consciously and definitely assumed. We must take our all and lay it at the feet of Christ. This is the wicket-gate by which we enter upon the blessed life of faith. Brainerd Taylor, feeling that he needed something which he did not possess, lifted up his heart in prayer, and became conscious of giving up all to God, and then he cried, "Here, Lord, take me, take my whole soul, and seal me Thine now, and Thine for ever." III. SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE TAKING OF SUCH A VOW. Let it be taken with all seriousness, and let it be a very definite one. Doddridge gives this advice, "Set your hand and seal to it that on such a day and year, and at such a place, on full consideration and serious reflection, you come to this happy resolution, that whatever others might do, you would serve the Lord." Doddridge's own vow was a very elaborate and detailed one. It may not be necessary to draw up a document setting forth one's vow, but in some definite way it should be taken. (R. C. Ford, M.A.)

Ver. 3. **Be Thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort.**—*God, our continual resort:*—David knew what it was to hide himself away in the great caverns and rocks of his native land. He had done so in the cave of Adullam. And such residences are never forgotten. You may live for an age in such a town as this, and forget it all. What is there to remember in this labyrinth of bricks and mortar? But when you get into the clear bracing atmosphere of the hills, amid these crags and glens, and you spend a night in some mountain cave, you will never forget that. And David never did. And in his loftiest songs he speaks of God in language culled from the cave. And what a gracious heart he must have had to be able to speak like this. He desired not merely to dwell with, but in, God. He would have the Lord to be his house, his home, whereunto he might continually resort. The text suggests—I. THE DELIGHTFUL REPOSE THAT DAVID FOUND IN GOD. Be Thou my strong habitation: that is, be my house and home. 1. What wonderful condescension he had experienced from God. That he should be allowed to think of the great and glorious God as his home. And he did so, for—2. He had realized in God peculiar love. In a man's own home he expects to find love. Pity the poor wretch who is disappointed therein. In the world we do not expect it, we reckon on rough treatment; but within our own doors we enter the sanctuary of love. And David had dwelt in God as in the abode of love. 3. And home is the place of special rest. We lay aside our working dress. The advocate takes off his gown, and says, "Lie there, Mr. Barrister, and let the father come to the front." The tradesman takes off his apron, the warrior his harness, the bearer his yoke, for he is at home. And so we have rest in God. 4. And of joyful freedom. Religious people sometimes start back from the prayers of a true saint, and say, "He is too familiar." Of course a child is too familiar for the imitation of a stranger; but have you ever blamed a child for clambering on his father's knee? And yet you would not think of copying him. "Boy, dost thou know what thou art at? Thou art playing with a learned judge, before whom prisoners tremble, and courts are hushed. Even wise counsellors speak to him as 'my lord.'" But that urchin does not say, "My lord." Look, he is plucking him by the beard; he is kissing his cheek. What presumption! No! he is the judge's child; he who is to judge others is "father" to him. So the saints of God say, "Our Father, which art in heaven," ever reverentially, but yet with sweet familiarity. They are at home with Him. 5. And of intimate knowledge. David knew the Lord even as he knew the caves in which he had sheltered. David could have served as a guide to the great hollow of Adullam. 6. Of tender care. We may get more skill elsewhere, perhaps, but what can make up for the tenderness of home? One would like to die there when our time comes. II. DAVID HAD REALIZED IN GOD POWERFUL SECURITY. He felt then, and so does the child of God, perfectly safe. III. GOD WAS TO HIM A PLACE OF CONTINUAL RESORT. The gate of communion with God is never locked. There is joy

in such resort itself, and as an outlook for the unknown future; and it is a joy which answers so many blessed purposes. Let us continually resort unto God as we ever may. Let us come now. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God the habitation of souls*:—I. A SENSE OF THE SOUL'S NEED. The soul needs a "habitation." It is a homeless wanderer. 1. It wants a home for protection. How exposed is a guilty soul! 2. It wants a home for comfort. Home is the scene of comfort. But the guilty soul is comfortless. 3. It wants a home for settledness. It is a restless wanderer. II. A FAITH IN GOD'S SUFFICIENCY. God is just the "habitation" which the soul wants, affording security, comfort, and permanent residence. 1. God is an accessible habitation. The doors of infinite love are ever open to welcome all who come. This habitation is ever near to us. 2. God is a secure habitation. Those who are in Him are safe from all dangers and all foes. "God is our refuge and strength." 3. God is a blessed habitation. In Him is found infinitely more than all we want to perfect us in everlasting bliss. 4. God is an enduring habitation. "The eternal God is our refuge," etc. Return, O prodigal, to thy Father's house. (*Homilist.*) *The best home* (to children):—I am going to talk to you about the best home you could ever think of. God is a home; that's what our text says. I. HOME IS A PLACE OF SHELTER AND SECURITY. Every boy and girl feels safe at home. Now, there are a great many dangers and troubles in the world that grasp us, and threaten us, and frighten us; but if we only get into this home of which I am speaking, they can't harm us. God is a sure refuge for His children. Long ago, rich people lived in castles built of strong stone walls, and frequently surrounded by a deep broad ditch, so that robbers and enemies would not be able to enter and despoil them of their property. They used to fight with each other, and when the battle began to turn against them, they would flee into their castles, and there they were safe. Now, God is a great castle; He is a "strong habitation." If you once get inside of it, no enemy can harm you. II. HOME IS A PLACE OF SUPPLY. I know that there are homes where children do not have many nice things, where they have at times to suffer hunger. But such is not the case with this home of which I am speaking. This home has everything to make those who live in it satisfied and happy. III. HOME IS A PLACE OF LOVE. Mother, father, wife, children, are but faint, faint images of God. He is the fountain of all their affection. There is no place in the universe so safe and so delightful. (*B. D. Thomas.*)

Ver. 5. *Thou art my hope, O Lord God: Thou art my trust from my youth.—God our hope in youth*:—It was a man well advanced in life who uttered these words. Aye, the snows of age are falling on his head; his back bends under the weight of years; but—is the frail old man dejected and forlorn? No, nothing of the kind: the faith of his youth proves the comfort of his age; and, as he leans his hand upon his staff, he lifts up his eyes to heaven, and says, "Thou art my hope," etc. What I wish to bring out and illustrate is this, that a pious trust in God at the outset of life guarantees a blessed hope in God at the end of it. Archbishop Leighton beautifully observes: "The world dare say no more for its device, than Dum spiro, spero, 'While I breathe, I hope'; but the children of God can go further and say, Dum exspiro, spero, 'Even when I die, I hope'; for that very event which drowns all the worldling's prospects throws open to the Christian the gates of a glorious eternity!" I. IT IS WELL FOR YOU IN YOUR YOUTH TO CONTEMPLATE AND PREPARE FOR AGE. As I was wandering one day through the old cathedral at Elgin, my eye lighted upon a quaint epitaph, carved on a slab in the wall:—

"This world is a city full of streets;  
And death is the market that all men meets;  
If life were a thing that money could buy,  
The poor could not live and the rich would not die."

The grammar may be at fault, but the sentiment is true. Oh, how many squander in early life those energies they would afterwards give a fortune to recall! How many are practically saying, Let youth have its carnival of pleasure, and let age look out for itself! It is your duty to contemplate living long and growing old. But will you? Where do you spend your evenings? Answer me that, and I shall have some notion where you will spend eternity. Are you in the habit of taking stimulants? If you are, that lessens your chance of seeing old age by some fifty per cent. Oh, do not tamper with the drink-fiend that every year digs a grave for



hundreds of the flower of London. If some of you will act upon the advice I am now to give you, you will thank me for it some day. It is meanly selfish for a man, dying in the prime of life and professing a Christian hope, to be perfectly happy whilst he knows that as he steps into heaven his wife and children will step into the workhouse. I say it is abominable! If you have the faintest prospect of having any dependent upon you, you have no business to spend on gratification all your weekly wage or your yearly salary. It is not yours to spend. The first few shillings, or the first few pounds, belong to them, and should go to pay the premium on a policy that at least will keep them from beggary. II. THE ONLY GUARANTEE OF A BLESSED HOPE IN AGE IS A PIOUS TRUST IN YOUTH. I was once summoned to the military barracks, to visit a soldier who was lying in the sick ward. I saw at once the stamp of death upon his countenance. It was evident he had but a few moments to live. I stooped over him, held his hand and softly asked him, "Have you a hope in Christ?" His answer made me tremble, and though twenty years have gone, it rings in my ear to-day—the last words of a dying unbeliever, "I have no hope!" Will any of you, dear lads, risk such an exit from the world? Can your life be genuinely happy, with a drawn sword hanging daily over you? Would you not wish, then, to be prepared? Would it not be a glorious thing if everybody could say with Dr. Watts: "I lay my head upon my pillow to-night, not caring whether I awake in this world or the next"? Oh, won't you all take the decisive step at once, the step that will make your whole life luminous, your death triumphant, and your eternity infinitely happy? (*J. Thain Davidson, D.D.*)

**Ver. 6. By Thee have I been holden up from the womb.—God the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the world.**—I. OUR BIRTH AND BEING ARE OWING TO GOD, AS THE ORIGINAL CAUSE OF THEM. II. IT IS HIS PROVIDENCE WHICH SUSTAINS, PRESERVES, AND HOLDS UP OUR GOINGS IN LIFE. Even if the materials of our being had, in themselves, a self-subsisting power, yet the form of them by which we are men, by which we are creatures of such a species, this, we know, is liable to various contingencies, and obnoxious to many fatal alterations. Wherefore, as we derive our birth and being from the wisdom and power of our great Creator, so, if we were not nursed up by the care and goodness of His paternal providence, the brittle and tender threads of life had probably long since been broken in us, and we had consequently returned to the dust from whence we were taken. III. THERE IS A PROVIDENTIAL DIRECTION AND DISPOSAL OF SUCH EVENTS AS CONCERN US. If we would attend to God's dealings with us, every man, I doubt not, might find his own experience attesting the truth and fact of this directing, overruling, superintending providence. Conclusion. 1. If God be our Creator, Preserver, and Governor, then we can nowhere fix our dependence so properly, nowhere with such security and safety, as upon His infinite goodness, wisdom, and power. 2. To render this persuasion of our dependence on God more practical, we are not only to recognize His majesty and power in thought and in word, but in deed and in truth. 3. If we owe our life and being to God, as the original cause and donor of them, let His demands upon us to resign them find us in the posture of a ready obedience. (*N. Marshall, D.D.*)

**Ver. 7. I am as a wonder unto many; but Thou art my strong refuge.—A wonder unto many.**—Consider the text, with reference to David, to Christ, and to the Christian. (*John Cawood, M.A.*)

**Ver. 9. Cast me not off in the time of old age: forsake me not when my strength faileth.—The cry of the aged.**—This is the cry of trembling, tottering age to man as well as God. Among the very saddest of human experiences is the decay which is the harbinger of death. If death were always a swift, sudden translation, like that of Enoch or Elijah, we could understand it better. The long act of dying is the darkest part of death. I. THE PHENOMENON OF HUMAN DECAY. At both ends of life man is the weakest and most helpless of creatures. The noblest of created beings and the most Godlike is cast more utterly, in birth and death, on the care of his fellows, than the weakest of the creatures which God made to be his satellites. Alas for the old and weary among the great mass of mankind; how utterly sad their lot, not only the body but the mind failing also. II. WHY IS THIS? Partly—I. To drive home the lessons God is ever teaching us about sin. 2. To develop the noblest qualities of the human spirit by the minis-

trials which sickness, suffering and decay call forth. 3. That He may strengthen faith and hope in immortality. Death is terrible that life may be beautiful. By faith and hope in Christ we can transmute death into blessing and the germ of everlasting joy. III. THE DUTIES WHICH SPRING OUT OF THESE FACTS. 1. The tender care of the aged. 2. The pressing on them with double earnestness the Gospel which brings to light life and immortality. (*J. Baldwin Brown, B.A.*) *To the aged*:—Old men do not always put up this petition. If the desires of many were put into words, they would be for money, power, and many other things. Covetousness is peculiarly the sin of old age. But the favour and presence of God should be our supreme desire. For—I. THERE ARE SOME PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES OF OLD AGE WHICH RENDER THIS BLESSING NECESSARY. 1. There is little natural enjoyment (2 Sam. xix. 35). 2. The troubles of life often increase. Poverty. Misery of our children, or their evil courses. Loss of friends. Results of the evil training of our children. See David's sorrow. 3. And as troubles increase we are less able to bear them. Jacob could bear the Padan-Aram hardships—he was young; but not the loss of Rachel when he was old. 4. Old age is not always treated with due respect, but often with neglect. 5. Death and eternity are near. II. WHEN MAY WE HOPE FOR THIS BLESSING? Not all old men enjoy it. Oh, the misery of a wicked old age! But if we have been God's servants from our youth, or have become so since we were old, or if now we cast ourselves upon the Lord, then this prayer shall be fulfilled. (*Andrew Fuller*.) *The time of old age*:—The time of old age is—I. SPECIALLY THE TIME FOR PRAYER. 1. On account of personal need. The text is an appeal to the Divine compassion. This the heavenly Father always welcomes and honours. It is in the supreme distinction of His nature. How He proclaims it! "The Lord God merciful and gracious." It is a frequent title in the Psalms, "full of compassion." To what else can weakness turn so hopefully, so trustfully, so joyfully? Human life is compared to a journey. Men grow tired after long walking. All pilgrims find it so. But to come in thence with timely help is altogether Divine. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." 2. By reason of past memories. The psalmist calls to mind what God had done for him: "Thou hast taught me from my youth." Well, he makes that a ground of expectation that God would carry on and complete what He had begun. That is the logic of the heart. A child can understand it. II. THE TIME OF HARVEST. If youth is passed in listless frivolity, old age will be childish or idiotic; but if it be passed in careful research and thoughtful study, it will be ripe in knowledge and understanding. If youth is passed in storing the false, the foul, the malicious, old age will be like the land of Egypt, hideous and loathsome, with its frogs and gadfly; but if it be passed in fellowship with the true, the pure, the loving, old age will be like Eden, with warbling songs and fragrant flowers, and ruddy and pulpy fruits. If in youth the passions are unbridled and burning, they will grow into tormenting fiends. If ruled and hallowed by the life of Christ, they will grow into bright angels with heavenly music. III. THE TIME OF FIXEDNESS. In earlier days men prepare the facilities and the forces of later days. How absurd it would be to send people to apprenticeship at seventy years of age! They could not learn. So in every event of life the same rule will be found to apply. When men get old their passions cool; but their affections grow firmer, and their will grows stubborn. That sapling may be easily trained. That grown tree must be cut down. The old man will often see a better way, and sigh to enter it; but Nature cries: "Too late! too late!" In everything the law is imperative and irrevocable. If Wisdom speak, it is by this rule: "They that seek me early shall find me." In Grace, as in Nature, "now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." The Lord meets every one at the threshold and says: "My son, my daughter, give Me thy heart." IV. THE TIME OF TESTIMONY. Those to whom we refer have had discipline and experience. They ought to have knowledge and conviction, and they ought to bear testimony of this for the honour of the Most High, and for the advantage of those with whom they have to do. It was so with the psalmist. He acted on this rule as every one ought to act. In his day the trial of faith was this—it was a dispensation of temporal rewards and punishments; yet they saw sometimes the wicked man prospering and the godly man seeming to suffer. Still he bore his testimony and said: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." The trial of faith in these days would rather seem to be in the pride and prevalence of unbelief. I own that it does not move me. You ask me why. Well, the work of the Good Spirit in every man's own

heart must for that man be the most personal and perfect and abiding ground of confidence. Yet, apart from that, this fixes and satisfies me—that the Gospel in itself, in its teaching, and in its effects is only goodness. "There is none good but one, that is God;" and goodness can come from Him and from Him alone. V. **THE TIME OF FAREWELL AND WELCOME**, giving up and getting. I say it is the time of farewell. There is one expression used by the Apostle Paul: "Though our outward man perish." Then it does perish: all biography tells us that. "The inward man is renewed day by day." Yes—the flesh decays; the spirit lives. The senses grow dull; but thought grows clearer and convictions grow stronger. Dreary memories lose their bitterness; holy ones get lighted up with a heavenly gladness. The simplest things in Nature shine with a heavenly light. The bloom and freshness and vigour seem an image of the untainted land. Earth ceases to distract and to dazzle. Strength declines but ambitions die, and the soul is even as a weaned child. The hectic has gone from the cheek, but the fever has gone from the heart. The day's work is well nigh done, but then home is near, and home's rest and safety and gladness and love. (J. Aldis.) *Remorseful reflection on growing old*:—John Foster, he who sprang into celebrity from one essay, "Popular Ignorance," had a diseased feeling against growing old, which seems to us to be very prevalent. He was sorry to lose every parting hour. "I have seen a fearful sight to-day," he would say—"I have seen a buttercup." To others the sight would only give visions of the coming spring and future summer; to him it told of the past year, the last Christmas, the days which would never come again—the so many days nearer the grave. Thackeray continually expressed the same feeling. He reverts to the merry old time when George III. was king. He looks back with a regretful mind to his own youth. The black care constantly rides behind his chariot. "Ah, my friends," he says, "how beautiful was youth! We are growing old. Springtime and summer are past. We near the winter of our days. We shall never feel as we have felt. We approach the inevitable grave." Few men, indeed, know how to grow old gracefully, as Mme. de Staël very truly observed.

Ver. 12. **O God, be not far from me.—God always near**:—A busy woman entered her room hastily as twilight shades were falling—went directly to her desk, turned on the gas, and began to write. Page after page she wrote. The solitude became oppressive. She wheeled her chair around, and with a shock of joyful surprise looked squarely into the face of her dearest friend, lying on the lounge at her side. "Why, I didn't know you were here!" she cried. "Why didn't you speak to me?" "Because you were so busy. You didn't speak to me." So with Jesus—here all the time. The room is full of Him, always ready to greet us with a smile—but we are so busy. But when the solitude grows oppressive we suddenly turn, and lo, He is at our side. We speak to Him and He speaks to us, and the soul's deepest yearnings are satisfied. (*Christian Age*.)

Ver. 14. **But I . . . will yet praise Thee more and more.—More and more**:—When sin conquered the realm of manhood, it slew all the minstrels except those of the race of Hope. For humanity, amid all its sorrows and sins, hope sings on. To believers in Jesus there remains a royal race of bards, for we have a hope of glory, a lively hope, a hope eternal and divine. I. Our first business shall be, to **URGE OURSELVES TO THIS RESOLUTION**. 1. It is humbling to remember that we may very well praise God more than we have done, for we have praised Him very little as yet. What we have done, as believers, in glorifying God falls far, far short of His due. 2. Another argument which presses upon my mind is this: that wherein we have praised God up till now, we have not found the service to be a weariness to ourselves, but it has ever been to us both a profit and a delight. I would not speak falsely even for God, but I bear my testimony that the happiest moments I have ever spent have been occupied with the worship of God. I have never been so near heaven as when adoring before the eternal throne. I think every Christian will bear like witness. 3. We ought surely to praise God more to-day than at any other previous day, because we have received more mercies. Even of temporal favours we have been large partakers. Begin with these, and then rise higher. 4. We have been proving through a series of years the faithfulness, immutability, and veracity of our God—proving these attributes by our sinning against God, and their bearing the strain of our misbehaviour—proving them by the innumerable benefits which the Lord has bestowed upon us. Shall all this experi-

once and in no result? Shall there be no advance in gratitude where there is such an increase of obligation? God is so good that every moment of His love demands a life of praise. 5. It should never be forgotten that every Christian as he grows in grace should have a loftier idea of God. Our highest conception of God falls infinitely short of His glory, but an advanced Christian enjoys a far clearer view of what God is than he had at the first. Now, the greatness of God is ever a claim for praise. "Great is the Lord, and"—what follows?—"greatly to be praised." If, then, God is greater to me than He was, let my praise be greater. 6. It is a good reason for praising God more that we are getting nearer to the place where we hope to praise Him, world without end, after a perfect sort. II. Let us in the Spirit's strength DRIVE AWAY THAT WHICH BINDS US FROM PRAISING GOD MORE AND MORE. 1. One of the deadliest things is dreaminess, sleepiness. A Christian readily falls into this state. I notice it even in the public congregation. Very often the whole service is gone through mechanically. A sleepy seraph before the throne of Jehovah, or a cherub nodding during sacred song, it were ridiculous to imagine. And shall such an insult to the majesty of heaven be seen on earth? No! Let us say to all that is within us, "Awake! awake!" 2. The next hindrance would be divided objects. We cannot, however we may resolve, praise God more and more, if, as we grow older, we allow this world to take up our thoughts. If I say, "I will praise God more and more," and yet I am striking out right and left with projects of amassing wealth, or I am plunging myself into greater business cares unnecessarily, my actions belie my resolutions. 3. To rest on the past is another danger as to this matter. III. LET US APPLY OURSELVES TO THE PRACTICAL CARRYING OUT OF THIS RESOLUTION. How shall I begin to praise God more and more? Earnestness says: "I shall undertake some fresh duty this afternoon." Stop just a minute. If you want to praise God, would not it be as well first to begin with yourself? The musician said: "I will praise God better"; but the pipes of his instrument were foul; he had better look to them first. If the strings have slipped from their proper tension, it will be well to correct them before beginning the tune. No; prepare yourself; make your heart ready. Thou needest the Spirit's aid to make thy soul fit for praising God. Go then to thy chamber, confess the sins of the past, and ask the Lord to give thee much more grace that thou mayest begin to praise Him. These inner matters being considered, let us go on to increase our actual and direct service of God. Let us quicken our speed. Or suppose we are already doing so much that all the time we can possibly spare is fully occupied, let us do what we do better. We should praise God much more if we threw more of His praise into our common conversation—if we spoke more of Him when we are by the way or when we sit in the house. We should praise Him more and more if we fulfilled our consecration, and obeyed the precept, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 15. **My mouth shall show forth Thy righteousness and Thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof.**—*An inexhaustible subject*:—This psalmist's words may well be a pattern for old men, who need fear no failure of buoyancy, nor any collapse of gladness, if they will fix their thoughts where this singer did his. Other subjects of thought and speech will pall and run dry; but he whose theme is God's righteousness and the salvation that flows from it will never lack materials for animating meditation and grateful praise. "I know not the numbers thereof." It is something to have fast hold of an inexhaustible subject. It will keep an old man young. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *Witnessing of God's grace and salvation*:—We may wrongly hide our religion so that it evaporates. Too many professing Christians put away their religion as careless housewives might do some precious perfume, and when they go to take it out, they find nothing but a rotten cork, a faint odour and an empty flask. Take care of burying your religion so deep as dogs do bones, that you cannot find it again, or, if you do, discover when you open the coffin that it holds only a handful of dry dust. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 16. **I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of Thy righteousness, even of Thine only.**—*God the source of the minister's strength*:—I. WHAT IS THE HELP THE MINISTER REQUIRES?—"the strength of the Lord God." 1. Not human strength, that is but weakness. What was Isaiah's comfort but this, "Surely shall we say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength"? And so with Paul. And he bids Timothy, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ

Jesus." 2. What is this strength? Not mere physical ability, nor mental might. For many who have no splendour of intellect are greatly used of God. When some one complained to his bishop of good and holy Mr. Rogers of Freme that his style of preaching was so at random, the bishop replied, "Ah, complain not about his style; Mr. Rogers charms more souls to Christ with his wild notes, than we do with all our set music." No; the strength which ministers require is that of the Spirit of God (John xv. 26, 27). And though we may not have His miraculous influence, yet we may and must have His instructing, His Christ-glorifying, His witnessing, His comforting, His holy, influence. This is the minister's strength, and none can withstand it. 3. But how do ministers go in this strength? By realizing it as secured to them by the covenant of grace, the blood of Christ and His intercession. And by depending upon it. The minister must not depend upon any one else, whether upon great men or small, and least of all upon himself. 4. Where will he go? In the path of communion with God. In the fields of conflict with spiritual wickedness. In the privacy of domestic life. "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." In the path of active duty. II. THE SUBJECT OF THE MINISTER'S BOASTING. "I will make mention of," etc. It is the righteousness of Christ that he is to make mention of—1. To God as the ground of his confidence. 2. To himself as the spring of his comforts. This supplies all his needs. As guilty, lost, empty, condemned, weak, dying. 3. To others as the hope of salvation. "I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." 4. With the multitude of the redeemed, as the matter of his joy. CONCLUSION. 1. Aim to adopt this resolution as your own. 2. Assist your minister in his endeavour to carry it out. Come and pray unitedly and help me in all works of mercy. Let there be no drones here, but all at work for Christ. (*James Sherman.*) *Faith's firm resolve*.—I. HIS RESOLVE. "I will go." 1. He will not sit still. 2. He will go to warfare. 3. He will go forward and make progress in Divine things. 4. He will go to suffering with holy resignation. II. HIS RELIANCE. "In the strength of the Lord God."—1. He will go glorying in strength already received. 2. Relying upon a strength which did not alter. 3. In a power which sanctified his going. 4. He is confident as to the sufficiency and adaptation of God's strength to every trial or work to which he may be called; for the Hebrew, being plural, hints at this. "I will go in the strengths of the Lord God." If I shall require mental vigour, God can give it me. If I shall want physical strength, He can give it me. If I shall need spiritual power, He can give it me. If the particular demand is a clear sight, that I may detect and baffle the cunning of the enemy, He can give it me. If I require courage and quick resolve, He can give them me. If my special need be firmness of mind in the day of temptation, He can give it me. If it be a patient temper, He can give it me. Nothing is wanted by a believer, but that which the strength of God supplies when it is needed. As our days our strength shall be. We shall find the supply always equal to the demand. III. HIS MESSAGE. "I will make mention," etc. Bear your testimony to the righteousness of God in providence. Stand to it that the Lord never does wrong. He is never mistaken; but whatever He ordains is, and must be, unquestionably right. Bear witness, next, to His righteousness in salvation; that He does not save without an atonement; that He does not put away sin without being strictly just; that He does by no means spare the guilty, but has laid on Christ that which was due to human sin, that He might be "just and the justifier of him that believeth." Declare the righteousness of God as to a future state. Declare that whatever Scripture speaks of the ungodly is true, and that God is righteous in it. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The Christian's duty and dependence*.—I. HIS PURPOSE OF HOLY WALKING, OF GOING FORWARD, AND PERSEVERING in the way of his duty. 1. A serious and deliberate choice of the ways of God. 2. A constant jealousy over his heart. 3. "I will go," though a cloud should hang over my head the whole way. 4. "I will go," let the duties I am called to perform be ever so arduous, or the difficulties ever so discouraging that lie in my way; I must look for them from without and from within, that will put all my resolution to the trial. 5. "I will go," if I should go singly and alone. There is no co-partnership here; every man must trade upon his own bottom. 6. "I will go," therefore, directed in every step by the infallible standard—"The scriptures of the inspiration of God." 7. "I will go"—I will go instantly, without admitting one excuse, were it but for a moment, for postponing my present purpose to a "more convenient season." 8. "I will go"—endeavouring to make daily progress. "Counting not myself to have attained," etc. II. HIS GROUND AND

**DEPENDENCE.** 1. Almighty strength was the psalmist's sole reliance; and it must be mine, or in vain are all my best efforts. Amidst all my attainments, no less than all my weaknesses, and all my fears, I will eye a superior power. In the one case, I will review and acknowledge the Divine bounty with the warmest sentiments of gratitude and dependence; in the other, I will pour forth my plaint, and offer my humble but fervent suit, expecting no relief nor aid from any other quarter. 2. I will make mention of Thy righteousness, as including in it the holiness and purity of Thy nature. It is the invariable measure of Thy moral administration; it is the centre of union, and gives, as it were, stability to all Thy other perfections. (*Thomas Gordon.*)

**Vers. 17, 18. O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works.**—*The old man's sermon*:—**HIS SCHOLARSHIP.** "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth." 1. The psalmist was an instructed believer. He had not merely been saved, but taught: conversion had led to instruction. I call the attention of all young Christians to this. How desirable it is not merely that you should be forgiven your sins, and that your hearts should be renewed by the operations of the Holy Ghost, but that you should go to school to Jesus, and take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him. 2. All his instruction the psalmist traced to his God. "O God, Thou hast taught me." He had entered Christ's college as a scholar. Most wisely had he chosen to learn of Him who was infinite wisdom to impart, and divine skill in communicating it. What a school have some of us passed through, a school of trial and a school of love. We have sat on the hard form of discipline. 3. David also had the privilege of beginning early. "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth." If you would be a good scholar you must be a young scholar. 4. Further, notice David tells us he kept to his studies. He says, "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth," which implies that God had continued to teach him: and so, indeed, He had. The learner had not sought another school, nor had the Master turned off His pupil. Some make slight progress because they seem to begin well, but afterwards turn aside to folly. **II. HIS OCCUPATION.** "Hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works." 1. A Divine subject. Did you notice the fifteenth verse, "My mouth shall show forth Thy righteousness and Thy salvation all the day"? That is the great Christian doctrine—the very pith and marrow of theology—the atonement in which grace and justice unite in the sacrifice of Jesus. 2. The style which David used was very commendable. "Declared." David's teaching about his God had not been with an "if," and a "but," and a "may be," but it had been, "Thus and thus, saith the Lord." **III. HIS PRAYER.** 1. He was not ashamed of his former reliance. He knew the secret springs from which all his blessings had flowed, and he pleads with the Lord never to stop the Divine fountain of all-sufficiency, or he must faint and die. 2. This proves that David did not imagine that past grace could suffice for the present. David acknowledged his present dependence, and it was wise to do so. Men always stumble when they try to walk with their eyes turned behind them. 3. He confessed his undeservingness. He felt that for his sins God might well leave him. But he humbly resolved not to be deserted, he could not bear it, he held his God with eagerness, and cried in agony, "O God, forsake me not." His heart was desperately set upon holding to his one hope and consolation, and so he pleaded as one who pleads for life itself. **IV. HIS WISH (ver. 18).** He had spent a lifetime in declaring God's Gospel, but he wanted to do it once more. Aged saints are loth to cease from active service. Many of them are like old John Newton, who, when he was too feeble to walk up the pulpit stairs of St. Mary Woolnoth parish church, was carried up to his place and preached on still. His friends said, "Really, Mr. Newton, you are so feeble, you ought to give over," and he said, "What? Shall the old African blasphemer ever leave off preaching the grace of his Master as long as there is breath in his body? No, never." It is harder work to leave off than to go on, for the love of Christ constrains us still, and burns with young flame in an aged heart. So here the good man pines to show forth once more God's strength. And, do you notice the congregation he wished to address? He would testify to the generation that was growing up around him. He wished to make known God's power to his immediate neighbours, and to their children, so that the light might be handed on to other generations. This should be on the mind of all who are going off the stage of action: they should think of those who are to come after them, and pray for them, and help them. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The training of a nation*:—This

psalm tells the experience of an old man, some grey-haired saint of the Old Testament. He speaks in accents now sad, now joyful, but always trustful. He invokes God's judgment against his enemies, in the spirit of the Old Testament rather than of the New. But the chief truth and the eternal teaching is, that behind all life's disciplines and trials he recognizes God as the Guide, the Friend, the Teacher, from whom they have come. And he is sure that God will be with him still, and he will be yet a witness of His righteousness. Jeremiah may have been the writer, or some other saint of his age. For it is said that the exiles were familiar with it. And some say the unknown author is telling not of himself but of his nation; if so, the true meaning of the text would be, "Thou, Lord, hast taught, trained and disciplined this nation from its birth," and, if we follow a more correct rendering of the rest of the verses, "and up to this day it has proclaimed and acknowledged, without reserve, the wondrous doings which have marked that history." Such application of the language gives new force and colour to it, whether right or wrong. I. HEAR THE VOICE OF OUR OWN NATION IN THESE WORDS. Trace her history from pre-Roman times, on through the beginnings of Christianity in her midst, by the days of our rude Saxon forefathers who had entered into the fair heritage which Rome had abandoned; how they in their turn bowed before the cross of Christ, and in their turn strove against ruthless Dane and Norseman. And once again foreign rule forced itself on the nation, how on this very spot the Conqueror, first of a long line of kings, was crowned by the tomb of the gentle, unwarlike monarch whose bones still rest amongst us. And we see the gradual fusing of the varied elements into that one hardy race, toiling, fighting, conquering, and being conquered, the memorials of all which are around us. But in and through all these vicissitudes has not God been training this land; might it not take our text for itself? II. And we may do so, again, IN REGARD TO THE REIGN OF OUR SOVEREIGN, whose jubilee we have so recently and joyfully celebrated. During these fifty years God has still been teaching this nation by ways and agencies manifold. What material prosperity has been given; for the amelioration of the lot of the poor, what were once the privileges of the few being now the common patrimony of the many; for all just and wise legislation; for the strides with which human knowledge has advanced, for fresh light thrown on history; for the good men and great whom God has raised up for us; for those who are gone and those who are left. And let us, above all, thank Him for those who have died in His faith and fear; and for all who have striven to extend the knowledge of our Father-God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. And let us ask Him not to forsake us now that He has led us so far on in our career. We may not shut our eyes to the perils of the future—the weakness as well as the strength of a world-wide empire; the decay of faith and the turning away from Christ. All the more, therefore, let us pray this prayer, "O God, forsake me not." (*Dean Bradley.*) *The discipline of life*.—Trace this in the life of David. I. IT BEGINS EARLY. II. IS CONDUCTED THROUGH VARIOUS AGENCIES. 1. Prosperity is one of them. Darwin says in one of his books, speaking of change of instinct in the lower creation, that when bees were carried to Barbadoes and the Western Islands, they ceased to lay up honey after the first year. They found the weather so fine, and the material for honey so plentiful, that they ate up their store, and neglected to provide for the future any longer. Their character degenerated under the influence of their prosperity. Too often it is so among men; and the greater their prosperity, the greater is their deterioration of character. It is said of one of the popes that when he was a poor priest he was regarded as a good man; when promoted to be a cardinal he doubted of his salvation; and when he was raised to the papal chair he despaired of it. Now, that ought not to be the result of prosperity. But it too often is so. 2. Adversity is another. Adversity, says one, is of use to kill those sinners which the summer of prosperity is apt to produce and nourish. I have seen a Christian man accumulate money, and in the process of accumulation begin to love it; and I have observed the wisdom and fatherly kindness of God, in making all his investments profitless, and scattering his little hoard to the winds like dust, and in the end drawing out his soul in deeper love and desire for the true riches. Affliction is beneficial in perfecting patience, fortitude, and acquiescence in the Divine will. No other form of discipline can so promote growth. III. IS OFTEN VERY MYSTERIOUS. See this in history of Joseph. And observation and experience teach the same. IV. IS PERPETUAL. And—V. IS REGULATED BY INFINITE WISDOM AND LOVE. (*William Walters.*) *God's pupil, God's preacher; an autobiography*.—I. Think of DAVID AS A PUPIL. God was his Teacher.

"O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth." This shows that David had a teachable spirit; and if you had asked him where it came from, he would have said that God gave him a teachable spirit. God is not only the Teacher of our spirit, but He gives us a teachable spirit. Have we all received that precious gift? A teachable spirit, although it is despised by many, is a happy spirit; it is a growing spirit; it is a restful spirit; it is a heavenly spirit; and whoever has it, must ascribe the possession of it to the Spirit of God, who leads us into all truth, and makes us willing to be led therein. Oh, that we may have such a spirit, that we shall count it an honour to say, "O God, Thou hast taught me"! In David's acknowledgment we learn that God took him very early into His school. "Thou hast taught me from my youth." What a mercy it is to begin to know God before we begin to know anything else! Happy shalt thou be if thy first intelligible thoughts shall be of thy Maker, thy Benefactor, thy Friend. There are many aged men who can say with David, "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth." They find themselves learners yet, for they are "Unstable, weak, and apt to slide." II. But now I want you to notice DAVID AS A PUPIL-TEACHER. While he was a pupil, he was also teaching. He says, "Hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works." Observe, then, that David taught people what he saw. He saw God's works all around him. Ah! me, that is a great sight. We do not see God as we should, and we shall never teach aright for God, until we have a kind of instinctive feeling of the presence of God, till we are conscious that God is in us, and round about us, and at work for us. God's work that David saw was very much work in himself, and work for himself, and work in other men's hearts. Being taken into the school of God, he was made to observe things; he had object lessons put before him, and he learned to read God's work; and as he saw it, he wondered. "Hitherto," said he, "have I declared Thy wondrous works." He who is a stranger to wonder is a stranger to God, for God is wonderful everyway, and everywhere, and anyhow. We find that David took opportunity to declare God's wondrous work; sometimes with his pen, writing his psalms; sometimes with his voice, singing those psalms; sometimes talking to a few, sometimes speaking to many. Now, dear friends, what I want you all to do is, if you have seen God's work, and have been struck with it, you should declare it, tell it to others. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 20. **Thou who hast showed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.**—*Divine help in times of trouble*.—This is a psalm of experience: it begins with trusting and ends with praise, which is the usual ending for such beginning. I. **THE FACT RECOGNIZED**, that troubles are often sent by God. If David were the author, then he might have remembered the troubles which arose—1. From Saul's jealousy. See the history, and learn, that advancement in social life is no security against trouble; and that the more we may do for another's good, the greater, oftentimes, shall be the ingratitude we shall receive. 2. From the accusings of conscience. The conscience of a man who is not an habitual sinner is a great source of trouble. 3. From the rebellion of his son. 4. The being forsaken by his friend. 5. The jeers of the ungodly (vers. 10, 11). 6. But the greatest trouble of all was when he thought God had left him. 7. We, to-day, may know some of all these things. II. **THE TROUBLES ARE ALWAYS SENT FOR A GOOD PURPOSE**. To admonish, to purify, etc. III. **RIGHTLY RECEIVED THEY SHALL ISSUE IN JOY**. (A. F. Barfield.) *From winter to spring*.—"What a lamentable change has taken place in my condition," said the frozen brook. "Only a short time ago I ran along, a lively stream, glistening in the sunshine, dancing in the shade, and doing my work with joyous pleasure; but now, alas! I am cold and motionless—what a melancholy change has come over me, and oh, what if I should never recover from this torpor—never flow again." A sturdy oak that had outlived a hundred winters, and now also stood bare and comparatively leafless, overhearing, tried to comfort it. "Don't despair," said the oak; "these changes are common, and affect you now so powerfully because you are so shallow. As long as streams have been exposed to climates of this nature, they have endured what you now suffer. But the glorious sun retains his power in the heavens; and depend upon it that by and by we shall both again feel his quickening influence—myself to put on a new dress of foliage, and you to flow with freedom and freshness." The old oak was not mistaken. In due time the sun poured forth bright beams from the sky, the air became soft and balmy, and the little rivulet burst its icy bonds and coursed again



through the meadows. The Christian has his wintry season, when cold and lifeless, as it were, and lamenting the absence of former spiritual enjoyments, he cries, "Quicken me in Thy way. Thou who hast showed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again." (W. Bowden.)

Ver. 21. **Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.**—*Christian dignity*:—The world has its great men; so has the Bible. Alongside the monarch, the Bible puts the man who rules his own spirit well; the warrior, one who fights the fight of faith; the artist, one who by loving deeds paints his own portrait on the canvas of the soul of the suffering. I. This greatness is **REAL**. Consider what God calls the good man—a saint, a son, a joint heir with Christ. II. This greatness is **CONSCIOUS**. God has spoken; I have heard. He has given; I have received. He visited the land I lived in, and did not pass my door. In His mighty lifeboat He touched at the shore where I stood, gave me a hail, and welcomed me on board! III. This greatness is **DERIVED**. Once I had it not. The remembrance of this shall ever keep me humble. "Not unto us," etc. But though I once possessed them not, now I do. IV. This greatness is **INCREASING**. David was an old man, yet he could say soberly and acceptably, "Thou shalt increase my greatness." 1. In my personal enjoyment. Religion is not a surface thing. Infirmities shall lessen, virtues shall increase, Thy love shall be more precious, Thy presence more valued. "Thou wilt not forsake the work of Thine own hands." 2. In the experience of the saints. David's name is great to-day! And in every well-worn Bible may be seen the signs of his sympathy and power. 3. In the admiration of angels. What sympathizing, appreciating, ministering spectators are these! (*Homilist*.)

Vers. 22–24. **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.**—*The praises of a Hebrew saint*:—Dr. Sanday has remarked that, "on the great world-stage different races have different functions," and that "for the Hebrew it was reserved beyond all other peoples to teach the world what it knew of religion." I. **THREE FEATURES OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER**. 1. Holiness. "O Thou Holy One of Israel." The root idea is separation. The Most High forbids the people to follow certain practices then in vogue among the surrounding heathen, and the reason given is because He is holy, and they, His people, are to be like Him (Lev. xix. 2). In every case where such prohibitions occur, we find that the practices condemned are morally alike, that they are mischievous and vile; and therefore by such teaching the Hebrew rose to the conception of a God altogether different from the gods of the heathen—of a Being who had no pleasure in selfishness or cruelty or hatred. Further, it is clear that such a doctrine put honour upon men as well as upon God. When the command was understood, "Ye shall be holy: for I am holy," the Jews must have seen that they were created for better things than hatred, malice, or lust. They were fulfilling the end of their creation when they conquered such passions, when they were ruled by kindness, honour, and purity. 2. Truth. "I will praise Thee with the psaltery, even Thy truth, O my God." The want of this virtue has often made the world a pandemonium. We can scarcely conceive a worse condition of things than when men are unable to trust their fellows—when men's word is not their bond, and their most solemn pledges are no guarantee whatever that they will act accordingly. Sir Richard Burton once said that "to the Oriental lying was meat and drink and the roof that covered him." Strong words, and yet a statement confirmed by multitudes of others who have lived in the midst of them. Such a condition of things undoubtedly existed among the neighbours of the Jews; they were false in word and deed, cunning, deceitful, treacherous. Here again the Hebrew stood alone in splendid isolation from his neighbours. His God was the "Strength of Israel, who will not lie," the "God of truth, and without iniquity." His promises held good; His threats were fulfilled. No wonder, then, when men believed thus, that their conduct should differ from that of others; and hence we find, among the characteristics of the perfect man of the Scriptures, truthfulness both without and within: "he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not"; "he that speaketh the truth in his heart." 3. Love. Notice the boldness of the psalmist's claim—"my God"; and his grateful acknowledgment of the redemption of his soul—"my soul, which Thou hast redeemed." To the writer of this psalm, God was the Father of His creatures, One who had lovingly watched over the psalmist himself from his birth, and to whom in distress

he could turn with the certain assurance of help. II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRAISE WHICH THE PSALMIST RESOLVED TO OFFER. 1. Sincere. "My lips shall greatly rejoice," etc. Let us see that we do not grieve our heavenly Father by insincere praise; however successful song may be as an artistic performance, it is abhorrent to God if words which mean so much are uttered with lips which do not greatly rejoice—lips which would be as readily used in the service of him who is the great Father's adversary and ours. 2. Hearty. Not merely should the psalmist's lips be made to rejoice, but all the powers of his redeemed soul; and, that he might present a worthy offering to God, both psaltery and harp should be called into service. Evidently he believed that music might be the handmaid of worship, and that the skill of man in the production of sweet sounds ought to be consecrated to the service of God. (*W. Scott Page.*)

### PSALM LXXII.

VERS. 1-20. Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the king's son.—*The world-wanted king:*—Society cannot exist without laws: these laws require to be expressed and enforced, and whoever does this is ruler. Again, whilst the millions have the instinct of obedience, and lack the faculty to rule, there are always some, on the other hand, in whom there is the tendency and the power to govern. Let us look at the reign of this ideal king as here sketched. I. It is characterized by RIGHTEOUSNESS AND COMPASSION (vers. 1-4). This compassion, this tender, practical sympathy for the woes of the indigent and oppressed, is not something opposed to righteousness. It is but a modification of righteousness, or rather, another phase of righteousness. Justice is but love sternly opposing all that is injurious to the universe, and benevolently encouraging all that is promotive of happiness. Justice is like some Alpine hill, when the sun is descending in the West: on one side it is dark, frowning, terrific, on the other side it glows in brightness, disports in beauty. This compassion, this mercy, "becomes the throned monarch better than his crown." II. It is characterized by the HIGHEST NATIONAL BLESSINGS (vers. 3, 7). 1. General peace. The prevalence of universal good-will is essential to universal peace. Men not seeking their own as the grand end, but seeking the good of each other. 2. Spiritual vitality. 3. The prosperity of the righteous. Men will be considered great, useful, and honourable in proportion to the amount of rectitude that lives in their hearts and comes out in their daily life. III. It is characterized by its MORAL COMMAND OVER ALL PEOPLES (vers. 9-11). Moral worth is always mighty; like the sun, no man can ignore it, no man can disregard its influence, or deny its value. But moral worth in a king is especially mighty, it is seen, and wherever seen is felt. Moral worth is moral sovereignty. IV. It is characterized by its EXPANSIBILITY AND DURATION (vers. 8, 16, 17). The language does not mean that the king himself is to live and reign for ever, but that his name, his moral character, will be held in everlasting remembrance and will work on the earth for good as long as the sun and moon shall last. V. It is characterized by its DIVINE ESTABLISHMENT (vers. 18, 19). For such a king as this the mighty Sovereign of the universe deserves the devoutest praises of men. He alone can form the character of such a king. (*Homilist.*) *Messiah's reign:*—I. CHARACTERISTICS. 1. Righteousness (ver. 2). (Isa. xi. 1-5; xxxii. 1, 17). Not till He comes whose right it is to reign will there be on earth a king whose judgments shall be based on an absolute knowledge of men, independent of the sensual judgment of sight and hearing. Then, and then only, will the people have righteousness meted out to them; then only will the poor be perfectly defended from the oppression of the rich. 2. Strength (Rev. xii. 10). In the day of Christ's reign oppression shall not only come to an end, but the saints shall inherit the kingdom and the oppressor shall be cast out of power. 3. Gentleness (ver. 6). Not with the sword does Christ win His kingdom, nor by such means will He execute righteousness in the deliverance of His poor and in the breaking of the tyrant's power, but by the almighty strength of truth itself. 4. Peace and prosperity (vers. 3, 10, 16). This can only indicate an abundance of every supply, both for the people in country and city, and for all

purposes of state and kingdom. II. EXTENT. 1. Duration. An everlasting reign (vers. 15, 17). His Kingship, as well as His Priesthood, is in the power of an endless life (Ps. xxi. 4; lxi. 6, 7). 2. Subjects. Not only of all nations, but of every class of men in all nations. 3. Territory (ver. 8). What a heaven this earth will be with the curse removed, all wickedness and evil taken out of the hearts and lives of all people; waters shall break out in the desert, and the very beasts of the field and the forest shall rest at peace each side with the others. III. UNIVERSAL ADORATION. 1. Prayer. "Prayer shall be made to Him continually." Every want shall be presented to Him, in the spirit of constant and humble, yet confident supplication, and no good thing will be withheld from those who pray. 2. Praise. "And daily shall He be praised." Eternity will not be too long wherein to praise Him who shall have delivered our souls from death, from the deceit and oppression of the wicked, especially from the power of our great enemy, the devil; to praise Him for the unspeakable blessings of forgiveness, justification, regeneration, sanctification. 3. Gifts. "To Him shall be given the gold of Sheba." The people will themselves be a free-will offering to their Lord and King; all that they are and have shall be laid at His feet as being worth nothing apart from Him and His blessing. Who shall say that in the age of glory there shall not be vast fields and unknown opportunities for the employment of all the redeemed and sanctified powers of man? (*G. F. Pentecost, D.D.*) *Jesus both King and King's Son*:—"The king—the king's son." We see that our Lord is here termed both "king" and "the king's son"; both as respect to His human nature and also as to His Divine origin; for the Father of the universe may, of course, be properly denominated King. Agreeably to this designation we find on Turkish coins the inscription, "Sultan, son of Sultan." (*George Phillips*.)

Ver. 3. **The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.**—*Mountain peace*:—Sympathy between the moral and physical worlds pervades the whole of Scripture and especially this seventy-second psalm. The beauty of the redeemed soul will be reflected, as it was at the first, in the beauty of a regenerated earth. Man will be then like another Adam in another Eden. Through the righteous rule of the new King of Israel, the physical features of the land of promise are pictured as contributing to the tranquillity and happiness of its people. Mountains in olden times were associated with gloom and terror. Imagination saw in them shapes of evil, and they seemed to belong to an alien, accursed land. Scenes of grandeur which the traveller will traverse half the globe to gaze upon with rapture were of old avoided altogether, or passed quickly through with shuddering dread. But we do not feel so now. The causes of this are varied. Increase of population, facility for travel, the pressure of crowded city life making us long for the quiet and grandeur of nature, increase of knowledge, etc. Now, in our text the security which mountains give is mainly referred to. Hence we learn—I. **THE PEACE WHICH THEY GIVE IS THE PEACE OF SAFETY.** In the plains man is exposed to attack on all sides, but amongst the mountains nature is his defence. See the Waldenses, Covenanters, Jews. For Palestine is an alpine land; hence in Babylon the exiles thought of their mountains as they sang, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." II. **AND OF ELEVATION.** It is in the heights of the soul that we can get true and lasting peace. On the low levels of sense life we are as was he who went down to Jericho—stripped and wounded by the evils of life. Man's moral career has run parallel with his physical. He descended from the mountain ranges of Asia to her level plains, and to Egypt; and so has it been spiritually. But we cannot be satisfied there. We must ascend again, cost what it will. Then we regain peace to our souls. If the strain of the ascent be great, so is the peace likewise. For on the height we are above the changes of this world. The soul that dwells ever on high has perpetual sunshine. III. **AND IT IS THE PEACE OF COMPENSATION.** The heavens come near and expand as the earth recedes and lessens. The men who saw most of heaven were they who possessed the least of earth. See Moses. IV. **UNIFICATION.** From the mountain top we see the whole landscape, not merely isolated portions. And so to ascend into the hill of the Lord is to see our life as a whole, and how parts of it that have distressed us belong to the goodly whole. V. **ISOLATION.** Mountains are as retreats from the fevered conventional life of cities. We can be alone with God, as in the secret chamber. So has it been with all God's great saints, they ascended often where the noisy echoes of the world did not penetrate, and where only the still

small voices of the sanctuary were heard. As we rise in spiritual life, the more lonely do we become. Our citizenship is in heaven. (*Hugh Macmillan, D.D.*) *The use of great men:*—The king is as a mountain. It is the meaning and the vindication of all greatness—of position, intellect, or character—that the great should live for the humble. I. *THE USE OF GREAT MEN.* Consider the uses of mountains. Besides their value as the bulwarks of a country, their services in kindling patriotism and educating feeling, they have very homely uses. They catch for us the sunshine, at once radiating and tempering the light and heat; the dews of heaven rest on them; underneath their mosses the rain lingers, filling the springs, trickling in runlets that supply the rivers; they bear the snows that all through the early summer refresh the heated land, and when autumn comes they precipitate the thunder showers and draw the passing wealth of storms; they bear the fury of the tempest, and shield the valleys from hurricane and hail; the lightning smites them harmless, which else might shiver homesteads and destroy the beasts; their waste supplies the lack of the lowlands; rich vegetable soil is washed from them over the hungry fields; the sands which descend from them bank in the rivers; of their stones the husbandman makes his fences, and from their forests he makes his tools. Mighty mountains—useful as mighty, benignant as strong; useful because so mighty, peaceful because so strong. I am not going to draw out these analogies at length, though every one of them is capable of copious exposition; I would simply say we need great men. There are many things the world wants done which only a few can do. We rest under the shadow of a truly great man as shepherds underneath a friendly mountain. If great men will only help the lowly, they may be sure of trusting friends. The strong is sure to be followed by the weaker. We want the tender to soothe troubled hearts; the saint to help us with his prayers. Both in their privileges and their trials great men are not inaptly symbolized by mountains. It is not that God does not care for the lowly; it is not that, like the blossoms on a fruit tree, only a few are reserved for ripening, and it matters not what becomes of the rest. God has not given the many to the few. He has given the few to and for the many. And if a great man does not care to learn the lesson, he is great no longer. There is no enduring greatness save in righteousness. But if it is idle to deny the advantages of greatness, it is unthankful to forget its trials. Freedom from meaner cares means exposure to strong temptations. The wind sweeps round the mountain top when the valley below is still; and humbler souls know nothing of the struggles that shake the lofty. Two distinct elements of character must meet in every one who shall be great with this protecting, helping greatness—courage of soul enough to bear the tribulation—graciousness of character enough to count their anguish light, and remember it no more in readiness to be made helpful. Many a sour man is a great man marred in the making; the truly great must have not only ready courage and triumphant patience, they must have also unfaltering faith, unchanging love. II. *THE SOURCES OF GREATNESS* in a man. They are two—righteousness and tenderness. The office of a judge is here set before us as the noblest human office; protective justice is the thing which makes a man like the great mountains. (*A. Mackennal, D.D.*) *Peace by power:*—This an unusual view of the conditions of peace. We expect impressions of tranquillity in the lowlier, not the loftier places of a landscape. The doctrine of the text is, that the quiet of the human soul is to be found not in descending to its lower and feebler states, but in the freedom of its highest qualities, and through its stronger exercises; or, that Christian peace is an attainment of the spiritual energies, and not a mere acquiescence in inferiority. See the Saviour's promise, "My peace I give unto you." But how did He obtain this peace? Was it not by way of the Cross? Power of character is before happiness. We are to be suspicious of effeminate contentments. Look again at the image of our text. The three obvious attributes of mountains are elevation, magnitude, permanency. Now, in just such attributes of human character are we to find real peace. Spiritual serenity is spiritual strength. The most intrepid are the most pacific. Magnanimity makes no quarrels. (*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*) *Peace on the mountain:*—The reason for choosing the mountain for prayer is poetic, but it is more than poetic, it is also practical. There one can be alone and quite still; the sights and sounds of earth are far down below in the valley. And as one is quite still one gets closer to God. Instinctively we think of our heavenly Father as in the sky above us; and so far as we may we approach His kingdom more closely by getting up into the mountain. This you may say is simply poetic, imaginative,

but it has a spiritual aspect too, inasmuch as the lifting up of the nature in spirit to heavenly things disposes it to pray with greater realization of the Divine presence, and less of distraction from earthly anxieties. It suggests a beautiful thought that our Lord should thus choose the most retired and ideal spots for His prayers. Because He needed no accessories of this kind. He could without difficulty withdraw Himself from the sights and sounds of earth which would be distracting to others. His devotions could not really be hindered by these things; yet inasmuch as He had taken upon Him the form of a servant, He willed to use all the helps to spiritual living which the Father has provided for His servants. It is the mountain considered as the place of prayer, which is to bring us peace in this world. The outer life is not likely to be peaceful, so far as temporal conditions are concerned. The sphere of human existence is almost invariably a troubled one. The peace is to be found within. And how can one secure it for himself? I know of no way except that of prayer. The thought of the mountains may suggest to us characteristics of genuine prayer, too little accented by us generally. The heart must be still to speak with God, all alone with Him, and pervaded with a sense of the nearness and the solemnity of His presence. When we pray after this sort the peace of God steals gradually over one's whole nature. The tribulations of life do not vanish, the anxieties are still there, but in the transfiguring light of the sense of the Divine nearness they no longer seem unbearable, no longer hopeless. If one really can feel that God cares, and is watching over him, he cannot be greatly disturbed by anything which happens in this present world. No evil spirit or wicked man, no blow of fate can take God from him or him from God, and one needs no more than that. Prayer rightly used throws all about this common weary life of ours a heavenly atmosphere, a halo of the eternal love and goodness. Everything in that celestial haze assumes its true relation to the immortal creature; the temporal things become the dreams, the illusions of a moment; the eternal things are the verities, and in them nought dwells but peace. (*Arthur Ritchie.*)

**Ver. 4. He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.**—*On the education of the children of the poor:*—I. Look to THE PRESENT SITUATION OF THE CHILDREN OF THE NEEDY, and compassion will urge you to befriend them. Look especially to the moral disadvantages and trials to which it subjects them; and you will think it little to relieve their bodily wants, while you leave the mind and the soul in bondage. II. Consider THE DESTINY WHICH AWAITS THESE CHILDREN OF THE NEEDY;—and the relief which before was prompted by compassion, will be felt as the dictate of imperious duty. 1. Let not the prosperous man despise the children of the needy. They in many ways minister towards the supply of his wants. Their labour furnishes the indulgence of his luxury. Their courage defends the interests of his country. They reside, perhaps, under his own roof. His property must be under their charge. His reputation must be in their keeping. 2. The children of the needy are destined for immortality. As surely as the lineaments of the human countenance are found in them, so surely may be found in them also the traces of a mind which thinks, not only for time but for eternity;—the traces of a soul which feels, not only for time but for eternity. (*A. Brunton, D.D.*) *God's care for the poor:*—God represents Himself to us as having a peculiar and tender care of the poor. It is not the robust, but delicate, child of the family around whom a father's and mother's affections cluster thickest. The boy or girl whom feebleness of body or mind makes least fit to bear the world's rough usage, and most dependent on others' kindness, is like those tendrils that, winding themselves around the tree they spangle with flowers, bind it more closely in their embraces, and bury their pliant arms deep in its bark. And what a blessed and beautiful arrangement of Providence it is that they who cost most care and lie with greatest weight on parents' arms and hearts are commonly most loved. (*J. Guthrie, D.D.*)

**Ver. 5. They shall fear Thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations.**—*The perpetuity and imperishable nature of the religion of Christ:*—The grand doctrine brought before us in these words is the perpetuity of the Church of Christ upon the earth; or the imperishable and indestructible character of His religion. We conceive that the same doctrine that is taught in this text is taught in such passages of Scripture as the following: "The gates of hell

shall not prevail against the Church—one generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts—of the increase of the government of the Messiah there shall be no end; my salvation shall be from generation to generation." And notwithstanding all the vicissitudes of the Church of Christ, that Church has been preserved through them all. In the reign of Solomon the Church in Israel seemed likely that men would always fear the Lord. But we know what apostasy began in his reign, and went on with scarcely an interruption till the days of the captivity. And then from the time of our Lord there have been seasons of decay, but revival has ever followed. All attempts to efface Christianity have failed, numerous, varied, and severe though they have been. We conclude, therefore, that the Church can never perish so long as time shall endure. (*James Smith, M.A.*) *The perpetuity and beneficence of Christ's reign*:—Like the treacherous signal-boats that are sometimes stationed by the wreckers off an iron-bound coast, the shifting systems of false religion are continually changing their places: Like them, they attract only to bewilder, and allure only to destroy. The unwary mariner follows them with a trembling uncertainty, and only finds out where he is when he feels his ill-fated vessel crashing into a thousand fragments on the beach. But how different to these floating and delusive systems is that unchanging Gospel of Christ, which stands forth like the towering lighthouse of Eddystone, with its beacon blaze streaming far out over the midnight sea. It moves not, it trembles not, for it is founded upon a rock. Year by year the storm-stricken mariner looks out for its star-like light as he sweeps in through the British Channel. It is the first object that meets his eye as he returns on his homeward voyage; it is the last he beholds long after his native land has sunk beneath the evening wave. So is it with the unchanging Gospel of Christ. While other systems rise and fall, and pass into nothingness, this Gospel, like its immutable Author, is the same "yesterday, to-day, and for ever." While other false and flashing lights are extinguished, this, the true light, ever shineth. (*T. L. Cuyler, D.D.*) *Christ's perpetuity*:—Leslie Stephen says, "It takes a very powerful voice and a very clear utterance to make a man audible to the fourth generation." That is very true, yet there is quite a galaxy of men who have spoken the clear utterance with a powerful voice, and have been heard through many centuries; but there is but one man, the man Christ Jesus, concerning whom it could be said, "They shall fear Thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations."

Ver. 6. *He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth.*—*Rain upon the mown grass*:—Some men say that Christianity is not genial, that the Christian scheme exhibits God in a most unlovely aspect, that the doctrines of Christ are dark with awful mysteries, that the promises of the Christian dispensation offer but little of present benefit, that its precepts demand conduct which is too high and self-sacrificing, that its ordinances are depressing rather than elevating, and that, as a whole, Christianity promotes narrow minds and feeble judgment, morbid and morose feelings, an enslaved will, a too sensitive conscience, an unmanly bearing, and a character which is intellectually low, and unsocial, and melancholy. This charge against the religion of Jesus Christ is most unjust, and cannot be maintained; it rests not upon truth, but upon prejudice. The Gospel is a device to seek and save the lost: not to judge but to justify, not to scathe and waste, but to sanctify and save. And it is a Divine device, planned and carried out by God our Father. We see love going after the lost. Now, if this be the Christian scheme; if it be a plan of redemption designed by the grace of God, and if it be executed, so far as its general provisions are concerned, by the Son of God, and if it be revealed and applied by the Holy Ghost the Comforter; if its morality be based upon love, and if it be spread by moral and spiritual forces; if it is received by faith, if it give not the spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind; if it bring good out of evil, and be consummated in the restoration of God's image to man, and of all saved men to the paradise regained; if it bring knowledge, and wisdom, and pardon, and purity, and patience, and love, and victory, and life; then we ask, Can this scheme be other than genial, and ought not its effect upon its disciples to be the nourishing within them of all goodness, and the production of genuine and habitual cheerfulness? Not genial? Then there is nothing genial. Soft morning light is not genial. Balmey evening air is not genial. Gentle and warm rain is not genial. Spring sunshine is not genial. The mother's bosom is not

genial. There is nothing genial on this earth. I had almost said, there can be nothing genial in heaven. (S. Martin, D.D.) *Rain upon the mown grass*:—The psalm tells of One greater than Solomon—Christ. These words teach that God will see to it that, by some means, Christ shall be made known to all mankind. I. CHRIST IS OF UNSPEAKABLE VALUE TO MEN. Language is inadequate to set this preciousness forth. Our present estimate is low and feeble, even in our holiest moments. But it is a happy thing when an author illustrates his own book. Now, God has done this. Nature illustrates Grace: that is, God illustrates God; for in nature we have the best resemblances to God's dealings in the kingdom of His Son. As the sleeping, frozen earth needs, in order to make up to beauty and fruitfulness, the sun and the rain, so the soul of man needs Christ. For what is the human spirit without the Saviour? A clod of earth hardened into stone. See the condition of those peoples who know not Christ. And remember, Christ does not merely prevent our dying: He comes with a blessed quickening upon the human spirit. The simile of the text fails, for the rain does not give life, but only quickens seeds already in the earth. But Christ acts upon the latent powers of the mind, wakes up all its faculties, makes the man worthy to be called a child of God. When Christ comes to us we become conscious of a new life. II. AND AS THE RAIN COMES SO DOES CHRIST COME. When God gave Christ to man it was a question how He should bring Him home to human hearts. And it is a problem which ought to stir all Christian people, how to make Christ known to men. But here again nature helps us. What a beautiful paradise God has constructed, "watering the hills from His chambers." There is the great ocean! more than three-fourths of the world's surface is water. But in vain would that water lie all round the land and lave its shores. All vegetation would die if the water lay there; and so the great God has set in operation a wonderful mechanism. The sun daily, hourly, every moment, draws that water up into the air by evaporation; currents created by the sun float that vapour thousands of miles inland; and then the alternating strata of warm and cold air effects its condensation, and all over the earth it falls wherever it is needed, and waters the earth. The icy mountain peaks amongst the Alps are continual cloud factories. The invisible vapour rising one side of the mountain is condensed by the cold air of the summit, and formed into a cloud. It is ever producing clouds and sending them away over the land. And how seasonably the rain comes, and silently and freely. So Christ comes to men. (L. Hebditch.) *Rain upon the mown grass*:—No more tender and beautiful image than this can be found in the whole range of sacred poetry. It is full of precious significance. The memories and associations which it suggests are very sweet. We all know the summer harvest of the hay-makers, whose pleasant toils seem to anticipate those of the autumn harvest of the corn. How different is the aspect of the hay-field before the grass is cut, and after it is mown and the hay removed! A meadow covered from end to end with tall ripe grass crowned with rich dark-purple heads of blossom and seed, and rippling in light and shadow like the waves of the sea, as the sun and the wind chase each other over them, is one of the most beautiful of rural sights. Myriads of wild flowers add the glory of their colour and the fragrance of their perfume to the blades of grass among which they grow. The eye is never weary of gazing upon the bright and living mosaic. But how different the aspect when the scythe has done its work. All the beauty has vanished; the fragrance that loaded the air is gone, and nothing remains but the stubble, a short, pale, sickly-yellow sward, without grace of form, beauty or colour. And this desolation of aspect is greatly aggravated during a season of drought, when the sky is as brass, and the earth is as iron, and the pitiless sun scorches the field. But how striking the change when a shower of rain comes; if it continues, what a healing process goes on, until at last an aftermath is formed which may be even more luxuriant than was the field in its first fresh strong growth. The rain upon the mown grass is thus the harbinger of new beauties and of a richer fragrance and fulness of life. And this is especially so in the arid soil and climate of Bible lands. The grass there, when cut, seems to dry up completely, and a brown naked waste remains. But when the rain comes it seems to spring up as if by magic, and renews with wonderful rapidity its former freshness and fairness (Deut. xxxii. 2; 2 Sam. xxiii. 4). Now, notwithstanding the title, the internal evidence of the psalm points to a far later date, when the Jewish kingdom was reduced to the lowest straits; when the nation was like the mown grass, shorn of their power and glory, blighted, withered and trampled under foot. But in this condition they looked for the

advent of a new King who should restore them, and be to them like "rain upon the mown grass." Thus, against the dark background of Jewish calamities arose the bright vision of the Messiah. But the Jews were the representatives of the human race, and therefore the image has a wider application. Through the fall all flesh became grass and his glory as the flower of the field. Everything became adverse to him who was afflicted with the great adversity of sin. But to man thus ruined the Lord Jesus Christ came to save him from his sin. How tender was the dealing of God with man. Like as He came to Adam and Eve after they had sinned, "in the cool of the day"—not suddenly, hastily, or angrily. And though His voice was stern there was a tone of tenderness and pity in it. And a higher life for man, a richer glory for God, is to be the aftermath which shall spring up in the wilderness through the rain of God's grace to sinners. And throughout the whole course of our Lord's life on earth, how wonderfully does He manifest the gentleness and tenderness of God. His works were those of healing and restoration, and are so still. And let the sufferer take the comfort of the text. How bare, scorched, shorn, many a life appears; all beauty, fragrance gone. But though He has mown down so much that we rejoiced in, His purpose is the aftermath which shall be more precious still. The rain of His grace comes down upon the poor, bruised, broken life, and the affliction that is not joyous but grievous afterwards yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness. (*Hugh Macmillan, D.D.*) *Rain on the mown grass*:—The text presents to us—I. A SCENE WHERE ONLY GENIAL AND QUIET INFLUENCES ARE AT WORK. The gentle showers water the earth. God does not rend the heavens and come down. Nor does He come in the storm; but in all gentleness. II. A SCENE OF TRANSFORMATION. See the changes of spring. So in the Church God gives revivals. III. A SCENE OF FERTILITY. Life is seen in its gentleness, strength, beauty and fragrance. IV. OF REVIVAL. V. RENOVATION. Life with some of you seems bare and desolate, shorn of its glory; still its autumn may be green, and the rain may weave new garlands for the brow of age. Your circumstances are changed. Your health is gone; or your property is lost. The fleece of life has been removed, so that it is stripped and bare of its covering; but, He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass. You have had bereavements. The widow says, I have lost my husband, and am desolate and alone in the world. The mother says, I have lost my child, and "my heart is smitten and withered like grass." The friend says, I have lost my companion, and henceforth my life is divested of interest. But He will come down like rain upon the mown grass. You think your heart is bare and burnt up as the field. The mower has come into your enclosure, and life has fallen before him; but God can pour out on you all quiet and blessed influences, and put new beauty upon life. (*H. Bevis.*) *The blessings of Christ's reign*:—The Holy Spirit has chosen to set forth these by an instructive and beautiful simile. Divine grace resembles the rain. I. AS TO THE SOURCE WHENCE IT PROCEEDS. Rain is the gift of God: a promised blessing, and its needed and seasonable showers may be sought by prayer. II. AS TO THE MANNER IN WHICH IT DESCENDS. 1. Sometimes violently, it falls in torrents. 2. Sometimes gently. 3. Frequently. 4. Unexpectedly. III. AS TO THE BENEFITS WHICH IT CONFERS. 1. It presents great evils. 2. It makes the labour of the husbandman easy and successful. 3. Causes plentifulness, and—4. Beauty. IV. CONCLUSION. 1. Acknowledge with deep humility our great need of the Spirit. 2. Honour and study the Word of God as the instrument by which the Spirit delights to work out our salvation. (*Anon.*) *On the Nativity*:—I. CONSIDER THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD AS A DESCENT OR coming down. II. THE MANNER OF THIS DESCENT. It was "sweet and peaceable, without trouble, without noise, scarcely to be perceived"; not in the strong wind, to rend us to pieces; not in the earthquake, to shake us; not in the fire, to consume us; but in "a still and small voice" (1 Kings xix. 11, 12): not as thunder, to make a noise; not as hail, to rattle on the housetops; not as the blast and mildew, to wither us; but as the "rain" falling "sweetly on the grass," or "on a fleece of wool," and "as the showers which water the earth," and make it fruitful. III. OBSERVE THE EFFECT WHICH THIS DESCENT PRODUCETH, or the fruit which springs up upon the fall of this gracious rain. 1. Righteousness springs up, and spreads herself: Justus florebit; so some render it: "The righteous shall flourish." 2. After righteousness peace shows itself, even "abundance of peace." 8. Thirdly, both these are not "herbs which spring up and wither in one day," but which will be green and flourish "so long as the moon endureth," which is everlastingly. IV. OBSERVE—1. The relation which is between these two, righte-



ousness and peace. Where there is righteousness, there is peace; and where there is peace, there is righteousness. 2. The order: righteousness first, and then "abundance of peace." Take them all three, and you shall find a kind of subordination betwixt them; for no peace without righteousness, no righteousness without this rain; but if the Son of God "come down like rain," straight righteousness appears on the earth; and upon the same watering, and from the same root, shoots forth "abundance of peace," and both "so long as the moon endureth." (A. Farindon, B.D.) *The geniality and beneficence of Christianity*:—We descendants of the Puritans are in great danger of exhibiting Christianity in an ungenial aspect. We are children of witnesses who prophesied in sackcloth, and there is special danger of our making the sackcloth an essential part of the testimony. In days of persecution, Christ calls His followers to wear sackcloth, but their common raiment is to be a robe rich in its fabric, and pleasant in its colour, and beautiful in form. To be really genial we must maintain personal intercourse with Christ by the aid of the Holy Ghost. We must often speak to Him, and more often listen to Him. We must constantly be looking unto Him. Then shall we receive and reflect the bright beams of His grace, and by our whole demeanour win souls to our Saviour. To be right and true and strong is our first duty; to be attractive and cheerful and genial is our next duty; and "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." (Samuel Martin.)

Ver. 9. **His enemies shall lick the dust.**—*The enemies of Christ subdued*:—I. WHO ARE THE ENEMIES OF CHRIST? 1. Those who maintain sentiments contrary to the Gospel of Christ. 2. Those who endeavour to subvert His influence over His people's hearts. 3. Those who refuse submission to His Gospel. II. WHAT WILL BE THE RESULT OF THE CONFLICT? 1. Over some He will triumph by His grace. 2. But those who reject all His overtures of mercy "He will break in pieces like a potter's vessel." III. WHAT ASSURANCE WE HAVE THAT SUCH SHALL BE THE ISSUE OF THE CONFLICT. 1. His own resistless power. 2. His unimpeachable veracity. (Evangelical Preacher.)

Ver. 12. **For He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also and him that hath no helper.**—*The poor man's friend*:—I. THE SPECIAL OBJECTS OF GRACE. 1. They are needy. This we all are, all our life long, for body and for soul. But God's peculiar people feel their spiritual need as others do not. They are full of needs. Once they thought they had need of nothing, but they do not think so now. 2. They are poor: "the poor also." A man might be needy, and yet be able to supply his own need, so far as temporal things are concerned. But in things spiritual we are not only needy, but poor also. 3. They have no helper. Now, until God enlightens us, we seem to have a great many helpers. Priests, ministers, parents, preachers and many earthly things. But we have done with all such help now; we have found them all broken reeds. We felt this at our conversion, and we feel it now when we would advance in grace; and we feel it also when Satan tempts us, and in our trials and sorrows. But the Lord has not cast us off, for "He shall deliver the needy," etc. Now, why does God select these for His favour? Partly because He is a Sovereign, and chooseth whom He will; then, they are the most willing to accept it; and they will never set themselves up in rivalry with Christ; they are glad to be saved in God's way; the Lord finds in them warm friends. If the Lord were to save the Pharisees, they would hardly say, "Thank you," they are so good themselves. But these poor and needy ones, they feel like that good old woman who said, that if ever the Lord saved her, He should never hear the last of it. They will praise and bless God with their whole soul. II. THE SPECIAL BLESSING WHICH THE GREAT KING HAS STORED UP FOR THESE PEOPLE. 1. They shall be judged with judgment—they are often judged now with harshness. The Lord will right them. 2. Saved from oppression. 3. Deliverance shall be theirs, and—4. He shall redeem their souls. III. THE SPECIAL SEASON WHEN ALL THIS SHALL BE TRUE. "When he crieth," when the needy cry unto Him. A cry is more than an ordinary prayer. We cry unto God when it gets so with us that we must have His grace, and our heart breaks for it when we will not let Him go unless He blesses, then deliverance is not far off. Oh, to feel our need, to know our utter poverty and helplessness, then shall we cry unto God, and He will save us. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The cry of the needy heard and answered*:—A French tourist relates that some time ago he set out to cross St. Bernard's Pass by himself, and got caught in the fog near

the top. He sat on a rock and waited for one of the dogs to come and attend to him, but in vain, and when the fog cleared away he managed to reach the Hospice. On arrival he observed that he thought the dog a rather overrated animal. "There I was," he said, "for at least six hours, and not one came near me." "But why," exclaimed one of the monks, "did you not ring us up on the telephone?" To the astonished tourist it was explained that the whole of the pass is provided with shelters at short distances from each other, all in direct telephonic communication with the Hospice. When the bell rings the monks send off a bound loaded with bread and wine and other comforts. The dog on duty is told what number has rung, and he goes straight to that shelter. This system saves the bounds their old duty of patrolling the pass on the chance of a stray traveller being found, and as the pass is for about eight months of the year under snow, this entailed very hard and often fruitless labour. There are many people in need of spiritual help who have not yet realized that there is One who will bear and answer directly the troubled soul cries to Him for aid.

**Ver. 15. And He shall live, and to Him shall be given of the gold of Sheba.**—*The greatness of the Redeemer's life*.—I. **THE GREATNESS OF HIS LIFE IS SEEN IN THE MAGNITUDE OF ITS INFLUENCE.** 1. It is co-extensive with creation. Christ is to be the centre of universal attraction. Analogy, the greatness of the agencies employed, and the Word of God warrant the conclusion. 2. It is an abiding influence. "His name shall endure," etc. Men, emperors, come and go like baubles upon the stream; but Christ lives for ever! Time destroys not His power, but unfolds it. "He reigneth king for ever." 3. It is a blissful influence. "And men shall be blessed in Him." A worm may make many miserable; but it requires a God-like nature to enhance the happiness of one soul. The life of Christ fills creation with blessedness. This great Benefactor does this by destroying the sources of misery, and by calling into exercise every fountain of bliss in the soul. 4. It is reflectively glorious. "Daily shall He be praised." He is the grand object of universal admiration and love. II. **THE GREATNESS OF HIS LIFE IS DEVELOPED THROUGH MEANS.** What are the means? 1. Truth. The Gospel contains the great biography of Jesus, and this is the mighty instrumentality. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," etc. 2. Wealth. "To Him shall be given of the gold of Sheba." Ye men of wealth, remember that every piece of gold and silver ought to appear to you as if stamped with the image of the Son of God. 3. Prayer. III. **THE GREATNESS OF HIS LIFE IS EXPERIENCED IN THE HEAVENWARD DIRECTION IT GIVES MANKIND.** He makes men pray to and praise Him. "And daily shall He be praised." 1. Such persons owe their existence to Christ. "We are His workmanship." 2. Such persons are the finest specimens of human excellence. The highest types of character have always been found in men of earnest prayer. Abraham, Noah, Job, Daniel, Paul, and Christ all prayed. 3. Such men alone fully give scope to their faculties to honour Him. IV. **THE GREATNESS OF HIS LIFE IS SEEN IN THE REALIZATION THROUGH ETERNITY OF HIS WORK ON EARTH.** 1. He will live in all that relates to man on earth; in such things as institutions, literature, etc. His name will be emblazoned upon the page of every new work, and His life will be the standard of all institutions. 2. He will live in the affectionate remembrance of a redeemed people. 3. He will live as the expression of all excellence—love, benevolence, truth, justice, authority. 4. He will live as the centre of all attraction to the glorified Church. (J. H. Hill.) *Messiah's predicted life*.—We may view the text in a threefold aspect. 1. As a prophecy of the endless life to which our Saviour would be raised. "He shall live." As "the high priest of our profession," He was to die. This was the grand purpose of His mission; for it was by dying that He was to "finish the work given Him to do." But having died, and thereby "put away sin," and "abolished death," He would live again, Himself the most satisfying evidence, and the most glorious example, of "the life and immortality He has brought to light by the Gospel." 2. As a prophecy of the blessedness to which our Saviour would be exalted. "He shall live." To live in the more common acceptance of it in Scripture, is to enjoy existence, to partake of true felicity, to be blessed. "Your heart shall live for ever" (Ps. xxii. 26); that is, shall be eternally happy. So, "your heart shall live that seek God" (Ps. lxxix. 32); and, "we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord" (1 Thess. iii. 8). In this sense the text is to be understood. Messiah "shall live": as He would be raised from the dead to die no more, so He would be exalted to boundless and endless blessedness. 3. As a prophecy of the prosperity

and the perpetuity of our Saviour's reign. "He shall live;" and in what character? As Zion's King. He would not only be raised to an endless life, and exalted to the highest blessedness; but as the King of the Church, His reign would be prosperous and perpetual. The same idea is expressed in parallel prophecies (Isa. ix. 6, 7; Jer. xxiii. 5, 6). (*D. Young, D.D.*) **Prayer also shall be made for Him continually; and daily shall He be praised.**—*Prayer for Christ*:—I. THE TEXT is a PREDICTION; reminding us, in the first place, that the Bible is distinguished from every other book, professedly Divine, by the grandeur and the authoritative tone of its promises, and by the multitude and splendour of its predictions. Human philosophy may be said to have had three creeds; which might not improperly be distinguished as the creed of the past, of the present, and of the future. The books of Pagan antiquity sang only of the golden-aged past—of scenes of pastoral simplicity and happiness never to return; while, for the future, they could say nothing—their burden was despair. Then came the creed of the present. As early antiquity faded from view, man became prepared for the philosophy of Epicurus—for the optimism which professes to be satisfied with things as they are; and which, instead of aiming at human improvement, acts on the animal maxim, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But to this has now generally succeeded the creed of the future—a philosophical belief in the perfectibility of the species—a persuasion that man is, at length, on the high road to perfection. Now, all these voices are but perversions of the great truths of the Bible as to the past, the present, and the glorious future. The Bible is the true prophet of hope. II. THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS PREDICTION IS TO BE FULFILLED. It is by prayer. Philosophy may object, but we rely on it as indispensable in the order of means. For prayer is the condition on which God puts forth His power. For with even more clearness than the law of the Divine unchangeableness is revealed, the law that prayer prevails with God is revealed likewise. III. But not only does the text predict a change, and represent prayer as a means of realizing that change; it DESCRIBES THAT PRAYER AS PARTAKING OF A SPECIFIC CHARACTER—as prayer for Christ; "prayer also shall be made for him continually." IV. THE WISDOM AND GRACE OF THIS ARRANGEMENT. For—1. It keeps us in our proper place, at the feet of God. 2. It gives us opportunity of afresh avowing our adoration of the scheme of redemption by Christ. 3. It affords the strongest assurance of success in prayer. 4. It enables all to show their love to Christ by aiding in the advancement of His Kingdom. V. But let us regard THE ESPECIAL OBJECT OF OUR PRAYER in the behalf of Christ: what are we to pray for? Our prayers cannot be necessary for Him, in the same sense in which they are necessary for ourselves, and for each other. He knows no want, for all things are given into His hands. The prayer, then, that is to be made for Him is not to be made for Him personally, but relatively—on account of His relation to other beings—His relation to us. But not only is prayer to be made for the reign of Christ—the text predicts its continuity, or uninterruptedness; "prayer also shall be made for Him continually." Under the former dispensation, the fire which burnt upon the golden altar was never allowed to go out—and the ardent desire of the pious Israelites for the coming of Christ glowed continually on the altar of their hearts—it never went out. Observe, again, that prayer for Christ is to be offered conjointly with other things—"prayer also." In all conquered lands, the subjection of the people was marked by two things—their money was stamped with the name of the conqueror, and they were obliged to pay for him in their public worship. In allusion to this fact, it is here said of the conquering Saviour—"To Him shall be given of the gold of Sheba, prayer also shall be made for Him continually." The gold of Sheba—a portion of our worldly substance is to be devoted to Him, in connection with our prayers. For to pray in His behalf, without accompanying the act with this proof of our sincerity, would be as profane as to use all other kind of means except prayer would be impious. How many and how powerful the motives, then, which should induce us to pray for the reign of Christ! A sense of consistency demands it. A principle of benevolence to man requires it. A principle of gratitude requires it. He has prayed for us with strong crying and tears, or we should not, at this moment, be in a condition to pray for ourselves. He gave Himself for us. His priestly robes are never laid aside. And shall we intermit our prayers for Him? Let a sense of our obligation induce us to pray for Him. (*J. Harris, D.D.*) *Prayer for Christ*:—Is prayer, then, necessary for Him? Is He not above the reach of danger, pain, want? Has He not all power? Therefore, our prayer is not to be for Him personally but relatively, and we pray for

Him whom we pray for His ministers, His ordinances, His Gospel. What should we pray for on His behalf? We are to remember these four things. I. **THE DEGREE OF THE CHURCH'S RESOURCES**: that there may be sufficiency of fit instruments raised up. II. **THE FREEDOM OF ITS ADMINISTRATION**—that all hindrances may be put out of the way. III. **THE DIFFUSION OF ITS PRINCIPLES**—that they may spread everywhere. IV. **THE INCREASE OF ITS GLORY**—that it may abound in all spiritual excellence. What reasons there are for such prayer: how certain it is to be heard if we be sincere in asking. Let our conduct prove this. (*W. Jay.*) *Praying for Jesus*:—We are, thank God, accustomed to praying to Jesus; we approach His footstool gladly, and believingly, and we are never sent empty away. We also pray through Jesus, appending His precious name to each petition presented to the Father. This it is that gives them worth. We cannot fail to recollect that He is now engaged in praying for us. It is perhaps somewhat of a novelty to call to mind the fact that we are privileged, nay, virtually enjoined, to pray for Him. It is a reversal of the accepted order of things, a delightful change of programme. It behoves us to be as continual in our prayer for Jesus as is our Mediator upon the throne in His pleading on our behalf. I. **WHAT SHOULD BE THE BURDEN OF OUR PRAYER?** We do not want in any case to utter vain words when our knees are bent before the throne, but when we are praying for Jesus we must exercise very special care. We must endeavour to discover what Christ desires. We must pray intelligently, reverently, lovingly, and to purpose. How may this be done? The best way to plead intelligently for Christ is to remember the promises that are given concerning Him. Get hold of a promise and wrap our prayers about it; let the Word of God be the nucleus of your petition, and then frame your own loving supplications round the Spirit-breathed predictions. I have found, also, that in this matter of praying for Jesus a consideration of the character of His work is of considerable assistance. If you are wishing to do a friend a good turn, or to give a relation a present, you will naturally consider the bent of that friend's mind, the purpose of his life, the task that he may happen to have in hand, that you may give an appropriate present, or offer acceptable service. Act after the same manner with regard to Jesus. Contemplate Him, meditate upon His character, reflect on His tastes and predilections. Try to discover what would please Him most. Why was He here on earth? He said Himself, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Then pray that the lost may be saved; that will please Him well. He was here to make disciples; to gather round Him and behind Him a fitting retinue, as became the Prince of Life, albeit He was in disguise. Pray that the number of the disciples may be increased, that those who profess to follow Him may follow, not afar off. He was here to sanctify the saints, to wash them with the washing of water by the Word; He was here to make them clean away every whit, head, and hands, and heart, and feet. Well, pray that the saints may be made holy and kept holy, for this will please Jesus; it will mean the completion of the work that He came to earth to start. II. **How to PRAY.** 1. It must be continually, for so says the text, "Prayer also should be made for Him continually." Our interest in Christ should never subside; it should not even know the changes that affect our prayers for others. I am not sure that they should be so changeful, but certainly in our desire for Jesus there should be no sort of variation. 2. Then pray loyally. "Vivat Rex!" "Long live the King!" "Hosanna!" 3. Then pray generously and practically, for the text says that the gold of Sheba shall be given to Him. Praying and giving go well together. Let there be self-denial with all your supplications. Give to Him gold if you have it, or silver if you have nothing better. Give Him the best you possess. 4. Then pray praisefully, for those who pray continually are to praise daily. "Daily shall He be praised." Adore Him while you pray for Him. And with all your praying let there be much of faith. Our prayers are wasted sometimes. Why? Because they are not prayers of faith. (*T. Spurgeon.*) *Prayer a vital force*:—I. **PRAYER IS A VITAL FORCE IN THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST.** II. **THE SORT OF PRAYER SPOKEN OF IN THE TEXT EXPLAINS, ILLUSTRATES, AND JUSTIFIES THESE STATEMENTS.** It is quite certain that Christ is to live and to prevail: it is equally certain that prayer is to be made for Him. Prayer is to be the great means of bringing in the kingdom: because Christ lives, prayer will be made: because prayer is made, His kingdom will continue to grow. He Himself has taught us thus to pray: when we say to the Father, "Thy kingdom come," we are truly praying for Christ, and the prayer is necessary to the coming of the

kingdom. III. PRAYER FOR CHRIST IS THE HIGHEST FORM OF PRAYER. It is much more important that He shall prosper than I or you. He is greater. He lives, I die. He lives not for Himself but for others; His prosperity will mean that abundant grace shall come to others; and my prayer for Him will help to hasten the day of His glory. So in praying for Him I am actually praying for all His people. Surely such prayer is the highest. (W. Y. Fullerton.) *Pray for Jesus*:—Many people misunderstand such expression. If He were still on earth we might pray for Him, but surely not now. But His cause is here, His work needs prospering, and if we pray for this we pray for Him. I. SUCH PRAYER ELEVATES THE TONE OF OUR PRAYERS. We can be selfish in prayer, and narrow, and sectarian, and even bitter; but praying for Christ will lift us above all this. II. SUGGESTS MANY THEMES OF PRAYER—for fitting witnesses for the truth; for those labouring in the field; for doors of utterance to be opened; for conversion of many souls; for those who are saved; for the coming of Christ's kingdom. III. INSPIRES US WITH PECULIAR EARNESTNESS. Consistency with my profession; gratitude, love to Him—all prompt such prayer. IV. GIVES SPECIAL ENCOURAGEMENT IN OUR PRAYERS. For the worthiness of Christ and the promise of God encourage us. V. DEMANDS CONSISTENT ACTION. It will hold us back from sin; make us thoughtful; diligent in service, etc. But let His great love constrain us. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 16. There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon.—*The life and power of the Gospel*.—I. OFFER SOME EXPOSITORY REMARKS. 1. The handful of corn. This tells of the few disciples who at the first preached the Gospel. As Isaac was offered on Mount Moriah, so our Lord on the summit of the same mount was offered up. He was the seed corn. 2. The fruit. This all the result of our Lord's death. And it shall be abundant like the forests of Lebanon. 3. They of the city. The apostles went forth from Jerusalem after they were endued with power. II. THE EXPRESSIVENESS OF THE SIMILE—the corn of wheat. 1. It possesses a kind of immortality. 2. Life springs from its death. 3. Propagates its own likeness. 4. Has unlimited power of multiplication. III. THE IMPORT OF THE SHAKING HERE TOLD OF (Hebrews xii. 25–29). The religious systems of the earth are doomed, and the political likewise. (J. A. Macdonald.) *Diffusion of the Gospel*:—I. THE INSIGNIFICANCE OF THE GOSPEL IN ITS ORIGIN. 1. In its introduction into the world. 2. In its structure as a religious system. 3. In its operation in the heart. II. THE IMPROBABILITY OF ITS SUCCESS. 1. The agency was feeble. 2. The opposition was powerful. III. ITS STUPENDOUS RESULTS. 1. The number of its followers. 2. Their influence on the world. (W. W. Wythe.) *The handful of corn on the top of the mountains*:—In the kingdom of nature it is not seldom seen that the greatest results proceed from apparently the most insignificant beginnings. The oak, the pride and glory of the forest, grows from a small acorn. The mighty river, which gradually expands its bosom towards the sea, and incessantly pours into it the tribute of its many waters, springs from an insignificant rivulet. The philosopher, the orator, the hero, each enters life at first as a “naked, helpless, weeping child.” Now, concerning the Gospel, note—I. ITS INSIGNIFICANT COMMENCEMENT. A handful of corn, and that sown, of all places, on the top of the mountains. How this sets forth the unlikelihood of success according to all human judgment. II. THE GLORIOUS CONSUMMATION THE GOSPEL IS DESTINED TO ATTAIN. This metaphorical representation conveys to us the idea of fertility; a fertility so great, that from a handful of corn, and that sown on the most barren spot, the top of a mountain, should issue a crop so strong and thick that it would shake and wave in the wind like the woods of Lebanon, while in the City of Zion the inhabitants would become numerous as the blades of grass in a field which the Lord hath blessed. It is thus beautifully intimated that in proportion to the smallness of its beginning shall be the greatness of the final increase of the Gospel. In various parts of Holy Writ we have abundant testimony to this fact. The metaphorical representation of the psalmist suggests also that the diffusion of the Gospel in the latter day will be characterized by great and extraordinary rapidity—“They of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.” Grass is, in Eastern countries, remarkably speedy in its growth; so will it be with the triumphs which the Gospel is destined universally to accomplish. This metaphorical announcement intimates further that the propagation of the Gospel shall be productive of happiness and joy to the world. “The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon.” Just such a change as, in the physical world, is made when the sterile mountain

top is converted into the garden of the Lord, will be that which shall be made in the moral world by the agency of the Gospel, when it shall be felt in its legitimate power. III. THE MANNER IN WHICH IT HAS ALREADY BEEN FULFILLED IS FITTED TO STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH IN THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPEL. IV. This prophecy furnishes us also with an ENCOURAGEMENT TO PERSEVERE IN OUR EXERTIONS FOR THE UNIVERSAL PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL. Although it may be with us a "day of small things"—although the means we employ may be feeble and small, and the obstacles we have to encounter be numerous and formidable, yet let us not give way to unbelieving doubts or fears. (*Peter Grant.*) *The blessed effects of sowing the Gospel seed:*—How precious is the Bible to men; it is the source of all our hope, the inspiration of all our work. In that we have—I. A HAPPY DESCRIPTION OF THE GOSPEL. It is a handful of corn. 1. For its excellency. 2. For its insignificance, in appearance, extent, instrumentality. II. THE PLACES WHERE IT IS TO BE SOWN: "on the top of the mountains," the most barren and inaccessible places. There are many hearts like this, but there we are to sow the seed. And in the most populous places—"the city." So did our Lord, and so should we. How great the need. III. THE BLESSED RESULTS WHICH WILL FOLLOW. 1. Abundant fruitfulness. 2. Rapid growth—like grass. 3. A beautiful scene. 4. Ample recompense. Conclusion. 1. Bless God if the seed of the Gospel has taken root in your heart. 2. How deeply guilty are they in whom no fruit is found. 3. Pity those who are without the Gospel seed. (*J. Sherman.*) *The handful of corn on the top of the mountains:*—1. Let us think of where the corn comes from. It does not come like anything else in the world. In the woods you may sometimes find a tree growing with a little round black fruit, hard and sour. It does not seem to be worth much by the side of the luscious plum from the garden. But that sloe, as it is called, is the plum in its wild state. The gardener takes it and cultivates it until it comes to be a larger and finer tree. So it is with the crab-tree and its little bitter fruit—that is, the wild apple. And so with the strawberry, and all the fruits and plants in our garden. They were found in a wild state, and they had to be cultivated before they were worth anything. But nobody ever found corn growing wild. Unlike everything else, corn is the special and peculiar gift of God, which He put into man's hand just as it is. And how like Jesus it is in this! 2. Corn will grow all over the world. And is not that like our blessed Jesus? No home but may have Him in it; no heart but Jesus will dwell there; no land under heaven but there men may find the Bread of Life. 3. Think again of what the corn is worth. A very little thing to talk about, this—"a handful of corn!" Corn is worth more than gold. Everybody wants bread. And so, all need Jesus. 4. Corn has life in it—yielding abundant increase. And so Jesus is like the handful of corn upon the top of the mountains: the prophet tells us that we "esteemed Him not," and "hid as it were our faces from Him"; there was no appearance of greatness in Him, or of power. But in Him is life. He comes into our hearts, and we are made like Him, and from us others catch a grain of the good seed, and the life spreads from heart to heart and from soul to soul, until "the whole earth shall be filled with His glory." 5. And yet though there is all this that is wonderful about the corn, let us remember that it is of no good except it be sown. A handful of corn is indeed a poor thing without that. They have found some mummies in Egypt thousands of years old, and in their hands they have found some tiny grains of corn. If they had been sown, by this time they would have grown into enough to feed the world. And so the glory of Jesus grows only when we have Jesus in our heart. 6. Before the corn does us any good, it dies. Think how much this is like Jesus. He lays down His life for us. He dies that we may live. He is beaten, and scourged, and broken, that we may have strength and everlasting life. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*)

Ver. 17. *His name shall endure for ever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun.*—*The name of Christ:*—I. THE SAVIOUR'S RENOWN. For by "His name" we understand His renown. 1. The source from whence this renown is derived. It is from His proper and essential divinity; from His condescending and efficacious sufferings; from His exaltation and mediatorial glory. What is all other renown compared to His? 2. The permanence with which it is invested. We have seen much of the essential perpetuity of our Saviour's renown, from what has already transpired in the history and annals of the world. It has endured the attack of heathenism when made under the elements of classic Greece or the

power of inferior Rome. It has endured the attack of modern infidelity, which uttered its hell-cry from philosopher to king, and back again from king to philosopher, "Crush the wretch, crush the wretch!"—by that wretch meaning the Redeemer, whose cause and whose glory we plead. II. **THE REDEEMER'S INFLUENCE.** 1. Its method. It is secured through His Spirit, His Word, His Church. 2. Its character—it is one of blessing and grace. The religion of Christ alone is the source alike of national, of domestic, and of individual felicity. 3. Its extent—"All nations shall call Him blessed." (*James Parsons*.) *The imperishable name*:—We apply these words to Christ, although their literal reference may point to another. What reason have we to believe that Christ's name will endure for ever? I. **HE IS THE AUTHOR OF AN IMMORTAL BOOK.** Men's names come down through the centuries by reason of the books they have written, although the time comes when the most enduring of these become obsolete and pass away. Now, the Bible is Christ's book. He is at once its Author and its substance. But, unlike other books, it has imperishable elements. 1. Its doctrines are true to the immortal intellect. 2. Its precepts are true to the undying conscience. 3. Its provisions are true to the unquenchable aspirations. II. **HE IS THE FOUNDER OF ENDURING INSTITUTIONS.** Men's names come down in institutions they have founded. Christ has instituted the Lord's Supper. And the Sunday commemorates Him. III. **HE IS THE LIVING HEAD OF AN UNDYING FAMILY.** Conclusion. Trust this name. (*Homilist*.) *The eternal name*:—It is the name of Jesus Christ. Text true of—**I. THE RELIGION SANCTIONED BY HIS NAME.** 1. There was never a time when it did not exist here on earth. 2. If it were destroyed no other religion would take its place. 3. If another could, by what means would you crush this? 4. And if it could be crushed, what would become of the world then: would life be worth living? II. **THE HONOUR OF HIS NAME.** As long as a redeemed sinner is to be found, so long will the honour of Christ's name endure. And so of—**III. THE POWER OF HIS NAME.** For it alone gives peace, purity, triumph in death. Let all other names perish, as they will: but this never. (*C. H. Spurgeon*.) *The honour of the name of Christ*:—The language of this psalm cannot be confined to Solomon: it speaks of him only as he was in office or character the type of Christ. The full meaning of the psalm belongs to Christ alone. By the name of Christ, His chief greatness or excellency, His peculiar honour and glory, is meant. Now, such glory has been given to Christ—I. **BY GOD THE FATHER.** 1. In the eternal counsels. 2. At His baptism. 3. On the Mount of Transfiguration. 4. By the Resurrection. II. **FROM THE ANGELS OF GOD.** Their knowledge, their security, have been furthered by Christ in His redeeming work. III. **FROM THE REDEEMED AMONG MEN.** Through their justification and sanctification they become witnesses to the glory and greatness of the Redeemer. (*J. Bannerman, D.D.*) *Christ's renown*:—By the name of Christ is signified His renown. Now, this prediction was uttered more than a thousand years before the birth of Christ, and when deep obscurity rested upon all that pertained to Him. And when He was born and had entered on His ministry, there was scarcely anything in His condition or circumstances to justify the anticipation of His endless renown. He died ignominiously forsaken of all His friends. But after His death their love revived, and they went forth to preach His name. But still there seemed little probability that the name of their Master should endure for ever. Yet so it has been. The triumphs of Christianity are all known. Time rolled on, and the fame of Christ widened and spread. And His fame and renown are entirely different from that which belongs to all others. For—I. **WHERE ONCE CHRIST'S NAME HAS BEEN KNOWN IT HAS NEVER BEEN ENTIRELY ROOTED OUT.** Even in the place where the seven Churches of Asia withered under the curse of heaven, His name is not lost. But other names, however great, are. II. **THE KNOWLEDGE WHICH MEN HAVE OF HIM IS MORE INTIMATE AND PARTICULAR THAN THAT WHICH THEY HAVE OF ANY OF THE GREAT MEN OF THE PAST.** How little we know of these: how much we know of Him. III. **AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM IS POSSESSED BY ALL CLASSES.** Not the rich and educated alone, but the poor and the common people know Him. IV. **AND HOW DIFFERENT THE FEELINGS WHICH WE ASSOCIATE WITH HIM FROM THOSE WHICH WE HAVE FOR OTHERS.** It is not mere admiration or respect, but we give Him our hearts. Every mention of His name touches our deepest affections. What wonder that He should receive the homage of a world! But what is He to us? That is the all-important question. Has such a friend, such a Saviour, no beauty in our eyes? God forbid that we should refuse Him that love which He asks for, and so richly merits from us,

(J. W. Adams, D.D.) *His name shall endure*:—I. WHY MAY THE INFLUENCE OF CHRIST'S NAME BE EXPECTED TO ENDURE FOR EVER? 1. Because He is the greatest benefactor the world has ever seen. 2. Because He is a mighty conqueror. He achieved victory, notwithstanding fearful odds. Look at two periods in the history of the Church. Look at the first three centuries. Emperors and rulers combined to exterminate this new sect. The most determined means were adopted. Religious teachers were put to death or cast into prison. Bibles were gathered together in response to several edicts and burned in different squares and market places. Did these succeed? The very means adopted to destroy the new faith were the means blessed of God for perpetuating it. Religious teachers were scattered over the then known world. To their amazement, I can well believe, they found that God had been preparing the world for their coming. Magnificent roads had been made, so that they could pass easily from town to town. The Greek language was spoken so that they could address the people in their own tongue. Verily it was only in the "fulness of time" that God "sent forth His Son." If you wish to see triumph in connection with the preaching of the Gospel, study the first three centuries of the Gospel history. Look at the last century of the history of the Church. In that century you see the history and the triumph of missions. II. How IS CHRIST'S NAME TO BE PERPETUATED? 1. In the hearts of His people. Take Christ and His teaching out of song. Take Christ and His Cross out of poetry, and you take away their very heart and soul and life. No teacher has ever received such tribute as Christ has done. The fact that you have the best geniuses in song, and poetry, and painting, laying their offerings at His feet is one of the most convincing arguments in favour of my text—"His name shall endure for ever." 2. By the character of His people. This is one thing that scepticism can never explain away. The maxims and the example of the world can never produce a holy life. It takes Christianity to do that. A holy life is therefore one of the best means by which the influence of Christ's name can be perpetuated in this world. 3. By the ordinances of the Church. (W. S. Goodall, M.A.) *Christ—His enduring name*:—I. THE NAME OF JESUS OUR SAVIOUR IS FITTED TO ENDURE. 1. By virtue of the law which connects memory with greatness. The great are remembered—great kings, great heroes, great sages, great saints—while the crowd must be forgotten. Jesus does not refuse to be commemorated according to this standard. He does not struggle indeed for fame, but for usefulness; but when He says, "Come unto Me," "Follow Me," He presupposes transcendent greatness. Even on the human side the greatness of Jesus is unexampled, the greatness of knowledge, of wisdom, of purity, of benevolence, of devotion—such greatness as amounts to absolute perfection. 2. By virtue of the law which connects memory with service. 3. By virtue of the law which connects memory with suffering. Even destroyers and conquerors are better remembered by disaster than by victory—as Alexander by his premature death, Cæsar by his assassination, and Napoleon by his exile. How much more have the great benefactors of our race had their memories embalmed by suffering; so that they are cherished as their works and endurements have cost them dear. But how imperfect is every such image of the connection between the Saviour's sufferings and the enduring of His name! All others were born to suffer, if not in that form in some other; they were sinners, and could not escape even by labour and service to mankind. But Jesus was above this doom, and stooped to meet it—stooped from a height beyond all parallel. "Though He was rich," etc. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto," etc. II. IT IS DESTINED TO ENDURE. 1. The name of Jesus is identified with the existence of the Church. Take it away, and the Church falls. Christianity is obliterated, or sinks in fragments! Take it away, and there is no pardon, no sanctification, no fellowship with God, according to His own word, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." 2. The name of Jesus Christ is bound up with the history and prospects of mankind. This name is a key to the history of the world. It is not without reason that history is divided into two great periods, before Christ and after Christ. 3. The Saviour's name is destined to endure, because it is committed to the watchful care of the Godhead. God the Father sees here the brightest manifestation of Himself, for He thus reveals the fulness of power, the depth of wisdom, the beauty of holiness, the tender radiance of mercy, all shining in the face of Jesus Christ. The continued display of this glory to men and angels is the last end of redemption, the fulfilment by the Father of the prayer of the Son, "Glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee." Shall this last prayer, then, be defeated? Shall these supreme mani-



festations of God, which, pent up from everlasting days, have at last broken forth upon the universe, be recalled? "And shall the word of promise that has gone out of His mouth be made void—"I will make Thy name to be remembered in all generations"? (John Cairns, D.D.) *The universality and perpetuity of Christ's reign*.—Buddha is reported to have said that he did not expect his religion to last more than 5,000 years. (W. J. Dawson.) Voltaire said he lived in the twilight of Christianity. He meant a lie; he spoke the truth. He did live in its twilight; but it was the twilight before the morning; not the twilight of the evening, as he meant to say; for the morning comes, when the light of the sun shall break upon us in its truest glory. The scorners have said that we should soon forget to honour Christ, and that one day no man should acknowledge Him. "His name shall endure for ever." (*Footsteps of Truth*.) **And men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed.**—*What history owes to Jesus Christ*.—I. THE MORAL AND SOCIAL BENEFIT. We need to take the simplest, plainest facts that lie upon the surface of history, to see what a revelation was implied in the entrance of Christian ideas into such a world as this. It brought, for one thing, a totally new idea of man himself, as a being of infinite dignity and immortal worth; it taught that every man's soul, even the humblest, poorest, and the most defiled, was made in God's image, is capable of eternal life, and has an infinite value—a value that made worth while God's own Son's dying to redeem it. It brought back to men's minds the sense of responsibility to God—an idea that had never been possessed, or had been altogether or almost altogether lost. It brought into the world a new spirit of love and charity, something wonderful in the eyes of those heathen as they saw institutions spring up round about them that they had never thought or heard of in heathenism before. It flashed into men's souls a new moral ideal, and set up a standard of truth, and integrity, and purity, which has acted as an elevating force on moral conception in the world till this hour. It restored woman to her rightful place by man's side as his spiritual helpmate and equal, and created that best of God's blessings on earth, the Christian home, where children are reared in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It taught the slave his spiritual freedom as a member of the Kingdom of God, gave him a place there in Christ's kingdom as an equal with his own master, and struck at the foundations of slavery by its doctrine of the natural brotherhood and the dignity of man. It created self-respect, a sense of duty in the use of one's powers for self-support and for the benefit of others. It urged to honest labour. "Let him that stole steal no more," etc. And in a myriad ways, by direct teaching, by the protest of holy lives, by its gentle spirit, it struck at the evils and the corruptions and the malpractices and the cruelties of the time. II. THE RELIGIOUS DEBT TO JESUS. It was Christianity that overthrew the reign of those gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome, and swept them so completely from the path of history that no one, even in his wildest imagination, now dreams of the possibility of their revival. It was Christianity that, still maintaining something of its youthful energy, laid hold of these rough barbarian people in the Middle Ages and trained them to some kind of civilization and moral life. It was Christianity that in England and Scotland lighted the light that by and by spread its radiance through every part of the country. It is Christianity that to-day is teaching the nations to burn their idols, to cease their horrid practices, to take on them the obligations of moral and civilized existence. Whatever blessings or hopes we trace to our religion, whatever light it imparts to our minds or cheer to our hearts, whatever power there is in it to sustain holiness or conquer sin, all that we owe to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. III. THE ETERNAL BENEFITS. "Jesus hath abolished death," we read, "and hath brought life and immortality to light through His Gospel." And what was better, He not only taught men the way of life, but stood there Himself, the great medium of return to God. He stood there not only teaching men what the way of life was, but He Himself was there to place their feet in its paths. He not only taught us about God, but showed us how to be at peace with Him—brought us back to God, from whom we had wandered, and reconciled us with God. He not only warned us of the dangers and the evils of the life of sin, of the ruin, the destruction which sin brought with it, of the alienation, the estrangement from the life of God that was in sin; but He united Himself there with us, with His infinite mercy in our lone, and lost, and condemned condition, took upon Himself there, on His own soul, that burden we could not for ourselves bear, and through His cross and passion opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. (Jas. Orr, D.D.) *The benefits of Christianity*.—I. THE BENEFITS

WHICH CHRISTIANITY CONVEYS TO THE COMMUNITIES AMONG WHOM IT IS PREACHED.

1. It has diffused among all classes of men the knowledge of God. "Nothing," says the son of Sirach, "is so much worth as a mind well instructed"; but there is no knowledge like that which respects the character of God, our obligations to Him, and expectations from Him. It is the only effectual source of right conduct, and of true comfort, in every state and condition of human life.

2. Christianity has greatly purified and reformed the manners of men. Some of those vices which marked and disgraced the character of heathen nations are scarcely known but by their name; and others, which were openly practised in the face of day, are now hid in obscurity and darkness. On the other hand, some virtues, of the obligation of which the heathens had no apprehension, are not only to be found in the character of real Christians, but have risen into such general credit and esteem as to influence the conduct of many who, in other respects, feel but little of the power of religion. 3. Christianity has promoted among men a spirit of humanity and benevolence, unknown to the heathen world. 4. Christianity has contributed essentially to the safety and prosperity of society. II. THE BENEFITS WHICH IT CONVEYS TO THE INDIVIDUALS WHO BELIEVE AND EMBRACE IT.

1. It effectuates their conversion to God, and to the obedience of His will. 2. The effects of Christianity upon the Christian's state of mind are not less important and happy than its influence upon his character; it restores him to peace with God, and to hope in Him. (*A. Duncan.*) *Blessed in Him*:—I. A SINGULAR CONDITION.

1. By nature, men are not blessed. The trail of the old serpent is everywhere. 2. The text promises that men shall be delivered from the curse, that they shall be uplifted from their natural unhappiness, that they shall be rescued from their doubtful or their hopeful questioning, and shall even come to be blessed. God shall pronounce them blessed. He shall set upon them the broad seal of Divine approbation; and with that seal there shall come streaming into their hearts the sweetness of intense delight, which shall give them experimentally a blessing to their own conscious enjoyment. 3. Let me tell you what Christ does for a man who is really in Him, and then you will see how He is blessed. (1) The man who comes to Christ by faith, and truly trusts Christ, has all the past rectified. (2) He has present favour. (3) His future is guaranteed. II. A WIDE STATEMENT. 1. To make this wide statement true requires breadth of number. The text says, "Men shall be blessed in Him," that is to say, the most of men, innumerable myriads of men shall get the blessing that Jesus purchased by His death on the cross. 2. It implies great width of variety. "Men"—not merely kings or noblemen, but "Men shall be blessed in Him." Men—not working men, or thinking men, or fighting men, or this sort of men, or the other sort of men, but men of all sorts—"Men shall be blessed in Him." It is a delightful thought that Christ is as much fitted to one rank and one class of persons as to another. 3. Our text indicates length of period: "Men shall be blessed in Him." Men have been blessed in Him; these many centuries, Christ has shone with all the radiance of omnipotent love upon this poor fallen world, but His light is as full as ever; and, however long this dispensation shall last, "Men shall be blessed in Him." 4. The text suggests fullness of sufficiency concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a wonderful depth of meaning in this passage when it says, "Men shall be blessed in Him."

"Oh!" says one, "Men shall be blessed by philosophy, or by Christ and philosophy." Not at all; it is, "Men shall be blessed in Him." "But they shall be blessed in Him through trade and commerce and the like." Not so; "Men shall be blessed in Him." Have not we, who are half a century old, heard a great number of theories about how the millennium is to be brought about? I remember that, at one time, free trade was to bring it, but it did not; and nothing will ever make men blessed unless they get into Christ: "Men shall be blessed in Him." III. THE FULL ASSURANCE expressed in the text. It is a grand thing to get a sentence like this with a "shall" in it: "Men shall be blessed in Him." It is not "perhaps they may be," but, "Men shall be blessed in Him." Not, "perchance they may be blessed under certain conditions"; but, "Men shall be blessed in Him." 1. They shall not try Him and fail. 2. They shall not desire Him and be denied. 3. They shall come to Christ and get the blessing. IV. Now, with all your hearts, think of my text with a PERSONAL APPROPRIATION: "Men shall be blessed in Him." Are you blessed in Christ? Will you personally answer the question? Do not pass it round, and say to yourself, "No doubt there are many who think that they are blessed, and who are not." Never mind about them; for the present moment, ask this question of yourself, "Am I blessed in

Christ?" (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Jesus: all blessing and all blest*:—I. **WE OURSELVES ARE LIVING WITNESSES THAT MEN ARE BLESSED IN CHRIST.** You and I do not pretend to be great sages, famous philosophers, or learned divines; but we feel when a pin pricks us, or when a dog bites us. We have sense enough to know when a thing tastes well or ill in the eating. We know chalk from cheese, as the proverb hath it. We know somewhat about our own wants; and we also know when we get those wants supplied. We bear witness that we have been blessed in Him. How much, how deeply, how long, and in how many ways we have been blessed in Him, I will not undertake to say; but this I will say most emphatically, for many of you now present, we have in verity, beyond all question, been blessed in Jesus to the highest degree, and of this we are sure. We believe—and faith grasps the first blessing—that we have received a great blessing in Christ by the removal of a curse which otherwise must have rested upon us. If He had accomplished nothing but the bearing away of our sin into the wilderness—as the scapegoat of old bore away the iniquity of Israel—He would have done enough to set our tongues for ever praising Him. He has lifted from the world the weight of the eternal curses; therefore, let all the bells of our cities ring out His honour, and all the voices of the village sing forth His praise. The negative being removed, we have had a positive actual experience of blessing, for God has blessed us in Christ Jesus, and we know that none are more blest than we are. We are now not at all the men that we used to be as to our inward feelings. II. **WE HAVE SEEN OTHER MEN BLESSED IN CHRIST.** 1. What social changes we have seen in those who have believed in Him! He has blessed some men and some women at such a rate that the devil himself would not have the impudence to say it was not a blessing. Liar as Satan is, he could not deny that godliness has brought sunshine where there was none: the blessing has been too distinct and manifest for any to deny it. 2. What a moral change have we seen in some! They could not speak without an oath, but the habit of profane swearing ended in a minute, and they have never been tempted to it since. Rash, bad-tempered men, who would break up the furniture of the house in their passion, have become as gentle as lambs. Such furies usually become quiet, peaceable, and long-suffering: grace has a marvellous influence upon the temper. 3. Then, as to mental blessing. What have we seen? This have I seen: here is one case out of many. A young man, who had fallen into sin, came to me in deep despair of mind. He was so desponding that his very face bore witness to his misery. I had tried to set the Gospel clearly before him on the previous Sabbath, but he told me that he could not grasp it, for that by his sin he had reduced his mind to such a state that he felt himself to be little better than an idiot. He was not speaking nonsense either, for there are vices which destroy the intellect. I told him that Jesus Christ could save idiots—that even if his mind was in measure impaired as the result of sin, yet there was quite enough mind left to be made glad with a sense of pardon, seeing there was more than enough to make him heavy with a sense of guilt. I cheered that brother as best I could, but I could effect nothing by my own efforts. Soon the Lord Jesus Christ came to him, and he is now a happy, earnest, joyful Christian. III. This whole matter is to extend till **THE ENTIRE WORLD SHALL BE BLESSED IN CHRIST.** Even at this moment the whole world is the better for Christ. But where He is best known and loved, there is He the greatest blessing. What snatched many an island of the southern sea from barbarism and cannibalism? What but Jesus Christ preached among them? Men have been blessed in Him in Europe, America, Asia, and everywhere. Africa, and other lands still plunged in barbarism, shall receive light from no other source but that from which our fathers received it centuries ago—from the great Sun of Righteousness. (*Ibid.*) *Christ's Kingdom: its progress and prospects*:—I. **THE PERPETUITY OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM**, extending from age to age throughout all generations; for it is in connection with it that "His name shall endure for ever, and be continued as long as the sun." Where are the mighty monarchies of the ancient world—the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian—that seemed to have taken deep root in the earth, and, matured by ages of vigour, to bid fair for perpetuity? Even the more modern States of Greece and Rome have undergone a complete change, and their ancient characters are sought in vain in the regions they once emblazoned with glory. Nor has the higher and less vulgar authority of wisdom and legislation been more stable. The schools of ancient philosophy have passed away, and the tenets of their sages have solved for us none of the hard questions suggested by reason and conscience: one great name after another dies from the memory of fleeting genera-

tions, as the stars fade with the rising morn. II. **THE FELICITY OF THIS KINGDOM:** "Men shall be blessed in Him." Whatever blessings have descended on the human race since the fall, have been communicated through the mediation of Christ; for thus only, we are taught, can a holy God have friendly intercourse with man. But the blessings that specially mark His kingdom are of a spiritual nature, and can be rightly estimated only by a spiritual mind. III. **THE DESTINED UNIVERSAL EXTENSION OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST:** "all nations shall call Him blessed." And why, asks the infidel, was not this kingdom, and the revelation that makes it known, universal from the beginning? Why did the God of the whole earth confine His favour for many ages to the descendants of Abraham, and, leaving other nations in darkness, restrict the light of heaven to the little province of Judæa? Is it to be believed that, overlooking and despising the great, populous, enlightened empires of the ancient world, He expended all His treasures on a people remarkable only for a bigoted and exclusive superstition? Is this system of favouritism worthy the Sovereign of the universe, the Father of mankind? But not to insist on arguments which, it may be said, are fitted to silence rather than satisfy, it is an important fact, never to be forgotten, that Divine revelation was originally universal, without limitation or selection, commensurate with the necessity that called it forth; none of the progeny of Adam being exempted from the promise of a Redeemer who should bruise the serpent's head, given to our first parents as a sacred trust for the benefit of mankind. The truths embodied in these facts were designed to regulate the faith, worship, and hopes of all mankind; and, had they been faithfully preserved, the blessings of the true religion would have been in every man's possession. It was the careless forgetfulness of these things, and the wilful preference of darkness to light, that introduced idolatry and wickedness into the world. If Divine revelation was not universal in ancient times, those who incurred the loss must bear the blame. For though the promise declared that "all nations should be blessed in Him," though the Saviour's parting command enjoined that His "Gospel should be preached to all the world and to every creature," have His disciples as yet acquitted themselves of the charge assigned to them in the realization of this purpose? If the Gospel be not universal, who, we ask, are answerable for this loss? where falls the blame of this delinquency? The commission given to them is continued with us—the promises that supported them are those we rest upon—the purposes of God wait on us still for their accomplishment; and those to whom He commits the fulfilment of His will, are no other than the reclaimed sinners who, like us, have passed from death into life, who stand obedient to His call, who are ready to start to any service in which His interests demand their activity. (*H. Grey, D.D.*)

**Vers. 18, 19. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things.**—*The law of suggestion in religious life:*—The law of memory recalls the same things; of association, different things. Certain sounds or sights awaken in our minds ideas which have been associated by the eye and by the ear. The name of, say, a horse calls up the picture of the horse, because of this law of association. Now, this law solves some remarkable phenomena. There are views of doctrine in whose presence devout souls are stirred with strong emotions, and these emotions are taken as evidences of the truth of the doctrines. For, say these people, "How could a false doctrine fill me with such holy thought and feeling?" But this reasoning will not hold. The emotions are the result not of the truth of the doctrine, but because men have been trained to experience such emotion in the presence of the doctrine: as men will in the presence of a picture, an image, an idol. A doctrine all unbeautiful and false may be so associated with things of beauty that it appears beautiful to those by whom it is so associated. Hard doctrines are like hard logs, which, if you let them lie long enough in the open air, under the softening influence of God's rain and dew, become overgrown with lichens and mosses until they are beautiful. It is not the beauty of the log, but of that which is associated with and sticks to it. And so it is of places and actions, of religious observances and reasons. It is this law of association that determines our conduct in regard to them. If they have been linked on to what is beautiful and good in our experience, we love them, and keep to them. And vice versa. What responsibility, then, does this involve for those who have the training of children. What associations will they have with the Bible, the Sabbath, with the idea of God? Our text shows that David had gained such

associations with the thought of God, that this outburst of praise is the natural utterance of his heart. (*H. Ward Beecher.*) *The general extension of Christ's kingdom fervently implored.*—I. AS A PROPHETIC ORACLE. It assures us—1. That the whole earth will be filled with God's glory (Isa. xi. 9; Hab. ii. 14). The glory of the Lord implies—(1) A display of His perfections in the salvation of mankind. (2) The pious acknowledgment of God's saving goodness. 2. That the earth will be filled with God's glory, by means of Christ's administration in His mediatorial kingdom. II. AS A SOURCE OF SACRED INSTRUCTION. Thus considered, it teaches us—1. That Christ is a Divine person. 2. That His regal acts are wondrous. (1) He did wondrous things as the God of Israel, in behalf of His Hebrew subjects, by delivering them from grievous bondage, by preserving them amidst a dangerous wilderness, and by blessing them with a desirable inheritance (Ps. cxxxvi. 10-23). (2) He still doeth wondrous things as the King of saints, in behalf of His Christian subjects, by delivering them from a worse than Egyptian bondage (Matt. xi. 28; John viii. 36); by preserving them amidst most alarming dangers (Ps. xvii. 7; John x. 27, 28); and by blessing them with a better country than that of the earthly Canaan (Heb. xiii. 14; xi. 16; 1 Pet. i. 3-5). III. AS AN EXAMPLE OF ACCEPTABLE DEVOTION. Thus considered, we are led to regard it as containing—1. Grateful adoration. "Blessed be the Lord God," etc. (1) To praise God for His goodness is our duty, for He requires it by express injunctions (Ps. l. 14, and cvii. 1, 8, etc.). (2) To praise God is our honour, for this is the most disinterested part of devotion; more so than that of deprecation and petition, in which we refer to our own interests. At the same time, praise renders our worship most like the worship of heaven (Rev. xv. 3). (3) To praise God is our wisdom. This duty is attended with pleasure (Ps. cxlvii.), and is the means of obtaining renewed favours (Ps. l. 23). 2. Humble acknowledgment. "Who only doeth wondrous things." This should be the language of all Christ's gracious subjects, for they are saved, not by their own merit, but through God's mercy (Tit. iii. 6, 7). This should also be the language of all God's honoured instruments, for God's work is effected by His own agency. It is He who removes all hindrances that would impede the labours of His servants (Zech. iv. 6, 7); and it is He alone who crowns their labours with success (1 Cor. iii. 6, 7). 3. Fervent desire. "Let the whole earth be filled," etc. It is desirable that the whole earth may be filled with God's glory—(1) On principles of piety, because hereby the felicity of angels will be augmented (Luke xv. 10); the most pleasing satisfaction will be afforded to our gracious Redeemer (Isa. liii. 10, 11); and God will become generally honoured by the human race (Mal. i. 11). (2) On principles of benevolence; for hereby much moral evil, or sin, will be prevented (Jas. v. 19, 20); much natural evil, or misery, will be avoided, as national judgments (2 Chron. vii. 14); political discord (Isa. ii. 4); and the eternal death of immortal souls (Jas. v. 20); and much good, or human happiness, will be occasioned. From this interesting subject we may infer—1. The certain fulfilment of God's purpose to fill the earth with His glory. 2. The propriety of concurring with God in fulfilling His purpose. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*)

**Ver. 19. Let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen, and Amen.**—*David's dying prayer:*—There was a time when this prayer was unnecessary, for the whole earth was filled with His glory. And, in a sense, it is still unnecessary. For the whole earth is filled with God's glory. "All Thy works praise Thee, O God." But David intended this prayer in another sense. He longed that men who have revolted from God should all return to Him. But—I. LET US EXPLAIN THE PRAYER. It is a large and massive one. It includes the whole earth. It seeks—I. That in every country; 2. In every family; 3. In every individual heart, the true religion of God may be made known. II. LET US STIR UP OUR HEARTS THUS TO PRAY. I would have you all, like the Crusaders, because "Deus vult," rush forward to this great battle of the Lord. For—1. Think of the Majesty of God. 2. His love on Calvary. 3. Of the needs of men, how great, how pressing. III. COUNSELS IN THE PURSUIT OF THIS OBJECT. 1. You must in your own life remove all hindrances to it. 2. You must forsake all sin. God will help you. Will not some volunteer in this service? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

**Ver. 20. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.**—*David as psalmist:*—Why were such oceans of feeling poured into David's soul, such true and graceful utterance of poetry infused into his lips, and such skill of music

seated in his right hand? Such oceans of feeling did God infuse into his soul, and such utterance of poetry He placed between his lips, and such skilful music He seated in his right hand, in order that he might conceive forms of feeling for all saints, and create an everlasting psalmody, and hand down an organ for expressing the melody of the renewed soul. The Lord did not intend that His Church should be without a rule for uttering its gladness and its glory, its lamentation and its grief; and to bring such a rule and institute into being, He raised up His servant David, as formerly He raised up Moses to give to the Church an institute of Law. And to that end He led him the round of all human conditions, that he might catch the spirit proper to every one, and utter it according to truth; He allowed him not to curtail his being by treading the round of one function, but by every variety of functions, He cultivated his whole being, and filled his soul with wisdom and feeling. He found him objects for every affection, that the affection might not slumber and die. He brought him up in the sheep-pastures that the ground-work of his character might be laid amongst the simple and universal forms of feeling. He took him to the camp and made him a conqueror, that he might be filled with nobleness of soul and ideas of glory. He placed him in the palace that he might be filled with ideas of majesty and sovereign might. He carried him to the wilderness, and placed him in solitudes that his soul might dwell alone in the sublime conceptions of God and His mighty works; and He kept him there for long years, with only one step betwixt him and death, that he might be well schooled to trust and depend upon the providence of God. And in none of these various conditions did He take from him His Holy Spirit. His trials were but the tuning of the instrument with which the Spirit might express the various melodies which He designed to utter by him for the consolation and edification of spiritual men. Therefore, David had that brilliant galaxy of natural gifts, that rich and varied education, in order to fit him for executing the high office to which he was called by the Spirit, of giving to the Church those universal forms of spiritual feeling, whereof we have been endeavouring to set forth the excellent applications. And, though we neither excuse his acts of wickedness, nor impute them to the temptation of God, who cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth any man, we will also add that by his loss the Church hath gained; and that out of the evil of his ways much good hath been made to arise; and that if he had not passed through every valley of humiliation, and stumbled upon the dark mountains, we should not have had a language for the souls of the penitent, or an expression for the dark troubles which compass the soul that feareth to be deserted by its God. So much for the fitness of the psalmist to have been made the organ of spiritual feeling unto the Church. (*Edward Irving.*)

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#### PSALM LXXIII.

**VERS. 1-28.** Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. —*The trouble of Asaph:*—In human biographies men are wont to cover up their heroes' imperfections. They see no reason why they should be recalled, but many why they should not. And in religious biographies what evident exaggeration there often is. But this can never be said of the lives of the men told of in the Bible. They are evidently men like ourselves. They have known our misery, passed through our struggles, and often, like us, have had to bow their heads in repentance. By this single trait I recognize the book of God. Nothing but the guidance of the Spirit of truth could have held back these writers from glorifying their national heroes. Now, this psalm tells of one who undoubtedly was a believer, but nevertheless passed through doubt and knew all its bitterness. See—I. **WHAT MADE ASAPH DOUBT.** It was the sorrow of those who feared God combined with the prosperity of the wicked. The spectacle of this world is a great school for unbelief, and makes more unbelievers than all the books of atheists. Instinctively we believe in the God of holiness and love; but when we look out into the world we cannot find Him. Fatality is what we see. In nature, for it cares neither for our prayers nor our tears. In history, for if now and then there

seems to be a providential law therein, more often there is no trace of anything of the kind. See the fate of those vast empires which for ever have passed away. In life: was not the old prophet deceived when he said he had never seen the righteous forsaken? How often our prayers are not heard. Fatalism is what the world teaches every hour. Antiquity was fatalistic, and so are our chief thinkers of to-day. What problems are brought before us by the sorrows that befall the godly. Poverty, sickness, injustice—this most unendurable of all. II. **WHAT SAVED HIM FROM HIS DOUBT.** 1. He believed in God, the God of his race and people. He came—and it is a blessed thing to come—of a holy race. 2. But he could not explain these problems. Human reason cannot. There are the mysteries, insoluble, of affliction; yet more of sin; and of the future life. Science has no answer for them. 3. But Asaph went into the sanctuary of God, and then he understood the end, the purpose of God in all this which the future alone, and not the short-lived present, can unfold. Now, Asaph saw God's purpose in regard to the wicked, and his tone changed from bitterness to pity, as he thought of the "slippery places" in which they stood, and of the "destruction" which was their end. How all changes to our eyes when we consider things from God's point of view. And he saw God's purpose in regard to those who wait on Him and fear Him. Even now consolation, sweetness, peace are theirs. The meanest calling is invested with grandeur when God is served in it. Without doubt the struggles of God's people have been terrible. But consider their end—"Nevertheless I am continually with thee." Asaph has come out of the sanctuary, and his face is beaming; his tears are effaced. His look is brightened by a divine hope, and it is a song of thanks which comes from his lips. And so shall it be with all them whose trust is in Asaph's God. (*E. Bersier.*) *The Asaph psalms:*—Here in the beginning of the third book of the Psalter we have eleven psalms which are grouped together as being Asaph's psalms. Those psalms have very much of a common character and a common style; they are the production of some oriental Bacon, of some Tacitus of grace. They are obscure if you will, they are oracular, they are sententious, they are occasionally, it must be admitted, sublime. And, first of all, Asaph's was no affected scepticism; Asaph was a real doubter. In a certain sense he may be looked upon as the St. Thomas of the Old Testament, but the doubt of St. Thomas, as we all know, was about a fact and about a dogma which underlay that fact—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead—the doubt of Asaph was about the moral truth of the government of God, for the cause of his doubt about the goodness of God was the inequality of human society, the fatal injustice as it appears to some in the distribution of the good things of this life. It was the base and mean character of many of those who are the most tremendous winners in what seems to be the ignoble lottery sometimes of a successful life. These men did not repeatedly hear the summons of the grim sergeant, Death; they were not repeatedly dragged by chains; "there are no bands in their death;" that oppressive burden that lies on the rest of our suffering humanity—they seem for a time clean outside of it; they are not in trouble as other men. And then there comes the deterioration of character, the encompassing pride, being robed with violence; the fulfilment of the words of that fierce satire, "Their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than their hearts can wish." There are hearts and hearts, and they have all, more than all, that hearts like theirs can wish for. Now, the means of removing Asaph's doubt we find to have been these four. 1. In the first place, there was his own spiritual life. If these haunting doubts about the goodness and the justice of God were real, if there was no good God in the heaven above, then his whole spiritual life was worthless. Well might he say in the thirteenth verse, if it were so, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." 2. And the second means of the removal of this doubt was the spiritual life of the children of God—"If I say I will speak thus, behold I should offend against the generation of Thy children"—he would be doing wrong to them, he would be breaking faith with the saints of God, who had lived this life upon earth and who had passed into the home beyond with this full faith. 3. Then a third means of removing this doubt we find in the closing part of the psalm (vers. 23-28). The spiritual life is also an eternal life, an eternal life in God and with God. Now, this psalm might almost be marked as the great psalm of the Hebrew "Summum Bonum," "The Highest Good." We are told by St. Augustine that the ancient classical philosophy had worked out no less than two hundred and eighty-eight different views or solutions of the "Summum

Bonum," the highest good of man. It was, we have been told on great authority, a sort of scholastic theology of the Pagans, but here is Asaph's view of the "Summum Bonum," here is the view of all the saints of God. How nobly the psalm begins! The prophet had long been encompassed about with the shadows of darkness and doubt. At last he looks upward and he says, "And yet, after all, God is good to Israel, even to those who are of a clean heart"; and as the psalm begins so it ends: "It is good for me to draw nigh unto God." Take this in, take in the eternal life with God in the home above, take in that and no doubt will arise about the distribution of God's good things, and we shall say with the psalmist: "So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before Thee." 4. And then the fourth means was this—it was a revelation in the sanctuary: "When I thought upon this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God." All of us who love the Psalter have critical friends who tell us not to be too mystical in our views, not to think of Christ or Heaven in the psalms; but when they comment upon this verse they begin to turn mystical and say, "Think of some inward sanctuary in your mind, think of some place where you may be alone with God"; to which I only reply, "My literal friend, you must be literal here at all events." The word unquestionably means the outward sanctuary of God, the visible sanctuary built up upon Mount Zion, the place upon which men walked with human feet, and listened with human ears. This was where Asaph learned to find the solution of his difficulty. (*A. Alexander.*) *A perplexing problem, and satisfactory solution:—I. A PERPLEXING PROBLEM.* We live under the government of God, and His government extends to all persons, and all interests in every life. This is a fundamental fact. From what we know of the character of God as good and just, and seeing that He has power to carry out all His decisions, we might expect that in every instance virtue would be rewarded and vice would be punished. But, in observing the circumstances of men, this expectation is falsified. For a time, at least, some of the wicked prosper, and some of the righteous do not prosper, until bad men say, and good men are tempted to say in their depression and doubt, surely the sympathy of the Divine Ruler must be on the side of vice, the reins of government must have fallen out of His hands, and what ought to be an orderly creation is simply a chaos. Why is the life of many a good man embittered by the wickedness of his son, whilst the ungodly father in some instances is surrounded by the best children? Why is the breadwinner taken away when the family seem to need most the strength of his arm, the intelligence of his mind, and the influence of his example? Why is it that some of the beautiful and noble, full of intellectual and Christian promise, are cut off in youth, whilst not a few of the stained and mean are allowed to drag their ignominy through a long, stained and dishonoured life? Why is it that sunshine and sorrow seem in so many cases to follow no rule of effort or desert? Ah! these are some of the dark riddles, the strange perplexities, of which many a life is full. Here we are confronted with a business problem. Now, nothing is more clear than that in worldly affairs the battle is not always to the strong. Whatever we may say in our conceit, worldly success does not always reflect commercial genius. It is surprising indeed with how little brains some business men succeed. They ought to succeed in business, for they exhaust themselves in the one supreme and strenuous effort of money-making, and have no time or taste for anything else. Some of the most shallow and superficial men I have met are men of this mould. Beecher said of such: "They resemble a pyramid, which is broad where it touches the ground, but grows narrower as it reaches the sky." In saying this I do not wish it to be understood that the righteous man is less fit and likely to succeed in temporal affairs than the unrighteous. No, religion helps a man to get on in the world. Other things being equal in the man, that man who is honest, industrious and persevering is more likely to succeed than his neighbour, who may have the same natural ability, but no Christian principle. Undoubtedly religion quickens and expands the whole man, and fertilizes the wide area of life. A man who is formed, reformed, and informed by religion will do far more effectual work than the same man without religion. Another fact must also be borne in mind. Some good men, whom we like to hear sing and pray in the "sanctuary," are not strong and smart at the "receipt of customs." Business is not their forte. They are estimable men in their home and Church relations, but they lack the keenness, suspicion, alertness, push, and enterprise so greatly necessary in these days of keen competition and quick movement. One can easily see why some easy, confiding, unsuspecting men who do not adapt themselves to certain



changed conditions in business do not succeed. The wonder would be if they did. But having said this, we all know worthy men who comply with the conditions of worldly success, and are even then disadvantaged, kept down and back by the greedy, avaricious worldlings, with whom they do not and cannot compete in certain questionable and wicked practices. Some are too delicately fibred, too considerate of justice, generosity, handsome behaviour, too Scripturally conscientious to chord in practice with those who do not scruple at lying advertisements, fictitious capital, adulterated articles. And so they secretly and silently suffer in mind and state. They are beaten and baffled, not simply by the greedy and gigantic monopolies, which appear to be the order of the day, but by the positive wrong-doing of the unscrupulous, who will have gain by means fair or foul. And so it is in my pastoral round, I have seen the good man—a struggling tradesman—"fretting" because of evil-doers, "envious" against the "workers of iniquity."

1. It tries his trust. It is easy to trust God when the "cup runneth over." But it is very hard for a man with an ill-stocked larder, and an ill-furnished wardrobe, to lean his whole weight upon God. 2. It proves his zeal. "Money is a defence." The rich man is protected by earthworks against much that beats pitilessly and cruelly upon the poor man. 3. It tests his humility. To retrench the pleasant superfluities of life, to abridge his sphere of usefulness, to curtail his gifts, to live in a smaller house, to miss his name from the subscription list, to rank among the unfortunates and be quiet—all this goes against the grain of a spirited, mettled man, who, although poor, is still a man of desire and ambition. 4. It taxes patience. Baffled and utterly bewildered, there are sad moments when the tempted Christian says he cannot understand the Divine dealings with him.

II. A SATISFACTORY SOLUTION. For a moment Asaph's conscience wavered, for a time giddiness seized him. How is it he did not fall into the abyss? Asaph believed in God. He could not after all believe in chance. That was the saving thought. Like a ship swinging at anchor, he swayed about by the ebb and the flow of the tide, but he did not drift from his moorings. What was it that wrought the vast change in the psalmist? It was going into the house of God. This is the Divinely-appointed place where God graciously answers those who are perplexed and pained, and who kneel, saying, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." The judicial faculty to weigh things, to take a calm survey of the entire situation, needs stillness and retreat. It is here, in the sanctuary, we see the relationship of this brief and broken life on earth to the wide, boundless kingdom of the eternal. Wait calmly until the clouds roll by. Said Dr. Dixon, "It is in the nature of a cloud to pass away." Possess your soul in patience, and, amid the sweet silences and kindling visions of the sanctuary, you shall change your murmur to a psalm. Revelation reconciles, if it does not explain, by telling us that there is a magnificent future, veiled, but certain, for which present inequalities and seeming injustices are the necessary, the suitable, the merciful preparation. You are now moving in the twilight, but it is the morning twilight, to be followed by the glory of eternity, when all these tangled things shall be smoothed out, and the vexed things of earth made plain in the light of heaven. (*G. Woodcock.*) *The goodness of God to Israel.*—I. THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. 1. Their name. 2. Their character. II. THE CONSIDERATIONS BY WHICH THEIR INTEREST IN THE DIVINE LOVE MAY BE PROVED. 1. By His Son He has saved them from hell. 2. By His Spirit He purifies them from sin. 3. By His providence He guides and guards them on earth. 4. At their death He receives them to heaven. Lessons: 1. If the goodness of God to the true Israel be thus great, how great should be their confidence in Him, and the love with which they love Him in return! 2. Let the sinner so come and share with the Israel of God in the blessing described in the text. (*Evangelical Preacher.*) *Bad men in good circumstances, and a good man in a bad temper.*—I. BAD MEN IN GOOD CIRCUMSTANCES. The bad men are described as the "foolish and the wicked." Folly and wickedness are convertible terms. Sin is folly. Man sinning is man violating all the laws of reason, all the principles of true policy. Such are the bad characters before us, and they are found in good circumstances, they are in great prosperity. The material heavens shine on them, the earth yields up her fruit to gratify their every taste and to supply their every want. Providence pours into their lap those gifts which it denied the Son of God Himself. II. A GOOD MAN IN A BAD TEMPER. Asaph, the supposed writer of this psalm, acknowledges that he was "envious" of these bad men who were living in good circumstances. 1. He was in an envious temper. (1) Now, envy is ever a bad thing. It is ever the attribute of selfishness, and

selfishness is the root of wrong. (2) Nor could envy well appear in a more unreasonable aspect. He was "envious at the wicked." This is truly irrational. Poor godless wretches, what have they of which the good should be envious? 2. He was in a murmuring temper (ver. 13). (1) A right act. Cleansing the heart and washing the hands means the cultivation of personal holiness; and this is certainly a right work for man. It implies—(1) The consciousness of personal defilement. (2) The possession of a cleansing element. (3) The effort of personal application. Moral evil is the defilement; Christianity is the cleansing element; and practical faith is the personal application. 3. A wrong opinion. The writer thought that it was "in vain." Three facts show that this is a great mistake: (1) That moral holiness involves its own reward. (2) That moral holiness is promoted by temporal adversity. (3) That moral holiness will meet with its perfect recompense hereafter. No; this cleansing the heart is no vain work. No engagement is so real and profitable. Every fresh practical idea of God is a rising in the scale of being and of bliss; every conquest over sense, appetite, and sin, is a widening and strengthening of our spiritual sovereignty; every devout sentiment, earnest resolve, and generous sacrifice attunes our hearts to higher music. (*Homilist*.)

Ver. 2. But as for me, my feet were almost gone: my steps had well nigh slipped.—*Spiritual crises*:—The problems of human life and destiny pressed sore upon the mind of the good and thoughtful Asaph, the writer of this psalm. The story of his struggle and victory is here recorded. I. THE PERILOUS CRISIS IN A GOOD MAN'S LIFE. "My feet were," etc. The sword is dropping from his nerveless hand, the shield from his grasp. His strength is ebbing fast. Now—1. Such crises may arise from circumstances over which we have no control: and—2. In the holiest lives. II. THE ANTECEDENT HISTORY OF THIS CRISIS IS DISCLOSED (vers. 3, 4, 13, etc.). 1. Asaph had come to doubt of the Divine Sovereignty. "How doth God know?" If God were Sovereign, how could He let such wickedness be? He forgot the future retribution. 2. And the Divine Fatherhood. 3. And had endeavoured to extricate himself by the aid of human reason alone (ver. 16). 4. This crisis was not an innocent one. Its root was unbelief. III. THE METHOD OF DELIVERANCE IS REVEALED. "Until I went into the sanctuary" (ver. 17). On which note—1. The sanctuary is the best place for trembling faith. Because—(1) There are special promises attached to its services (1 Kings ix. 3; 2 Chron. vii. 15, 16). (2) There we enter the domain of faith. (3) And are brought face to face with eternal realities. The future life comes into view. 2. The sanctuary is not necessarily any material edifice. Probably in this case it was. But every spot hallowed by heavenly intercourse is a sanctuary. Jacob's stony temple; Peter's housetop, etc. And even within the sanctuary it is the attitude of the mind, not the position of the body, which brings relief. IV. A RECIPE OF PREVENTION IS RECORDED. We have—1. A confession of folly (ver. 22). 2. An expression of confidence (ver. 23). 3. An affirmation of trust (ver. 24). 4. A testimony of gratitude (vers. 28, 25). Therefore, learn—(1) A querulous spirit is a source of spiritual danger. (2) The record of past experience is the safeguard of to-day. (3) God is our refuge and strength, and a very present help in trouble. (*Homiletic Quarterly*.) *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 guiding his barque safely into port sometimes knows how through lack of seamanship he nearly made shipwreck. 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. THE OCCASIONS OF OUR PERIL. 1. Our soul is sometimes in imminent danger from unbelief. Many of God's people find their faith severely tried, and hardly endure the trial. We have perhaps been exercised on the Divine existence, or we doubted the Divine Word. Sometimes these doubts have been pressed upon us from the outside by the disciples and literature of scepticism, at other times suggested by our own experience; and our soul fluttered in the fowler's net. 2. At other seasons our special danger has arisen from worldliness. The most spiritual of God's people may perchance remember when their heart was all but absorbed by the secular—the inner man forgotten in the outer, the eternal in the temporary, the love of the Father in the love of the world. Little by

little we yielded to the authority of worldly maxims, to the tyranny of worldly interests, to the indulgences of worldly society and pleasure. Prayer became infrequent and unreal; the house of God was neglected; the Scriptures lost their relish; the family altar was dropping stone by stone into the dust. 3. Again, our peril has been actual immorality. How nearly betrayed by passion, appetite, covetousness, pride: the partition thin between us and the fallen. 11. THE LESSONS OF OUR DELIVERANCE. 1. Thankfulness. Great is our debt of gratitude to Him who renders our venial errors innocuous, who sustains us as we unwittingly step on slippery place or giddy brink; who delivers us from our inexperience, short-sightedness and frailty, not permitting our infirmity to work its natural issue of woe. 2. Humiliation. When we remember the fulness of light, the strength of motive, the richness of grace against which we sinned and brought ourselves into jeopardy, we may justly be humbled. 3. Caution. Narrow escapes gender presumption in foolish men, but the wise are admonished. 4. Sympathy. Having so narrowly escaped condemnation, we must think kindly and hopefully of those who went a little further, only a little further, and fell; having been so nearly run over, we must think tenderly of those who are carried to the hospital. 5. Consecration to God. Where a Christian is ever stumbling and slipping there is a real weakness of character, a deep defect of mind or heart or will, a central lack of balance and force. What such of us need is to come to the psalmist's conclusion—complete, final devotion to God. Let us thus yield ourselves to God, and these humiliating, dangerous episodes we shall know no more. Let us dwell in the sanctuary. Every visit to the throne purges our vision, refreshes our soul, renews our strength. In communion with God we find the secret grounds of God's ways, and become able to await calmly and hopefully the solution of all painful problems. Worship, too, fills the soul with spiritual images and forces, preserving from the insidious encroachments of worldliness. And, faithful to our priestly privilege and purity, we shrink from contact with the unclean thing. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Faith—its peril and rescue.*—I. WHEN WAS THE FAITH OF THE PSALMIST ENDANGERED? 1. When he "saw the prosperity of the wicked." 2. When he observed the apparent desertion of the righteous. The adversity of the saints was more mysterious than the prosperity of the wicked. II. WHY WAS THE FAITH OF ASAPH IMPERILLED? Faith is designed for times of darkness, distress, etc. Job declared, "Though He slay me, yet," etc. 1. The psalmist has a wrong spirit. "I was envious," etc. Our opinions are affected by our moods. Envy impaired the judgment and blurred the spiritual vision of Asaph. 2. The psalmist had narrow views. We are apt to express our opinions as if we understood all events and could compass all time. III. THE RESCUE OF FAITH. 1. Through holy influences. "I went into the sanctuary"—the place nearest God. 2. Through clearer views, "Then understood I their end." As we trace, on the other hand, the closing chapters in the lives of Joseph, Daniel and others, apparent discrepancies fade away. 3. Faith becomes more vigorous than before. He not only was satisfied but jubilant: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee," etc. Lessons: 1. Guard against judging by appearances, or from imperfect data. 2. Trust where it is difficult to trace infinite love. 3. Faith rests, questionings are silenced, when the soul is nearer to God. (*John Love.*)

Ver. 3. **I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.**  
 —A popular fallacy exposed:—The position I wish to lay down is this:—THAT THE CONDITION OF THE GODLY POOR EVEN IN THIS WORLD, IS FAR SUPERIOR TO THAT OF THE UNGODLY RICH. Public sentiment, I am aware, is against this doctrine; hence the universal struggle to be rich. Hence, too, the popular disregard of goodness as goodness, and the almost contempt for it if found in connection with poverty. Hence the current cant in some districts of the religious world that God's "dear people" have the worst portion in this life; that as a rule their situation here is not comparable to that of those who forget God. I. THE WEALTH OF THE ONE IS IN HIS HAND; THAT OF THE OTHER IN HIS HEART. 1. The one is of contingent value; the other is of absolute worth. 2. The one is essentially virtuous; the other is not. 3. The one is essentially a blessing; the other often a bane. 4. The one is alienable; the other is not. II. THE GREATNESS OF THE ONE IS IN HIS CIRCUMSTANCES; THAT OF THE OTHER IN HIS SOUL. 1. The one is respected for what he has; the other for what he is. 2. The respect rendered to the one is in proportion to the low state of moral education among the people; not so with the other. III. THE HAPPINESS OF THE ONE IS FROM WITHOUT; THAT OF THE OTHER IS FROM

WITHIN. 1. The happiness that springs from without is sensational; the other spiritual. 2. The happiness that springs from without is selfish; the other generous. 3. The happiness that springs from without decreases; the other is ever hightoning. (*Homilist.*) *Our wealth is proportionate to our content:*—Our incomes should be like our shoes; if too small they will gall and pinch us, but if too large they will cause us to stumble and trip. Wealth, after all, is a relative thing, since he that has little and wants less is richer than he that has much and wants more. True contentment depends not upon what we have, but upon what we would have. A tub was large enough for Diogenes, but a world was too little for Alexander. (*The Quiver.*)

Vor. 4. **For there are no bands in their death.**—*No bands in the death of the wicked:*—I. THEIR MINDS ARE OCCUPIED EXCLUSIVELY WITH THE THINGS OF A PRESENT WORLD (Phil. iii. 19). 1. Habits. 2. Tastes. 3. Wants. II. THE CONSCIENCE AND HEART, THEN, EXEMPLIFY THE EFFECT OF LONG-CONTINUED RESISTANCE TO THE GOSPEL. 1. The natural effect. 2. The judicial effect. 3. This produced by the abuse of abundant mercy. III. THE MORAL CHARACTER OF GOD IS GROSSLY MISAPPREHENDED. 1. It is with God they have to do. 2. Did they apprehend His character, infinitely holy and just. 3. They have an idol in His place. IV. THE NATURE OF THE LAW BY WHICH THEY ARE TO BE TRIED AND JUDGED IS NOT UNDERSTOOD. V. THERE IS GENERALLY AN EXTREME IGNORANCE AS TO THE NATURE OF THE SALVATION WHICH IS OFFERED IN THE GOSPEL. (*J. Stewart.*) *Bands in death:*—I. Let us see what are SOME OF THE BANDS OF DEATH, the sufferings of the Christian at his departure, that we may realize more fully this seeming freedom and tranquillity of the wicked. Need we say that death, when seriously looked at, is always terrible? Consider that religion teaches men to be far more jealous of themselves, and to think far more deeply and correctly of judgment and of eternity than others do. At death the books are made up, our fate sealed irrevocably. There is also the sense of the holiness of God, before whom he must so soon appear, with the eager desire that he had served Him in his day and generation with all tenderness of conscience, and a consequently painful sense of shortcomings and offences. II. THE FREEDOM OF THE WICKED. 1. The quietness and peacefulness of the death-bed of a wicked man, without the agony of remorse, without bitter self-chiding and awful presentiments of judgment and eternity, may tell the same tale that the violence, the pride, the cruelty, the rashness, the unrestrained licentiousness of his life did. 2. The placid death-bed of the wicked, without a groan, or pain, or fetter, without regrets or murmurs, is sometimes welcomed by him in his stolidity and ignorance as a happy escape from some disappointment or trouble. 3. The wicked shall be freed from bands in their death, if, by the temptations of Satan, they have been led to presume on that mercy from God which they have never sought. 4. They have no bands in their death, because of its utter suddenness and unexpectedness. This busy present, these manifold wants, and cravings, and indulgences, these strong drinks that deaden the soul, and their over-mastering passions of a life of brief rule over others, of vengeance, of rivalry, of tyranny, of temporary renown and influence—oh, how they succeed in banishing the thought of death while yet the vigour of life is full in veins and body! (*G. B. Blake, M.A.*)

Vers. 5, 6. **They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men.**—*The mercy of a changeful life:*—In the first verse a fact is stated; in the second verse an inference is drawn; and our business will lie with the showing you that the inference is just. The stated fact is, that the wicked have less of trouble than other men—and this fact we shall assume without any endeavour to prove; the inference which the psalmist drew was, that on this account, on account of their comparative exemption from tribulation and the changes and chances of life, the wicked remain the wicked—"compassed with pride as a chain, and covered with violence as a garment." And here therefore is the principle, which we shall endeavour to exhibit and establish;—namely, that continuance in wickedness is a natural consequence of exemption from trouble. You have the same principle announced in other portions of Scripture; so that we shall not be building on a solitary passage, in laying before you an important topic (Jer. xlviii. 11; Ps. lv. 1). We are well aware, that so natural is the desire for prosperity, and the aversion from the trials and changes of life, that we may expect to have prejudices and inclinations arrayed against us, as we

attempt to make good the position derivable from our text; but nevertheless, the cases we shall have to describe are so common, and the reasons we shall have to advance so simple, that we may calculate on obtaining the assent of the understanding, if not on overcoming the repugnance of the heart. I. And we shall perhaps best compass our design by endeavouring to show you, in the first place, THE TENDENCIES OF A STATE IN WHICH THERE ARE NO ADVERSE CHANGES. We may not hesitate to affirm of prosperity that it is far harder to bear than adversity. We may apply to it the remarkable words of Solomon in reference to praise: "As the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold, so is a man to his praise." As though he had said, that praise as much tries a man, and detects what is in him, as the fire of the furnace the metals submitted to its alchemy. You will occasionally meet with cases in which there appear to have been few or none of the thwartings of what is called Fortune; whatsoever has been undertaken has succeeded, and the individuals have worn all the aspect of being the favourites of some overruling power, with whom it rested to dispense the good and the evil of life. And where there has not been from the first a course of unbroken prosperity, there will often set in a sudden tide of success, and the man is borne along year after year on the waters of this tide, with no storms to retard him, and no rocks to endanger. This is far enough from uncommon, especially in a commercial community. But with such men attachment to earthly things grows with their acquirement; and if not impossible it is a thing of extraordinary rareness and difficulty to have the affections fixed on things above whilst the hands are uninterruptedly busied with sweeping together perishable riches. The man who is never made uneasy upon earth, is naturally almost sure to take it as his home, and to settle himself down as though it were never to be left. Thus the reasons are plain and convincing, not to be easily overlooked nor controverted, which go to the proving of prosperity, that it has a tendency to keep men at a distance from God. Undoubtedly the grace of God, mighty at overcoming every obstacle to conversion and every impediment to piety, may enable a man, under circumstances the least favourable to religious improvement, to seek and to know "the things which belong to his peace"; but we now speak only of the natural and direct tendencies of prosperity, allowing that they may indeed be counteracted, though not perhaps without some more special assistances, than we are ordinarily warranted in expecting from above. II. Now, in thus showing the dangerous tendencies of an unbroken prosperity, we have in a measure also shown you THE BENEFICIAL RESULTS OF CHANGE AND CALAMITY; but the advantage of "being in trouble as other men," of "being plagued like other men," is too important a truth to be dismissed as a mere inference from what we have already established. We wish, therefore, now, to give ourselves to the separate consideration of this second truth: the truth, that it is the direct tendency of adverse changes in our circumstances to make us more attentive to religious duties, and more earnest in seeking those things which God promises to His people. We remark, in the first place, that change admonishes us of the transitory nature of terrestrial good. Exactly in proportion as calamity is deferred, confidence is strengthened; and if evil be slow in coming, men easily persuade themselves that it will never come. If for many years there have been no eruption of the volcano, from whose outbreak the peasantry had fled with every demonstration of terror, cottages will again be built around the treacherous mountain, and the smiling gardens clustered on its side; but if the cottages were swept away year after year by fresh descents of the fiery flood, we may be sure that the peasants, however attached to the place, would be finally wrought up to the abandoning it altogether, and seeking a home in some more secure, if less lovely place. And it may be, that with some of you the chain still binds, and the garment is still worn, because "they are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other folk." Then may the Almighty God send them trouble! Come anything rather than indifference, and apathy, and carnal security; anything, rather than that settling down of the soul in earthly comforts and entanglements, in which there is no disturbance, till from it there is no escape. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Ver. 10. Therefore His people return hither, and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.—*The full cup for Christ and His people:*—It is great comfort to meet amid the many references to the ungodly the mention of the people of God. But in the text he tells the sad truth that, owing to what they saw of the prosperity of the ungodly, many of "His people"—God's people—return hither, that

in, to the same unhappy place of doubt and unbelief where his own feet had well nigh slipped. It is disreputable ground for a Christian, but many of them have been found there. Observe, then, the following three things, which are set forth in my text: first, the holy and honourable household specified as "His people"; second, their usual experience—"a cup, a full cup, waters of a full cup wrung out to them." And then, in the third place, we will glance at the pattern and contrast all of this in the cup of Christ. (*Joseph Irons.*)

Vers. 12, 18. **Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.**—*Paganized Christianity*:—The trouble with us is that in our everyday life we do not make our faith vital enough. We bring the ways of the world into the Church, instead of taking the ways of the Church into the world. We find doubt, and temptation, and difficulty, and sin at the very threshold of our being, and we try to drive these foes out of our nature by the weapons which we find lying scattered around us in our mixed social life, instead of rising to the height of our privilege and our calling as followers of Christ and children of our Father in heaven. I. The common weapon of our moral life is *DUTY*—the sense of our moral obligation to a principle of right which is ruling us. It is a grand principle; it brings forth great moral results, but it is not the highest motive in the armoury of character. It is like the sure and faithful study of the primary school, which acts as a strong basis for the after education to rest upon. But the primary school can never be the university, and the mere sense of duty can never bring out of your nature the highest results of which you are capable. A sense of duty is fine in a son and in a father, in a wife and in a husband; but there are higher motives in human nature than this primary motive of duty, and these higher motives bring about the higher results. A sense of duty is a fine element in an artist, in a poet, in a musician; but you know perfectly well that any genius, any nature with a soul and with a great executive capacity, will scorn this rudimentary germ of motive power. It is a primary motive; it is an elementary principle. It is like the ruled copy book to the child who is trying to write; it is like the transparent slate to the child who is learning to draw. You make use of it; you are trained and developed by it, and then you pass it by; it has done its formative work in the matter of your education. II. The other motive is *FAITH*—grasp upon God—the privilege of service—the faculty of spiritual apprehension. We do our duty to believe in God: we believe in God, and as a result of this we do our duty. After all that we may say about it in the brisk and brilliant intellection of our younger days, a living God is better than an uncertain conscience; privilege is always a higher motive than duty, and the grasp of your nature upon divine things through the faculty of spiritual apprehension will be a surer and more intuitive guide than your hastily gathered deductions from the decalogue. Over our fears, over our failures, over our shortcomings and wrongdoings, the borrowed light of duty will at times be powerless to force its way. But the cry of the rejoicing prophet of old, as with a new belief in the God of their fathers the captives came back from the land of their exiles, will again and again be realized with us as we stand face to face with the hard problem put before us—"Who art thou, O great mountain?" etc. If you live for earth, for gain, for pleasure, or for self, you may gain your end, but you will lose your very soul. But if God is a reality, if the spiritual life has any meaning to you, if beneath all the rubbish of dogma and cant in religion, you get your feet once upon that rock which is the Rock of Ages—God above us—God in us—God in Christ—God in human life—God in immortality—then that instinct of the awakened soul, that hunger of the spiritual nature for the Being who created it, will generate its own motive power—a power fourfold greater than the mere sense of duty—and the problems of life which before had been too hard for you will be made easy when, like this far-off, honest doubter of our psalm to-day, you see the meaning of life as by a flash, when you stand in the presence, not of duty merely, but in the presence of God! (*W. W. Newton.*) *The prosperity of the wicked no argument against God's providence*:—I. **THE PROSPERITY OF THE UNGODLY, WHICH THE GOOD MAN IS GRIEVED AT SEEING, IS A MERE ILLUSION OF FANCY**, when no such thing as happiness doth really attend them. The emptiness of worldly good, and its utter insufficiency to answer the endless cravings of our several desires, betray themselves in nothing more, than in that general imagination which seems to haunt all orders of men amongst us, that if they had somewhat which they have not, somewhat which they see others have, and fancy themselves to want,

all would be well and easy with them; when yet those others are not more easy than themselves, but are teased with the same incurable imagination, the same dissatisfaction for want of somewhat which they have not, or for some unpleasant circumstance in what they have, which spoils their relish of all the entertainment they can find in life. II. DIVERS CONSIDERATIONS, WHICH MAY CLEAR THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD FROM ALL REPROACH AND MISCONSTRUCTION IN IT. 1. It is fit and reasonable that some room should be left for the operations of faith, for the trials of virtue, and for liberty of action; all which ends would be defeated if the punishment of sin did in every instance immediately attend it. 2. Without such an interposal from the hand of Providence, as, for the reasons just given, would be improper and inconvenient, the sinner must and will have his chances in the scramble of life, must and will secure to himself more than a common share in the felicities of fortune. 3. Our present state is designed not so much for retribution as for trial; and consequently what best answers to the latter purpose is the fittest portion for us. Now, the ends of trial may be consulted as effectually in a station of prosperity as in a post of adversity; since each hath its proper temptations cleaving to it, which, upon proof, may exemplify the firmness or weakness of our several virtues. And in all reason and decency it ought to be presumed that the great Searcher of hearts is the fittest judge which of the two conditions is most likely to approve them. 4. It follows, as a certain consequence from the promiscuous distribution of adversity and prosperity in this present life, that there must and will be a life beyond it, in which the righteousness of our holy Judge will perfectly clear up the honour of His government, and signalize His never-failing regard to His laws. (N. Marshall, D.D.)

Ver. 13. **Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.**—*Trust and trouble.*—The innocent suffer with the guilty, often suffer for them, that so the guilty, spared, may be led by God's goodness to repentance; to be helpful in such a ministry is an abundant recompense for all its pain. This the Gospel teaches us; it tells us that we have not "cleansed our hearts in vain, and washed our hands in innocency"; for that the fellowship of the righteous Saviour is the fellowship of the Man of Sorrows. But it brings us face to face with deeper mysteries than those which it solves. If we ask the reason of this—why God has so constituted the world as that all this is true; if we are not content with seeing how God acts, but want to know the reason, then there is no answer for us. We can do nothing but wait and trust. God is doing for us in the Gospel what He did for Asaph in the sanctuary; He is bringing us to trust in Him. He is confirming our faith, enlarging our conceptions of His righteousness, calling us to a broader view of His counsel, deepening our confidence that He is good. There is no mystery in life so dark but we can bear it, if only we are persuaded that God is pursuing His purpose in it. Let us consider, then—I. How FORGETFULNESS OF GOD LEADS US TO CHAFE UNDER THE PAINFUL DISPENSATIONS OF HUMAN LIFE (ver. 3). No doubt Asaph was perfectly familiar with the pious sayings in which the experience of the godly is gathered up and afterwards repeated by others. Doubtless he could have talked as sagely as we about the prosperity of the wicked being transient, of the Lord's loving whom He chastens, and scourging every son whom He receives. But the feebleness of his hold upon these truths is seen in that he cannot bear their actual sight. When he "sees" the prosperity of the foolish; when he marks their pride and self-complacency, that seem to laugh his lowly trust in God to scorn; then he finds that his maxims do not serve him much, he gives way to envy of them. He needs more than maxims, however sage. It is the actual stress of life, contact with all its hard and trying realities, that tests our faith. We can talk well about God's favour being our chief joy. But can we bear to "see" the prosperity of the wicked while we ourselves are in adversity? That is the real test and strain. Notice, too, how envy grows into self-righteousness. "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain." Such words suggest that the man is pretty well satisfied with himself, because he is free from blame. And verses 10–14 show deep distrust in God, as well as flippant self-satisfaction. It suggests, "We good men ought not to be treated thus, we are not being dealt with righteously." They even venture to ask, "Is there knowledge in the Most High?" Does God Almighty know what He is doing? This is what is meant. Asaph is startled when he sees where the speculation he has begun is leading him. Hence he says, "If I say, I will speak thus, behold I should offend against," etc. II. NOTICE SOME CONSIDERATIONS WHICH MAY HELP US TO TRUST

THAT GOD IS GOOD IN ORDAINING FOR US THE PAINFUL DISPENSATIONS OF HUMAN LIFE. Perhaps we could not have borne prosperity. When Asaph went into the sanctuary of God and saw the end of the wicked, he learned that they had been "set in slippery places," that the "pride" which "compassed them about as a chain," that their "having more than heart could wish," had but sealed them up against the day of "desolation," and the "terrors" that should "utterly consume" them. Because they were prosperous, they were self-confident, and their self-confidence was their destruction. And then there opens upon him an awful vision of what prosperity might have done for him. With the memory of his sinful murmuring upon him, he feared that he might have grown sinfully proud. The heart which tribulation had grieved would have been hardened by prosperity. So "foolish" was he, and "ignorant" in his adversity, "as a beast before God"; what would he have been if he had known no trouble? Then think, how hopeless would be the restoration of the wicked, which the Gospel bids us hope for, and not for their destruction, if all the sufferings of life were apportioned to them, and the righteous were never troubled. They would be consciously and irrevocably doomed, and they would sink into worse despair. It is to save them from this and that God does them good: He would "spare" them, that so "His goodness may lead them to repentance"; He would save them from the hopeless agony of seeing themselves already condemned. It is the grace of God that restores the ungodly, not His punishments. And then let us look on Christ—what a life was His! Trouble, anguish, and at the end the Cross. And yet He was God's well-beloved Son. Would we not be with Him? God has better things for His children than prosperity. (*A. Mackennal, D.D.*) *A right act but a wrong opinion*:—I. HERE IS A RIGHT ACT. Cleansing the heart and washing the hands mean the cultivation of personal holiness; and this is certainly a right work for man. It implies three things:—1. The consciousness of personal defilement. 2. The possession of a cleansing element. 3. The effort of personal application. Moral evil is the defilement—Christianity is the cleansing element—and practical faith is the personal application. II. HERE IS A WRONG OPINION. The writer thought that it was "in vain." Three facts show that this is a great mistake:—1. That moral holiness involves its own reward. 2. That moral holiness is promoted by temporal adversity. 3. That moral holiness will meet with its perfect recompense hereafter. No; this cleansing the heart is no vain work. No engagement is so real and profitable. Every fresh practical idea of God is a rising in the scale of being and of bliss; every conquest over sense, appetite, and sin, is a widening and strengthening of our spiritual sovereignty; every devout sentiment, earnest resolve, and generous sacrifice attunes our natures to higher music. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 15-28. **IF I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of Thy children.**—*Searching and finding relief in the right direction*:—I. **SEARCHING** for relief in the right direction (vers. 16, 17). He went where the mind of God was to be met with, where he obtained such ideas from the great Fountain of wisdom as calmed his agitation and solved his difficulties. Whenever God speaks to us, whether in providential events, or in the works of nature, or in sacred writings, or in the dictates of our own consciences, it must be in some place, and that place is a sanctuary. To go into this sanctuary, is simply to put our minds in a reverent, praying, waiting attitude. II. **FINDING** relief in the right direction. 1. New light came (ver. 17). The condition of the wicked. (1) Their position is dangerous. "Thou didst set them in slippery places." (2) Their danger is awful. "Thou castedst them down into destruction." Into destruction of what? Of all their property, worldly grandeur, health, friends, all that renders existence tolerable. This comes and breaks the sleep of sin. "As a dream when one awaketh." (3) His own temper in relation to their prosperity (ver. 21). 2. New inspiration came. New confidence in God. (1) New confidence in His upholding power (ver. 23). (2) New confidence in His future guidance (ver. 24). Man wants a guide through this life. God is the only safe Guide. Following His guidance, we shall be led on to glory. (3) A supreme delight in God (ver. 25). He felt that without God the universe to him was nothing; that with God, whatever else was absent, he had all his delight. "God is the strength of my heart." (4) Here is a fact in the history of all men. The fact is decay. The law of decay is universal and inexorable. (5) Here is a privilege in the experience of some men. God is the soul's power and portion, all-satisfying, inexhaustible, ever-



enduring "portion." (6) A higher consciousness of nearness to God (vols. 27, 28). (*Homilist.*) *The problem of suffering*.—A great preacher has reminded us of a truism that we are all in danger of forgetting, namely, how very old our difficulties are, that there is really very little of novelty about them. We are apt to think that they are new, that no one has ever faced the problems with which we are confronted; that human life at no period of its history has been crowded with problems and perplexities as it is crowded for us to-day. But all the time there is really very little of novelty about them. When the cry goes up, "It is too hard for me," what can religion say? "Until I went into the sanctuary of God"—that is what religion says. 1. To believe in God is to believe in His purpose; it is to be absolutely certain that there is a golden cord somewhere running through the history of the world, running through the story of my own personal life, often hidden, sometimes emerging, but continually there, the eternal purpose of God. If I am sure there is a purpose, though I have not found it yet, I can afford to wait if there is anything to be waited for. I can understand how the very waiting, the very imperfection of my knowledge, the very impossibility of explaining things to me as yet, may be invaluable to me, develop powers in me that will best enable me to see the light when it comes. 2. The man who prays, apart altogether from the answer to his prayer, prays humbly, feelingly, perhaps with moral consciousness, in the very act of prayer is calming his spirit, accumulating strength, exercising his highest powers in the highest way. "As He prayed He was transfigured." And the man who worships, without much thought of edification perhaps, in the very act of worship is realizing his dependence on his God, educating his whole nature. 3. The sense of immortality was borne in on him in the sanctuary of God. "Man doth not live by bread alone." The whole place rang with echoes of that cry. Those lives that were in his thought, those inequalities that troubled him, that suffering that was so undeserved, that prosperity that was so basely won—how small they all look beside that endless life of which the sanctuary spoke to him. God has a larger scheme than he has ever dreamt of, a vaster vision of prosperity, a loftier standard of happiness—"then understood I the end of these men." The idea of consecration. The sanctuary of God! It speaks of a separate place, a hallowed house of men and things consecrated to the service of God. Do you remember that splendid picture, the vision of St. John, the crowned ones of the earth bringing their crowns and flinging them down before the throne? What were those crowns? Surely the completions, the highest developments of the power and the talent with which God had endowed them. That is the picture of the future. But, tell me, may it not be the picture of to-day? Surely, it makes the grandeur of one's work when you dedicate your work. Those crowned ones were never so crowned as when they cast their crowns before the throne. It makes the value of their work. Everything is valuable, but for what, for whom is that work done? It lights up the whole career, it makes failure more bearable, success more sweet. It is all for God, it is brought into His sanctuary; we cast our crowns before Him. (*Bp. F. E. Ridgeway.*) *Doubt*.—The most intelligent among believers themselves have, as a rule, known painfully what doubt is, and have even built up their newer and better faith upon the ruins of the old. If there were no room for doubt, there would be no room for faith. Doubt is simply the power to see the negative side of things of which faith is the power to see the positive side. No believer who knows what he is talking about claims that everything is clear. What believers do claim, in all the great questions between faith and unbelief, is that the reasons for unbelief are outweighed by the reasons for faith, and that if faith has its difficulties, unbelief has more. And they claim this also, that while allowing to the full the force of the agnostic question, "Who hath known the mind of the Lord?" all that we practically need to know of God for the imperious necessities of life and duty and redemption has been adequately revealed in Jesus Christ. And as we admit that there is room for doubt, let us further admit that the ministry of doubt has often played a beneficent part in the progress of men's knowledge of truth and their advance from a lower to a higher faith. God as often speaks to us through the chill silences of doubt as when the whole air around us is musical with the voices of faith. Hence the saying that the doubters of "one generation are the believers of the next." The great movements of thought in science, in philosophy, in religion, have invariably begun in scepticism as to the finality of the movements which went before them. True, as Carlyle says, scepticism is not an end, but a beginning. But you must have the beginning before you can have the end. Let us distinctly understand, however, that the

doubt which deserves sympathy, and which God often uses as a stepping-stone by which a man may pass to a nobler faith, is doubt that rests on intellectual grounds, not on moral, or, rather, immoral grounds. That was the kind of doubt which the psalmist had. He assures us he had cleansed his heart, and washed his hands in innocency. His doubts were those of a good man, who was earnestly trying to live a pure and upright life. Now, supposing that a man is really and truly striving to be a good man, pure in thought, devout in heart, upright in life, spiritual in his views of things, and yet is troubled with grave and bewildering doubts, what is he to do? Several things; but the one thing which I have both time and desire to emphasize now, is this—he should keep his doubts to himself. That was what the psalmist did. He felt that, if he had not done so, if he had gone about instilling them into other minds, and suggesting to them difficulties they probably did not feel, he would have been acting treacherously towards God's children and his own brethren. Treacherously! No, more than that—devilishly! It is the serpent in Genesis who insinuates doubt. It is the Mephistopheles in *Faust* who is the spirit that denies. "Don't tell me your doubts," said Goethe wisely, "tell me your certainties; I've doubts enough of my own." Be sure of this—that the most serious moral injury you can do to your brother-man is in any way to undermine his religious faith, unless you have a higher one to offer him in place of it, or to weaken his sense of the sacred imperiousness of the moral law. It involves, first of all, the man's loss of what even sceptics themselves admit to be, and what believers know from experience to be, the noblest and fullest source of the moral strength we all need for successful resistance of the assaults of temptation and of sin. What is the meaning of human brotherhood, if there be no Divine Father, if there be no Christ in whom humanity is summed up and perfected, crowned and glorified? Then, secondly, loss of faith involves, as a rule, loss of courage to do and bear in this human life of ours. It is a common saying, but it is very true, that ages of faith are strong and heroic ages, and ages of scepticism ages of weakness and decay. And what is true of ages is true also of individuals. Look abroad upon the world to-day, and everywhere you will find that it is believers who are foremost in the ranks of those who are toiling self-denyingly for the real progress of our race. And the reason of this is clear. You know how the companies that supply us here in London with water build lofty towers at their pumping-stations. Why? Because it is a law of nature that water will not rise above its own level. And so, if the cisterns at the top of our houses are to be supplied with water, a column of the fluid must be forced at the pumping-stations to a height higher than that of the highest houses where the water is to come. In the same way, if we are to be inspired to holy and loving activity for the good of others, we must draw our inspiration from a source higher than ourselves. Life for man must flow from life in God. We can give to others only as we receive from Him. And though I don't by any means deny that there are to-day many men and women who are doing noble service in the field of philanthropy without any profession of religious faith, this is rather in spite of their lack of faith than because of it. What they would gain in joy, in inspiration, in a sense of support in their work, if they had this faith, may be proved from the experience of those who, with labour for man, join belief in Christ and God. So much for the influence of faith as regards doing. And as for its influence as regards bearing—bearing pain and loss, grief and trial—can you find anywhere such a source of resignation and comfort and hope as in the conviction of God's changeless love and unerring wisdom, in the feeling of the tender and sustaining sympathy of the Divine Man of Sorrows? Our very tears glisten in the sunlight of God's smile. The Cross of Jesus has turned the bitter waters of suffering into a fountain of health and life. (*Henry Varley.*)

Vers. 16, 17. **When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.**—*The rectifying influence of the sanctuary*:—It is not perfectly clear what is here meant by "the sanctuary of God"; literally it means "the holies of God." A few would understand it in the first sense as designating "the righteous plans of God's government," or "the secret grounds of his dealings with men"; while others would take it, in the second sense, as denoting "the eternity where God dwells as in a holy place." But to me it seems self-evident that by "going into the sanctuary of God," in this seventeenth verse, the primary reference of the term must be to the temple, which was the earthly residence of God and the place where He com-

muned with His people. Asaph had been greatly disturbed by the anomalies which were continually occurring in the world around him. But by the revelation made in the sanctuary, through sacrifice and symbol, he was enabled so to grasp anew the truth that God is righteous, and so to appropriate the God of the mercy-sent as his own God as to find there the compensation for all his privations and the solvent for all his perplexities. But under the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ is the true antitype of the temple, and therefore, when by faith we enter into Him, we have the true corrective influence, by which we are able to rectify the false judgments of the world, and to preserve our faith amid all the doubts and difficulties that the course of things suggests. See this in—I. CHRIST'S ESTIMATE OF WEALTH. Men think it the supreme good. But Christ bids us care only to be rich toward God. II. OF GREATNESS. He makes it to consist in service. III. SUCCESS. In a Christian's daily business he is thrown continually among those who consider that the laws of his Lord are fanatical, or impracticable, and who tell him that if he is determined to act upon them, he may as well make up his mind to be defeated in the race of competition. More than that, his observation convinces him that as things now are their assertion is largely true; and so, as the days go on, he is in danger of being lowered to their level. But the Sabbath comes, and he enters into the sanctuary, where he is confronted with God, and then and thereby all the webs of sophistry that his fellow-men have spun are swept away as easily as one brushes from his path the gossamer of the morning. During the week the consciences even of the best among us have been more or less affected by things immediately around us, so that we are in danger of making serious mistakes in our life voyage. But here Christ comes to us and gives us our "true bearings," as they are in the standard of His Word, undisturbed by any earthly or metallic influences, and so the needful rectifications may be made by us and we may start out afresh. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The faculty of judgment:*—Let us think of the presence of God as the school of a right judgment, of communion with God as the means of growth in that high grace whereby frail, erring men may come to view with some justice of insight the movements and controversies, the hopes and fears, the promises and opportunities and dangers of the age in which they have to play their part. I. HOW RARE A THING IS ANY HIGH DEGREE OF THE FACULTY OF JUDGMENT. It may be, perhaps, more common than the very finest forms of literary or artistic excellence; but it is surely rarer than such a measure of genius as suffices to secure a recognized place among the poets or painters of a generation. There are more men whose works one can praise than there are whose judgment one can trust. There are many, indeed, whose decision on any point within the sphere of their especial business or study we, from outside that sphere, may gratefully accept as not likely to be bettered for some while. And even in regard to the conduct of life, in the sphere of judgment, there are many whose counsel it would be impossible to set aside without uneasiness or distress, many whom we must feel to be incomparably wiser judges than ourselves, many who will always enable us to see, more justly than by ourselves we could see, some aspect of a case. But there are very, very few from whom we get that higher, deeper, broader help which it is the prerogative of true excellence in judgment to bestow; help to discern, through the haste and insistence of the present, what is its real meaning and its just demand; help to give due weight to what is reasonable, however unreasonably it may be stated or defended; help to reverence alike the sacredness of a great cause and the sacredness of each individual life, to adjust the claims of general rules and special equity; help to carry with one conscientiously, on the journey towards decision, all the various thoughts that ought to tell upon the issue; help to keep consistency from hardening to obstinacy, and common sense from sinking into time-serving; help to think out one's duty as in a still, pure air, sensitive to all true signs and voices of this world, and yet unshaken by its storms. Yes, it is rare indeed, such help, and one's whole heart goes up to God in thanks and praise for those with whom one finds it; and it is as they are taken from one that something like the chill of autumn falls on life, and the real severity, the trial and strain of it, is felt, in deepening loneliness and silent fears. II. It hardly can seem strange that excellence in judgment is thus rare if we go on to think of THE MANIFOLD DISCIPLINE THAT IT NEEDS. 1. Even physical conditions tend at least to tell on it, and most of us may have to own that there are days on which we know that we had better distrust the view we take of things. It is good counsel that a man should, if he has the chance, reconsider after his holiday any important decision that he

was inclined to make just before it; that he should appeal from his tired to his refreshed self; and men need to deal strictly with the body and to bring it into subjection, not only lest its appetites grow riotous, but also lest it trouble with moods and miseries of its own the exercise of judgment. 2. There must also be the insight and resourcefulness of learning; that power to recognize and weigh and measure and forecast, which comes of long watching how things move; the power that grows by constant thoughtfulness, in study or in life; the distinctive ability of those who, in Hooker's phrase, are "diligent observers of circumstances, the loose regard whereof is the nurse of vulgar folly." It is a high prerogative of the real student of history, that power to summon from the past the very scenes and issues, achievements and disasters, unverified alarms and swift reversals, which may point to the real import of the present and correct its misplaced emphasis. 3. And then, beyond all physical and intellectual conditions, are the moral qualities and habits, without which even able men blunder so strangely. For round the seat of judgment there are specious counsellors, who read our perverse desires before we own them to ourselves, who know exactly the rate of swerving from justice which will suit and gratify without shocking us, whose suggestions really seem reasonable enough, till, as it were, the search-light of an honest contrite heart is turned full upon them. No knowledge of the world will guard right judgment in a man who lets ill-temper have its way with him; no warnings from history or experience will pierce the smoky fog of wilful sullenness; no fineness of discernment will be proof against the steady pressure or the sudden onsets of ambition. And what shall we say of vanity as an assessor in the work of judgment? Surely, brethren, many of us might describe, with the help of humiliating recollections about our own folly, some stages of defective sight which are like milder forms of that blindness, that loss of all sense of humour and fitness and proportion, which belongs to a well-settled satisfaction with oneself. 4. But there is another disclosure that he needs, if in the multitude of sorrows, in the cloudy and dark day, in the terror by night, he is still to hold the course to which God calls him. Only by a light that is not of this world can we surely see our way about this world; only in the strength of thoughts that are not as our thoughts can we "think and do always such things as be rightful." In God's light do we see light; and for all our discipline and care we shall lose our way if we try to find or keep it in forgetfulness of Him and of His self-revealing. Sooner or later it will come home to us, by His mercy, that we must strive to bring our souls into His presence and to hold them there, if we would hope to "see life steadily and see it whole." We too may set our minds, as the psalmist set his, to think out and understand the hard things that the experience of life presents to us; we may perhaps fancy that we do understand them, and we may even deal with them successfully for a while; but presently we too shall find that they are proving too hard for us, until we go into the sanctuary of God. For it is there, in the most adequate consciousness of His presence that, in the power of the Holy Ghost, our weak and sinful souls can reach; it is there that the faculty of judgment gradually gains its freedom, its illumination, and its strength. It is not only that those who seek with contrite hearts that awful, holy Light must needs have striven to put away the sins that darken and bewilder counsel. It is far more than this. It is that in the stillness and simplicity of drawing near to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, and in the passiveness and intense listening of the soul, conscience may speak to us with penetrating clearness of the height, the majesty, the tranquillity of justice; of its home, in the very nature of God; of its work, sure as His will; of its exactness, absolute as His perfection; of the silent and immediate certainty with which the false estimates and verdicts of mankind are set right before "the Judge of all the earth"; of the solemnity of that appeal which, spoken or unspoken, reaches Him from every age, and is written down and cannot be erased: "O our God, wilt Thou not judge them?" "The Lord look upon it, and require it;" "Thou art the helper of the friendless;" "Thou art set in the throne that judgest right;" and of our heavy responsibility for every exercise of the power given us from above, to judge and act in whatsoever sphere, as His viceregents among men. And then, as conscience thus speaks out her witness to the supreme and everlasting royalty of justice, the soul is also strengthened in the presence of God by a deeper sense of the power that is on the side of justice—the power that can wait, but not fail; that may use this means or that, but all for one unalterable end; the power which is behind the patience of Almighty God, and which we forget when we

grow restless and fretful at His tarrying, and misread the little fragment that we see of His vast purpose in the world. But, above all, more moving to our hearts, more responsive to our need, than any thought which we can grasp of His power and His justice—there comes to us, as we watch and pray in the sanctuary of His presence, the distinctive disclosure of the faith of Jesus Christ. Much may still be dark and strange to us, and the questions that are always rising round us will need our utmost care, and we may often make mistakes in thought, and word, and deed; but the real, inner bewilderment, the fatal blundering of the soul can hardly be when we think of men and deal with them as, one by one, the distinct and unforgotten objects of that love which we ourselves have known in its astounding forbearance and condescension and inventiveness and glory. There is some sure light in the perplexity of this world, some hope even in its worst disasters, something steadfast through its storms, something still undefeated by its sins; since it is the scene where God, whose love can only be measured by the Cross, is seeking, one by one, in countless, hidden ways, the souls of men, if here He may but begin to draw them ever so little towards Himself, that hereafter He may prepare them to be with Him where He is. (*Bishop Paget.*)

*The sanction of science to the Christian interpretation of the world:—I. THE THEORIES AND FINDINGS OF MODERN SCIENCE AGREE WITH THE SCRIPTURAL ACCOUNT OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THINGS.* Everywhere the Bible affirms or assumes that the ideal, the primitive, the essential arrangement of things was "very good," but that the catastrophe called sin broke up the original order, and henceforth Nature became full of contradiction and misery. Never does revelation fall into the error of teaching that the substance of the world is vicious, or that any of its great laws are malevolent, but with wonderful clearness and consistency it maintains that Nature is a right noble system unhappily spoiled. Are not our great philosophers conscious that this interpretation of the world expresses the substantial truth? Professor Huxley finds two distinct orders prevailing in Nature—a cosmical order and a moral order; the cosmical order being vicious, the moral order, which is discovered in the growth of civilization, being the expression of reason and righteousness. But is it possible to believe that two distinct antagonistic programmes prevail in Nature side by side? Surely if science has established one position more firmly than another it is that which affirms the unity of things, and it is impossible to believe that in the bosom of Nature a dual order should exist like that which Huxley suggests. Is it not far more reasonable, far more in keeping with science, to infer that there is but one celestial, persistent order, which somehow has been obscured and disturbed? And what is this normal order? If the world presents such contradictory phenomena and yet we are compelled to believe in one fundamental law and order, what is that fundamental law and order? Is the good element the deepest thing in Nature, or the bad element? Are truth, goodness, and beauty the primitive, essential, and abiding laws of the world, or illusion, selfishness, ugliness, misery? Huxley suggests, as I have just said, that there are two orders, the cosmical order, which he calls the "natural" order; and the moral order, which he calls the "artificial" order; but this view has not commended itself to the majority of thinking men. The moral order of the world which is more and more coming into light presents no features of "artificiality." Surely the moral order is the universal, the fundamental, the persistent order; amid the flow of phenomena it is the moral kingdom and law which cannot be moved. The earth is full of perplexing sights and experiences, but at the bottom it is good. The ethical process is really the cosmical process. The eternal elements are truth, goodness, mercy, beauty, joy. We should not have noticed the maladies of the world had there not been first an organic health; we should not have felt the discords of the world had we not first been conscious of an eternal music. The rational, the moral, the good, constitute the profound and absolute order. Nature as we see it is not the ideal Nature; the order of Nature, taken simply as science knows it, is not its true order; we behold the primitive design in a darkened glass. Nature with all her terrible phenomena rises up, as human nature with all its terrible crimes rises up, the magnificent protest on its lips: "I, yet not I, but sin which dwelleth in me." And as the ages proceed the true and eternal order of right and beauty is ever being revealed more conspicuously.

**II. REVELATION TEACHES THAT ALL THINGS HAVE BEEN THROWN INTO CONFUSION THROUGH THE ABUSE OF MAN'S FREE WILL, AND MODERN SCIENCE HAS MADE IT THE MORE EASY TO BELIEVE IN THIS DOCTRINE.** Let us state exactly the dilemma that the condition of the world involves. Very often we find it impos-

sible to look out upon the great universe without feeling that it is a magnificent expression of infinite intelligence and beauty. Our intellect exults in it; our heart does; our whole unsophisticated nature. We feel as sure as we can feel sure of anything that this glorious orb could not spring out of the blind workings of rude matter. Little comes out of a pot of paint left to itself. You must put the fire of genius under it before those magical prismatic exhalations arise which are known as the Crucifixion of Rubens, the Transfiguration of Raphael, the Paradise of Tintoretto, the Judgment Day of Michael Angelo. Genius alone glorifies paint into pictures, builds stones and dust into a St. Mark's, converts ink into Iliads. So we cannot believe that this round world and all that it inherits sprang out of the blind working of slime and fire-mist. A fire of genius must have glowed under chaos before there arose out of it rounded skies, suns, moons, stars, the million types of birds, beasts, blossoms, human faces, human hearts, human consciences, all the living pictures and vital shapes of this wondrous universe. The order of the world suggests to our intelligence a rational Creator; the beauty of the world a loving and perfect God. Darwin acknowledges all this in his simple, touching manner. He says, "Another source of conviction in the existence of God, connected with the reason and not with the feelings, impresses me as having much more weight. This follows from the extreme difficulty, or rather impossibility, of conceiving the immense and wonderful universe, including man with his capacity of looking far backwards and far into futurity, as the result of blind chance or necessity. When thus reflecting, I feel compelled to look to a First Cause having an intelligent mind in some degree analogous to that of man; and I deserve to be called a Theist." ('Autobiography and Letters.') Again he writes: "I cannot anyhow be contented to view this wonderful universe, and especially the nature of man, and to conclude that everything is the result of brute force." And in one of his latest letters he says, "You have expressed my inward conviction, though far more vividly and clearly than I could have done, that the universe is not the result of chance." But very different thoughts and feelings took possession of Darwin when he surveyed other aspects of Nature. Greatly distressed by its enigmas, he was constrained to write himself an Agnostic. He says, "With respect to the theological view of the question, this is always painful to me. I am bewildered. I had no intention to write atheistically. But I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the *Ichneumonidæ* with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice." ('Autobiography and Letters.') Again he writes: "I cannot overlook the difficulty" (of believing in the existence of God) "from the immense amount of suffering through the world." And again, "This very old argument from the existence of suffering against the existence of an intelligent First Cause seems to me a strong one." Revelation solves this problem by declaring that the world as we see it, and its line of development as we know it, are not according to God's ideal and purpose. "And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good!" "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him." But, by the abuse of free-will, man has spoiled himself and marred the whole creation. There is something that man can call his own, "his own lust," inordinate, irregular desire, and this intemperance and disobedience of thought and action have spoiled the good and perfect gifts of God. There is a great deal in this world that was not created by God, that does not come from the normal action of His laws, and in which God disclaims all proprietorship. We call earthquakes, cyclones, pestilences, famines "acts of God," but the more we understand the power of man over telluric nature the more are we persuaded of his responsibility in these catastrophes. Man to a great extent holds the climates in his hand; the vast dominion of Nature falls into confusion through his sins of omission and commission; and if you consult Darwin, Marsh, and other scientists you learn that man, not God, is the agent of huge catastrophes which are charged to the account of the Almighty. As John Garth Wilkinson keenly observes, "Man is the insect of the universal gall." And when we regard the ugly, venomous, and destructive forms which abound in the earth, they are no more to be imputed to God than are deserts and pestilences. The author of "Evil and Evolution" says aptly, "Evolutionists are agreed that it is just the fierce struggle of created things that has produced birds

and beasts of prey, and there can be little doubt that it is the malignity of the struggle that has produced the venom of so many reptiles." And I may add here that this work, which I read after writing this address, contains a very interesting chapter on the subject of evolution without maladjustment. We do not hold the Almighty responsible for the stiletto of the assassin, the sword of the tyrant, the cup of the poisoner, and we do not hold the Almighty responsible for the locust, the spider, the vulture, the shark, the phylloxera, the microbe, for the fang of the serpent, the beak of the hawk, or the blade of the sword-fish. What is done under our eyes by the malign cleverness of the breeder of dogs has been going on in Nature to an infinite extent and by secret processes we may not follow. "Every good and every perfect gift is from above;" but our lusts are our "own," and they have put their stamp of original horrible disfigurement upon the fair face of the world. The lord of the house determines the house in an extraordinary degree, and the good creatures of God by our misrule and violation have become agents and forces of evil. But it will be said that it is only possible to develop the world on the lines of conflict and suffering, it is only thus that things can be evolved and perfected. Now, it is quite true that the world hitherto has been developed by bitter and bloody processes, and, without doubt, seeing that we are what we are, no other method is possible; but it was palpably God's design that we should reach the goal by another path—by a path of sunshine and flowers. Great things have come to pass through hunger, battle, bleeding, and death, but this is not the normal programme of God. He would have attained the glorious ideal through peace and plenty, through noble passions and fellowships. Sir W. J. Dawson has an instructive page in which he affirms that whilst the struggle for existence has played a great part in the development of the world, the most productive and progressive ages were those in which the struggle for existence played the least part. "Again, we are now prepared to say that the struggle for existence, however plausible as a theory, when put before us in connection with the productiveness of animals and the few survivors of their multitudinous progeny, has not been the determining cause of the introduction of new species. The periods of rapid introduction of new forms of marine life were not periods of struggle, but of expansion—those periods in which the submergence of continents afforded new and large space for their extension and comfortable subsistence. In like manner, it was continental emergence that afforded the opportunity for the introduction of land animals and plants. Further, in connection with this, it is now an established conclusion that the great aggressive faunas and floras of the continents have originated in the north, some of them within the arctic circle, and this in periods of exceptional warmth, when the perpetual summer sunshine of the arctic regions coexisted with a warm temperature. The testimony of the rocks thus is that not struggle but expansion furnished the requisite conditions for new forms of life, and that the periods of struggle were characterized by depauperation and extinction." (Salient Points, p. 27). The world would be far more beautiful, scientists declare, without this exhaustive struggle for life. Colour being dangerous is kept down to conceal creatures from their natural enemies. Humming-birds are so splendid because they have no enemies, and all birds and beasts would acquire new beauty were it not for the hawk and the tiger. And in many directions it is seen that, whilst struggle secures fitness and strength, it also implies impoverishment and extinction. These facts give an insight into the benign possibilities of Nature, and show how peace, abundance, and sunshine might have filled the earth with mild beasts, glorious vegetation, and noble men. God could have worked with other pressures, attractions and stimulations. We struggle now by a "Via Dolorosa" and with bleeding feet to the golden goal, but God meant us to reach it by a way of pleasantness and a path of peace. That God should endow a creature with free-will, knowing that that endowment would involve its possessor in manifold sorrows, is a mystery we may agree to give God time to explain, but granted the moral agent, that is, the free agent, and granted that this agent proved faithless, the anarchy of the world is explicable without impeaching the character of its Creator and King. God is right and man is wrong, and the wrongfulness of man has perverted his whole environment. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Light arising in darkness*:—I. UNASSISTED HUMAN REASON CANNOT VINDICATE DIVINE PROVIDENCE. 1. Because we are prone to err. (1) Our intellect is depraved. (2) Our will is perverse. (3) The devil deceives us. 2. Because we see only parts of the ways of God. (1) The machinery is so vast. (2) The period of its revolution is so

long. 8. Because Jehovah does not fully reveal Himself. II. THE WAY OF DUTY IS THE WAY OF SAFETY. 1. We receive instruction. Wherever we commune with God, meditating on the Word of God, and praying, "Open Thou mine eyes, that," etc., we are in "the sanctuary of God," and are taught of the Lord. Receiving light from Holy Scripture, and from the Holy Spirit, our incorrect judgment respecting the prosperity of the wicked is rectified, and we see sufficient to convince us that the Judge of all the earth does right. (1) We see that rich sinners are inaccure. (2) We see that rich sinners are suddenly cast down. (3) We see that rich sinners are the objects of God's displeasure. 2. We grow in faith. Two things especially nurture our faith. (1) A conviction of our own ignorance and insufficiency. "So foolish was I, and ignorant," etc. (2) A consciousness that God is near to us and sustains us. "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee," etc. Hence, "we endure as seeing Him who is invisible," and become "strong in faith, giving glory to God." 3. We rejoice in hope. The end is not yet. Eternity is before us. (P. J. Wright.) *On the difficulties of speculative inquiry:*—Knowledge is pleasant to the mind as light is sweet to the eye. But such pleasantness has its limit. Its pursuit may become painful—"too painful for me." See this in the mercy of the providence of God. Up to a certain point it is delightful to contemplate; but it has also its fearful aspects which forbid too close a scrutiny. So of man's intellectual nature: how pleasant to investigate man's position, prospects, destiny under the government of God. Yet inquiries of this sort lead to dark and fearful issues. What are we to say of the problem of evil under the rule of a benevolent God? And the effect of such inquiries is twofold. Some are made sceptics: others are embarrassed and distressed. Some become angry and do nothing but complain. Others are much troubled and hindered in their religious life. Now, I would offer some considerations by which this feeling of painfulness may be mitigated or removed. And I begin with a confession—that I cannot solve the difficulties of speculative philosophy, nor the problem of the universe. I admit their reality, but they are all of them reducible to a common element, and to a simple expression. They all prove only this—the imperfection, the restriction of our knowledge, nothing more; and concerning this we note—I. THAT SUCH RESTRICTIONS OF OUR KNOWLEDGE ARE ONLY PART OF A GENERAL SYSTEM. Mystery is everywhere. II. THEY ARE AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF OUR BEING. There are of necessity mysteries to all created beings. It may be that to God all things are clear, but to us they cannot be, for we are finite and He is infinite. III. WE HAVE KNOWLEDGE SUFFICIENT FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES. But these are the great purposes for which life is given, and to accomplish them God did not teach any one a theory. Men fed themselves on the fruits of the field long time before they knew botany; sailed on the rivers and seas before they knew the science of navigation. And so our Bible will tell us our duty and what else we really need to know, though on many questions it leaves us where it found us. But how foolish to refuse practical obedience until we can solve the problem of the universe. IV. RESTRICTED KNOWLEDGE IS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN OUR MORAL CONDITION. It tests what is in a man's heart, and gives scope for faith. V. BUT RESTRICTED AS OUR KNOWLEDGE IS, ITS FIELD IS MARVELLOUSLY AMPLE. See the varied departments of science, natural, intellectual, moral. The expanse is crowded with objects. No one can master them all. And then—VI. WE ARE IN A POSITION, IN REGARD TO KNOWLEDGE, OF BRILLIANT EXPECTATION. Soon we shall remove to a world where our present limitations will be no more, and where we shall know even as we are known. Therefore have patience. Are you prepared for the discoveries of the other world? Think how momentous they are. Do not, because some things are "too painful" for you to know now, waste your life in inaction and complaint. (J. H. Hinton, M.A.) Surely Thou didst set them in slippery places: Thou castedst them down into destruction.—*The sinner's end:*—Want of understanding has destroyed many. The best place to get understanding is the sanctuary of God. Until he went there David was in a mist, but in the sanctuary he was as on a mountain summit with the clouds far beneath his feet. For there he had communion with God, and heard the law of God, and so understood the end of the wicked. Let us then try to—I. UNDERSTAND THE SINNER'S END. 1. Like all else, there is death, but what a death is his. 2. It is the death of all in which he took delight. 3. It brings him to the bar of God. 4. He is sent to everlasting hell. Now, all this is certain; and often sudden; and how terrible; and it is endless. II. SEEK TO PROFIT BY IT. 1. How grateful should we be if we are saved. 2. Let us make our calling and election sure. 3. Be earnest about the salvation



of others. **III. WARN THE UNREPENTANT.** You are slipping down to perdition. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Slippery places*:—Winter is the season of frost. Then there is ice on every hand. There are perils on the land and on the water. **I. THERE ARE SLIPPERY PLACES IN LIFE.** 1. Scenes of animal excitement. The market—the theatre—the social feast—the excitements of wine and music, such things as work upon the senses, and enkindle the passions. 2. Opportunities of selfish gratification. 3. Company of the ungodly. 4. When tempted to doubt God's righteousness and love. **II. THOSE WHO WALK IN SLIPPERY PLACES ARE IN DANGER OF FALLS.** 1. Insecurity. 2. Risk of injury. (1) To peace. (2) To character. (3) To usefulness. **III. SLIPPERY PLACES PROVE FATAL TO THE WICKED.** 1. Unmask the evil of their character (Prov. xi. 3). Judas. 2. Reveal the worthlessness of their hopes. Seem to thrive, promise themselves ease and length of days. Vanity. When tested they fail utterly (ver. 17; Prov. xxix. 1; Ps. cxlvi. 4; Job viii. 13–20). 3. Manifest that they are the objects of God's displeasure. Nothing keeps them out of hell but God's mercy. Destruction is impending. Sure—sudden—overwhelming. **IV. SOME COUNSELS AS TO SLIPPERY PLACES.** 1. Avoid them, when possible (Ps. cxix. 101; Prov. i. 10; 1 Thess. v. 10; Ps. xvii. 4). 2. When you do come to them walk warily. "Watch and pray." "Be not high-minded, but fear." 3. Take such friendly help as may be available (Eph. vi. 15; Ps. xxiii. 4; Eccl. iv. 9, 10; Ps. xxvi. 1; cxix. 63). 4. Should you fall, endeavour to get good from the evil. Time for thought—prayer—renewal of faith and strength. 5. Should you escape, be thankful, and give God the glory (Ps. xciv. 18; Ps. cxvi. 1–8). 6. Let Jerusalem come into your mind. There will be no "slippery places," etc. (*W. Forsyth, M.A.*) *The prosperity of the wicked insecure*:—This may be argued—1. From the fact that it is not founded on the favour of God. 2. From the uncertain and temporary nature of the very elements of which it is composed: (1) The good opinion of others. (2) The honesty and trustworthiness of our fellow-men. (3) Deceitful, uncertain riches. 3. From the fact that the very habits to which that prosperity gives rise, may acquire such strength as to destroy it. Napoleon Bonaparte is an illustrious instance of the power of that habit of overgrown, lawless ambition, which in one luckless hour can ruin the splendid fortunes of an empire. 4. From the fact that their own consciences are not thoroughly reconciled to their prosperity, and the pangs and forebodings of conscience can soon embitter and destroy the very essence of worldly fortune. 5. The known uncertainty of life haunts the wicked with a dread that destroys the baseless joys of their prosperity. (*D. L. Carroll, D.D.*)

**Ver. 20. As a dream when one awaketh.**—*The sleep and dream of ungodly men*:—**I. THE UNGODLY ARE ASLEEP.** Not physically but spiritually. **II. IN THIS SLEEP THEY DREAM.** They fancy the world and its joys are real, abiding, secure, satisfying. **III. AT DEATH THEY AWAKE.** Their all is in this world, and lo, death comes and strips them of all they valued, as a dream of one awaking. How much better to have this awakening here! (*W. Harris.*)

**Vers. 22–25. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before Thee.**—*Flesh and spirit a riddle*:—What secrets of inward experience we have in our text. Consider—**I. THE CONFESSIONS CONCERNING THE FLESH.** David was a great saint, yet he tells God—"So foolish was I . . . beast before Thee." 1. Foolish. It was sinful folly, not to be excused by frailty, but perverse and wilful. And is not this true of us? 2. Ignorant. Surely after all his experience he ought to have known better than to be envious of the wicked. And how often we have to make the like confession. If we could but see ourselves we should see our knowledge to be nothing and our ignorance to be all. Then—3. "As a beast before Thee." The Hebrew is, "I was a very beast before Thee." It means, so worldly-minded, so empty of all holy desire, so short-sighted, so full of animal passions. But turn to—**II. THE EXPRESSIONS OF THE SPIRIT.** 1. He is conscious of Divine regard. "Nevertheless I am," etc. Upon His mind, before His eye, in His hand. 2. Of Divine help. "Thou hast holden me." 3. Of Divine guidance. "Thou shalt guide," etc. 4. Of Divine reception. "Receive me to glory." **III. TO THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE.** "Whom have I in heaven but Thee," etc. I have known men lose their property, and what is dearer than property, but they have not said, "Whom have I in heaven," etc. The confessions of our text will be heard in the adoring gratitude of the redeemed in glory. That Christ should have saved them—the foolish, the ignorant, and who had been as a beast before Him.

But this He will do for all who believe. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A pilgrim's progress*:—I. THE PILGRIM'S CHARACTER AND CONDITION before he was turned to the Lord. "So foolish . . . beast before Thee." What a hearty and thorough confession this is! Probably it was not so made at first. Men never accurately measure the depth of the pit they lay in until they are out of it. Note the terms he uses in this confession. See the cattle browsing on the grass. It is no shame to them to be beasts; but it is a shame for a man to be as a beast, for he was made in God's image. The beast never had a soul; and I have quenched the life of mine—put out its light. I was like a beast in having a body and life and appetites, and stopping short with these, as if these were all! They knew not a God to live for; and I lived without God. Being a man, I became as a beast. II. HIS PRESENT NEARNESS AND PEACE. "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee." What a difference—"I was as a beast"; but "I am with Thee." Transformations unknown in nature are accomplished in grace. The man has become new. How has it been brought about? There has been reconciliation; the saved are made nigh through the blood of Christ. And this nearness continues. III. THE CAUSE AND MANNER OF THIS GREAT DELIVERANCE. "Thou hast holden me by my right hand." It is God's doing, not his own. The picture represents a father leading his strayed child home. IV. THE COURSE THROUGH LIFE WHICH THE PENITENT NOW EXPECTS TO KEEP. "Thou shalt guide me," etc. V. THE ISSUE OF ALL IN ETERNITY. Look to the last three points, that we may mark their order and their relations. 1. Salvation accomplished by almighty grace: "Thou hast holden me." 2. New obedience now, according to the Word of God: "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel." 3. Hope of glory afterward: "Thou shalt receive me." In the middle is the actual holiness—the new obedience of the saved man, and on either side of a strong one on whom it may lean. On the one side is salvation already accomplished; on the other is the hope of glory yet to come. (*W. Arnot.*)

Ver. 23. **Nevertheless I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand.**—*The Christian's portion*:—Four privileges of God's servants are mentioned in the text. I. HIS PRESENCE WITH THEM—His constant presence. "I am continually with Thee." It is another way of saying, "Thou art continually with me." The Lord is ever side by side with His people. II. SUPPORT. "Thou hast holden me"—"holden me by my right hand." Two men may be travelling together the same road in company, and yet separate one from the other. "But" (says the psalmist) "not so the Lord and I His afflicted servant; He takes hold of my hand, as He walks by my side, and lets me feel His presence, and I am content." With Him the wilderness becomes (as it were) a paradise; and without Him the fairest earthly paradise—oh, how soon does it become a desert to our souls! III. GUIDANCE. "Thou shalt guide me"—"guide me with Thy counsel." "Thou" shalt do it. Hitherto we have looked on the Lord, as simply the companion and upholder of the believer on his way; here, you perceive, another character is given Him. He points out that way to him—the way to glory—leads him to it, and directs him along it. IV. GLORY. Thou shalt "afterward receive me to glory." The Lord's guidance of us is ultimately to end in this. Thither all His dealings with us tend. And now I would say to you two things. 1. Aim to get the psalmist's faith and confidence. He saw and felt and rejoiced in his own personal interest in God's care and love. And—2. Aim to get the psalmist's submissive spirit. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *God's abiding presence*:—Here was a man who lived with an abiding sense of the Divine nearness. To him God was not an occasional visitor, but an abiding guest. "I am continually with Thee." Now, is this a common experience with religious people? I fear not. "Lo, I am with you always," said Jesus, and if we do not realize His presence the fault must be our own. Well, now, let us see what effect this abiding consciousness of God would have upon our daily life and experience. I. OUR LIFE WOULD BE MUCH **HOLIER**. It is related that a certain shoemaker kept by his side a portrait of that famous Brighton preacher, the Rev. F. W. Robertson, and that whenever he was tempted to do anything wrong he took a look at the portrait, the very sight of which made it practically impossible for him to yield. Now, if the sight of that good man's portrait could have such a restraining effect upon that shoemaker, what would be the effect upon your life and mine did we daily live with the holy God before our eyes? "I have set the Lord always before me," said the psalmist; and did we live with a constant consciousness of the Divine nearness I am sure we should be restrained from many things to which we are so apt to yield, and

in which we sometimes perhaps indulge. But in a more positive way, and in a much larger sense, our whole life would be wondrously hallowed if we only carried into it all an abiding sense of the Divine presence. Professor Drummond has said that "there are men and women in whose company we are always at our best. While with them we cannot think mean thoughts or speak ungenerous words. Their mere presence is elevation, purification, sanctity. All the best stops of our nature are drawn out by their intercourse, and we find a music in our souls that was never there before." And if the society of good people can exert such a hallowing influence upon us, what must be the sanctifying effect of daily companionship and fellowship with God? "Ten minutes," said Professor Drummond, "spent in His society every day, aye! two minutes, if it be face to face, and heart to heart, will make the whole day different." And if our whole life were pervaded with the consciousness of the Divine, as, thank God, some lives have been, then the whole life would be different.

**II. SUCH A CONSCIOUSNESS OF GOD WOULD MAKE OUR LIFE MUCH STRONGER AND SAFER.** Life is full of difficulty and danger, and if we would be valiant and victorious we must seek a fuller and more constant realization of the Divine presence. I remember that on one occasion I had a very lonely road to travel, and had often felt exceedingly nervous. But I had an old friend who frequently accompanied me on that part of the journey, and in his companionship I had no sense of danger, but felt equal to any emergency. And amidst life's thickest difficulties and dangers we may have the companionship of God, and that shall be our defence. The strongest and bravest man may well fear to face life's stern duties and difficulties in his own strength; for in that case defeat is inevitable. But with the assurance of God's presence there comes power to face life's sternest forces and foes. "Our sufficiency is not of ourselves; our sufficiency is of God." **III. THIS ABIDING CONSCIOUSNESS OF GOD WOULD MAKE OUR LIFE MUCH HAPPIER.** In ordinary life there is certainly much to sadden and sour the human heart, and the one great antidote to that is a more vivid realization of the Divine presence. "In Thy presence is fulness of joy." Those words have a present significance. "In Thy presence is fulness of joy;" not then and yonder only, but here and now. "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." The unexpected appearance of Jesus in their midst chased away those men's disappointment and doubt and sadness, and inspired them with a new hope and gladness. I have a little girl who repeatedly awoke in the night, and was terribly frightened with the darkness; and she always insisted on coming into her mother's room and bed. Nothing else would satisfy or soothe her. One night her mother said to her, "You should not do so, Olive, for there is nothing to be afraid of; and it is just as dark in this room as in your own." Then, nestling up beside her mother, the little one replied, "Yes, mother, but you are in this dark room." Ah, her mother's nearness made all the difference to the child's feelings. And there is nothing that can disarm the soul's fears and soothe its sorrows like the realization of our Father's presence. (*B. Haddon.*)

*Influence of the Divine presence on a good man:*—**I. HIS INTERNAL MORAL STATE.** 1. The belief of the Divine presence acts upon them here, first, as an incitement to virtue. The presence of one whom we highly esteem and revere, of a sovereign, for instance, a father, or a friend, whose approbation we are solicitous to gain, is always found to exalt the powers of men, to refine and improve their behaviour. Hence, it has been given as a rule by ancient moralists, that, in order to excel in virtue, we should propound to ourselves some person of eminent worth; and should accustom ourselves to act as if he were standing by and beholding us. But what is the observation of the greatest or wisest men on earth to that presence of the Divinity which constantly surrounds us? The man who realizes to his mind this august presence, feels a constant incentive for acquitting himself with dignity. 2. Supposing, however, his virtuous endeavours to be faithful, many imperfections will attend them. Passions will sometimes overcome him; and ambition or interest, in an unguarded hour, will turn him aside into evil. Hence he will be ashamed of himself, and disquieted by a sense of guilt and folly. In this state, to which we are often reduced by the weakness of human nature, the belief of God's continual presence brings relief to the heart. He can appeal to Him who knows his frame, that, in the general train of his conduct it is his study to keep the law of God. **II. HIS EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES.** 1. It not only preserves the virtue of a good man amidst the temptations of pleasure, but it gives to his prosperity a security, and a peculiar relish, which to others is unknown. He dwells as with a friend and protector, from whom he conceives his blessings to

proceed. He can appeal to him for the thankfulness with which he receives them; and for his endeavours to employ them well. He trusts that the God whom he serves will not forsake him; that the goodness which he has already experienced will continue to bless him; and though he believes himself not exempted from the changes of the world, yet, in the midst of these, he has ground to hope that sources of comfort and happiness shall always be left open to him. Moreover, the pleasures of life, while they last, are unspeakably heightened by the presence of that Benefactor who bestows them. The pleasing emotion of gratitude to the giver, mingles with the enjoyment of the gift. 2. From the prosperous, let us next turn to the afflicted condition of a good man. For as prosperity may, affliction certainly will, at one time or other, be his lot. It enters into the appointed trial of his virtue; and, in one degree or other, is the doom of all. Here we shall find various situations occur, in which no relief is equal to what a virtuous and holy man derives from a sense of the perpetual presence of God. (1) Is he, for instance, thrown into an obscure condition in the world, without friends to assist him, or any to regard and consider his estate? He enjoys the satisfaction of thinking, that though he may be neglected by men, he is not forgotten of God. (2) But though raised above obscurity or poverty, yet, in any situation of fortune, calumny and reproach may be the lot of the servant of God. His good intentions may be misconstrued; his character unjustly traduced; and, to the open reviling of enemies, the more bitter unkindness of friends may sometimes be joined. In this situation, when wounded in spirit, and, perhaps, unable to make his innocence appear, to whom shall he have recourse for defence, to whom make his last appeal, but to that God who is ever present with him, and who knoweth his heart? (3) Supposing the character of a good man to be untainted by reproach, supposing also his external situation to be opulent or distinguished; many, notwithstanding, and severe, are the distresses to which he may be exposed. Secret griefs may be preying upon him; and his heart left to feed in silence on his own bitterness. He may labour under sore disease, and discern his earthly frame gradually moulder into dust. He may be deprived of those friends and relatives who had been the chief comforts of his state; or may be obliged to prepare himself for taking farewell of them for ever. In the midst of these various afflicting scenes of human life, no consolation can be more powerful than what arises from the presence of a Divine protector and guardian, to whom our case, with all its sorrows, is perfectly known. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*) *The Christian with God, supported by Him*.—I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN BEING CONTINUALLY WITH GOD. 1. As a duty, it implies, that this is peculiar to real Christians; as they alone are prepared for it, and disposed to it, as being acquainted with Him, reconciled to Him, and in a state of the most intimate friendship with Him (*Amos iii. 3*). (1) It is God's express command (*Gen. xvii. 1*). (2) Their covenant-consent strengthens the obligation (*Jer. i. 5*), and having opened their mouths they cannot go back. (3) The honour of God, which of all things is the dearest to them, obliges them to it. To forsake Him would be a reflection on God and His ways. (4) To this they feel the constraints of love (*ver. 25*). (5) The blessedness arising from it, and the misery resulting from a contrary conduct, is a further obligation to this. (6) The sincerity of their love and attachment to God is thereby to be evidenced. (7) And they feel themselves deeply concerned thus to act, as they would not lose their work and their crown, and expose themselves to greater wrath (*2 John viii.*; *Heb. x. 38*). 2. As a privilege, it implies that they are with God, (1) As members of His Son (*1 Cor. xii. 27*). (2) As His children (*Rom. viii. 14*). (3) As His heirs (*Rom. viii. 17*). (4) As His portion (*Deut. xxxii. 9*). (5) As His living temple (*Eph. ii. 21*). II. THE HAPPINESS RESULTING THEREFROM. The Lord holds them by their right hand. This is necessary—1. On account of the weakness of their graces (*1 Cor. iii. 1, 2*). 2. The remains of the carnal mind (*1 Cor. iii. 3*). 3. The prevalence of evil example (*1 Cor. v. 3*). 4. The opposition of the world (*John xv. 19*). 5. The unwearied diligence of Satan (*1 Pet. v. 8*). 6. And in all these circumstances God will uphold them, according to His word and promise (*Heb. xiii. 6*; *Isa. liv. 17*). Improvement:—1. How happy is the state of those who walk with God! Let us cultivate a greater intimacy than ever. 2. How dreadful is the state of those who are at a distance from God! (*Ps. lxxiii. 27*). (*T. Hannam*.) *Constant enjoyment of the Divine presence consistent with variable experiences*.—Our abiding frame is the index of character, said Garfield. "I have seen the sea lashed into fury and tossed into spray, and its grandeur moves the soul of the dullest man. But I remember that it is not the billows, but the calm

level of the sea from which all heights and depths are measured. When the storm has passed and the hour of calm settles upon the ocean, when the sunlight bathes its smooth surface, then the astronomer and surveyor takes the level from which he measures all terrestrial heights and depths." And it is thus with the saint in his spiritual enjoyments. They may be as variable as the surface of the ocean, but he does not judge of his state by their fluctuations, but by the fact that deep down in his heart, in yearning and desire, if not in actual experience, he is able to say, "I am continually with Thee." (*The Quiver*.)

**Ver. 24. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.**—*God-guided freedom*:—Some, as the Church of Rome, would deny to men the right of free thought. They appeal to authority, and think it better that men should hearken only to their appointed guides. Now, I say that a Church which hinders and destroys thought curses the world. The men who think make progress; they become inventors, owners of the land they till and of the houses in which they dwell; they become foremen and masters; while the men who do not think are carriers of the hod, the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. **I. THAT A GOD-GUIDED LIFE IS A PILGRIMAGE.** **II. DIVINE COUNSEL IS GIVEN TO ALL WHO TRY TO DO GOD'S WILL.** **III. LET THE RESOLVE OF THE PSALMIST BE REPEATED IN YOUR SOUL.** Thou shalt guide me and receive me. If you resolve to be true to yourself, by acting up to the light you have, then God will guide you by His counsel, and afterward receive you to glory. Our heavenly Guide will never steer us wrong. Trust Him. (*W. Birch*.) *Guidance and glory*:—In this psalm troubled men find help. **I. HOW SHALL WE MEET OUR TROUBLES?** 1. There is no better way than to go into the sanctuary of God. Sorrow is almost a blessing if it drives us there. 2. Next, we may well look on to the end of things. 3. Best of all, we must be careful to maintain the blessed life. To be continually with God, cultivating the momentary sense of His presence. **II. BUT WHY ARE THESE EXPERIENCES NOT MORE PERMANENT?** We read that "Daniel continued." Oh to be steadfast and unmovable! 1. We must always distinguish between our emotions and our attitude. The one may die off our lives like the sunset glory from the ridges of the Alps, that seem so grey and cold when it is gone; but the other should resemble the changeless perpetuity of the everlasting hills, unaltered by the transitions of the ages, or the alternations of day and night. You may not always feel as happy, but you can always say "Yes" to the will of God, and realize your attitude in the risen, ascended, loving Jesus, amongst the thousand thousands that minister to Him. In moments of depression, be sure to live in your will and His will. 2. We must be careful to maintain this attitude of the will unaltered. God is constantly putting into our lives little or greater occasions of testing. Unless we are watchful in applying to each new point the principle of surrender, which we have assumed, we may drift from full face, to three-quarter, and half-face, before we are aware. 3. We must exercise ourselves to have the "conscience void of offence toward God and toward men." Not a scrupulous, but a sensitive, conscience. Conscience and the Holy Ghost are expressly allied by the apostle—the crystal stone ever bathed in the translucent glory of heaven. 4. We must ever keep our heart open to the Holy Spirit. It is His province and prerogative to nurture the inner life, and to fill it with the realized presence of the Lord. 5. We must be very careful to maintain unbroken the habits of the devout life. Too many are like the slip-carriage, which runs for a little from the impulse received from the engine, but then slackens till it comes to a stand; instead of resembling that which keeps its connection with the speed and strength of the locomotive. In a laundry, the other day, I saw two kinds of irons. One, the usual sort, needing to be put on a heated surface at frequent intervals to fit them for their work. The other, in which the iron was attached by a flexible gutta-percha tube to the gas-pipe, so that it was easy to use it, and inside the iron a jet of flame, fed by the gas, which maintained it at a regular temperature, and counteracted the chilling effects of its work. Is not this what we want? Not depending on the outside stimulus of a convention, a mission, or a sermon; but receiving straight from God Himself that inward fire of the Holy Ghost, to give and perpetuate which is the dearest passion of the heart of Jesus. All this will cost us something; the daily dying to self; saying "No" to the flesh; the cutting-off of hand or foot; the dropping down into the earth to die; but these sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the growing glory of our life, or its blessedness. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Guidance to grace and glory*:—**I. THE CONVICTION WHICH LED THE**

PSALMIST TO TAKE A GUIDE. Happily for him, that conviction came very early. If I aim to have a guide on my journey, I should like to have one at the beginning, for it is the starting that has so much to do with all the rest of the way. 1. I suppose it was because of a work of grace upon his heart; for, naturally, we do not like being guided. It is a fine piece of knowledge when you have learned that you are not fit to take care of yourself, but need somebody to lead you all the way through life. 2. I suppose that the psalmist said to the Lord, "Thou shalt guide me," because he had been convinced of his own folly, and therefore felt that it was well to commit himself into wiser hands; and also that he had obtained some knowledge of the difficulties of the way. To no one of us is the path of life an easy one, if we desire to be pure, and clean, and upright, and accepted with God. 3. The psalmist's desire to have a guide also showed his great anxiety to be right. I wish that all men began life with an earnest desire to act rightly in it; and that each one would say, "I shall never live this life again, I should like to make it a good one so far as I can." If this were the intense desire of every one of us, we should be driven at once to this conclusion, "I must have a guide. I want to live a glorious life; and if I am to do so, I must be helped in it, for I am incompetent for the task by myself." II. THE CONFIDENCE WHICH LED HIM TO TAKE GOD AS HIS GUIDE. If we were but in our right senses, we should all do so. 1. A man, looking about wisely for a guide, will prefer to have the very best; and is not God, who is infinitely wise, the best Guide that we can have? Who questions it? Is not the Lord also the most loving, the most tender, the most considerate, who can be chosen as a guide? 2. Choose Him also because of His constant, unceasing, infallible care. If I choose a guide who may die on the road, I am likely to be unhappy; but God will never die. If I choose a guide who, being my friend at the starting, will not care for me when I have advanced half-way on my journey, I am unwise in my choice; but God cannot change, He will ever be the same. But will God guide us? 3. Well, it were vain to choose Him if He would not; but of all beings God is most easy of access. III. THE HEAVENLY COMMERCE WHICH NOW REIGNS BETWEEN THE SOUL AND ITS GUIDE. How does God guide us? 1. By the general directions of His Word. Obey the Ten Commandments. Imitate Christ. 2. There are great principles infused in every man who takes God for his Guide. (1) Avoid everything that is evil. (2) Live for the glory of God alone. (3) Show love to your fellow-men. 3. God guides His people on the way of life by giving a certain balance of the faculties. When we come to God in penitence, when we are born again of the Spirit, and live by faith in Christ, then, first of all, fear is banished and faith takes its place. We are then better able to judge which is the right road. Above all, the grace of God guides us very much by the dethroning of self as the traitorous lord of our being, and makes us loyal to Christ. When a man acts out of loyalty to Christ, he is pretty sure to act very wisely and rightly. 4. There is a special illumination of mind which comes from dwelling near to God. 5. At the very worst times, when all these things will fail you as a guide, you may expect mysterious impulses, for which you can never account, which will come to you, and guide you aright. IV. THE SURE RESULT OF THIS GUIDANCE: "Thou shalt . . . afterward receive me to glory." On earth, there is no real glory for us unless we are guided by God's counsel. There is no true glory for any man who takes his own course. Afterward He will receive you to glory. This is a delightful thought, but I can now only answer this one question. When we die, who will receive us into glory? Well, I do not doubt that the angels will. John Bunyan's description of the shining ones, who come down to the brink of the river to help the pilgrims up on the other side of the cold stream, I doubt not is all true; but the text tells us of somebody better than the angels who will come and receive us. Our dying prayer to our Lord will be, "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit," and His answer will be, "I receive thee to glory." (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The Lord the Guide of His people:*—I. IN WHAT WAY THE LORD CONDUCTS AND GUIDES HIS PEOPLE IN THIS PRESENT STATE. 1. By His providence. 2. By His Word. 3. By His Spirit. The Spirit of God does not reveal any new truths different from, or in addition to, those recorded in the written Word. He does not guide by impressions on the mind, the nature and tendency of which cannot be explained. But He opens the understandings to understand the Scriptures. He enables and disposes clearly to perceive, and faithfully to apply the truths already revealed in His Word, as the various cases and circumstances of His people require. II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THAT GLORY INTO WHICH THE LORD WILL RECEIVE HIS PEOPLE, AFTER HE HAS LED

AND CONDUCTED THEM THROUGH THE PRESENT LIFE. 1. Heaven may be represented by the term "glory," because it is a glorious place. If this earth which we inhabit, defiled as it is with sin, exhibit to a careful observer such evident marks of the most consummate wisdom and design—what must be the majesty of that place, where the whole art of creation has been employed, and where God has chosen to show Himself in the most magnificent manner to the view of all its blessed inhabitants? 2. Oh! how glorious is the company that fill the mansions in our Father's house above! 3. The employments of heaven are glorious. 4. The enjoyments of heaven infinitely transcend our highest conceptions. (*A. Ramsay, M.A.*) *A new year's resolve*:—I. MAN REQUIRES A GUIDE IN THE PATH OF LIFE. 1. Man's ignorance of the future. 2. Man's proneness to consult false guides. 3. Man's frequent mistakes. 4. The awful consequences of mistakes. II. GOD IS THE ONLY TRUE GUIDE FOR MAN IN THE PATH OF LIFE. 1. He alone knows all the future. 2. He alone understands the full relation of the present to the future. 3. He alone has capacity to provide for our future. 4. He alone has manifested that interest that would warrant our perfect confidence for the future. III. GOD HIMSELF WILL GUIDE MAN INDIVIDUALLY IN THE PATH OF LIFE. "Thou shalt guide me," etc. The psalmist did not believe in the Pantheist's god, he speaks of a person—"Thou." Nor in the Deist's god who cares only for the vast; it was for the individual "Me." Every man requires special guidance. Each man is a world in himself and has an orbit of his own. No two are alike. IV. UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF GOD THE PATH OF LIFE BECOMES GLORIOUS. What does the world call glory? Conquest? You have conquest over evil when guided by God. Exalted fellowship? The greatest spirits of all worlds and times are the society of those whom God guides. Dignified position? They are kings and priests. (*Homilist.*) *Guidance and glory*:—I. GUIDANCE HERE. 1. He confesses his need of guidance, It is a grand thing if God compels us to seek direction. 2. He professes confidence in God. 3. He announces his belief in God's willingness to lead him. This is not included in the other; it is a distinct step. Are you sure that God will guide you? You may be sure, for He who wings an angel guides the sparrow; He who tells the number of the stars heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds. 4. He declares himself willing to be led. II. GLORY HEREAFTER. 1. We are just as sure that it is to be revealed as we are that guidance is ours moment by moment. The glory seems more wonderful than the guidance, but it is not really so. The flower is more beautiful than the bud, yet the flower was in the bud, and glory is but grace developed and revealed. The glory to which we are to be received is part and parcel of the guidance which we daily enjoy. 2. The only uncertainty is as to the time, and I think we ought to bless God that there cannot be full knowledge in this respect. It is enough that we know that He will receive us to glory afterward. Blessed word, "afterward"—after the pain, after the struggle, after the toil, after the cross, after the temptations, after the work is done, that is when He will receive us. Do not ask to know more than that. 3. Did you notice that the arrival is called a reception? "And afterward receive me to glory." Thank God for this! There is a welcome awaiting us there. I have known what it is, occasionally, to arrive unexpectedly in a strange place. The vessel draws up to the wharf, there is a crowd of folks to meet their friends, and one looks anxiously for a familiar face, but no, the message had miscarried, or there was some mistake about the time and there is nobody to extend a welcome. Oh, you do not run any such risk as regards heaven. 4. And what is there beyond the reception? Just this—glory! I was wondering what was the Scriptural use of this term glory. I find that in the Word of God it stands for riches, authority, sumptuous buildings and garments, and in some instances for hosts of warriors. Well, all these things are yonder in illimitable degree. (*T. Spurgeon.*) *Man's constitution declares his need of Divine guidance*:—Suppose a man were to say about a steamship, "the structure of this vessel shows that it is meant that we should get up a roaring fire in the furnaces, and set the engines going at full speed, and let her go as she will." Would he not have left out of account that there was steering apparatus which was as plainly meant to guide as are the engines to draw? What are the rudder and the wheel for? Do they not imply a pilot? And is not the make of our souls as plainly suggestive of subordination and control? (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The guidance of the Holy Spirit as compared to a compass*:—A mariner who puts out to sea, losing sight of land, beholds nothing but a waste of waters around him. The night comes on, and clouds and darkness gather in upon him. But in his chart and compass he has an infallible

guide. He regulates the sail as the wind requires, and holds to the rudder, never losing sight of the compass, and watchfully keeps the narrow way to which it confines him by night and by day. So the wise Christian looks up as one continually dependent on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the one source of all his spiritual life and motion. He is careful to watch the least breathing of the Spirit upon his soul that he may not quench it, but yield himself up to its full impression. And adding to this, his faith, all diligence and watchfulness, he is wafted onwards in safety, amidst the storms and wrecks around him in an evil world. (*H. G. Salter.*)

Vers. 25, 26. **Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.**—*God the only portion*:—"Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" Not "what." Not in things, but in persons, the personal soul must find its portion. Not in many, but in One, to whom the soul can look, and to whom, as here, it can lift up its cry. **I. GOD ALONE CAN MEET OUR SINFULNESS.** This is our first need, for we are sinners, and this fact affects everything else. There may be any amount of slumbering grandeur in us, but it cannot get out for sin. None of us would be willing or able to reveal to another all that he is conscious of in himself. Hence men are reserved with one another. A man is accosting his neighbour in neighbourly kindness, and thinking the while, "He does not know me, and I durst not tell him what I think and what I feel and what I am. If I were sure he would understand everything just as it is, I might be able to tell him; but being sure that he would not understand, I cannot." Now we are not speaking of any great sins or vices which particular men may have committed, and the remembrance of which they carry within, like ghastly skeletons shut up in closed rooms, but just of the secret of sinfulness which is in every heart. A terrible secret! A secret which must be told, which cannot be shut up for ever. But to whom? To Him who is greater than the heart, and who knoweth all things. To Him, in fact, because He knoweth all things. And then, according to His own promise, He will meet us and take all our sin away. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." God is for ever declaring His willingness to forgive. Thus He makes Himself our God by meeting our sinfulness. **II. GOD ALONE CAN MEET OUR FEEBLENESS.** We are compassed with infirmities, we are made up of needs. Some are so utterly blinded and bewitched that for a while they seem to indulge the hope that this world is the foundation-rock on which they can rest. How we should pity such men! And how pitiable indeed they become when they are undeceived; when the seeming rock shows itself to be but shifting sand; when the fair house shivers itself to atoms in their hands, and they stand houseless and homeless in the storm. **III. GOD ONLY CAN MEET OUR NOBLENES.** For we are noble, as well as frail and sinful. Things high and low meet strangely in our nature. We are made in the image of God. The image is marred but not erased. We belong to a fallen but also to a rising race. And this is our nobleness that we are still God's sons, and that we are awakening to this consciousness. And God alone can meet us in this. As He alone can understand the vastness of our needs, so He only can understand the greatness of our desire and the strength of our endeavour to be like Him, and with Him again. We misread, and then we misreport, each other woefully. We are on the homeward way together, and no doubt there is thus great mutual help, but there is mutual hindrance as well. One often casts a shadow on the path of another. He seems to see nothing but the wrong things, and the weaknesses; the rightness and the growing strength are within, and are seen only by Him who looks from above. It is not only that the wrong things are seen, and the weaknesses are noted, but often the right is called the wrong, and treated so. No doubt the temper of suspicion and distrust is fostered by the publicity which everything now receives, or rather by the malign prominence given in our daily literature to the vile and the wrong things. For the good things are not published; they are put into quiet corners; a thousand of them may be enacted by effort and by sacrifice, by patience and perseverance and love, and no notice will be taken of them. This uncandid temper, this extreme unwillingness to see moral inequalities among men, this strange desire to strike down the lofty and lay them with the low, rather than toil for the elevation of the low to the level of the lofty, is becoming quite one of the operative principles of our intellectual and social life, and of course it affects the Church also. Suspicion is bred among Christian men. One does not



see how God is working in another, how the glorious image is shining out again. All this is trying enough, but at least it should enhance and endear to us the truth we are now enforcing, that God alone can meet our nobleness. How precious the privilege of being able to turn to Him when we can turn to no one else! IV. GOD ALONE CAN MEET AND SATISFY OUR IMMORTALITY. He only is "the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever." Even if the things and the persons we are so apt in our haste and blindness to put in the place of Him could be to us what we hope, the question still remains, "For how long?" and turn where we will, we can find no answer of such a kind as to furnish the ground of confidence for a single day. Try to apply the great language of the text to any person, to anything, but Him, and what a mockery it will be! Turn, then, from sin to God, from frailty to God, from trouble to God, from baffled endeavours to God, from unrequited love to God, from self to God, from men to God, from the world to God, from heaven to God, from eternity to God; and standing, separated and alone, on the height of this decisive hour, say, while heaven hears the cry, and angels register the vow—"Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none," etc. (A. Raleigh, D.D.) *The home of the heart*:—The more perplexed and sad the music at first, the more triumphant and jubilant is the orchestral close. This singer's first notes were both perplexed and sad. He was wrestling in vain with the old problem of the apparent disconnection between goodness and happiness, his "steps had well nigh slipped"; he was down in the depths, burrowing there. He has soared now to the heights. He has caught hold of God's hand, and feels that he is ever with Him, and so the distribution of life's uncertain ill and good becomes a less difficult and a far less important problem. Therefore the end of his song circles back to the beginning. He began by saying, and saying it when he could scarcely believe it to be true—"truly God is good to Israel, but as for me"—and he ends with "it is good for me to draw near to God." In this utterance we have—I. THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM. What did the psalmist mean by the rapturous question, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee"? Perhaps, he was thinking, amongst other things, of false gods, and proclaiming the monotheism of Israel and disowning the gods of the nations. Perhaps he had no such specific idea in his mind; but simply looking up into the heavens with all their stars, and with all their possible inhabitants, he felt that they were nought to him. And then does he come down, or does he go up, in the next clause? "There is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." In one respect that is a descent; more truly it is a climax. What does he mean? This is not the utterance of a foolish, false, unnatural, impossible effort to denude him of what makes man. God desires no vacuum in the heart into which He comes. He does not "make a solitude and call it peace." Mark that "beside Thee"—"none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Does not that suggest that there is to be none else on a level with Him; that His throne is to overtop all other golden seats? It implies, also, that all other delights and desires are held, not only in subordination to, but in association with, the supreme desire and delight which is fixed upon Him. As many loves as you will, as many desires as the heart can frame, if only all are linked with God, and you love and aim at all other loves and aims in God, and at God in all others. II. A PRACTICABLE IDEAL. Can it be realized perfectly? No. Permanently? No. Approximately? Yes. Progressively? Yes. Do you ask how? The first thing to do, because men are meant to be guided by their brains, is to familiarize our minds, by frequent contemplation and meditation, with the truth that God is our all-sufficient good. There is no depth in religion unless that lies at the very root of it all. And there will be no power in the practical life, for the sake of the clamant demands of which so many of us are strangers to God and ourselves, unless, in the midst of the bustle and the crowd, we do clear for ourselves a little space, and there, in the silence of our own souls, learn to know how good God is. And another thing that is necessary in order that we shall progressively approximate to this great ideal is diligent and honest direction and suppression of desires that draw us away from Him. You have to cut off the suckers and the side-shoots if you want the leader to go straight towards the sky. You have to dam up the side-streams if you want the river to run with a power and a scour. And you have to exercise coercion, violence sometimes, on these vagrant desires, and gather them together, if they are to be directed successfully and triumphantly to Him. But there must be further distinct efforts, not only of a negative kind, and in the way of suppression and withdrawal, but of the positive kind, in the way of seeking after a closer union with God, and a more

continuous experience of His all-sufficiency. If we practise these three things, meditation, self-control, and the aspiration after God, in the measure in which we do we shall be able to make this psalmist's word our own, and we shall find it true what God Himself has declared, "I have never said to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek ye My face in vain." III. THE SECRET OF BLESSEDNESS. The misery of human life is its being torn asunder by the multiplicity of aims and objects. The blessedness of human life is its being simplified and unified into search after one. All of us know how the number of vulnerable points in a life is increased, just in the measure in which its aims and desires are manifold. And we might all of us know how we become lords of circumstances, and cased in triple armour against all sorrows, when we bring our lives down to the simplest form, and say, "God only is my good and my desire." It is bad business to put all your capital into one speculation. It is good trading to put all your desires on God. God, and God alone, will unify our lives. This saying discloses the secret of peace. It is something to be delivered from all painful and perpetual and profitless quests after the manifold, and instead of wandering about the world seeking for goodly pearls, to have no need to roam, because at home we have the one pearl of great price. Need I remind you, again, how this great utterance reveals to us the secret of blessedness, in that it points us to the only path on which he that seeks is sure to find. To seek for anything else than God is to lay up for ourselves sore hearts some day. To seek after Him, and Him only, is to secure blessedness in the search, and blessedness in the fruition. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *The believer's portion in his God*:—1. We are here taught that God is the portion of His people. God not only gives us His grace and favour, pardon of our sins, a perfect righteousness, and a glorious inheritance, but He gives us Himself. He bids us find our happiness not merely in the streams which flow from His goodness, but in Himself, the fountain of all. 2. While the psalmist professes to take nothing short of God Himself as his portion, he expressly excludes all other claimants upon his supreme regard and affection. He can survey the whole firmament, and range through all the courts of heaven's glorious palace; and though his eye falls upon myriads of noble and blessed objects—angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim—prophets, apostles, and martyrs—saints of all climes and all ages—all these he passes by, he will set his hopes upon none of them, he will fix his heart's trust upon nothing short of the eternal God Himself. 3. If the believer thus excludes all in heaven from competition with the one Lord of all for the supreme place in his heart's affections, much more will he not allow anything on earth to interfere with such a claim. The kind benefactor, the sympathizing fellow-sufferer, the beloved Jonathan who is as his own soul; none of these must be permitted to usurp a place reserved for only one. They have their own appointed places, but they must not presume to occupy that throne in his heart which of right is his Lord's. 4. But besides these various claimants upon the believer's affections, there is one who is often a more formidable rival to their rightful Lord than any other, and that is himself. It is very rarely that a man does not love himself better than any one else; and too often he occupies in his own heart the very throne of God. His dependence is upon his own wisdom and his own strength. He trusts in his physical or his mental capacity, or it may be his spiritual understanding and Christian experience. His trust is divided between his Lord and himself—his Lord's mercy and goodness, and his own faith and holiness; and so when these fail, as fail they always will, then of course he is disquieted and discouraged. 5. What then is the conclusion to which all this leads us? I do not know that we can express it more forcibly than in the closing words of the psalmist himself—"It is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Thy works." (W. E. Light, M.A.) *Reasonable rapture*:—The text indicates the very high-water mark of religious experience, the very apex and climax of what some people would call mystical religion to which this man has climbed because he fought with his doubts, and by God's grace was able to lay them. To him the world's uncertain ill or good becomes infinitely insignificant, because for the future he has a clear vision of a continued life with God, and because for the present he knows that to have God in his heart is all that he really needs. I. A NECESSITY WHICH, MIS-DIRECTED, IS THE SOURCE OF MAN'S MISERY. We all of us need, though, alas! so few of us know that we need, a living possession of a living perfect person, for mind, for heart, for will. You try to fill that deep and aching void in your hearts, which is a sign of your possible nobleness, and a pledge of your possible

blessedness, with all manner of minute rubbish, which can never fill up the gap that is there. Cartload after cartload may be tilted into the bottomless bog, and there is no more solid ground on the surface than there was at the beginning. Oh! consult thine own deepest need; listen to that voice, often stifled, often neglected, and by some of you always misunderstood, which speaks in your wills, minds, consciences, hopes, desires, hearts; and is it not this: "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God"? II. THE LONGING WHICH, RIGHTLY DIRECTED AND CHERISHED, IS THE VERY SPIRIT OF RELIGION. He, and only he, is the religious man, who can take these words of my text for the inmost words of his conscious effort and life. And only in the measure in which you and I recognize that God is our sole and all-sufficient good, in that measure have we any business to call ourselves devout or Christian people. III. THE BLESSED POSSESSION WHICH DEADENS EARTHLY DESIRES. The sun when it rises quenches the brightest stars, that can but fade in his light and die. And so when, in answer to our longing, God lifts the light of His countenance—a better sunrise—upon us, that new affection dims and quenches the brightness of these little, though they be lustrous, points, that shed a fragmentary and manifold twinkling over the darkness of our former night. Only remember that this supreme, and in some sense exclusive, love and longing does not destroy the sweetress of lower possessions and blessings. A new deep love in a man's or a woman's heart does not make their former affections less, but more sweet and noble and strong. IV. THE POSSESSION WHICH IS THE PLEDGE OF PERPETUITY. The whole context requires us to suppose that the psalmist's eye is looking across the black gorge of death to the shining table-land beyond. So here we are admitted to see faith in the future life in the very act of growth. The singer soars to that sunlit height of confidence in the endless blessedness of union with God, just because he feels so deeply the sacredness and the blessedness of his present communion with God. Next to the resurrection of Jesus Christ the best proof of immortality lies in the present experience of communion with God. If there be a God at all, anything is more reasonable than to believe that the union, formed between Him and me, by faith here can ever come to an end until I have exhausted Him, and drawn all His fulness into myself. This communion, by its very sweetness, yieldeth proof that it was "born for immortality." And the psalmist here, just because to-day God is the Rock of his heart, is sure that that relation must last on, through life, through death, aye! and for ever, "when all that seems shall suffer shock." (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *Tenderness of desire*:—I. THEY EXPRESS A CONSCIOUS NECESSITY WHICH GOD ALONE IS ABLE TO MEET. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" God alone can meet the varied needs of our nature. II. STRONG AND ABSORBING LOVE FOR GOD. This no hireling love for what it gets, but love for the giver, for the Lord Himself. And it need not come into collision with the love of our earthly friends. If we put the love of man first, all is wrong: but put the love of Christ first, and then all is right. (E. Garbett, M.A.) *Why should a man love Jesus Christ?*—I. BECAUSE OF THE SUPERLATIVE BEAUTY OF HIS CHARACTER. Jesus Christ is the purest, truest, highest, most gracious human character which this world has seen. Every lofty virtue had in His life its natural home; every rich grace flowered in faultless perfectness, in coherence, and congruity, and symmetry. In the great worlds of character and conduct, in the realms of thought and feeling, speech and act, He has a sovereign pre-eminence. Without the thought of His character and the power of His influence, the moral wealth of the world would suffer an irreparable impoverishment, and the strength of the world's ethical energy would be seriously diminished. II. BECAUSE OF THE DEPTH OF HIS APPEAL TO US. He never appeals to us for small things, but asks for those higher consecrations which tax to the very limit every power of life. III. BECAUSE OF THE ELEVATION TO WHICH HE RAISES LIFE. We have no need, and no desire, to disparage the delicate beauty of the lives of some splendid Pagans, nor are we unmindful of the nobility of some characters which have even neglected the Gospel of our Lord—unconsciously to them, Christ is the root of every bit of their goodness. In every walk of life, and in every realm, Jesus has lifted some noble spirit into an excellent grandeur; He has fertilized his thought, inspired his genius, deepened every noble enthusiasm, strengthened every holy purpose, lifted every power to its best energy, created and sustained the highest tastes and sweetest dispositions, and given to the whole life symmetry and influence. (G. B. Austin.) *The desolate soul finding rest in God*:—1. In those moments when the soul is left desolate, do not still seek comfort from the world. Why would you set your heart upon that which

is not? 2. Do not overwhelmed with over-much sorrow. Such feelings are natural in the first flowings of affliction; but it is not meet to indulge and brood over them, so as to abandon the duties of life and sink in melancholy. 3. Harbour not revenge against those who have injured you, or in any way been the cause of your affliction. Revenge stops the sources of Divine consolation. 4. Beware of interrupting your desires toward God by any wilful sin. Afflictions do not intercept, they rather raise the desires to heaven; but every wilful deliberate sin overspreads the soul with a thick cloud, and separates betwixt us and our God. 5. Improve distresses of every kind as means of virtue, and grounds of praise. (S. Charters.) *The necessity of an Infinite Being to make men happy*:—I. THE INSUFFICIENCY OF ANY WORLDLY GOOD FOR THE HAPPINESS OF MAN.

1. The nature of man in his present state makes it impossible for him to be completely happy. He hath hopes which cannot be answered, fears which cannot be silenced, desires will not be satisfied. 2. The nature of things, or at least the posture of them, will not and cannot render us completely happy. They have too much uncertainty to be depended on, and too much alloy mixed up with them to pass for durable or solid riches. II. THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF AN INFINITELY PERFECT BEING, TO MAKE MAN COMPLETELY HAPPY. Let us therefore examine what are the essential qualifications of an all-sufficient good, that we may be sure we are right, in resorting to God for it. 1. God is Almighty, and so can do whatever He pleaseth in heaven and earth. Wherever therefore the ingredients of our happiness are scattered, He can bring them together, and make the faculty and its object meet. 2. Infinite wisdom knows how to employ an infinity of power with all advantage for our interests. 3. His goodness assures us that He will exert these great perfections in our favour, so that whatever infinite wisdom can contrive, or infinite power do for us, His infinite goodness assures us will be contrived and done for us. 4. Eternity and unchangeableness are necessary to finish and complete our happiness. (N. Marshall, D.D.) *God the only adequate portion*:—

I. THE PSALMIST HAD ASCERTAINED WHAT THE NATURE AND PROPERTIES OF AN ADEQUATE PORTION FOR MAN MUST BE. He had, without doubt, considered himself, his nature, his wants, his capacities—had thought on his situation, and the dangers to which he was exposed from every quarter. He must have ascertained what influence that must have on his soul, and on those scenes of trial and temptation through which he might be called to pass—what it must do when strength and flesh fail, when death shall call him away from every created comfort, dissolve the dearest and tenderest connections—what it must do for his departing spirit, and that throughout eternity—to which he could direct his thoughts, and say, "This is all I want." II. THE PSALMIST HAD RESOLVED THE QUESTION, WHETHER THE PROPER PORTION AND FELICITY OF MAN WAS IN CREATED NATURE, OR IN GOD. This would be his language:—"Could I ensure the favour and friendship of Jehovah; His power, my shield; His light, my sun; His wisdom, my counsellor; His arm, my support; that consolation and joy He can at present create; and that never-ending felicity He can give me to possess; should I not then have what will satisfy my soul? May I not rest here, and say—'It is enough'?" III. THE TEXT EXPRESSES THE DECIDED CONVICTION OF THE PSALMIST, THAT THE ONLY PORTION AND FELICITY OF MAN IS IN GOD. 1. God is all-sufficient. There is no difficulty from which He cannot extricate the soul, no enemy out of the reach of His arm, no evil impending which He cannot prevent, nor any sum of felicity but what He can bestow. 2. God is an unchangeable good. 3. God is a portion of which the pious can never be deprived. IV. OUR TEXT SUPPOSES THE PSALMIST'S PERSUASION, THAT JEHOVAH WOULD BECOME THAT MAN'S PORTION, WHO, RENOUNCING EVERY OTHER, SEEKS IT IN HIM. V. ON THIS CONVICTION, THE PSALMIST MADE AN ACTUAL AND DELIBERATE CHOICE OF GOD. VI. THE PSALMIST REPOSED IN GOD WITH ENTIRE SATISFACTION—HE WAS THE SUPREME OBJECT OF HIS DESIRE AND DELIGHT. (N. Hill.) *God the only adequate portion of the soul*:—1. God is the proper portion of the soul, because He is the only undervived and absolute good. Whatever of virtue and truth, of moral worth and spiritual beauty, there may be in any part of the universe, among our race or other races, all must be referred to Him as its source. 2. He is a good adapted to the nature and necessities of the soul. Man was made originally in the Divine image; and whatever changes may have occurred in His character and condition, His nature is unchanged. A sick man is still a man; and a soul, dislocated and enervated by sin, is still a soul. As such it can find its supreme happiness only in God. 3. This will be further evident from considering that God is an infinite God. Here is a God we

can adore. Here the intense longings of the soul are satisfied. In this august, ever-present, all-seeing, all-controlling Divinity, our minds repose with the assurance that His nature is not only suited to our nature, but absolutely boundless and unsearchable. 4. This implies that God is an eternal good—which may be mentioned as another proof that He is the only adequate portion for the soul. 5. As the crowning argument to show that God is the proper portion of the soul, it may be added that He is a most comprehensive good. Where He gives Himself, He gives every other good. (*H. A. Boardman, D.D.*) *Moral character tested by the estimate of God, the chief good*:—The psalmist here uses the largest possible terms to assert his preference for God over all else. There is something very noble in such an assertion, so unqualified and so fearless, appealing, as it does, to the great Searcher of all hearts. How far off we are from being able to make the like assertion! Where is the single eye to God's glory? and how frequent the attempt to "serve two masters," and these irreconcilable. But such noble assertions as this are not to be regarded as beyond Christians generally. We have no proof that Asaph was a man of extraordinary piety. But though few only can adopt such language without presumption, still, to be a righteous man at all, it is necessary that he prefer God to aught besides, whether in heaven or in earth. A man may distrust himself whether he really does thus prefer God, and desire that he may do so far more, but the fact may be, all the same, that God is supreme in his affections. It is not the same thing our making God our chief good, and our being able to appeal to Him that we do. Just as there may be faith without assurance. There can be no real religion without God being first in our regard, but there may be this and yet no realization of it in our feelings. But our purpose now is to take the psalmist's words and to use them as a measure by which all may judge men's distance from moral excellence. And we do this—I. IN REGARD TO THE UNCONVERTED. God is not in all their thoughts, much less supreme in them. Nor do they wish Him to be. The psalmist desired, but they do not, to be for ever with God. It is said that men dread annihilation, the soul dying with the body. But do men dread this? Have not poetry and philosophy greatly exaggerated here? Unquestionably, man's dissatisfaction with the present is proof of his being designed for another state of being. But whilst a man may have the witness in himself that he is not to be annihilated, he yet may have no horror at the thought of it. He would be glad to know that death is but an everlasting sleep. For they cannot endure to look forward. Wrath and retribution are there. Hence they cannot shrink, as do the godly, from ceasing to exist. But is not this the most affecting of all evidences of the vast extent of human degeneracy—that any should be willing to perish as do the brutes: that the soul should not shrink from annihilation? But the psalmist—how different his desire! And this not only as to the future, but as to the chief good of the present. II. THE RIGHTEOUS. Too often they love life over-much. If their circumstances be easy, how they shrink from death; how few are "ready to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." Christians who cling to this world are more blameworthy than the ungodly who shrink from the next. For the psalmist, God alone could suffice. And in regard to our hope of the future, take heed lest our delight in heaven be that there our loved ones are, rather than that God is there. The presence of God and Christ make heaven. Let us learn to say, "Whom have I in heaven," etc. (*Henry Melvill, B.D.*) *God the only happiness of man*:—Man himself is not sufficient for his own happiness. Because he is liable to so many evils; so full of wants; compassed about with so many infirmities, and this from youth to old age. Think what evils would happen to man if the providence of God did not rule the world. Man, therefore, needs a source of happiness outside himself. 1. It must be an all-sufficient good. 2. It must be perfect goodness. 3. It must be firm and unchangeable in itself. 4. It must be such a good as none can deprive us of, and take away from us. 5. It must be eternal. 6. It must be able to support and comfort us in every condition, and under all the accidents and adversities of human life. 7. It must be such a good as can give perfect rest and tranquillity to our minds. Nothing that is short of all this can make us happy: and no creature, no, not the whole creation, can pretend to be all this to us. All these properties meet only in God, who is the perfect and supreme good; and, consequently, God is the only happiness of man. (*J. Tillotson, D.D.*) *The discipline of desire*:—The disciplining of our desire lays upon us no small or light or fleeting duty. On the contrary, it has to do with the weightier matters of the law. The issues are far-reaching, and the application

must be constant. 1. Be watchful of your desire for possession. A man may have a greed for gold without having the gold. A poor man may love money. 2. Be watchful of your desire for pleasure. Be on your guard that it does not take the moral grit out of your soul. Work and play should go hand in hand, and both should be hallowed. 3. Watch your desire for praise. Don't let it tone down the energetic strokes that give strength and value to your virtues. 4. Watch your desire for ease. I suppose it is true that there is a vein of laziness in all of us. We don't want to be bothered; but the world has a right to expect us to evince that we possess will, character, and to evince also that that character is supreme. 5. Watch your desire in reading. Be on your guard against books which make no requirement upon your thinking powers, and take care they do not wound your sympathy. Some persons will weep profusely over pathetic scenes described in books, and have no tears to shed or help to give in the actual needs and griefs of life. 6. Train your desire to make the best of your circumstances. We may not be able to choose our circumstances, but we can use them. Every man is a king or a slave. Don't ask to be "coddled," but let your request be: "Get out of the sunlight; give me opportunities." Be on your guard against wandering desires, for it is these that give emptiness to life. 7. Finally, bring your desires to Christ. Put that desire which is spoiling you into His hands. Let His love cleanse and direct and complete it. There is nothing that will kill an old love like a new love, and higher. Make faith the teacher of desire. (*W. R. Britton.*) *The good man's reward*:—There is a beautiful story of Thomas Aquinas, that one day, while worshipping in the chapel in which he was accustomed to perform his devotions, the Saviour appeared to him and said, "Thomas, thou hast written much and well concerning Me. What reward shall I give thee for thy work?" Whereupon he answered, "Nihil nisi te, Domine"—"Nothing but Thyself, O Lord."

Ver. 26. **My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.**—*Immortality*:—The especial point of this whole psalm lies in the contrast between the present and the future, between the transitory and the eternal. His bodily frame, or "flesh," the psalmist feels, is breaking up. For the moment it might seem that his "heart" was partaking in the depressing sense of coming dissolution. The "heart" with the Hebrews means, speaking generally, the centre or inner seat of life, whether physical or spiritual. It is indeed used in one well-known passage of the Psalter in the physical sense of animal life-power which is quickened by food and made glad by wine. More commonly it is the centre from which the life-stream of thought and feeling pours through the soul. Thus the "heart" is said to "speak," to "think," to "conceive within self," to "meditate," to "desire," to "cry out in song and jubilee," to be heated with intense thought, to be grieved, to be desolate, to be smitten and withered like grass, to be wounded, to be broken. Especially is the heart the seat of the moral life, of its movement and repose, of its conquests and failures, of its final victory or death. Thus the heart is said to be "ready," or "clean," or "fixed," or "whole" and "perfect," or "converted," or "hardened," as the case may be. As the seat of the moral life the heart is described as "deep." God knows its mysterious secrets. Thus, then, in the passage before us, "the flesh" is in contrast to the "heart," as the animal frame of man might be contrasted with the life of consciousness, feeling, and moral effort. The former is yielding to the slow, certain action of time, and has already upon it the presentiment of death. The latter seems for one instant to lose the sense of its real indestructibility in its profound sympathy with the weakly body which yet encases it. But the darkness lasts for a moment only; for "God is the strength of my heart," etc. The contrast is too perfect to be evaded. On the one side the perishing body; on the other, the undying soul. And it is this vision which removes the difficulty he had felt in regard to the ways of God. It melts away altogether beneath the rays of light which stream from one cardinal truth, it is solved by the doctrine of the immortality of the soul of man. (*Canon Liddon.*) *A common fact and a special privilege*:—I. A FACT IN THE HISTORY OF ALL MEN. The fact is the decay of man as a citizen of this earth. The seed of death is planted in us all, and as the seed grows, man decays. "All flesh is grass." This inevitable decay of our nature shows two things:—1. The absurdity of worldliness. 2. The necessity of spirituality. Without this, man has no interest in a life beyond this mortal state. With this, brighter worlds loom before him. This

spirituality, however, can only be obtained through Christ. This is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God. II. A PRIVILEGE IN THE HISTORY OF SOME MEN. "God is the strength (rock) of my heart." 1. God is the soul's power. Without Him it has no moral strength to resist the wrong, to pursue the right, to endure trials, to welcome death, to serve humanity, and to honour God. God is the strength. As sap in all the branches of the tree, He is strength to all the faculties of the soul. "Our sufficiency is of God." 2. God is the soul's portion. "My portion for ever." A loving heart can be satisfied with nothing less than the object of its affection. The object may give to the lover all he has, but unless he gives himself the hunger of love is not allayed. Even so man's soul cries out for the living God, and nothing less will do. He is the portion (1) most satisfying; (2) most exhaustless; (3) most enduring. (*Homilist.*) *The believer's consolation in death*.—I. WHAT THE PSALMIST MEANS BY THE FLESH AND HEART FAILING. 1. By the flesh failing, we are to understand death. (1) We die daily; are gradually decaying and wearing away (Job xiv. 10). (2) Universally (Eccles. vi. 6). (3) With great variety; in some early; in others in their bloom; with others, not till the shadows of the evening come upon them (1 Sam. xx. 3). (4) Most certainly, without a possibility of prevention; neither food nor physic will always avail (Eccles. viii. 8). (5) Swiftly (James iv. 14; Job xiv. 1, 2). (6) In death, the flesh fails irrecoverably, as to its being restored to its former state upon earth (Heb. ix. 27; Ps. xxxix. 13). 2. When the flesh is thus failing in a dying hour, the heart may be ready to sink into a state of despondency; and this may be owing—(1) To severity of affliction (Job xvi. 12). (2) To the recollection of past sins, although forgiven, without eyeing the sacrifice of Christ (Job xxi. 6). (3) To the temptations of Satan (1 Pet. i. 6). (4) To the loss of our evidence, as to our acceptance with God (Ps. xlii. 5-7). (5) To a suspension of the sensible presence of Christ. II. THE SOURCE OF OUR DEPENDENCE IN SUCH AWFUL CIRCUMSTANCES, God. "God is the strength of my heart." This may be inferred—1. From His love to them (Ps. xi. 7). 2. From His ability (Isa. lix. 1). 3. From His infinite presence with them (2 Chron. xvi. 9). 4. From His faithfulness to His kind promises made to them, and on which He has caused them to hope (Isa. xliii. 1-3). 5. From their interest in Him, their portion for ever, "The Lord is my portion," etc. (Lam. iii. 24). 6. What kind of a portion God is, no creature can fully describe (Job xi. 7). (1) God is a suitable portion, suited to man's spiritual nature (ver. 25). (2) All-sufficient portion (Gen. xvii. 1; Eph. iii. 20). (3) Infinite portion: and this is the ground of His being all-sufficient. Infinite mercy to pardon, infinite wisdom to counsel, infinite power to support, infinite grace to enrich, infinite glory to bestow (Ps. lxxxiv. 11). (4) He is an eternal portion (Gen. xv. 1). And on this ground it is, the children of God make their boast (Ps. xlviii. 14). Improvement: 1. Let the consideration of our flesh failing daily excite us to a daily preparation for eternity. 2. As God is the strength of our hearts, let us trust in Him, in life and death, that He may be our portion for ever. (*T. Hannam.*)

Ver. 28. *It is good for me to draw near to God.*—*An assuredly good thing*.—When a man is sick everybody knows what is good for him. They recommend specifics by the score. Amid such a babel, it is well for a man if he knows what is good for himself. And so in our spiritual troubles. Every friend commends some different course. But the psalmist puts them all aside, and declares, "It is good for me to draw near unto God." Thus—I. HE TACTICALLY CONDEMNED OTHER COURSES OF ACTION. From the connection of the text it is plain that he repents of certain kinds of thought to which he had given way. The text tells of his recoil from them. 1. From trying to fathom the mysteries of Providence. What have we to do with measuring its great depths? And yet we are ever trying to. 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 eye from his book, he saw standing upon the window ledge his little son. He was troubled and affrighted to the last degree, for the child stood there in utmost peril of falling to the ground and being dashed to pieces. The little one 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 to climb up, with boyish daring, 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 destruction." My God, it is not good for me to pry into Thy secrets with curiosity, but it is good for me to draw near unto Thee in sincerity. And—2. We learn also it is not good for us, under any circumstances, to go to a distance from God. The preceding verse reads, "They that are far from Thee shall perish." Now, the tendency of repeated affliction is, in the carnal mind, to drive us away from God. A dog may follow you if you offer it a bone, but strike it and see if it will follow you then. But it can never be good for us to go away from God. II. **OBSERVE WHAT IS PLAINLY COMMENDED**—"to draw near unto God." 1. This implies that we are reconciled to Him. To attempt to draw near while He is angry would be insanity. As well might the moth draw near to the candle. We must first be accepted in Christ. 2. To draw near the soul must realize that God is near to it, and must have a clear sense of who and what God is. 3. It is prayer, but it is more than prayer. There may be no words, but it is the laying open of the chamber of your soul that the Lord may enter and inspect the whole; it is the complete yielding up of yourself to God to be dealt with as He pleases. 4. It may assume the form of praise. As with David when he sat in the Lord's presence, wondering "Whence is this to me? What am I and my father's house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto?" 5. It is looking at the matter in the Divine light. If we judge God from our standpoint we shall misjudge; but see how that which troubles you looks in the light of God. Bereavement, poverty, when seen as God's way of saving your soul, look very different then. 6. It is the being pleased with anything and everything that pleases God. We are often willing to give up our own way to please those we love; should we not be so in order to please God? III. **THE GROUNDS FOR THE UNQUALIFIED COMMENDATION OF THIS DRAWING NEAR TO GOD.** 1. It is good in itself. How can it be otherwise? The courtier delights to bask in the presence of his sovereign. 2. It is good if we consider our relations to God. Are we not His children? But is it not a good thing for the child to come near to its parents? 3. And because of our pitiable condition and character. We are the weakest of the weak. 4. It removes many evils to which you are constantly exposed. Man of business, absorbed in your work, day by day, what can so keep you from worldliness and fret and anxiety, as drawing near to God? 5. And there are many good things which it will confer. There is no blessing which prayer cannot obtain, which close approaches to God will not ensure. If then it be so good, let us do it at once. You who have been living afar off; you who are happy; and especially you who are penitent sinners. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *A devotional spirit*.—I. **EXPLAIN WHAT IS MEANT BY SUCH DEVOTIONAL SPIRIT.** Note then—1. Its means—prayer, etc. 2. Its refuge—God. 3. Its exercises. II. **ITS IMPORTANCE AND ADVANTAGES.** 1. Such spirit furthers holiness. 2. Helps the understanding of Divine truth. 3. Becomes a habit full of help to the soul. Is—4. One of the strongest safeguards against temptation. 5. Cultivates all the Christian graces. 6. Fixes his heart. 7. Is humble, tender, childlike. 8. Gives increase in holiness, which but for it would yield no help (Ps. civ.). 9. Hangs round the very essentials of religion—Christ, God, the promises, etc. (I. S. Spencer, D.D.) *Drawing near to God*.—I. **THE CONDUCT REFERRED TO.** 1. It implies that there has been separation. 2. It is the religion of the heart. 3. It demands enlightenment of mind, and—4. The realization of God's presence. II. **THE BENEFIT OF THIS DRAWING NEAR TO GOD.** "It is good for," etc. This must depend upon the character of the God to whom we draw near. If He be only my judge, how could I say, "It is good," etc. But He is our Father, and hence it cannot but be good to draw near to Him. Now, the blessings of this are—1. Deliverance from care and fear. See David; the three Hebrew youths; Paul and Silas, etc. 2. It is the only real preservative from sin. 3. It is the assurance to us of safety now and for ever. 4. It is a very foretaste of heaven. Remember it is not a mere isolated act, but our habit. How terrible to come to a death-bed without ever having drawn near to God. (Montagu Villiers, M.A.) *The excellence of drawing near to God*.—I. **AS TO ITS NATURE,** it comprehends much. It implies, first, that man is morally distant from God. This sacred exercise implies that a medium or a means of access is appointed. We have this blessed truth set forth by Christ Himself; "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." He is the Daysman; He heals the wide and awful breach. In further illustration of this exalted exercise, I would remark, that prayer is appointed as the act of our approach to Him. There is a sense in which we cannot be nearer to God in one view than another. I cannot go where He is not. But in the act of prayer I enter as it were into His



presence. Prayer is the appointed means of communication betwixt God and man. Let me further observe, in illustration of this holy exercise, that God requires it should be accompanied with a suitable disposition. Would you "draw near to God" acceptably? you must come with humility. Would you "draw near to God" with acceptance? you must draw near with fervour—contemplating the magnitude of the blessings which you ask. To "draw near" to God acceptably, you must draw near in perseverance. The blessing which you ask may be for a season withheld; or the success you implore may for a time be suspended. II. THE ADVANTAGES OF THIS EXALTED EXERCISE. For David says, "It is good to draw near to God." And why so? Because God has commanded it; and this circumstance alone ought sufficiently to convince us of its value and necessity. "It is good," because, apart from the authority of that command, it is reasonable. "There is no truth more obvious, and eternal." And there is yet another great advantage; it tends to help us to cherish the calmness of mind, so essential to our advancement, and our spiritual prosperity and peace. "It is," further, "good," as instrumental in obtaining all spiritual blessings. The truth of the text is exemplified in all the events of life; but in the awful hour of death you shall find, with additional energy of conviction, that "it is good for you to draw near to God." "He will be the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever." (*John Bowers.*) *Let us pray:*—There are many ways by which we draw near to God, but prayer is the best used means. So then take our text—I. AS A TOUCHSTONE. Try your prayers by it. Is there any drawing near to God in them? No matter how beautiful, venerable, scriptural the form, if the petitions be never presented. Suppose I should desire a favour of some friend. I shut myself up alone, and I commence delivering an oration, pleading earnestly for the boon I need. I repeat this at night, and so on month after month. At last I meet my friend, and I tell him that I have been asking a favour of him, and that he has never heard my prayer. "Nay," saith he, "I have never seen you; you never spoke to me." "Ah, but you should have heard what I said; if you had but heard, it surely would have moved your heart." "Ah," saith he, "but then you did not address it to me. You wrote a letter, you tell me, but did you post the letter?" "No, no," you say; "I kept the letter after I had written it; I never sent it to you." Now, mark, it is thus with many prayers. There has been no drawing near to God. This drawing near is at first with holy fear, then with holy reverence, then with joy as a child to a father. Next—II. On the text AS A WHETSTONE. Pray, for prayer explains mysteries; brings deliverances; obtains promises. If thou hast a burden on thy back, remember prayer, for thou shalt carry it well if thou canst pray. Once on a time Christian had to carry it. He crept along on his hands and knees. There appeared to him a fair and comely damsel, holding in her hands a wand, and she touched the burden. It was there, it was not removed; but, strange to say, the burden lost its weight. That which had crushed him to the earth had become now so light that he could leap and carry it. And prayer ensures success in our work for God. Two labourers in God's harvest met each other once upon a time, and they sat down to compare notes. One was sorrowful, and complained that though he diligently sowed, no harvest came. The other said, "I steep my seed in prayer, and I have much success." III. AS A TOUCHSTONE. For the prayerless soul is a Christless soul. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The saint's happiness:*—"It is good;" that is, it puts in us a blessed quality and disposition. It makes a man to be like God; and, secondly, "it is good," that is, it is comfortable; for it is the happiness of the creature to be near the Creator; it is beneficial and helpful. "To draw near." How can a man but be near to God, seeing He filleth heaven and earth: "Whither shall I go from Thy presence?" (Ps. cxxxix. 7). He is present always in power and providence in all places, but graciously present with some by His Spirit, supporting, comforting, strengthening the heart of a good man. As the soul is said to be in several parts by several faculties, so God present He is to all, but in a diverse manner. Now, we are said to be near to God in divers degrees. 1. When our understanding is enlightened; and so the young man speaking discreetly in things concerning God, is said not to be far from the kingdom of God (Mark xii. 34). 2. In minding; when God is present to our minds, so as the soul is said to be present to that which it mindeth; contrarily it is said of the wicked, that "God is not in all their thoughts" (Ps. x. 4). 3. When the will upon the discovery of the understanding comes to choose the better part, and is drawn from that choice to cleave to Him, as it was said of Jonathan's heart, "it was knit to David" (1 Sam. xviii. 1). 4. When our whole affections

are carried to God, loving Him as the chief good. Love is the first-born affection. That breeds desire of communion with God. Thence comes joy in Him, so as the soul pants after God, "as the hart after the water-springs" (Ps. xlii. 1). 5. When the soul is touched with the Spirit of God working faith, stirring up dependence, confidence, and trust on God. Hence ariseth sweet communion. The soul is never at rest till it rests on Him. Then it is afraid to break with Him or to displease Him. But it groweth zealous and resolute, and hot in love, stiff in good cases; resolute against his enemies. And yet this is not all, for God will have also the outward man, so as the whole man must present itself before God in word, in sacraments; speak of Him and to Him with reverence, and yet with strength of affection mounting up in prayer, as in a fiery chariot; hear Him speak to us; consulting with His oracles; fetching comforts against distresses, directions against maladies. 6. When we praise Him; for this is the work of the souls departed, and of the angels in heaven, that are continually near unto Him. And thus much for the opening of the words. The prophet here saith, "It is good for me." How came he to know this? Why, he had found it by experience, and by it he was thoroughly convinced of it. (R. Sibbes.) *Good to draw near:*—Who does not wish for good? But too many fail to understand what real good is, and choose that which is evil by mistake. I. THE ACTION—"drawing near." We may do so by prayer, by study, by preparation. But we must do so chiefly by being conformed to the likeness of the Holy Spirit and by being united through Jesus. II. THE REWARD. It is good—good in every way: good for our happiness; good for our holiness; good for our eternal interests; good for our usefulness; good for our Master's glory. (Homilist.) *The nature and benefits of communion with God:*—I. WHAT IT IS TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD. It is to have clear and realizing views of His character, and especially as that character is made known in and by Christ—to exercise towards Him suitable acts of faith, dependence, love, gratitude and worship. II. WHY IT IS GOOD THUS TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD. 1. Because it is then the soul realizes in an especial manner God's love, and finds its own love powerfully called into exercise. 2. Because it has a peculiarly sanctifying influence upon the mind. 3. Because it is a means of strengthening the soul to run the race that is set before it, and to persevere without wavering in the ways of the Lord. (R. Oakman, B.A.) *Advantages of communion with God:*—I. WHAT IS INCLUDED. 1. A Scriptural knowledge of God. 2. Faith in God. 3. An explicit apprehension of the only medium of drawing near to God and of access, whether it be by prayer, meditation, or communion with Him. 4. Humble, yet confident dependence on the aids of the Divine grace. II. THE ADVANTAGES. 1. It tends to the intellectual elevation of the soul. 2. It is essentially adapted to man's spiritual improvement. 3. It is the source of man's highest blessedness. 4. It is good as connected with our absolute safety. 5. It is an essential preparation for the glory of heaven. (J. Burns, D.D.) *On devotion:*—I shall endeavour to recommend the duties of devotion, by considering their influence on the virtue and the happiness of human life. I. THEY ARE ADMIRABLY CALCULATED TO PROMOTE YOUR IMPROVEMENT IN VIRTUE. The duties of devotion, leading to the contemplation of infinite excellence, and improving the best affections of the heart, plant in our breasts the seeds of virtue. The exercises in which these duties engage us are favourable also to its growth; for we come into the presence of God, not merely to adore the perfection of His nature, and to celebrate the goodness to which we owe all our bliss—we come to lay open before Him the secrets of our souls—to bewail the transgressions by which we have offended Him—and to form our resolutions of future obedience. These exercises lead to a serious review, and produce a knowledge of our own characters extremely favourable to improvement. II. THE INFLUENCE OF DEVOTION ON THE HAPPINESS OF LIFE. 1. Devotion is, itself, a source of the sublimest enjoyment. The human mind delights in exercise; and the duties of piety are the noblest exercise in which its powers can be employed. 2. Devotion exalts and purifies every earthly pleasure. It adds to the enjoyment of our present comforts the delightful emotion of gratitude to our Maker. 3. But adversity is the scene in which devotion triumphs; for, however in our prosperity we may forget our Maker, affliction reminds us of our dependence on Him. (W. Moodie, D.D.) *The benefits of drawing near to God:*—I. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF OUR SALVATION, AND THE FOUNTAIN FROM WHICH WE DRAW OUR SPIRITUAL SUPPLY. The waters of a stream become purer and better as we approach the fountain head. II. Drawing near to God ENABLES US THE BETTER TO KNOW GOD. To know our fellow-men we must draw

near to them. We may know something of God from tradition—from nature—from a cold and critical study of the Bible; but to know Him more perfectly we must draw near to Him, and thus know Him in our own Christian experiences.

III. IT INVOLVES A DRAWING AWAY FROM THE WORLD. Our arms are too short for us to walk hand in hand with God and the world. The great, clutchy arms of the world are about us, and the loving arms of God are extended towards us, inviting us to come nearer to Him.

IV. IT PUTS US IN OUR PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WORLD.

1. It enables the world to put a proper estimate on us. When we are far away from God, the world is in doubt whether or not to count on us.
2. It enables us to form a proper estimate of the world. We owe the world a great deal, and we never know how much until we draw near to God.
3. This is the secret of success in the Christian life. Are we to accomplish anything together for the Master? This will depend upon the distance between us and God. (*John Hall, D.D.*)

*On drawing near to God:—*I. BY THE PRACTICE OF HOLINESS AND VIRTUE THROUGHOUT THE GENERAL TENOR OF OUR LIFE. He who lives in the exercise of good affections, and in the regular discharge of the offices of virtue and piety, maintains, as far as his infirmity allows, conformity with the nature of that perfect Being, whose benevolence, whose purity and rectitude, are conspicuous, both in His works and His ways.

II. BY ACTS OF IMMEDIATE DEVOTION. There are two ways by which these contribute to bring us near to God.

1. The first is, by their strengthening in the soul that power of vital godliness and virtue in which consists our chief resemblance to God: for it is never to be forgotten, that all our devotional exercises are subservient to this great end. Herein consist their whole virtue and efficacy, that they purify and improve the soul, raise it above low passions, and thereby promote the elevation of the human nature towards the Divine.
2. When our acts of devotion are of this nature, they form the other sense in which the words of the text are to be understood. We therein draw near to God, as we enter into the most immediate intercourse with Him, which the nature of our state admits; approaching Him through a great Mediator and Intercessor; sending up those prayers to which we are encouraged to believe that the Almighty is lending a gracious ear; resigning ourselves to His conduct, and offering up our souls to Him; exercising, in short, all those acts of faith, love and trust which become dependent creatures towards their Sovereign and Father. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*)

*The benefit of drawing near to God:—*I. IT WILL ESTABLISH YOUR CONFIDENCE IN GODLINESS AS A REALITY. Nearness to God is nearness to all that is good; for "with Him is the fountain of life." Nearness to God is nearness to the object to which all religious institutions are designed to bring you: it is this that explains their meaning, and in this they gain their end. Nearness to God is nearness to religious truth, which is the animating soul of all these institutions; nearness to that truth, not in intellectual perception merely, but in an experimental sense of its sweetness and efficacy.

II. IT WILL RECTIFY YOUR ESTIMATE OF TERRESTRIAL THINGS. It is in the mount of communion with God that you are drawn away from the sordid and the grovelling, and made to soar to the spiritual and the heavenly. There your range of view is exceedingly widened; your souls are elevated, enlarged, and filled; things unseen and eternal are realized in their transcendent greatness and importance, and things seen and temporal sink into insignificance; the sublime of heaven expands before you, and reveals earth in its littleness, and you say (Ps. xvii. 14, 15).

III. IT WILL FORTIFY YOUR MINDS IN THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION. What is the design of every temptation? To seduce from God. In nearness to Him, therefore, you are keeping your ground; you are resisting and overcoming. You are verifying what is said of the child of God (1 John v. 18).

IV. IT WILL QUICKEN YOUR SPIRITUAL DESIRES. This is a thing of great importance. Just as your spiritual desires are, so is your spiritual health: when they are languid, it is infirm; when they are lively, it is vigorous. Again, just as your spiritual desires are, so is your affection to the things of earth: when they are keen, it is dull; when they are weak, it is strong. Moreover, just as your spiritual desires are, so is your spiritual prosperity as a whole; so is your growth in grace, and so is your spiritual enjoyment. It is of the nature of grace in the heart, that the more it enjoys, it craves the more; and the more it has of the best of earth, it longs the more for the bliss of heaven.

V. IT WILL AUGMENT YOUR CHRISTIAN USEFULNESS. The fit agent for rousing consciences, and moving hearts, and winning souls, is the man that comes forth from the presence-chamber of the King, with the atmosphere of "the Holiest" about him, and his own face shining with the lustre of the glory of God upon it.

To conclude : see from this subject—1. One thing about godliness which we should keep prominently before our minds. The good that is in it, and that flows from it. 2. One reason why we so much underrate the future world. It is because we so much overrate the present. 3. Who the safest and happiest man among us is. The man who is nearest to his God. 4. The mistake of those who make communion with God to consist chiefly in pleasing feeling. They will have the way to heaven to be heaven itself. 5. What to look for after those days of high privilege we have been seeing. The full harvest of those blessed fruits or effects of "drawing near to God," of some of which we have now been speaking, is yet to be reaped. Let us take good heed to ourselves that we reap this harvest in all its fulness and preciousness. (*D. Young, D.D.*) *Nearness to God the key to life's puzzles*.—I. **NEARNESS TO GOD IS THE ONE GOOD.** Union with God is life, in all senses of the word, according as the creature is capable of union with Him. Why; there is no life in a plant except God's power is vitalizing it. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow"—because God makes them grow. There is no bodily life in a man unless He continually breathes into the nostrils the breath of life. If you stop the flow of the fountain then all the pools are dry. There is no life intellectual in a man unless by the "inspiration of the Almighty" in union with God, from whom all just "thoughts do proceed." And high above all these forms of life, the only real life of a spirit is the life that it draws from its union with God Himself, whereby He pours Himself into it, and in the deepest sense of the words it is true—"Because I live ye shall live also." I need scarcely go on pointing out other respects of this supreme—or more truly, this solitary—good. For instance, nothing is really good to me unless I have it within me, so as that it never can be wrenched away from me. The blessings that we cannot incorporate with the very substance of our being are only partial blessings after all; and all these things round us that do minister to our necessities, tastes, affections, and sometimes to our weaknesses, these good things fail just in this, that they stand outside us, and there is no real union between us and them. So changes come, and we have to unclasp hands, and the footsteps that used to be planted by the side of ours cease, and our track across the sands is lonely; and losses come, and death comes, and all the glory and the good that were only externally possessed by us we leave behind us. "It is good for me," amidst the morasses and quicksands and bogs of life's uncertain and shifting ill and good, to set my feet upon the rock, and to say, "Here I stand, and my footing will never give way." Do you, brother, possess a changeless, imperishable, inwrought good like that? You may if you like. But remember, too, that in regard to this Christian good, it is not only the possession of it, but the aspiration after it, that is blessed. "It is good to draw near;" and the seeking after God is as far above the possession of all other good as the heaven is above the earth. II. **THE WAY TO NEARNESS TO GOD IS TWOFOLD.** On the one hand the true path is Jesus Christ, on the other hand the means by which we walk upon that path is our faith. The apostle puts it all in a nutshell when he says his prayer is that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith," and then, by a linked chain, leads up to the final issues of that faith in that indwelling Christ—"that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God." So to draw near and to possess that good, that only good which is God, all that is needed is—and it is needed—that we should turn with the surrender of our hearts, with the submission of our wills, with the outgoing of our affections, and with the conformity of our practical life, to Jesus. Seeing Him, we see the Father, and having Him near us, we feel the touch of the Divine hand, and being joined to the Lord, we are separated from the vanities of life, and united to the supreme good. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The delights of prayer*.—Alaine once wrote—"Though I am apt to be unsettled and quickly set off the hinges, yet, methinks, I am like a bird out of the nest, I am never quiet till I am in my old way of communion with God; like the needle in the compass, that is restless till it be turned towards the pole. I can say through grace, with the Church, 'With my soul have I desired Thee in the night, and with my spirit within me have I sought Thee early.' My heart is early and late with God; 'tis the business and delight of my life to seek Him." (*Life of Alaine.*)

## PSALM LXXIV.

**VERS. 1-23. O God, why hast Thou cast us off for ever! why doth Thine anger smoke against the sheep of Thy pasture!**—*The wail and prayer of a true patriot:*—**I. THE WAIL** (vers. 1-17). 1. Some communities of men are far more favoured of Heaven than others. The Jews were (vers. 1, 2). In this diversity of endowment—(1) There is no just reason for complaining of God. As the Sovereign Author of all life, He has an undoubted right to determine as to whether He should give life to any or not; what kind of life it should be, and to how many; and what kind or measure of power He should give to each. (2) There is no injury done to any. The man or community least favoured has no right to complain, for he is only responsible for what he has. Obligation is bounded by capacity. 2. The most favoured communities are not exempted from terrible calamities (vers. 7-9). 3. Those terrible calamities are often inflicted by wicked men. 4. The wicked men who inflict these calamities are ever under the control of God. (1) He has power to arrest them (ver. 10). (2) This power He has sometimes signally displayed (vers. 13, 14). (3) This power is implied in the universality of His dominion. **II. THE PRAYER** (vers. 18-23). 1. The enemies of God are the enemies both of themselves and of their country (ver. 18). A bad man cannot be a good citizen, but must be more or less a curse to his country. An ungodly man can never be a true patriot. 2. The interposition of God is necessary to deliver a country from the pernicious influence of wicked men (ver. 22). (1) The cause of true philanthropy is the cause of God. (2) The cause of philanthropy is outraged on earth. Men, instead of loving each other as brethren, hate each, oppress each other, murder each other. (3) The cause of philanthropy is dear to the heart of the good. Hence the prayer, "Arise, O God, plead Thine own cause." In this prayer two things are to be noted—(i.) The anthropomorphic tendency of the soul. (ii.) A good man's conscious need of God. How deeply did this godly patriot feel the necessity of God's interposition. In the midst of his country's distress he looked around, but there was help to be found nowhere but in heaven. (*Homilist.*)

**Ver. 5. A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees.**—*The axe and the altar:*—Shall we regard the text as an epitaph on the headstone of some worker for God and the good of man, long, long ago? If so, we shall find but the merest fragment of a sentence, which you have to complete by supplying the first two words, as our translators did, when they bent over it, as it were, on hands and knees, to read it. They found no name, and, in order to make sense of the broken record, they had to prefix two words—"a man"; for his name, whatever it was, has been lost to us, but not to God, in the dim shadows of the past. **I. HIS WORK.** We must throw our minds back to the time when the temple was in course of building. This man had no gold, or silver, or precious stones to bring: it may have been that he had little or nothing of material substance at his command; but he had strength in his brawny arm, and he gave himself, his time and his labour, and all the ardour of a loving heart to the good cause. Now he is on his way to the stately cedars with a fixed purpose clearly set in his face; he selects those that are best fitted for the roof, or for beams, or pillars, or for the doors, or other finer parts of the work that must be carved with great taste and care; and if he can do nothing else for the national undertaking, he can at least do the rough work of felling trees. **II. HIS MOTIVE.** Nothing is said about this in the text, but we may rest assured that his work would never have found a place in the sacred minstrelsy of the ancient Church, had there not been underlying it all a noble motive. It was the cause of God in the land that made him stand forth, and which brought him out of obscurity, just as it has done with many others in seasons of religious awakening, when the peasant and the artisan have come nobly forward to fight side by side, and generously to give of their substance for what was dearer to them than life itself. If the common people are not roused to action in the interests of true godliness, the heart of the nation will never be stirred to that combined effort, which must ever be put forth to secure any permanent good, and to give vitality and stability to any great religious movement. It is, therefore, a pleasing picture to us, to see "our man" with his axe, which he consecrates most heartily to the cause of righteousness and truth. The work he does with it is not for personal or selfish ends, but for the nation; yea, for the world—for God Himself. It is this that gives surpassing dignity to every stroke, and makes him

stand out on the page of the sacred record as a striking example of unselfish service, and true, honest work. III. HIS REWARD. 1. This he received, in the noble enthusiasm with which he inspired others. Such a man could not but have a large following. He was from the people, and many of his comrades, animated by a similar spirit, went forth with him to do valiant things. The man who can move others for good has received a great gift, and when he makes use of it he has his reward in the number of enthusiastic followers he draws into the same path. 2. In the consciousness that he was doing good. The commendation of one's own conscience, and the sunshine of God's approving smile, are no small part of the reward connected with any work of faith or labour of love. 3. In the sacred memorial of the text. Rough as the work of the man referred to appears to be, in the mere felling of trees, it reached the very depths, and at the same time rose to the sublimest heights of man's spiritual nature, for it was inseparably bound up with the glorious future that lies before the cause of God, in its fullest development in earth or in heaven. The marble may be broken up and crumble into dust, and every feature that genius has impressed upon it may pass away, but the influence and the record of true worth are eternal as the spirit of goodness itself, and like the word of the Lord must endure for ever. So shall it be with the memorial of this man. 4. In the "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." He did his work for God in a loving spirit, and was called home when it was done to enter into his rest, and to receive his reward. IV. HIS LIFE-LESSONS. 1. It matters not whether we work with the axe or the pen, with hand or with brain; given but the power of true faith, there will be work done, and that of a kind to an extent that will surprise ourselves and others. We have all our daily tasks, and in doing them honestly and thoroughly well, we are doing nobly for ourselves, for others, and for God, and thus the toils of every day may be pervaded by the Master's spirit, and lifted up to a higher level, far above the mere drudgery of life. 2. Passing from this personal view of the work for Christ in our own hearts and in connection with His Church, let me remind you that you are all members of the general community, and as such should be deeply interested in its welfare, and ready to do your part in securing this. (A. Wallace, D.D.)

Ver. 8. *They have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land.*—*The synagogues of God*:—We do not know the precise circumstances under which this psalm was written. But we thank God our synagogues are not destroyed as were those of the Jews. I. LET US GLANCE AT THE SYNAGOGUES OF JUDEA AND IN THE ANCIENT WORLD. And we note—1. That they express one of the greatest marvels of Providence. They were to be the places where, and by means of which, the message of the Gospel was to be delivered. The Jews had synagogues everywhere, and thus God by His providence had prepared the field in which first the Gospel seed was sown. 2. They were intimately connected with our Lord's work. 3. And with the ministry of the apostles. II. AT THE SYNAGOGUES OF GOD TO-DAY. The word means a coming together, and it expresses an essential idea of Christian worship. And they are synagogues of God. This the main thing. There God works and blesses souls. And think of them all, and of those especially in our own land. May God's power be manifested in them more and more. (J. Aldis.) *The synagogue a post-exilic institution*:—Dr. Prideux affirms that the Jews had no synagogues before the Babylonish captivity; for the main service of the synagogue being the reading of the law unto the people, where there was no book of the law to be read, there certainly would be no synagogue. How rare the book of the law was through all Judæa before the captivity, many texts of Scripture tell us. Dr. Fairbairn, in support of the same view, says, "There is every reason to think that this psalm was composed during the Babylonish captivity, and was intended to describe the desolation which had been brought by the Chaldeans upon all the sacred spots of Palestine. The word for synagogue in the original, however, properly expresses the places of the revelation of God, and can refer only to the temple, that one place on which God had chosen to put His name."

Ver. 9. *We see not our signs.*—*Signs of life*:—This psalm is clearly not one written by David. Vers. 6, 7 prove that; but it is one of the psalms of the Exile. The signs here meant, which the writer mourns that he did not see, were certain outward marks of God's special favour. 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; the spirit of prophecy, for that spirit ceased with Malachi, and did not reappear until John the Baptist. Now, on this groundwork we may build up a spiritual interpretation. We may not always do this, but only where there is, as here, a real groundwork for it, and where there is a response to it in the heart. The Church of to-day often has to lament that she sees not her signs. In considering this, note—I. **THE NATURE OF THEIR SIGNS.** They are marks of God's favour, and there appear to be two classes of them. 1. Those which, if removed, would not remove the thing itself which they signify. The crown of a monarch, you may take that away, but he remains a monarch still. Remove the milestones on a road, but you do not remove the distances which they indicate. Banknotes also. But—2. There are other signs which are constituent parts of the thing itself, so that the taking away of the sign is a taking away of the thing. For example, the lengthening days are a sign of spring; but if there be not this sign there is no spring. Now, of this sort of sign are those which the text tells of. Not, however, entirely. For good works may be absent, partly and for a time, but the life of grace may yet be present. And when good works are present they are not infallible signs of grace. 3. But for the most part the sign and the thing it indicates go together. As, the fear of the Lord; the spirit of grace and of supplication; repentance; faith in Christ; love to the Lord's people and to Christ; the witness of the Spirit; a life consistent with the Gospel. II. **THE SEEING OF THESE SIGNS.** What does this mean? It is implied that there are times when the signs can be seen, as well as when they cannot. Now, what is requisite to see them? Those that travel along the heavenward way have certain landmarks—Ebenezers, stones of help. But in order to see them there must be light, that told of in Ps. xxxvi. 9; not the pale moonlight of speculation, nor the frosty northern light of cold doctrine, nor the meteor light—the "ignis fatuus" of delusion; not the mere phosphoric light, which dimly gleams by rubbing together rotten evidences; not the sparks of their own kindling, elicited by the collision of fainty hearts and steeled consciences; we want no light such as we can make, but the Lord's light. III. **WHY IT IS THAT WE SEE NOT OUR SIGNS.** Some people say they can always see them. This is not true, and the belief of it full of evil. But the causes of our not seeing them are various: the smoke of infidelity; the fogs of unbelief; the valley of trouble; the sun may go down by the Lord's bidding. But all this will be a source of sorrow and lamentation, for such things are no signs of grace, though not inconsistent with it. But you must have seen the signs before you can lament that you see them not. (*J. C. Philpot.*) *The prospects of the age.*—If it were suggested that there could be any parallel between our own prosperous, progressive, enlightened age, and those melancholy days to which the psalm relates, the supposition might at once be scouted as absurdity. Yet I am not so sure but that in respect at least of the one particular referred to in the text—the dearth of the greater order of men—some degree of parallel might not very fairly be argued. I. First, then, as to **THE FACT**—how far this description of the text answers to anything that exists in our own times. I have in view chiefly the bearings of this subject on religion, but it is not in religion only, but in all the spheres of our thought and life that I think this falling off of the greater order of minds can be detected. We had a series of great poets in the early part and middle of last century. Where is the poet of the present day whose works are likely to live like theirs? We have had a succession of great writers of fiction—their books are on every one's shelves—but where is the writer of to-day whose books we would put in the same rank? We have had great musicians—Mozart, Handel, Beethoven, Haydn, and the like. Their compositions live. Who are producing pieces of the same grandeur? We have had a century of great statesmen. It is no disparagement of the men of the younger generation to say that they are not men of the calibre of those who have led the country for the last fifty or eighty years. We had a generation or two of great preachers—men like Chalmers, Guthrie, MacLeod. Once more the piety and teaching of the past generation gave us Christians, whose weight of religious character it was a pleasure to acknowledge—men reverent, sober-minded, deeply instructed in God's Word, massive in Christian substance, matured and real in Christian experience; is the newer type of religious character—brighter and more attractive as it is in some of its aspects—characterized by anything like the same depth, solidity, and durability? II. **THE CAUSES** of this apparent absence, in all spheres of life, of the greater order of men in our midst, and what are the possible remedies. 1. One thing which should give us hope is the fact that after every great and creative

epoch in history, there comes necessarily a period of pause. The human mind cannot always be at its highest stretch. History does not flow on evenly, but in great ebbs and flows—in grand creative epochs, followed by long-breathing spaces, in times when the strongest call is made for great men, and they are drawn out and developed by the very magnitude of the crisis that calls for them, and quieter times, when people rejoice in the possessions they have won, and do not feel impelled to great efforts. 2. Again, it is to be remembered that after every great creative period which men live through, there comes a time when the results of that creative activity have to be gathered up; and this very process puts of necessity a check, for the time being, on further production. This, indeed, is how history proceeds—there is first a great burst of creative genius under the influence of some new idea or impulse; then, when the wealth of that new movement has been poured into the lap of the age, men have the new task laid upon them of sitting down and looking carefully into the nature of their treasure, taking stock of it, as it were, seeing what it really amounts to; getting to understand it, and working it out to its practical results. This is the labour of industry more than of creation, but it is equally essential to the world's progress. There is another part of this task which is of great importance. With every great advance of thought or discovery—with every burst of new truth into the world—there is laid on those who receive it, the duty of adjusting it to the truth they already possess. 3. There are, however, special causes which do belong to the character of the present age which tend, I think, to explain more particularly the dearth of the greatest type of minds in our midst. (1) It is obvious that from the very multiplicity of its possessions our age tends to diffusion rather than to concentration. (2) Our age is critical rather than constructive. (3) The bent of the present age has been to material ends rather than spiritual. (*James Orr, D.D.*) *Faith in signs and without them*:—The Israelites had formed a certain conception of God, and of His relation to them. They thought themselves to be His own peculiar people, and thought, therefore, that for them there would be a peculiar place among the nations of the earth. When they triumphed over their enemies, they regarded it as a sign of God's presence with them. National supremacy was one of the signs of God. At the time of this psalm that sign was not to be seen. National supremacy there was none. What was the truth behind that dogma? What was it that was struggling for utterance in it? That truth, I believe, was this: that through them the world was to receive a universal religion. They mistook their true spiritual significance for a prophecy of national dominion over the world. And, therefore, they were looking for victories as signs of the Divine Presence. In times of defeat they had to say, "We see not our signs." Again, they connected the Divine Presence specially with certain places. The sanctuaries were the peculiar dwelling-abodes of God—His places of revelation. But here are the enemies roaring in the midst of the congregation, and breaking down the carved work with axes and hammers; burning up all the synagogues of God in the land. No wonder they cry, "We see not our signs." This disposition to fix upon certain signs of God is still with us, and it is the prolific source of religious despondency and of partial temporary eclipses of religious faith. Some, when their undertakings do not succeed, cry dolefully, "We see not our signs." Others of us can maintain our spirit bravely enough until our sanctuaries are touched. One man's sanctuary is the Church. Another man's sanctuary is a theory about the Bible. The Bible is an infallible book, a Word of God indisputable. Question that theory, and they say they have no sign left, they can't be sure of God. Now, what are we doing when we thus choose signs of God? We are creating for ourselves the possibility, often the certainty, of overwhelming disappointments. We are liable to come to crises where such signs will fail us. In reality we have been setting up a little god of our own make as truly as if we had made an image of wood or stone, and the idol may be destroyed. I am glad to think that there is a faith without signs, and a faith that persists when things are apparently against us. And it is this faith which lies deepest in the human soul. This, I think, is evident even in the history of those who have looked for signs. When the signs do not appear, they are disappointed, they cry bitterly; but even then, as a rule, they pray! Their eclipses are only temporary. Indeed, nothing is more remarkable than the way in which religious faith, that apparently rests on some supposed evidences, can still live when those evidences are taken from it. This shows that the real root of faith was not in such evidences at all, but deeper in the soul of man. The sense of God belongs to us. And like this psalm, even when we have



been expecting signs, and cannot see them, we pray to a God above the clouds, whose face is light and whose favour is life. Like the man in the Gospels we say, "I believe, help Thou my unbelief." We may doubt all the arguments for God's existence, declare this unsatisfactory and that untenable, and when every argument fails we find we believe in God still. We feel and know that He is here. "Eternal Father, strong to save," Thy child lives in Thee. (T. R. Williams.)

Vers. 10, 11. **O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme Thy name for ever?**—*The long forbearance of God*:—1. Men's patience is much short of God's longsuffering and forbearance; for here it is the speech of a suffering people: "O God, how long shall the adversary reproach?" when with God it is not yet time to fall upon them. 2. The Lord's longsuffering patience doth greatly harden the adversaries in their insolent mocking of God's people; for instead of saying, Lord, how long wilt Thou bear with them? he saith, "O God, how long shall the adversaries reproach?" 3. The truly godly can endure their own troubles better than they can bear the open dishonouring and blaspheming of God by occasion of their trouble. Therefore this expression, from the deepest sense of his heart, doth break forth, "Shall the enemy blaspheme Thy name for ever?" 4. Albeit tentations from carnal sense do represent God as if He were idle when He suffers His enemies to trample on His people, and on His glorious Name; yet faith will not admit of such a thought, but dealeth with God by prayer, to let His strength and power be so manifest, that the world may not think His hand is in His bosom; "Why withdrawest thou thy hand?" etc. This he believeth the Lord shall do, and giveth reasons for his hope, in that which followeth. (D. Dickson.)

Ver. 12. **For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.**—*The sovereignty of God*:—I. LOYALLY ACKNOWLEDGED. "My King." II. OF ANCIENT DATE. "Of old." III. BENEFICENT IN OPERATION. "Working salvation." At this time, as the psalm indicates, His people were in a most desolate and afflicted state. Was the King working for their salvation? Their misery arose from their sin—from their rebellion against His authority and government. At present, darkness, suffering, and sorrow are here, but they are here because sin is here. God rules to bless. IV. AS A PLEA FOR HIS HELP. He mentions what God had done for them in olden time, and pleads that as their King He would interpose for them again. As their King—1. He would possess sovereign authority. 2. He would be faithful to His sovereign obligations. 3. He was immutable. This plea may be used by us—(1) As communities forming part of His Church. When any portion of His Church languishes, or is afflicted, or is in difficulty, it may plead with the King for help. (2) As individuals on our own behalf. In our times of perplexity and distress, let us go to our King, and plead with Him for direction and deliverance. (William Jones.)

Ver. 14. **Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.**—*Leviathan*:—We cannot certainly tell what animal is meant by leviathan, but whatever be intended, it is here used to represent Pharaoh with all his policy and power. Who were the people inhabiting the wilderness? I. THE BIRDS AND BEASTS OF THE DESERT. The carcasses of the Egyptians became their prey. II. THE JEWS THEMSELVES. For literally, Pharaoh and his hosts became meat for them by the spoils they took from them. And morally, because they gained from the event food for their faith, gratitude, and hope. III. CHRISTIANS TO-DAY. For they are such a people: the world is a wilderness to them, not their rest. And for them many leviathans have been destroyed. Satan's power: the curse and condemnation of our natural state. And the remembrance will feed our humility, gratitude and trust. And there have been providential interpositions also. Take note of these things. (W. Jay.)

Ver. 16. **The day is Thine, the night also is Thine.**—*The day and the night*:—I. GOD'S ORDINANCES. 1. Day is a Divine institution, and is strongly characterized by that wisdom and goodness which are over all God's works. In its principal feature—light—light over all, filling the heavens, flushing the earth, mantling over hill and valley, meadow and plain, kindling the great face of the ocean into a mirror, till it reflects on its bosom all that is above it, and repeats in shadow all that is upon it—it may even be regarded as the similitude of God, for "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." 2. But if the day is

God's institution, so also is the night, which is not less closely written over with the characters of His wisdom and goodness. If day unto day uttereth speech, night unto night sheweth knowledge. They are parts and counterparts of each other. The day makes us ready to welcome the night, and the night furnishes us with a standard by which to measure and estimate the splendours of the day.

II. GOD'S SERVANTS. Neither of these two servants of God ever rests. There is always day somewhere, and there is always night somewhere. Continually the night is laying down one half the world to repose, and continually the day is leading forth the other half of the world to work. The night receives the world weary from the hands of the day, and puts it to rest; and the day receives the world refreshed from the hands of the night, and lights it to action. And all the time also they are otherwise doing for man what man cannot do for himself. They are growing his food. They are weaving his raiment. They are enriching his dwelling-place with beauty and verdure. And in all this multifarious kindness to us they are serving God, fulfilling His pleasure, doing what He meant them to do, when He set them in the heavens to be for signs and for seasons, for days and for years. So that, in point of fact, this manifold service of nature is just God's kindness to us through the ministry of His two great servants, the day and the night.

III. GOD'S ABSOLUTE POSSESSION. That is to say, we are not at liberty to do what we choose with them. For the manner in which we deal, with the possibilities of good which they contain, we are strictly and constantly under law to God. In ministering to us as He has ordained, they are serving Him. But in the use we make of them we must serve Him too. What they do unconsciously we must do consciously, in the exercise of those higher faculties which render us capable of a higher service. God has always been jealous of the treatment His servants have received at the hands of those whom He has appointed them to serve. "Touch not Mine anointed, nor do My prophets any harm." And even these unconscious and inanimate servants, the Day and the Night, have a voice in His ears which He does not disregard, calling for judgment on those who treat them ill, who turn them to purposes of selfishness and sin; who degrade them to be the ministers of unworthy pleasures, or even slothful ease, and who do not rather send them back to their Proprietor laden with the fruits of righteousness unto life everlasting. (A. L. Simpson, D.D.) *Disorder in the Church*:—We have lost that immediate vision which is the peculiar privilege and gift of those religious Easterns, who see God in the undeviating realities of experience. The Jew sees God with the seeing of the eye, sees Him in the mighty activities of nature, sees Him in the concrete facts of experience. God is present to him there, attesting His validity, disclosed as the supreme and only actuality. In the roar of the storm, in the rush of the rain, in the splendour of the sun, in the obedience of the moon, in the steady fixities of rock and tree and cliff, he and his God come face to face and commune together. There is the dominion where his God never fails him. Tossed and afflicted as he may be in his spiritual experiences, he still holds fast to this abiding consolation. Anyhow "the day is Thine, the night also is Thine: Thou hast prepared the light and the sun." We have to learn to see with his eyes. That is what we mean by taking the Bible as our authority in revelation. And then we have one other lesson to learn from him. Not only did he find absolute certainty of evidence of God in nature, but he was also prepared to be loyal to a revelation which for long dark periods may fail to accord him that clear security of God's close presence, that regularity of order and seamliness in God's workmanship which he found so constant in the natural world. It is his revelation which is disturbed by such strange perplexities. It is his special privileges, sealed to him by God, which is open to such terrible insecurities. It is the holy Church which seems to be emptied of God, deserted, forgotten, left to the scorn of adversaries who make havoc of its fair delights. Outside there the great order of nature proclaims aloud God's mighty name, "The day is thine; the night is thine." They never languish or grow troubled. But inside the Church he cannot understand what God is about; and yet it is His congregation. It is His inheritance. Nothing shakes the Jew's loyal belief in the peculiar favours which were shown to him. He never dreams of arguing, "If it is a revelation it is bound to be clear, decided, protected against all possible doubts and uncertainties. God would never give a revelation and then leave it open to perplexities." The Jew answers, "That is just what God has done. It is a revelation which He gives. We are His flock, His inheritance, His Church. That is certain, and yet look at our actual situation, how we are troubled, and tossed, and agonized, not knowing

which way to turn. Nature is calm, but we are disturbed. And yet we will not fail the word given us, for all that. We are the Divine society, the holy congregation, even though God seems absent from us so long." And we must possess ourselves of a like loyalty to his. The extraordinary assumption that a revelation, if it be a revelation, must be free from difficulties, must be clear-out, logical, complete, must leave no problem unsolved, must secure itself against every possible misunderstanding, is flatly contradicted by everything that we know of the only revelation of which we have any experience at all. It is the mark of heresy—it was always the mark in old years—to aim at logical completeness, at clear-out consistency. Surely we will take courage from this Israelite in our psalm. We may desire, as he did, that God's revelation in Jesus Christ might work with the even, smooth, unbroken regularity of natural law. We may painfully contrast, as he did, the comfortable certainty of the one with the perplexity of the other. But God will not have it so. And we know too little of the end He has in view to criticize or complain. Therefore, as the Jew of old, so we at all costs will surrender ourselves to the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, however strange its adverse fortunes, however belated its victory. (*Canon Scott Holland.*) **The night also is Thine.**—*The God of the night*:—Regard night—I. As a DIVISION OF TIME. And as such it is—1. The first. 2. Natural. 3. Universal. 4. Beneficent. "The dew of the night heal the wounds of the day." II. As THE PRODUCT AND POSSESSION OF GOD. Of storm as well as of calm, of night as well as of day. God is at once the Source and Sovereign. Therefore—III. LEARN. 1. A lesson for the regulation of conduct. Take care to wisely and rightly use the night time. 2. A message for the consolation of human sorrows. For our nights of pain and sorrow are ordained, relieved and terminated by God. (*Wingate Thomas.*)

**Ver. 17. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: Thou hast made summer and winter.**—*Summer*:—This season so changes the whole of life, so intensifies and blesses it, that we begin to think of summer as a personal friend. One of its chiefest charms is its fulness. And this fulness is its peace. And with the peace is welfare, welfare in the world. For the perfect health of things makes us most happy. The air seems fondly to caress our cheek, the tree to give us its love in its shade, the stream to rejoice for our sakes in its own music. Summer has the deep consciousness of fruitfulness, it rejoices in its own fulness and wealth. Few things are more full of teaching than the beautiful endurance and quiet resolution of Nature during its stormy spring. It has so much to make grow, so much to perfect. Though all the aspirations of spring are not fulfilled, yet more than enough are, to give to summer satisfied content. Have we the like content in regard to our past year's life? Life is in fruitfulness, not in looking on to immortality, discontented with the present. Life is in fruitfulness which brings content to others, and which brings content to us. The real looking forward we should have is that which the summer has—to the harvest, and it is founded on the faith of work already done. That is the image of a true human aspiration. But we are not to be so content as to desire no better things and be without the mighty impulse of far-off ideals. Only remember, it is so easy to speak beautiful words and to do nothing—to have a fair show of leaves and no fruit. Better to have no ideals than this, and to be doing just what lies before us day by day. Repelled by mere talk of ideals, many men are saying now, "We will have no future: we will be content to do the common work of daily life as it comes hour by hour to the hand." And summer teaches also the contentment of rest. A time of quiet has come: it is no longer hard to live. But to many this is not true; summer is the contrast, not the image of their life. Things seem to have gone all wrong with them. But the cure is to learn the lesson which Nature gives us day by day—self-forgetfulness. Or we may win peace by daily self-surrender, doing good to others. Oh, seek the summer life of the soul—the rest of the Lord. (*Stopford A. Brooke, M.A.*) **The Gospel of the summer**:—I. IT REMINDS US OF GOD'S EXISTENCE. The glory of the world declares that the living God stands behind the world; for if He did not stand behind it and pervade it with His gracious energy, there could be none of this beauty. Beauty is always the outward and visible sign of indwelling mind. Mere paint does not make a picture, no matter how fine you may grind the colours; mere stone does not make an Athenian Parthenon, or a Doge's palace, or a Giotto's tower; mere wind and reeds do not make grand music; it is the soul of the artist that gives grace and grandeur to the things which delight the world. Objects of art are beautiful as they express great thoughts; the final secret is

always intellectual. II. IT REMINDS US OF GOD'S BEAUTY. To the Jew God was full of wisdom, and justice, and patience, and tenderness, and benevolence, and this was the supreme primal glory which lights up with splendour both heaven and earth. "How great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty!" And the New Testament fully recognizes this glorious truth. "The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory," etc. The Deity was made known to us as the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley—the most delicate and majestic beauty of character and action were revealed in Him. He was strong, wise, pure, gentle, longsuffering, just, true, and full of infinite love and grace. This is the beauty of God, the beauty of holiness, and all other beauty is but a broken gleam of this. III. IT REMINDS US OF GOD'S LOVE. In the day of creation, "God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good." And blighted as creation has been by sin and wrath, we still know that the essential plan is good, the deepest facts and laws are the best. Evil is on the surface; it is the accident, not the fundamental fact of the world and life. Philosophy and science tell us that all beauty is organic, that it always springs from the depths of a thing; and so let us be sure that, where there is so much beauty in the form of things, there must be love at the heart of things. IV. IT REMINDS US OF GOD'S BLESSEDNESS. "He hath made summer." He must be happy; it is the entrancing expression of His deep happiness. What a joy to know that the omnipotent One is the blessed One—a great bright ocean of sunshine and music! And does not the summer remind us that God wishes us to share His gladness? And many of us, perhaps, are full of darkness and distress. What we want is the summer putting into us. We want the tender blue sky putting into our mind; we want all the flowers that grow about our feet to spring in our heart; we want to hear in our spirit the music of the world; we want to get the rainbow into our conscience; we want all the fruits of light to enrich and adorn our life. This is what we want most of all. Well, is not God waiting to do this very thing for us? (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Summer*:—Summer illustrates—I. SOME ASPECTS OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER. 1. God's love of beauty. 2. God's wonderful wisdom. (1) The simplicity of the agencies which produce such a variety of results—creating the beautiful, picturesque, and the sublime—sustaining life—increasing happiness, and producing expansion of soul. (2) The permanent maintenance of these agencies. Earth still wears the freshness of Eden, wherever there are the perceiving eye and the sympathizing heart. And is not the truth felt by us, that the mind of God is unchangeable towards man, although His final purposes are not yet completed? 3. God's infinite benevolence. (1) It is given to all to enjoy. (2) It is appreciated by all. II. SOME ASPECTS OF HUMAN LIFE. 1. The imperceptible progress of the spring into summer is a representation of the gradual advance of the mind in knowledge. 2. The gladness of summer is an emblem of the temporal prosperity of man. 3. The luxuriance and loveliness of the summer is an emblem of the progress of the soul in the Divine life. There was as violent a struggle in nature between winter and spring as there was in the soul between sin and holiness; but the latter gained the victory, and it expands with life under the influences of the Holy Spirit and the Sun of Righteousness, as the fields and woods under the heat of the sun. And as the life of nature depends on the bounty of God, so does the life of the soul. And as the scenes of nature excite our admiration and love, souls consecrated to His service in the dawn of manhood will kindle emotions of gratitude in our hearts too deep for utterance. (*Homilist.*) *Lessons of summer*:—It may be well enough, perhaps, to show one's acquaintance with nature, by talking learnedly of climate as affected by the sun's rays; the elevation of different regions above the level of the sea; the influence of mountains and currents; but, after all, we must discover in these several agencies the Hand of the Great and Good God. "Thou hast made summer." The constant repetition of this mercy should teach us—I. THAT GOD'S POWER IS NEVER DIMINISHED, NOR HIS RESOURCES EXHAUSTED. II. Again: The text reminds us HOW PATIENTLY THE GOOD LORD BEARS WITH THE INGRATITUDE OF MAN. The slightest disappointment of our unimportant plans by a shower of rain will be met by complaints and murmurings, as if we were the only beings to be thought of, and our convenience to be consulted before that of all others. "All weather is good; sunshine is good; rain is good. . . . One may see in Europe artificial waterworks, cascades constructed by the skill of man, at enormous expense—at Chatsworth, at Hesse Cassel—and the remains of magnificent waterworks at Marly, where Louis XIV. lavished uncounted millions of gold. . . . The traveller thinks it a great thing to see a little water thus pumped up

by creaking machinery or a panting steam-engine, to be scattered in frothy spray; and do we talk of its not being a good day when God's great engine is exhibited to us, His imperial waterwork sending up the mists and vapours to the clouds, to be rained down again in comfort, and beauty, and plenty?" III. If we are bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit, no doubt the Holy Ghost has visited and blessed us. There is a delightful period of the year, known as Indian summer, and, in some parts of Europe, as St. Martin's summer. The woods put on their most brilliant colouring, the waters of the lakes are smooth and unruffled, and the red men of the forest are wont to welcome it as the special gift of their most honoured Deity, to whom they believe their souls go after death. As in nature, so in grace also do we find a pleasant illustration here: "In the life of the good man there is an Indian summer more beautiful than that of the season—richer, sunnier, and more sublime than the world has ever known—it is the Indian summer of the soul. When the glow of youth has departed, when the warmth of middle age is gone, then the mind of the good man, still ripe and vigorous, relaxes its labours, and the memories of a well-spent life gush forth from their secret fountains, enriching, rejoicing, fertilizing; and the soul, assuming a heavenly lustre, is no longer shut up within the narrow confines of business, but dwells happily upon the summer which awaits it within the gates of Paradise." Does not the same gracious God who makes summer in the physical, make it also in the spiritual world? And if the summer of the one be glorious, must not the summer of the other be even more glorious? Surely the joyful song of the ransomed ones, during the days of millennial glory, will be, "Thou hast made summer." (J. N. Norton.) *Winter.*—*Winter.*—God has made the winter. It now claims our thought, and has as much happiness as gloom. Week by week we have watched decay doing its work on earth. The harvest was gathered in and the fruits of the earth, and then came the wind and the rain to gather the harvest of the leaves and flowers. And gradually all around winter has deepened, and there is no light in the sun nor heat in the bones of the earth. We strive to create joy and brightness at home to balance the mourning of the world. By the fireside when the light is low, we re-create the year, and recall its varied changes. And we see the image of what is when the winter of life comes chill on us in age. We had our spring and summer, and our days were warm with glowing love and happy friendship. Now these things have grown cold around us. Love remains, but the heart does not beat as heretofore. And in the dim fire-light, as we sit silently, it is not living presences that haunt the room, but the ghosts of men and women long loved, long dead, and un forgotten. It is winter, not summer. We had our harvest time, but we can only look back upon it. Such is our retrospect in the first days of gloom. What kind of prospect have we then? It also is imaged in the world of winter. The earth after the frost is bound in iron bands. The waters of the land are hushed, frost has chained their rippling light. The flowers, the trees, the birds and beasts, all suffer in their own way. The patient earth is dead; over its dark face the pitying heaven draws the winding sheet of snow, and the grey and bitter fog hangs over it the funeral pall. It is death we see, and death we look forward to, and death only in this first hour of wretchedness. And it is well to look straight into the gloomy eyes of the worst fate, and look into it however hard it be, without fear, and know it to its depths. For only so can we wring out of it its secret, and then, as is our way, when we have once seen the worst, we invent the better. We find we can rise above the evil and despise it, and we think we have power to create the good. And we do so by the aid of memories of the past. As the winter drives us to our homes and to life indoors, so the winter of age drives a man home to himself, and our life becomes an inner life. But our heart's happiness will depend on how we have lived our past life, if it has been truly and lovingly human, if it has been kind, and true, and good. For on that all will depend whether we can summon any and what guests to our hearts. And not only the memory of past love but the sweetness of love present, will make glad the winter of age. Love is not lost, nor beauty, nor all we mixed with love. Age may possess both a noble and a beautiful life. Only you must make ready for it. Keep your soul healthy, your heart and brain awake to noble thoughts. And there is far more than death in winter. See the life hidden away in every root, in every seed. Not death but life in preparation—hidden, but in slow activity, is what we see. Faith arises for ourselves, and we forget the winter of age to realize the enchanted youth of the life to come. "It was the winter wild," when our Saviour came at His first advent, as if to tell us of the immortal spring that lies hidden in the winter of humanity. By His eternal life in

us we conquer the decay of winter and the frost of death. (*Stopford A. Brooke, M.A.*) *Winter*.—I. THE BEAUTIES OF WINTER. II. THE WONDERS OF WINTER. One of the greatest wonders of winter is its most common product, ice. Had water followed the general law, and contracted and become specifically heavier in the act of freezing, how terrible would have been the consequences to our comforts and perhaps our lives! Whenever the atmosphere had reached the freezing point, the water on the surface of lakes and rivers would, in the act of freezing, sink and form a layer of ice on the bottom. Another layer would immediately follow from the same cause, and this process going on through the several months of winter, would solidify all the water available for the use of man so thoroughly, that the heat of summer could never melt it, and after a time, the springs of water in the earth would cease to flow except in the tropical regions. How fully does the existing order of nature obviate all such difficulties and dangers, since the ice remains on the surface, and prevents the cold from solidifying the water to any great depth, and then is exposed to the direct rays of the sun and the warmth of the atmosphere, which liquify it, whenever the season of cold is past. What a continued and apparent evidence have we thus furnished us during the winter, of the wonderful wisdom of God, and His wonderful care for the welfare of man. Another wonder of even greater value to us is, that the atmosphere we breathe is not capable of being congealed. If it were otherwise, life would speedily come to an end in the arctic and temperate zones. That it is not so, is an evidence of the kindness and wisdom of Him who is "wonderful in counsel." III. THE BLESSINGS OF WINTER. Suppose there was no winter, and consequently no cold and no difference in the degrees of temperature on the face of the earth. Many, without reflection, would say that if this monotone of temperature could be such a delightful medium as we sometimes enjoy in spring or autumn, it would be a great blessing to have it perpetuated. But if this state of things should exist, wind which is caused by the air rushing from a colder to a warmer place could not exist, and there could be no stirring of the atmosphere, except on such a limited scale as artificial means could effect. Then the impurities of the air which are now carried away and disinfected by the winds, would remain stationary until the atmosphere became loaded with them; the vapours which arise from the ocean would also remain stationary, and could not be wafted over the land to refresh by their shade, and invigorate by their descent in rain; and the deadly impurities of the air would be supplemented by the deadly drought, and would be aided by the deadly contagion of disease, to sweep the face of the earth with the besom of death, and make the imaginary paradise a perpetual desert. Let us never forget it as one of the chief causes of gratitude for earthly blessings, that we can say to our God, "Thou hast made winter." (*N. D. Williamson.*) *Winter*.—I. ITS LESSONS. 1. Divine power. (1) An ancient work. (2) A beautiful work. (3) A benevolent work. Winter comes like an angel of light on a mission of mercy; epidemics flee before its health-giving presence, the frost prepares the soil, the snow preserves the seeds, shoals of destructive insects are destroyed, the atmosphere is purified, there is a glory sparkles in the very frost, a lustre in the snow, and good in both. 2. Divine equity. As in grace, so in nature; He is no respecter of persons; "He maketh His sun to shine upon the evil and the good," and though the blessings of nature are infinitely diversified, yet each zone has natural products, wisely adapted to its peoples. God decrees the alternation of winter and summer for the general good. At our summer solstice He says to the north, "Give up!" and winter gradually returns; and at our winter solstice, He says to the south, "Keep not back!" and the south flinging open her sunny gates, permits the return of summer to bless our isle. 3. Divine providence. The preservation of the feathered tribes in this season clearly and pleasingly illustrates this doctrine. You have seen during protracted snow storms, these interesting creatures picking up a precarious meal as best they could. Naturalists tell us considerable numbers necessarily perish; the wonder is all do not die, that any are left to warble the overtime of spring, or swell the chorus of summer. Well, winter teaches us of a great Provider who "opens His hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing," and reminds us that He who in summer makes the lily more beautiful "than Solomon in all his glory," in winter cares for the feathered flocks "which have no storehouse or barn." If the providence of God respects the less, will it neglect the greater? II ITS EMBLEMS. 1. A barren Church. 2. A backsliding state. 3. Old age. 4. Death. (1) No exemption. (2) To the Christian death is the gate of life, where the winter of discontent is changed to glorious summer. (*T. J. Guest.*) *The teachings of winter*.—The

approach of winter, first of all, may remind us of our own natural life—its progress, its beauty, its close. How short a time does it seem since we were rejoicing in the spring, with all its promises of plenty, all its elements of beauty! yet it has gone. The summer, with all its brightness and enjoyment, has followed; the autumn, with its bounteous stores of food for man and beast, has succeeded and passed; and already are we drawing on to the close of the year, almost before we seem to have realized the fact that those seasons are fled. Even so is it with our life. The springtime of youth, the summertime of manhood, the autumn of maturity, how soon do they pass! and the winter of old age creeps on; and with powers fading, faculties of mind and body weakening, we draw on towards the end. But what lessons of prudence and forethought should this resemblance of our life to the revolving seasons teach us! First, as to the duties of this world. The spring, the summer, and the autumn are the times provided for cultivating the earth, for producing and gathering its fruits. Winter is no time for this; but it is the time for using and enjoying what the other seasons had enabled us to secure. The husbandman that will not plough and till his land in the spring, shall beg in harvest-time, and have nothing. Thus the wise man employs the example even of a mean insect to teach men prudence in the affairs of this life:—"Go to the ant; consider her ways," etc. This is a lesson that is not confined to the cultivators of the earth. It applies to all kinds of employment, and especially to the employment of mechanics and others of the working classes. The expenses of a household in the genial seasons of the year are less than in the winter. The days, too, are longer, and afford opportunity for greater industry. Work is in general more plentiful. What, then, is the lesson taught by this example, but that every one should strive to lay up during those seasons for the increased expense, the probable deficiency of employment, and the interruption of work, which may be expected in the winter? There are those who act upon this prudent principle; and for them winter has fewer discomforts; they can look forward to it without alarm. But how is it with those who have been living from hand to mouth, spending all as it came, laying up nothing for the approaching period of trial? What but grievous suffering, if left to the consequences of their own imprudence, or painful dependence, or the uncertain benevolence of others? But if this lesson is important with respect to temporal interests, how much more so is it with regard to things spiritual and eternal! Youth, and manhood, and maturity are the seasons in which the seed must be sown, and the work done, which may end in a harvest of everlasting blessedness. It is the time in which treasure must be laid up for eternity. The call to repent, to believe in Christ as our Saviour, and to keep His commands, is too often neglected in those periods of life when it might be obeyed. Youth is too much occupied with enjoyment, manhood is too busy, maturity is too much absorbed with worldly interests; and then wisdom is too often pushed out of life. The call is disobeyed till too late. The winter of life comes on, and finds the worldly still worldly, the impenitent and unbelieving hardened; and they die as fools die. If, in spiritual things, this provision is made during the more vigorous periods of life for the inevitable change that awaits you, then, as it is with those who have laid up for the natural winter,—it has lost its terrors for them,—so will it be in the higher interests of the soul. Old age may be drawing on; death may be approaching; the winter of the tomb may be at hand. But it has nothing in it alarming for the sincere Christian. The seasons of this world teach him a lesson of trust and hope, as well as of prudence and activity. We know, that though at this time of the year all nature seems to die—though the sun loses its power, and storms, and cold, and darkness prevail—yet this state of things is not to continue. The winter's inaction is but a state of temporary repose: the vegetable world is only preparing to start afresh into renewed life and beauty in the spring. Even so the voice of revelation assures us, in prospect of the weakness and weariness of age, and the approaching darkness and desolation of the cold grave, that another springtime awaits our bodies as well as our spirits. (*W. Blatch, M.A.*) *Winter*:—God, who has "made winter," makes nothing in vain. For—I. WINTER BELONGS TO THE PLAN OF HEAVEN, and is a season indispensably necessary. It aids the system of life and vegetation; it kills the seeds of infection, and destroys pestilential damps; it refines the blood; it gives us vigour and courage; it confirms the nerves, and braces up the relaxed solids. Snow is a warm covering for the corn; and while it defends the tender blades from nipping frosts, it also nourishes their growth. Isaiah remarked this. Winter is the needful repose of Nature, after her labours for the welfare of the creation. But even this pause is only to acquire new

strength; or rather it is a silent and secret energy of preparation to surprise and charm us again with fresh abundance. II. WINTER IS A SEASON WHICH HAS ITS PLEASURES. I love to hear the roaring of the wind. I love to see the figures which the frost has painted on the glass. I love to watch the redbreast with his slender legs, standing at the window and knocking with his bill to ask for the crumbs which fall from the table. III. WINTER IS A SEASON IN WHICH WE SHOULD PECULIARLY FEEL GRATITUDE for our residence, accommodations, and conveniences. Things strike us more forcibly by comparison. Let us remember how much more temperate our climate is than that of many other countries. Our winter is nothing when we turn to the Frigid Zone. When the French mathematicians wintered at Tornea, in Lapland, the external air suddenly admitted into their rooms, seizing the moisture, became whirls of snow; their breasts were rent when they breathed it; and the contact of it with their bodies was intolerable. We read of seven thousand Swedes who perished at once, in attempting to pass the mountains which divide Norway from Sweden. IV. THIS SEASON CALLS UPON US TO EXERCISE BENEVOLENCE. Sympathy is now more powerfully excited than at any other period; we are enabled more easily to enter into the feelings of others less favoured than ourselves. And while we are enjoying every convenience and comfort which the tenderness of Providence can afford—oh, let us think of the indigent and miserable. My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. V. WINTER SHOULD IMPROVE US IN KNOWLEDGE. It affords leisure, and excludes many interruptions—it is, therefore, favourable to application. Let us read, and study, and prepare for action and usefulness in life. And let us not pass heedlessly by those subjects of reflection and improvement which the very season itself yields. How instructive, for instance, is the goodness of God, not only in the preservation of the human race, but in taking care of all the millions of animals during a period which threatens to destroy them! What a number of retreats does He provide for them! Some of them, by a singular instinct, change the places of their residence. Some of them are lulled into a profound sleep for weeks and months. And all this teaches us, first, to resemble Him, and be kind to every being. If we learn of Him, we cannot be cruel to the brute creation. The season is also instructive as an emblem. Here is the picture of life—thy flowery spring, thy summer, thine autumn, and at last thy winter. See to it that thou art possessor of eternal life. (*W. Jay.*) *The winter and its moral analogies*.—The winter is generally felt an unpleasing and gloomy season of the year; the more desirable is it to make it yield us some special good, by way of compensation. There are gratifying examples to this purpose. "Thou hast made—winter." God's work and wisdom in it are to be regarded. The Almighty Maker has fixed in the order of the world that which is the natural cause of the winter; a most remarkable adjustment of supreme wisdom and power, appearing at first view something like irregularity and disorder—that is, the inclination of the earth's axis. We may note the signal benefits of this adjustment. We must have our winter in order that others may have their summer. We are to be willing to part with a pleasing possession for a season for their sakes. And the unproductiveness of winter should remind us of the care and bounty of Divine providence, in that other seasons are granted us to make up by their supply for winter's want. Observe, again, the winter has a character of inclemency and rigour—has ideas and feelings associated with it of hardship, infelicity, suffering. In this, it should be adapted to excite thoughtful and compassionate sentiments respecting the distress and suffering that are in the world. The fair and cheerful aspect of the world is veiled, as if that our thoughts may take another direction. May we not here find an instructive emblem of another order of things? Think of the bloom and vigour, and animated action and expression of the human person, destroyed by sickness or disease! Think of delightful hopes, shedding spring and summer on the heart, suddenly extinguished! Think of a state of exuberant prosperity changed by a rapid reverse to one of difficulty, calamity, or desolation! (*Job*). There is another thing which the winter may suggest to our thoughts, namely, that resemblance to it which there may be in the state of the mind, in respect to its best interests. Is a man afraid to turn from the gloom and cold without to see what there is within? Would he even rather contemplate and endure the greater rigours of a still more northern climate a while than to take a sojourn in his own soul? Truly the winter in the soul is far worse than any season and aspect of external nature. Suppose a contrary state to be fully prevalent in the soul, how small an evil, comparatively, then, would be all that is inclement and gloomy in the seasons and



scenes of nature! Suppose communion with heaven, animated affections, ardent devotion to God and our Redeemer. Why, if such a man were placed in the frozen zone (and could live there), he would be happy! This may suggest a last observation that the gloomy circumstance of winter on our globe points to the desirableness of an abode where there shall be nothing like winter; or of a mode of existence quite superior to all elemental evils. (*John Foster.*)

**Ver. 20. Have respect unto the covenant.**—*The covenant pleaded:*—It is the covenant of grace, not of works, that we are to plead. I. **WHAT IS MEANT BY THIS PLEA.** 1. Fulfil thy covenant: let it not be a dead letter. 2. Fulfil all its promises. 3. Let nothing hinder or turn them aside. II. **WHENCE THIS PLEA DERIVES ITS FORCE.** 1. From the veracity of God. 2. His jealousy for His honour. 3. The venerable character of the covenant. 4. Its solemn endorsement, God's Word. 5. Its seal—the blood of Christ. 6. Nothing in it has ever failed. 7. The testimony of God's dying people. III. **HOW AND WHEN THIS COVENANT MAY BE PLEADED.** 1. Under a sense of sin. 2. Labouring after holiness. 3. When under strong temptation. 4. Or in great distress. IV. **PRACTICAL INFERENCES.** 1. Have a grateful respect for the covenant to which you pray the Lord to have respect. 2. Have joy in it. 3. Be jealous for it. 4. Practically respect it. (*O. H. Spurgeon.*) *The Divine covenant steadfast and sure:*—Rutherford says that unbelief may tear the copies of the covenant of grace given us, but Christ keeps the original in heaven with Himself. Though we believe not, yet He remaineth faithful. He cannot deny Himself. **The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty.**—*The Church's duty to the heathen:*—The world wants the Gospel; the Gospel alone meets the world's necessities. I. **THE WORLD'S NEED OF GOD.** "The dark places," etc. 1. How dark a system is idolatry: see its sin, and misery, and cruelty. II. **GOD'S PROVISION FOR THE WORLD.** The covenant tells of the Gospel with all its abundant provisions. It brings light; it implants love. Christ is offered as food for the hungry, pardon for the guilty, consolation for the mourner, life for the dead. III. **HOW IS THIS REMEDY TO BE APPLIED?** 1. God Himself must apply it. But—2. We must pray for the heathen; pray in public and at home. 3. And we must send messengers to the heathen who shall tell them of Christ. (*John Hambleton, M.A.*)

**Ver. 21. Let the poor and needy praise Thy name.**—*The poor and needy have cause to praise God's Name:*—Rev. Mark Guy Pearse relates that he was walking once beside some cliffs, when he saw a father draw near with his children; the two boys were running on in front, and every now and then the father called to them to be careful, and gave them various directions for their safety. But he was leading the little girl slowly and gently, for she was blind. Presently he sat down beside her and told her of all the beauties of the vision, cheering her by many a tender thought. He never let his healthy boys go beyond his sight and care, but the blind child he held continually by the hand. So let the weak ones be cheered and encouraged by the thought that for them there are special promises, special assurances of care: thank God, none of us can drift beyond the reach of His love, but His feeble children He is holding by the hand.

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#### PSALM LXXV.

**VER. 1-10. For that Thy name is near Thy wondrous works declare.**—*God's nearness to the world:*—I. He is near as the **SUSTAINER OF A DISSOLVING SYSTEM** (ver. 3). The force of disintegration operates every moment, not only in organized matter, but even in what we call simple substances, if, indeed, such things exist. The mountains falling come to nought. Every plant in the great system of vegetation is dissolving; and the great world of animal life, from the tiniest insect to the hugest monster of the forest or the sea, is ever in the process of dissolution. What prevents the whole universe tumbling to pieces, flying off part from part, particle from particle as a log of wood in the flames? No force short of God. The same principle of disintegration is at work in human society. Families, societies, Churches, nations, are dissolving; kingdoms are constantly

breaking into pieces. God alone keeps things together, bears up the pillars of a dissolving universe. "He upholds all things by the word of His power." II. He is near as the **REDUKER OF HUMAN WICKEDNESS** (vers. 4, 5). 1. Three phases of wickedness are here indicated:—(1) Folly—"Deal not foolishly." Sin is folly. It is against the reason, the interests, the dignity and blessedness of existence. "He that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul." (2) Haughtiness—"Lift not up the horn." Pride and arrogance enter into the very essence of wickedness. "God resisteth the proud," etc. (3) Recklessness—"Speak not with a stiff neck." Bold, shameless, obstinate disregard to the claims of God and all the moral proprieties. 2. God is present in the world, reproofing all the wickedness with the voice of Providence, by the admonitions of conscience, by the ministry of His Word and the strivings of His Spirit. III. He is near as the **SOVEREIGN DISPOSER OF ALL SOCIAL CHANGES**. "For promotion cometh neither from the east," etc. "But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another" (1 Sam. ii. 7). He is in the rise and in the fall, not only of empires, but individual men. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust," etc. IV. He is near—**ADMINISTERING TO ALL MEN DISPENSATIONS FROM A COMMON SOURCE** (ver. 8). What is that cup? Infinite benevolence; and from this cup "He poureth out of the same," great natural blessings. "God is good, and His tender mercies are over all the works of His hand." 1. The cup is a mixed cup. "Full of mixture." What an infinite variety of blessings are in this cup, this cup of love! Something from it falls fresh upon every being every hour. 2. The contents of this cup have a different effect upon different characters. To the righteous it is a pleasant cup. Its blooming, sparkling mixture is delicious and inspiring. Not so to the wicked; what is delicious and sustaining to the good is distasteful and pernicious to the evil. Moral character changes subjectively the very nature of things. V. He is near to **DESTROY THE POWER OF THE WICKED AND TO AUGMENT THE POWER OF THE RIGHTEOUS** (ver. 10). Matthew Arnold has somewhere described God "as a stream of tendency that maketh for righteousness." His meaning, I presume, is that the whole procedure of God in the moral world tends to put down the wrong and to raise and glorify the right. (*Homilist*.) *The nearness of God*:—God is near—I. To **OBSERVE OUR SINS** (Job xxiv. 14, 15; Ps. cxxxix. 2-4; Gen. iii. 9-24; xix. 24-28; Josh. vii. 24-26; Acts v. 1-10). II. To **NOTICE OUR DESIRES AFTER HIM** (Jer. xxxi. 18-20; Luke xv. 20). III. To **PARDON, SANCTIFY, AND JUSTIFY** (Isa. i. 7-9). IV. To **ANSWER OUR PRAYERS** (Ps. cxlv. 18, 19; Isa. lxxv. 24). V. To **RELIEVE OUR WANTS** (Ps. xxxiv. 10; lxxxiv. 11; Hab. iii. 17, 18). VI. To **SUCCOUR US IN DISTRESS** (Ps. xxxiv. 19; Isa. xlix. 10). VII. To **SAVE US FROM DANGER** (Dan. iii. 27). Job; Peter. From this subject we may derive warning to sinners, an encouragement to the penitent; comfort to believers. (*R. Simpson, M.A.*) *God's works declare Him*:—When that great artist, Doré, was once travelling in Southern Europe, he lost his passport. When he came to the boundary line where he needed to produce it, the official challenged him. Said he, "I have lost my passport; but it is all right—I am Doré the artist. Please let me go on." "Oh, no," said the officer; "we have plenty of people representing themselves as this or that great one." After some conversation the man said, "Well, I want you to prove it. Here is a pencil and some paper. Now, if you are the artist, draw me a picture." Doré took the pencil, and with a few master strokes sketched some of the features of the neighbourhood. Said the man, "Now I am perfectly sure of it. You are Doré; no other man could do that." Thus all the works of creation their great Original proclaim, "that Thy name is near Thy wondrous works declare." *God revealed in nature*:—A legend has it that a prophet appealed to God for a sign such as had been granted to other prophets. In response a tuft of moss opened before the man, and from the rock beneath rose a lovely violet. As he looked admiringly on the opening leaves he had no need to ask for signs and wonders, for as he was leaving home his little daughter had given him a violet precisely like the one created before his eyes. We need not ask to see a new star flashing gorgeous lights on the darkness of a wintry night, or oaks to spring in a moment from acorns, as demonstrations of a Divine presence. God is as truly revealed in a little flower as in the most stupendous miracle that could amaze and overwhelm the mind. Archdeacon Farrar tells about a boy who took a flower with him to his work every morning. He put the flower on his desk in the schoolroom, and when asked why he did this, replied that the flower was to remind him of God and keep him from evil thoughts. (*The Signal*.)

**Ver. 3. I bear up the pillars of it.—God behind nature:—**It is literally true IN THE REALM OF NATURE. "I bear up the pillars of it." God is being gradually eliminated from His own world. In olden time God was brought in at every nook and corner and turn. If it rained, the Lord had opened the bottles of heaven. If there was a drought, the Lord had locked up the heavens. If a hurricane occurred, the Lord had raised up a mighty wind. In ancient times men saw God in all the phenomena of nature. We are more educated now—indeed, so educated that we have nearly excluded God from the realm of His own universe. There is a scientific explanation for everything. No matter what may happen, we are told, "There are the pillars that support, and there is nothing supernatural." But the Lord comes in and asks this question, "Who supports the pillars?" If a semi-infidel world says, "Everything can be explained by science, and that which at present seems almost insoluble has only to be waited for a little while, and the pillars will appear," God says, "True, but then I bear up the pillars." (*A. G. Brown.*)

**Ver. 5. Speak not with a stiff neck.—Stiff necks:—**The text is a figure of that pride, stubbornness, or wilful disobedience which refuses to yield to rightful and loving authority. I. Let me indicate THE CLASSES OF PERSONS WHO ARE MORALLY AND SPIRITUALLY STIFFNECKED. 1. If you resist the conviction of sin, you are stiffnecked. 2. You have shown your stiff neck by despising faithful warnings. 3. Or, it may be, that you have rejected the counsel of godly parents. 4. Your stubbornness in tribulation shows that you have a stiff neck towards God. II. Let me EXHORT YOU TO REPENTANCE. Let the love of God draw you to turn to Him. (*W. Birch.*)

**Vers. 6, 7. God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another.—Getting on:—**It is not a trivial question, whether your life, my young friend, is to be a failure or a success. Everybody is going on. We are all getting through our little span of daylight. But some people are not only going on, they are getting on. Each vocation has its rising men. How is it that men get on? It is a very simple and primary notion, capable of reception only by the most unsophisticated mind, that the most deserving always get on best. Whatever be the law, it is not that. To gain any advantage or eminence, a man must have a certain amount of merit. I am obliged to say, as the result of all my observations of the way in which human beings get on, that they get on mainly by chance or luck, in a fashion that looks fortuitous. There must be merit in walks where men have to make their own way; but that a man may get on, he must be seconded by good luck. We know, of course, that there is a Higher Hand, and we humbly recognize that. I believe that these words of the psalmist give us the entire philosophy of getting on. It is a matter of God's sovereignty; and God's sovereignty, as it affects human beings, we speak of as their good or ill luck. Of course, there is really no chance in the matter. Everything is rightly arranged and governed. Still, nothing can be more certain than the fact that there are men who are what we call lucky, and other men who are unlucky. The unlucky, perhaps, need it all; and the lucky can stand it all; but there is the fact. And we know that there are blessed compensations, which may make the crook in the lot a true blessing. Life is a lottery. No doubt, there is no real chance in life; but then there is no real chance in any lottery. Honest industry and perseverance, also resolute selfishness, meanness, toadyism, and unscrupulousness, tend to various forms of worldly success. But you can draw no assurance from these general principles, as to what either may do for yourself. My text is not the resort of soured disappointment: it is the confession of humbled and shamed success. The worthier way of getting on is, when a man, by his doings and character, makes a position important, which in other hands would not be so. In treatises on the arts of self-advancement and self-help, there is a fallacy at the foundation of all their instructions. They all say, "Do so and so, and you will get on." But they all fail to allow for chance or Providence. Let us always keep it in our remembrance that there is something far better than any amount of worldly success, which may come of worldly failure. A wise and good man in this world will not set his heart on getting on, and will not push very much to get on. He will do his best, and humbly take, with thankfulness, what the Hand above sends him. It is not worth while to push. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." It is not worth while. Let us trust in

(God, and do right, and we shall get on as much as He thinks good for us. (A. K. H. Boyd, D.D.)

**Vers. 8. For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red.—***God's threatenings against incorrigible sinners:*—In this verse we have a lively description and amplification of the judgments of God upon the world, which are here set forth unto us under a threefold representation of them. First, in their preparation. Secondly, in their execution. Thirdly, in their participation.

**I. THE PREPARATION.** 1. The vessel—a cup. By this we may understand whatsoever it is which is the means, and conveyance, and derivation of any evil unto us. God makes the same providences to be a cup of physic to His children, for the recovering of them from their spiritual infirmities, and a cup of poison to His enemies, for the destroying of them, in the midst of their sins. 2. The liquor. (1) Red wine—a cup of blood prepared for the inhabitants of the world, as an expression of God's vengeance upon them. (2) Full of mixture, i. e. wrath and revenge. 3. The preparer—God Himself. **II. THE EXECUTION.** God will not be always in the forewarnings of judgment, He will be at last in the dispensations of it. He will not be always tempering it, He will be at last pouring out of it. The Lord is full of patience and longsuffering, and bears much with the sons of men for a long while together; but when His patience and longsuffering is once abused, He then comes on to punishment and execution. And this I say it is, when sin is come to its ripeness and maturity, and is at its full growth. There are three aggravations of sin which do put God upon the execution of judgment, and this pouring forth of wrath. 1. Boldness and insolence in sinning (Jer. viii. 12). 2. Generality in sinning; when it comes to taint and overspread a whole nation. 3. Security and presumption. **III. THE PARTICIPATION.** 1. The persons mentioned. "The wicked of the earth," that is, such as are more scandalous, and presumptuous, and impenitent, and farthest from reformation; such as those who, for the nature of sin, are more abominable, and for the continuance in it, are more incorrigible; these are they which the Holy Ghost does here point at in a more principal manner. 2. The evil denounced against them. (1) The potion or draught itself, it is the dregs of the cup. This is the potion of wicked men, while 'tis said they shall drink the dregs, there are three things implied in this expression as belonging unto it. (a) The reservation of judgment, they shall drink the last. (b) The aggravation of judgment, they shall drink the worst. (c) The perfection and confirmation of judgment, they shall drink up all. They shall drink the last, they shall drink the worst, they shall drink all; each of these are implied in the dregs. (T. Horton, D.D.) *The Lord's cup:*—**I. THE CONTENTS OF THE LORD'S CUP.** "The wine is red; it is full of mixture;" that is, however fair the appearances of things may be, however splendid any state of happiness, or any situation of life may appear, there is always added to it a certain portion of evil. By evil, I mean only the usual misfortunes and afflictions of human life. These are what temper the cup of the Lord; and in this mixed state it is poured out to the inhabitants of the earth. Man being compounded of good and evil, all his labours partake of the mixture. Let him form what schemes he will; let him employ all his little prudence and foresight in bringing them to perfection, still we will find mixed with them in one shape or other, uncertainty, disappointment, and miscarriage. **II. HOW THE UNGODLY MAN DRINKS IT.** The text says, "He drinks the dregs." Now, the dregs of any liquor are the pernicious parts. It is fairly implied, therefore, that the ungodly man turns both the good and evil of life to his own destruction. **III. HOW THE GODLY MAN DRINKS IT.** As the ungodly man drinks the dregs, the finer parts of the liquor are, of course, the portion of the godly man. In the first place, he expects to find a degree of bitterness in his cup. He sees the propriety of it, and fully acknowledges the great usefulness of this mixture of good and evil. If the potion were perfectly palatable, he fears he might drink to excess. When it pleases Heaven to bless him; when his designs succeed; and his hopes dilate in some view of happiness before him, "Now is the time" (he suggests to himself) "when I must guard my heart with double care. Now is the time when insolence, and wantonness, and pride, the attendants of a prosperous hour, are most liable to corrupt me. Let prosperity soften my heart, instead of hardening it. Let me be humble, and mild, and condescending, and obliging to all. In the midst of my own enjoyments, let my heart expand. Let me feel the misery of others; and turn my plenty to the relief of their necessity." Again, when it pleases Heaven to mix

some bitter ingredients in his cup, still he has the same sense of acting under the will of God. "Now," he cries, "is the time when I am to exercise patience and resignation. Now my religion is put to the test. Shall I receive good at the hand of the Lord, and not receive evil? Gracious God! grant that I may improve my heart under this trial of my faith; and make my sufferings, through Jesus Christ, the means of purifying my affections. Let me for His sake bear a trifling part of what He bore for me; and let me keep that great pattern of suffering resignation always before my eyes." Thus the godly man drinks of the Lord's cup, and his draught, whether sweet or bitter, is wholesome to him. (W. Gilpin.)

Vers. 9, 10. **But I will declare for ever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.**—*A model of devout praise:*—The praise resolved upon here is worthy of our imitation, inasmuch as it—I. **LOSES SIGHT OF SELF IN DEVOUT ADMIRATION OF THE CHARACTER AND DOINGS OF GOD.** 1. He will praise God for His doings. (1) Underserved by us. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (2) Unsought by us. We did not seek God, but He sought us by Jesus Christ. (3) Freely and heartily given by God out of His own sovereign love. "Bless the Lord, O my soul." 2. He will praise God for His faithfulness. With Him there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." 3. He will praise God "for ever." "Let not thy praises be transient—a fit of music; and then the instrument hung by the wall till another gaudy day of some remarkable providence makes thee take it down. God comes not guest-wise to His saints' house, but to dwell with them. David took this up for a life-work: 'As long as I live, I will praise Thee.'" II. **EVINCES ITS REALITY BY RESOLVING TO IMITATE HIM.** Our praise of the excellences of others is a very hollow affair unless we also cultivate those excellences. We praise God for His "unspeakable gift"; are we imitating His pure generosity? We praise Jesus Christ for His great self-sacrifice for us; are we denying ourselves in His spirit that others might be benefited? We bless God for the Gospel; are we exemplifying the spirit of the Gospel? A certain Dr. Whitaker, on reading the fifth chapter of Matthew, brake out, saying, "Either this is not the Gospel, or we are not of the Gospel." And is it not to be feared that the spirit of the Gospel for which men praise God, and the spirit of their lives, are often widely different? Let us evince the sincerity of our praise to God by imitating Him in our spirit and life. Let us admire Him, commune with Him, adore Him, until we are transformed into the same image. (W. Jones.)

### PSALM LXXVI.

Vers. 1-12. **In Judah is God known: His name is great in Israel.**—*Glorious aspects of the Divine character:*—I. **AS THE GLORIOUS RESIDENT IN THE MIDST OF HIS PEOPLE** (vers. 1, 2). God is everywhere; but is in an especial sense present with holy souls. They are represented as His "temple," which implies—1. Special connection with Him. 2. Special consecration to Him. 3. Special manifestation of Him. II. **AS THE TRIUMPHANT CONQUEROR OF HIS ENEMIES.** He does His work—1. Thoroughly (vers. 3-5). 2. Easily (ver. 6). His word is the fire that will burn up corruption, the hammer that will break the rocky heart, the sword that will slay moral evil. 3. Judicially (vers. 8, 9). God is infinitely just in crushing all evil. Satan is a usurper, and all his hosts are rebels. As a just God, He will put all enemies under His feet. In a moral sense, God is a "God of battles." He is eternally warring against wrong. III. **AS THE ABSOLUTE MASTER OF MALIGN PASSIONS** (ver. 10). 1. He subordinates human wrath. As the mariner makes the gale his servant to bear his vessel to the port, so God makes the malign passions of men and devils to bear on His great purposes to their complete fulfilment. 2. He restrains it. He allows the wrath of His creatures to go no further than He chooses. As He has set a boundary to the ocean, He has also to the human passions. "So far shalt thou go, and no further." IV. **AS THE SUPREME OBJECT OF HUMAN WORSHIP** (ver. 11). This implies two things. 1. Devout resolutions. "Vow and pay unto the Lord your God." In this clause we have the fundamental

conditions of moral progress. (1) No man can truly advance unless he vows rightly. Some men have no resolutions. Some men have bad resolutions. Good resolutions are essential. (2) No man can truly advance unless he fulfils his resolutions, embodies them in actions. It is the resolution that draws out and concentrates the faculties. 2. Devout dedication. "Let all that be round about Him bring presents," etc. What are the presents? The cattle upon a thousand hills are worthless. Gratitude, loyal service, homage. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," etc. V. AS THE DETERMINED ANTAGONIST OF THE WICKED (ver. 12). The Infinitely Holy, Just, and Good is necessarily and eternally against the wicked, however exalted in power. (*Homilist.*) *The knowledge of God and how it comes to us*:—Mr. Beecher says, "The Divine nature can only be made known to us through the part of our nature which is like His. You cannot imitate silence by making a noise. You cannot make a man have sweet tastes by giving him sour or bitter. You cannot take an opaque stone and with it illustrate the transparency of glass or a diamond. You cannot by darkness imitate light. You must have the quality itself that you wish to make known. If that which in God is so precious were a material thing, then it might be made known to us through material organizations; but as God is infinite in love, beauty, and wisdom, and glory, and excellence, He is to be known to us in these elements by the actual possession of the qualities themselves, as windows through which the light of heaven shines. The windows in us are to be like the heavenly windows, and the knowledge that comes to us is to be brought out from the very chords which are in our bosom, and which vibrate in us." *God a continual discovery*:—An eminent English preacher has a sermon entitled, "God—A Continual Discovery." The figure suggests a continent into which explorers are ever advancing, and concerning which they are for ever learning. He is "the endless study." "To know God," said the earnest but sad French philosopher, "is the one thing needful"; to know God, said Jesus, is to have eternal life. The old prophets believed in God as they believed in themselves. They were not shallow enough to think that they could be persons, and yet there be no fountain of personality. (*The Quiver.*)

Ver. 9. **There brake He the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle.**—*The arrows of the bond broken in Zion*:—All the wonders recorded in the book of the wars of the Lord are eclipsed in the Gospel annals, for they are but the destruction of men's bodies, the temporary deliverance of cities and of nations from the oppression of war; but the Gospel tells of eternal redemption. I. First, He has fought victoriously for us. Our God has wrought for us great spiritual victories, by which all the ingenious weapons of our many adversaries have been snapped. Let me remind you, first, of what the Lord our God did in the day of our redemption by the sufferings of Christ. Let us celebrate the triumphs of Calvary. Christ has emptied the quivers of hell, has quenched every fiery dart, and broken off the head of every arrow of wrath. Sin hath no more dominion over us. Jesus has made an end of it, and put it away for ever. O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end. When our Lord, after a short sojourn in the grave, rose again on the third day, His resurrection effectually crushed all the remaining hopes of hell. Our risen Lord shines forth in transcendent majesty beside the empty tomb, surrounded by the broken swords and bucklers of His people's foes. Yet further, when, after forty days, our Lord ascended from us to take possession of the purchased possession, in our name, and to prepare a place for us at the right hand of the Father, in that day He again gave to hell such a defeat as it shall never be able to recover. Nor is the story quite ended yet. Jesus is now exalted far above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named, but the enemy of our souls, though defeated, continues maliciously to attempt our destruction. Satan's head is bruised, but still he lives, and continues perpetually to assault the saints of God. We seldom stand before the angel without Satan comes forward as our accuser. II. The victories which Jesus Christ has won in us. Whereas we were enemies, we are now reconciled unto God by the death of His Son. Let me take you back to the time of your conversion. Some of us were very stout-hearted. We knew the truth, but we did not love it; we understood the Gospel, but we abhorred it. Ah! the bringing in of great sinners is indeed a glory to Christ—and the salvation of great moralists is not a secondary victory, for perhaps of the two it is more difficult to subdue the righteous self than the sinful self of men. Since conversion, how often has the great Conqueror been obliged to interpose on our behalf to save us from our

rebellious lusts. Further than this, those who know anything of the inner life will frequently have to contend with doubts and fears, suspicious and forebodings. III. And now, lastly, as this has been done for us, and in us, it will be done by us. The Church of God is God's battle-axe and weapons of war in fighting His battles for truth and righteousness; and, up till now, history shows that none have been able to stand against God in the midst of His people. At first the enemy attacked the Church with persecution. Those rough and barbarous weapons of war were used which were to be found in the Colosseum, with its wild beasts and cruel men, or in the axe, the stake, and the rack. O persecution, where are thy trophies? The virgin daughter of Zion hath shaken her head at thee, and laughed thee to scorn. God has indeed broken "the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle," by sustaining His people in times of persecution. The Church has also been assailed with deadly errors. There is scarcely a doctrine of our holy faith which has not been denied. Every age produces a new crop of heretics and infidels. If you want to answer the infidel, live a holy life. There, in the working man's cottage, which was once the haunt of drunkenness and the den of vice, and the abode of misery—but which has now become a little paradise, where the children are trained for heaven, where father and mother are knit together in love, there the grace of God breaks the shield, and the sword, and the battle. There where the weeping sinner finds peace, where the troubled merchant wins rest to his spirit, where the tempted young man overcomes the temptation, and stands fast in the day of trial—there it is where suffering is endured with patience, where labour is performed with perseverance, where the command is obeyed with holiness, and sin is resisted with steadfastness; there it is that the Gospel of Jesus breaks the "arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle." (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 5. **The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep.**—*Human power defeated*.—I. MEN OF COURAGE, POWER, AND SUCCESS, OF EMINENT QUALIFICATIONS, ARE OFTENTIMES ENGAGED AGAINST THE LORD, AND THE WAYS OF THE LORD. 1. These very qualifications of a stout heart, strong hands, and former success are apt of themselves, if destitute of directing light and humbling grace, to puff up the spirits of men, and to engage them in ways of their own, contrary to the mind of the Lord. 2. God will have it so, that the greater may be His glory in the powerful protection and defence of His own, with the destruction, disappointment, and ruin of their enemies. If His enemies were all sottish, weak, foolish, childish, until He makes them so, where would be the praise of His great name? Use 1. Be not moved at the most formidable enemies that may arise against you in the ways of the Lord. Use 2. Let men to whom the Lord hath given stout hearts, strong hands, and great success, watch carefully over their own spirits, lest they be led aside into any way against the mind of God. II. GOD SUITS THE WORKINGS AND ACTINGS OF PROVIDENCE FOR DELIVERANCE TO THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE OPPOSERS. Are they stout hearts? They shall be made to yield themselves. Are they men of might? They shall lose their power; they shall not find their hands (Ex. xviii. 11; Isa. xxxi. 2; Acts xii. 23; Ex. i. 10; xiv. 27, 28). III. **THOUGH MEN HAVE COURAGE, MIGHT, AND FORMER SUCCESSES TO ACCOMPANY THEM, YET, WHEN THEY ENGAGE THEMSELVES AGAINST THE LORD, OR ANY WAY OF HIS, VANITY, WEAKNESS, AND DISAPPOINTMENT WILL BE THE ISSUE THEREOF.** 1. The Lord will take away their stout hearts, that they shall no more be able to carry them out to any success in their great undertakings. He will break that wheel at the very fountain, that it shall no more be the spring of their proceedings. Now this the Lord usually doth, one or more of these four ways: (1) He fills them with fury and madness; so taking away their order. (2) He fills them with folly and giddiness; so taking away their counsel. (3) He fills them with terror and amazement; so depriving them of their courage. Or—(4) with contrition and humility; so changing their spirits. 2. He will not only take away their hearts, but also their hands; He will not only dispirit them, but He will also disarm them; He will take not only wisdom from their hearts, but the wheels from their chariots. He is the God of the power of men, as well as the spirits of men. Will He continue power and strength unto men to use it against Him that gives it? (J. Owen, D.D.)

Ver. 9. **When God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth.**—*Help of the meek*.—I. GOD SHALL COME TO JUDGMENT. II. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH HE SHALL COME: namely, for the helping of all the meek upon earth.

1. The poor in spirit. 2. The humble. 3. The afflicted. III. THE STATE OF THE WORLD AT THE MOMENT OF CHRIST'S APPEARANCE (ver. 8). When a storm of thunder is approaching, and thick clouds are rising up from different quarters of the sky to send down fire upon the earth, it is commonly preceded by an awful stillness; the wind is silenced, and the leaves are at rest; as if things below were preparing themselves for the visitation that is coming upon them from above. Thus shall it be, when those clouds of heaven shall descend, on which the Son of Man shall sit in judgment, and the lightning of His presence shall shine from the east even unto the west. A sudden fear and silence shall seize upon the world: the noise of folly and the mouth of iniquity shall be stopped; the hurry of business shall be at an end; and every work then in agitation shall be left unfinished. Therefore let us examine our own hearts, whether we have attended to that pattern which we all profess to follow, even our blessed Master, who said, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." (W. Jones, M.A.)

Ver. 10. Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee; the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain.—*The wrath of man praising God.*—The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth in the armies of heaven, and in the kingdoms of men, none can stay His mighty hand, or challenge His supreme authority. The floods of ungodliness are subject to His rule, and the angry passions of man are subservient to the wise purposes of His administration. I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE WRATH OF MAN. It is the groundless and fruitless enmity of the wicked against the righteous. This enmity includes all the dark devices, and crafty machinations which they employ, in order to carry their wrath into effect. But the vast and complicated engine which they have with wicked hands fabricated shall recoil upon their own heads, they shall be caught in the net which they have spread, and shall fall into the pit which they have digged, for the way of the ungodly shall perish. II. HOW THE WRATH OF MAN MAY BE SAID TO PRAISE GOD. 1. In the patience and resignation of His saints, when they have been reviled and persecuted, and all manner of evil said against them falsely for the sake of Christ. 2. In the stability of His Church, for this tends solely to the glory of its great Guide and Guardian, whose tabernacle of old was in Salem, and whose dwelling-place was in Zion, and who is the rock and refuge, the stay and the strength of His people in every age. 3. Inasmuch as it frustrates its own foolish ends, and promotes His wise and gracious purposes. III. THE CERTAINTY OF THIS EVENT. "Surely." The great Author of Nature governs all His creatures, and all their actions, in a most holy, wise, and powerful manner. In some of His creatures He maintains a necessity of acting, in others a contingency, and in others a sense of liberty, or freedom of working, but all of them are so overruled by Him as to accomplish the eternal counsels of His will, without in any degree affecting the responsibility or accountableness of His rational creatures. The manner, however, in which this is accomplished lies beyond the power of our limited faculties to comprehend or clearly to explain. IV. THE LIMITATION OF MAN'S WRATH. You have seen the surges of a stormy sea, raging and rushing towards the shore, deep calling unto deep, as if they had combined to overflow the whole land with one fierce and foaming deluge. But they knew and recognized their limits, and obeyed the voice of the Almighty. When you saw this magnificent spectacle, you then beheld a lively emblem of the impotent rage of the wicked and profane against the Church and people of God. Are you concerned with regard to the Christian Church and the Christian cause in the world? Though they should come as a river overflowing its banks, or as the rushing of mighty waters, to use the words of the prophet, they shall not prevail. (J. Wightman, D.D.) *The dominion of Providence over the passions of men.*—I. HOW THE WRATH OF MAN PRAISES GOD. 1. The wrath of man praises God as it is an example and illustration of Divine truth, and clearly points out the corruption of our nature, which is the foundation-stone of the doctrine of redemption. 2. The wrath of man praiseth God, as it is the instrument in His hand for bringing sinners to repentance, and for the correction and improvement of His own children. 3. The wrath of man praiseth God, as He sets bounds to it, or restrains it by His providence, and sometimes makes it evidently a means of promoting and illustrating His glory. II. APPLY THESE PRINCIPLES TO OUR PRESENT SITUATION. 1. Press every hearer to a sincere concern for his own soul's salvation. 2. See what ground there is to give praise to God for His favours already bestowed on us, respecting the public cause. 3. Learn what encouragement you have to put your trust in God, and hope for His assistance in the present important conflict. He



is the Lord of hosts, great in might, and strong in battle. Whoever hath His countenance and approbation shall have the best at last. (*J. Witherspoon, D.D.*)

*The wrath of man*.—I. THE DOCTRINE ASSERTED. 1. That the evil passions of men shall eventually promote the glory of God. 2. That all human wickedness, not available for this end, shall be irresistibly controlled. II. PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. Adore God's unfathomable wisdom. 2. Confide in His protection. 3. Dread His displeasure. (*J. Jowett, M.A.*)

*Man's wrath against God's people shall turn to God's praise*.—I. THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF WRATH AND ANGER IN THE HEARTS OF MEN AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF GOD. 1. A violent wrath and anger: proud and violent men are risen up against mo. 2. A fraudulent and deceitful wrath: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; speaking of the enemies of the people of God. 3. A mortal wrath and anger is in their hearts towards the people of God. 4. Devouring, consuming and destroying wrath. 5. A blaspheming wrath. 6. An unreasonable wrath. 7. An insulting wrath. 8. A universal wrath. 9. An implacable wrath. II. WILL GOD LET WICKED MEN ALONE IN THIS THEIR WRATH AND ANGER AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF GOD? No, but He will either turn their wrath and anger unto His own praise, or He will restrain it. I use to express it thus: by the miller that lets the water run; so much water as will serve his turn to grind the corn, he lets it run, the rest he doth restrain, and does not let it run. So the Lord doth let the wrath of man run so much as may grind His corn, so much as may serve His turn, so much as may work to His praise. The remnant He doth restrain, either He will work the wrath and anger of men to His own praise, or He will restrain the same. (*W. Bridge, M.A.*)

*The wrath of man, the praise of God*.—I. The lamentable condition of human nature aside from the grace of God. Wrath, malice, madness are visible in all man's conduct, against Himself and against others, showing that his moral state is utterly disordered. Did the law of love preside, as it should, over the movements of the human heart, the actions of the human hand, and the utterances of the human lips, what a happy aspect would society everywhere present. But instead of that, passion, pride, prejudice, envy, jealousy, suspicion, selfishness—in one word, wrath, either in its subtle and more secret, or its grosser and more striking forms, has embittered the intercourse of men with one another. But worse than all, man not only exercises such feelings of hostility against his fellow-man, but even against the laws and ordinances of God. Here is the seat, the core, the root, the spring of the other evils, of lawless passions within the man and lawless conduct toward his neighbour. The law of God broken, no other law can be rightly kept. The heart not right in respect to Him, it is more or less wrong in every other relation. 2. It is a mighty alleviation of all this wrath and evil induced by sin, that its action is neither fortuitous nor necessitated, but is entirely under the governmental control of the great and good God. Were it not for this, our lot had been most fearful. But for this it had been better for the most favoured among us that we had never known existence. O ye children of men! who are willing to live without God in the world, and prayerless, conducting life in a spirit of independence of Him, do you not see that the idea of God is necessary to the completeness of every other idea; that humanity is in a state of utter orphanage without it, and that when the heart aches under the pressure of affliction, and longs for relief, its cry is hopeless, unless there is a God that rules in providence and answers prayer? 3. Our subject has a lesson for the godless, whoever they may be. It bids them not to triumph because their wrath, whether it be against God, or man, or their own nature, is tolerated for the present. It tells them that to escape from the requirements of the Divine law is not to escape from its penalty; to oppose the truth is not to extinguish it; to cast off God's authority is not to wrest its sceptre from His hand. He holds it as firmly when He forbears as when He acts; and He will eventually show that His temporary forbearance arose not from lack of power, or displeasure either, but from the plenitude of wisdom, holiness, and love. 4. As the subject has a lesson for the godless, so also for the godly. To them it is cheering; it teaches them courage; it affords them peace. (*W. Sparrow, D.D.*)

*The wrath of man made to praise God*.—I. By the exhibition it has afforded of the faith and patience of the saints. 2. By the proof it has supplied of the indestructible nature of the Churches. 3. By the remarkable interpositions for which it has given occasion. 4. The measures it has adopted have been so overruled by God as to produce opposite results to those intended. (*Thomas Price.*)

*The wrath of man made to praise God*.—I. By restraining His people's wanderings (*Judges vi. 12, 18*). Israel

had never prayed, if the oppression of the Midianites were not felt; but the wrath of man drove them to their knees, and the event was praise to God. 2. By drawing out the grace of the Spirit. God has called out a people to His service, that they may exhibit His perfections to the world. It is only under provocation that the fullness of a believer's grace can be known. 3. The wrath of man is made subservient to the believer's growth in grace. Each successive attack of the enemy produces more renunciation of self, more dependence on, and abiding in God. Each member of Christ gains strength by wrestling with the enemy; and thus wrath is overruled for good. 4. The wrath of man praises God, in causing His children to long for their home. Some Pharaoh rises up to shake the Israelites out of their sleep of slavery, and drive them out into the land of promise. (*G. Carr, M.A.*) *The wrath of man bounded by the power of God*:—I. THE WRATH OF MAN. 1. What it imports. (1) The wickedness of man's nature, and its enmity against God. (2) The weakness and impotence of it. (3) The rashness and precipitancy of it. (4) The fierceness of it. (5) The illegality and arbitrariness of it. A man in wrath has no regard either to the laws of God or man, being fully under the law of his own lusts; such as malice, revenge, pride, and the like corruption. 2. Whence is it that wicked men have so great wrath against God, His people, and interest? (1) This flows from the power of Satan in and over them; for he rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience (Rev. xii. 12). (2) This flows from the power of natural enmity against God and His interest, which is nothing else but the poison and venom of the devil's malice infused into the souls of wicked men; and when the devil has any ill turn to do in the world, he has no more ado but to say to this or the other lust of the heart, Go, and it goes; and to another, Come, and it cometh. The wheel of corrupt nature just rolls as the devil would have it. (3) They are filled with wrath against the people of God, because their own works are evil, and the works of the other good (1 John iii. 12). (4) Because God's people seek the good of the Church of Christ upon earth, but the wicked seek to destroy it. The one prays for the peace of Jerusalem, and takes pleasure in her stones and rubbish; whereas the wicked seek to ruin it; they cry, "Raze, raze Jerusalem to the foundation"; and therefore they cannot but be filled with rage against those that cross their measures. II. INQUIRE HOW IS IT THAT THE WRATH OF MAN DOTHE PRAISE GOD? God levies a tribute of praise out of the wrath of man—1. By making it to redound to the glory of His name, and the illustration of the perfections of His nature. 2. By making it subservient to the advancement of His own work in and about His Church. (1) His discovering work; for by the wind of man's wrath He separates between the precious and the vile, betwixt the chaff and the wheat. (2) His purging work. (3) God's uniting work is thereby advanced in a time of peace and external tranquillity. The sheep of Christ scatter and divide among themselves; but God lets loose the dogs upon them, and then the flock runs together; or like pieces of metal cast into the fire, they run together in a lump. (4) God's enlarging work, or His work of spreading the Gospel, is sometimes advanced by the wrath of man (Acts viii. 1-5). The Gospel, like the camomile, the more it is tread upon, the more it spreads. 3. The wrath of man praises God by ministering matter of praise to the saints of God in the wilderness. 4. God many times extorts praise to Himself out of the mouths of His enemies, especially when they see God taking the field against them in a way of terrible majesty (Exod. xiv. 24, 25). III. INQUIRE HOW IS IT THAT GOD RESTRAINS THE REMAINDER OF MAN'S WRATH? 1. He sometimes restrains their wrath, by converting them; a cast of converting grace will make the "wolf to dwell with the lamb, and the leopard to lie down peaceably with the kid." So Saul (Acts ix.). 2. Sometimes by diverting them from their design, as He did Sennacherib for a while, when His wrath was bent against God's Israel; God raises up the inhabitants of Libnah against him, the rumour of which obliged him to desist from his wrathful enterprise at that time (2 Kings xix. 7. So 1 Sam. xxiii. 27, 28). 3. Sometimes by destroying them, as he did Pharaoh and the Egyptians when pursuing Israel. "Envy slays the silly one." 4. By putting favourable thoughts of God's people in the hearts of their enemies, whereby their wrath is stayed (Dan. ii. 46-48; v. 29). 5. Sometimes by disclosing their secrets and revealing their angry and wrathful plots against the Church and people of God. Thus the secret plots of the king of Assyria were disclosed and revealed to the king of Israel by the prophet Elisha, whereby his design against Israel was baffled, and his rage stayed. 6. Sometimes by blunting their courage, and taking away both heart and hand from them. "The stout-hearted are spoiled, and none

of the men of might find their hands," when God binds them. IV. USE. 1. See here the corruption and depravity of nature. 2. See the folly and madness of sinners who fight against God and His cause. 3. See hence, that there is a holy and overruling providence in the most gloomy and threatening dispensations that befall God's people. 4. See hence a notable antidote against the slavish fear of man's wrath, which causes a snare, especially in a day when the wicked walk on every side, and the vilest of men are advanced to power and authority; and they employing their power to oppress God's people and to ruin His interest. 5. See hence, that "it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in men: better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes." 6. See whence it is that the Church of Christ has been preserved, in all ages, amidst the greatest storms, when hell and earth has been raging and plotting her ruin. 7. This doctrine should teach us to bear injuries, especially for the cause of Christ, with a great deal of meekness, patience, and quietness of spirit, and to refer our cause to the Lord, when suffering wrongfully at the hand of man. (*E. Erskine.*) *On the Divine government of the passions of men:*—I. THE WRATH OF MAN REDOUNDS TO THE PRAISE OF DIVINE POWER. It brings it forth, with full and awful lustre, to the view of mankind. To reign with sovereign command amidst the most turbulent and disordered state of things, both in the natural and moral world, is the peculiar glory of omnipotence. II. THE WRATH OF MAN IS MADE TO PRAISE THE WISDOM OF GOD. Nothing displays more remarkably the admirable counsel of Heaven, than its arranging the train of events in such a manner that the unruly passions of the wicked shall contribute to overthrow their own designs. III. THE WRATH OF MEN PRAISES THE JUSTICE OF GOD, by being employed as the instrument of inflicting punishment on sinners. Did bad men trace the course of events in their life with attentive eye, they might easily discover the greatest part of the disasters which they suffer to be brought upon them by their own ungoverned passions. The succession of causes and effects is so contrived by Providence that the wrath which they meant to pour forth on others frequently recoils, by its effects, upon themselves. He delivers them up to themselves, and they become their own tormentors. Before the world they may disguise their sufferings; but it is well known, that to be inwardly torn with despite, revenge, and wrathful passions is the most intense of all misery. In thus connecting the punishment with the crime, making their own wickedness to reprove them, and their backslidings to correct them, the avenging hand of a righteous Governor is conspicuous. The wrath of man also praises the justice of God in the punishment of other criminals, as well as of the wrathful themselves. Ambitious and lawless men are let loose upon each other, that, without any supernatural interposition, they may fulfil the just vengeance of Heaven in their mutual destruction. IV. THE WRATH OF MAN IS MADE TO PRAISE THE GOODNESS OF GOD. 1. It is employed by God as a useful instrument of discipline and correction to the virtuous. The storms which ambition and pride raise among mankind He permits with the same intention that He sends forth tempests among the elements; to clear the atmosphere of noxious vapours, and to purify it from that corruption which all things contract by too much rest. 2. God makes the wrath of man contribute to the benefit of the virtuous, by rendering it the means of improving and signaling their graces; and of raising them, thereby, to higher honour and glory. The wrath of man opens the field to glory; calls us forth to the most distinguished exercise of active virtue, and forms us to all those suffering graces which are among the highest ornaments of the human soul. It is thus that the illustrious band of true patriots and heroes, of confessors and martyrs, have been set forth to the admiration of all ages, as lights of the world; while the rage and fury of enemies, instead of bearing them down, have only served to exalt and dignify them more. 3. The wrath of man is often made to advance the temporal prosperity of the righteous. The violence with which wicked men pursue their resentment defeats its own purpose, and engages the world on the side of the virtuous whom they persecute. The attempts of malice to blacken and defame them bring forth their characters with more advantage to the view of impartial beholders. The extremities to which they are reduced by injustice and oppression rouse their courage and activity; and often give occasion to such vigorous efforts in their just defence as overcome all opposition, and terminate in prosperity and success. 4. The wrath of man, when it breaks forth in the persecution of religion, praises the Divine goodness by being rendered conducive to the advancement of truth and propagation of religion in the world. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*)

**Ver. 11. Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God.**—*Vowing and paying vows*:—Let us look at the purely religious aspect of vowing; and finally consider it in its practical bearing as upon God, ourselves and society. I. A vow is a resolution, AND SOMETHING MORE. You may resolve to be in France next week, but the resolution may amount merely to an expression of a conclusion which may be reversed by unforeseen occurrences. In this case the resolution is simply an affair of opinion, or judgment, or intention. You say you have made up your mind to a certain course, but something may happen to change your mind. A vow affects not only the judgment, but the heart. A vow should not be based upon expediency, but upon rectitude—upon foundations which cannot change. A resolution may be an effort of mere judgment—a vow must be the expression of the heart. I resolve to have the Bible bound in morocco, but I vow to read it: the binding and the reading belong to two different regions: in the one case, fancy speaks; in the other, conscience. You resolve that your child shall wear a certain style of clothing, but were you to vow it you would be guilty of exaggeration—you would thrust a mere trifle into association with the deepest solemnities of life; you would make too much of it—you would not exalt your taste, you would degrade your religion. II. VOWS ARE TO BE MADE TO GOD, OR IN THE NAME OF GOD: THEY ARE DEEPLY RELIGIOUS ACTS (Gen. xxviii. 20; 2 Sam. xv. 7). Life is made sublime by the fact that it can in all its highest acts be in league and bond with God. Life is thus redeemed from lowness, littleness, poverty, commonplace, and vulgarity. What subjects, then, are fit for the solemnity of vows? 1. The religious consecration of periods of time. 2. The godly training of children. 3. The religious devotion of sums of money (Gen. xxviii. 22). 4. A fuller dedication of energy to Divine service. Then there is an inner region known only to the individual himself—besetting sins, mortification of passions, duties to those who have special claims upon us, care for others, and many points secret to each heart. III. WE ARE NOT ONLY TO VOW, WE ARE ALSO TO PAY OUR VOWS (Num. xxx. 2). It is profane to treat a vow lightly (Deut. xxiii. 21). So a man's religion may actually be turned into aggravated impiety! Specially observe, that to vow, and not to pay, destroys the finest qualities and powers of manhood. Non-payment means diminution of soul-power—exhaustion of spiritual force. Observe, too, that in not paying a vow, man loses faith in himself: he is a liar to his own soul! The spiritual and practical lesson arising out of the whole is this: The great questions of life lie first between man and God—not between man and man, but between man and God. A man must settle with God what ought to be done and how it ought to be done, then he will be lifted above all social fear. Does he give money? He must give it first to God. Does he give time? Let him first give it to Jesus Christ. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Honesty towards God*:—I. SOME MEN NEITHER VOW NOR PAY. This is bad. They never seem to recognize the claim of God upon them, but lead a smooth, unalarmed existence (Ps. lxxiii. 3-7). II. OTHER MEN VOW, BUT DO NOT PAY. This is worse. Frequent prickings of conscience. General sense that all is not right. Have peculiar impressions owing to special experiences. But lack of decision, and so "goodness like morning cloud and early dew" (Eccles. v. 1-5). III. THE BEST THING, THE ONLY RIGHT THING, IS TO VOW AND PAY. 1. Appeal to those who have vowed. "Ye are not your own," for you have given yourselves to God. Let your resolution be (Ps. cxvi. 14). 2. Appeal to those who have not vowed. (1) Vow to live to God; vow to be Christ's. (2) And then in God's strength prayerfully and strenuously seek to pay your vows. (*J. R. Bailey.*) *The way to a noble life*:—Were the question asked me by any one, How am I to realize the true idea of manhood; how am I to gain a noble life? the text would enable me to answer the question. I. BY MAKING GOOD VOWS. "Vow!" There are three classes of men amongst us. 1. Those who pass through life without any clear and earnest resolution. They move along the path of life by instinct, habit, or custom; they have no clear and well-defined purpose. Such, of course, can never reach true manhood. 2. Those who pass through life with wrongly formed resolutions. There are those who make rash resolutions; and there are those who form resolutions inspired by bad passions, such as avarice, revenge, jealousy, etc. These resolutions can never conduct to a noble life, they embitter and embarrass life. 3. Those who pass through life with a well-formed resolution. What is a well-formed resolution? It is a resolution implying an earnest determination to render all the activities and circumstances of life subservient to the will of God—an invincible purpose to make His will our law in everyday life, secular as well as spiritual. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" This resolution is (1) Philo-

sophic. If there be a God, His will is everything. This resolution is (2) Developing. It brings out vigorously and harmoniously all the faculties of our nature. Such a resolution unites the whole soul. II. BY FULFILLING GOOD VOWS. A good resolution, if unfulfilled, is—1. Worthless. It passes off as a mere passing sentiment or floating idea. It is a cloud without rain; it does not stir or rouse the faculties; it might have excited them at first, but afterwards they relapsed to a weaker state than before. It has been said that "hell is paved with good resolutions." 2. Wrong. The man who vows that he will do a thing, and does not do it, lies against his own nature. Better not make a good vow at all, than make it and not carry it out. (*Homilist.*) *Devotion helped by the vow of it:*—Rabbi Aikba said, "Vows are the enclosures of holiness." Midshipman Andrew Foote (afterwards Admiral), pacing the deck of the ship 'Natchez' in mid-ocean and under the impressiveness of the night sky, knit his young soul into life-holding resolution, saying, "Henceforth I live for God." Charles Kingsley wrote on entering his twenty-second year, "My birth-night. I have been for the last hour on the sea-shore; not dreaming, but thinking deeply and strongly, and forming determinations which are to affect my destiny through time and eternity. Before the sleeping earth, and the sleepless sea and stars, I have devoted myself to God—a vow never (if He gives me the faith I pray for) to be recalled." The chivalric service of Christ is beautifully symbolled in the devotion of the mediæval knight to his earthly king. He knelt hareheaded, without arms, and, placing his hands between those of his superior, swore: "Hear, my lord! I now become liege-man of yours for life and limb and earthly regard; and I will keep faith and loyalty to you for life and death. God help me!" Whereupon the lord with the sign of the kiss invested him and his heirs for ever with the land. (*J. M. Ludlow, D.D.*)

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### PSALM LXXVII.

Vers. 1-20. I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and He gave ear unto me.—*The faculty of human thought:*—The whole psalm may be used to illustrate the faculty of human thought. Throughout the whole the author speaks of "remembering," "considering," "musing," making "diligent search," meditating, etc., etc. I. IT IS A POWER THAT CAN INFLAME THE SOUL WITH LONGINGS FOR GOD (vers. 1, 2). By thought this man brought the Eternal into his soul, even in the stillness and darkness of night. It presented Him as an Object to whom he appealed in his distress, and from whom he received relief. II. IT HAS POWER TO FILL THE SOUL WITH MINGLED EMOTIONS. 1. Here is sadness (vers. 2-10). The writer says, "his soul refused to be comforted," "he was troubled," "overwhelmed," so "troubled that he could neither sleep nor speak," so troubled that he cries out, "Will God cast off for ever? and will He be favourable no more?" What sinful man can think upon God without being troubled with remorse and troubled with forebodings? Thought can lash the soul into a tempest, can kindle it into a hell. 2. Here is joy (vers. 10-20). "And I said, this is my infirmity;" or rather, my hope. (1) The joy of gratitude. "I remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." Thoughts upon the past mercies of God have a power to kindle the soul into raptures of gratitude. (2) Joy of adoration. "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary;" or, Thy way is holy. The holiness of God is suited to inspire us with holy rapture. (3) Joy of trustfulness. "Thou art the God that doest wonders." The psalmist remembers what God had done in conducting the children of Israel through the Red Sea into the promised land; and this inspired and exalted him with new hope. Thus, thought can fill the soul either with sadness or with joy. It creastes the weather within—cloudy or sunny, stormy or calm; the seasons within—spring, summer, autumn, or winter. What a wonderful faculty is this with which Heaven has endowed us, this faculty of thought. III. IT IS A POWER OVER WHICH MAN HAS A PERSONAL CONTROL. The psalmist speaks of himself as directing his own thoughts. "I sought, I remembered, I considered." This power over thought is the dignity of our nature, and is that which invests us with responsibility. Man has no direct power over any faculty but this. He has no immediate control over his feelings

or faiths. He could no more awaken love or produce repentance by a direct effort, than he could create a world. He can think or not think—think upon this subject or that, in this aspect or another, consecutively or desultorily, profoundly or superficially. This he can do; and herein is his freedom. (*Homilist.*) *God's ear open to the cry of the needy:*—A cheque without a signature at the bottom is nothing but a worthless piece of paper. The stroke of a pen confers on it all its value. The prayer of a poor child of Adam is a feeble thing in itself, but once endorsed by the hand of the Lord Jesus, it availeth much. There was an officer in the city of Rome who was appointed to have his doors always open, in order to receive any Roman citizen who applied to him for help. Just so the ear of the Lord Jesus is ever open to the cry of all who want mercy and grace. It is His office to help them. (*J. C. Ryle.*)

**Ver. 2. My soul refused to be comforted.**—*Refusing to be comforted:*—I. When a man's soul refuses to be comforted, POSSIBLY HE MAY BE RIGHT. He may have a great spiritual sorrow, and some one, who does not at all understand his grief, may proffer to him a consolation which is far too slight. Not knowing how deep the wound is, this foolish physician may think that it can be healed with any common ointment. So, too, it is equally right to refuse to be comforted, when the comfort is untrue. When a man is under a sense of sin, I have known his friends say to him, "You should not fret; you have not been so very bad. You have been, indeed, a very good sort of fellow." You have not committed any very terrible sin; God help the world if you are a great sinner! I do not know what will become of the rest of us." Another says, "You have only to pray, and go to a place of worship; perhaps be a little more regular in your attention to religion, and it will all come right again; you are not so bad as you think you are." Such talk as that is a lie, and the man whom God has really awakened to feel his state by nature will refuse to be comforted by such falsehoods as those. We have known others who have tried to comfort poor, mourning, repentant sinners in an unhallowed way. They have said, "You want to raise your spirits, I can recommend you some fine old wine; it will do you a world of good." Another will say, "You should really mix a little more in society, and shake yourself up; you should get with some gay, lively people, they would soon take this melancholy out of you." I am sure that a person who is really troubled in spirit will increase his sorrow if he attempts to cure it in that way. It is only putting more fuel on the flame. "In danger every moment of death, and certain that, if death came, I should be lost, can I enjoy mirth? It cannot be!" Refuse every comfort short of being born again, and made a new creature in Jesus. II. But now, I want to show **WHEN THIS REFUSAL IS WRONG.** PROBABLY HE IS WRONG who says, "My soul refused to be comforted." It is quite wrong if it be a temporal matter that causes your sorrow. Refuse not to be comforted, I pray you; you are only driving the dagger deeper into your wounds. Instead of doing that, think of the mercies that you still have, think of how God can bless your troubles. But now I will suppose that yours is a spiritual trouble. Do not refuse to be comforted, for if you do, you will be spiritually a suicide. The man who will not eat, and so dies of starvation, is as much a suicide as he that puts the pistol to his head, and blows out his brains. III. But now, **HARPLY YOU WILL HAVE TO REPENT OF REFUSING TO BE COMFORTED.** Possibly you will have to repent it in a very terrible way. Suppose, now, that you should refuse to be comforted, and so should wilfully go into a yet darker and deeper dungeon of despair. Suppose that your Christian friends should grow weary of you. Where would you be then? And suppose that, because you shut your eyes to the light, God should take it away? I do hope that many here present, who have refused to be comforted, will yet regret it when they shall be enjoying the fullness of comfort. "What a fool am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty! I have a key in my bosom, called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle." So he pulled it out of his bosom, put it in the lock, opened the door of the dungeon, and they soon passed out. Now, finally, when you and I get to heaven, we shall regret that we ever refused to be comforted. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A sermon for the most miserable of men:*—My main bent, this morning, is to deal with mourners who are seeking Christ, but up till now have sought Him in vain. I. Concerning so deplorable a state of heart, alas! still so common, we will remark in the first place that it is VERY WONDERFUL. It is a most surprising thing that there should be in this world persons who have the richest

consolation near to hand, and persistently refuse to partake of it. Doth the ox refuse its fodder? Will the lion turn from his meat? Or the eagle loathe its nest? The refusal of consolation is the more singular because the most admirable comfort is within reach. Sin can be forgiven; sin has been forgiven; Christ has made an atonement for it. It is said that some years ago, a vessel sailing on the northern coast of the South American continent, was observed to make signals of distress. When hailed by another vessel, they reported themselves as "Dying for water!" "Dip it up, then," was the response, "you are in the mouth of the Amazon river." There was fresh water all around them, they had nothing to do but to dip it up, and yet they were dying of thirst, because they thought themselves to be surrounded by the salt sea. How often are men ignorant of their mercies! How sad that they should perish for lack of knowledge! But suppose after the sailors had received the joyful information, they had still refused to draw up the water which was in boundless plenty all around them, would it not have been a marvel? II. Secondly, this wonderful madness has a method in it, and MAY BE VARIOUSLY ACCOUNTED FOR. In many, their refusal to be comforted arises from bodily and mental disease. It is in vain to ply with scriptural arguments those who are in more urgent need of healing medicine, or generous diet, or a change of air. In some the monstrous refusal is suggested by a proud dislike to the plan of salvation. They would be comforted, aye, that they would, but may they not do something to earn eternal life? May they not at least contribute a feeling or emotion? May they not prepare themselves for Christ? In others it is not pride, but an unholy resolve to retain some favourite sin. In some cases we have found out that the sorrowing person indulged still in a secret vice, or kept the society of the ungodly. I fear, in a great many, there is another reason for this refusing to be comforted, namely, a dishonouring unbelief in the love, and goodness, and truthfulness of God. They do not believe God to be gracious; they think Him so stern that a sinner had need plead full many a day before the stern heart of God will be touched. Oh, but you do not know my God! What is He? He is love. Some, however, have refused comfort so long, that they have grown into the habit of despair. Beware of nursing despondency. Does it creep upon you to-day through unbelief? Oh, shake it off if possible! III. This remarkable piece of folly ASSUMES DIVERS FORMS. One is a persistent misrepresentation of the Gospel, as though it claimed some hard thing of us. Another shape of this malady is this: many continually and persistently underestimate the power of the precious blood of Jesus. There are some who will then say, "But I have sinned such and such a sin." What, and cannot the blood of Jesus wash that away? "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." IV. This refusal to be comforted INVOLVES MUCH OF WRONG. When you hear the Gospel and refuse to be comforted by it, there is a wrong done to the minister of God. He sympathizes with you, he desires to comfort you, and it troubles him when he puts before you the cup of salvation, and you refuse to take it. But worse than that, you wrong God's Gospel. You put it away as though it were a thing of nought. You wrong this precious Bible. It is full of consoling promises, and you read it, and you seem to say, "It is all chaff." Oh, but the Bible does not deserve to have such a slur cast upon it. You do wrong to the dear friends who try to comfort you. Above all, you do wrong to your God, to Jesus, and to His Holy Spirit. The crucifixion of Christ is repeated by your rejection of Christ. V. SUCH A REFUSAL SHOULD NOT BE PERSISTED IN. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 3. **I remembered God, and was troubled.**—*Remembering God*:—This was a very sad condition. Asaph must have felt that it was unnatural to entertain such gloomy thoughts of God. I. A TEST OF OUR CONDITION. Do we remember Him and become troubled? Then our state is wrong. If troubled now at the remembrance of His holiness, how much greater will the trouble be when we meet Him face to face in all His terrible glory. But if we remember Him with joy, happy indeed is our condition. II. AN INTIMATION OF DUTY—"I remembered God." Alas, how few do remember God! And yet this is the first of all duties. We get a glimpse of Asaph's character. He was not a bad man. But he felt that it was better to probe the wound and open the sore, rather than that it should fester to the death. He would remember God; he would take his sin to God, so as to have it mortified, and then forgiven. (*Homilist.*) *The memory of God a trouble*:—I. AN IMPORTANT MENTAL EXERCISE. "I remembered God." II. A SAD SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE. "I remembered God, and was troubled." What a deplor-

able fact is this: a soul "troubled" at the memory of God. 1. This is unnatural. It can never be that the great Father of our spirits formed us to think on Him in order to be miserable. 2. It is unnecessary. The memory of God with some is blessedness; it is so with the hosts of heaven, it is so with the saints on earth, it might be so with all. Thank God there is no need to be troubled at the idea of Him. 3. It is ungodly. It argues a morally corrupt state of soul. It is a sense of guilt that makes the idea of God so troubling. The idea of God to a depraved soul is hell. Here—(1) Appears the necessity for regeneration. (2) Appears the value of the Gospel. Its grand work is to cleanse the soul from all evil, to redeem it from all iniquity, and to fill it with the love and life of God. (*Ibid.*) *Troubled thoughts of God and the remedy for them:*—To the unconverted, thoughts of God come laden with trouble. I. **BECAUSE COUPLED WITH THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF GUILT.** Adam: "I heard Thy voice . . . and was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." II. **COUPLED WITH THOUGHTS OF GOD'S PRESENCE.** "I AM." "Thou, God, seest me." Your own personality face to face with God's personality! III. **COUPLED WITH THOUGHTS OF GOD'S EMOTIONAL NATURE.** God loves good, hates evil, with all His infinite nature. Sinner must forsake sin or go down, along with it, under His wrath. IV. **COUPLED WITH THOUGHTS OF HIS ATTRIBUTES.** Holiness brings out the awful bleakness of sin. Justice and Truth—"I will by no means clear the guilty." Omniscience (Ps. lxxxix. 2-6, 11, 12). Omnipresence (Ps. cxxxix. 7-10). Omnipotence (Dan. iv. 35; Luke xii. 5). Immutability—He will never alter His decrees against sin. Eternity—He will always live to execute them. Goodness and Love—leave the sinner without excuse. V. **COUPLED WITH THOUGHTS OF THE JUDGMENT.** "For God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing" (Rev. xx. 11-15). VI. **THE REMEDY.** "Being justified by faith we have peace with God," etc. (*Homiletic Monthly.*) *Recollections of God painful to the wicked:*—I. **WHAT WE MEAN BY REMEMBERING GOD.** I mean, as the psalmist undoubtedly meant, recollecting those ideas which the term God is used by the inspired writers to signify. When they use the word, they use it to denote an eternal, self-existent, infinitely wise, just, and good Being, who is the Creator and Upholder of all things, who is our Sovereign Lawgiver, and who worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will; who is always present with us, who searches our hearts, who approves or disapproves our conduct, who loves holiness. II. **WHY THE RECOLLECTION OF SUCH A BEING SHOULD EVER BE PAINFUL.** If our hearts condemn us not, says the apostle, then have we confidence towards God; and the man who has confidence towards God, cannot be troubled at the remembrance of Him. But on the other hand, if our hearts or consciences condemn us, it is impossible to remember Him without being troubled. It will then be painful to remember that He is our Creator and Benefactor; for the remembrance will be attended with a consciousness of base ingratitude. It will be painful to think of Him as Lawgiver; for such thoughts will remind us that we have broken His law. It will be painful to think of His holiness; for if He is holy, He must hate our sins. It will be painful to think of Him as Judge; for we shall feel, that as sinners, we have no reason to expect a favourable sentence from His lips. III. **APPLICATION.** 1. This subject affords a rule, by which we may try ourselves, and which will assist us much in discovering our real characters; for the moral character of every intelligent creature, corresponds with his habitual views and feelings respecting God. 2. From this subject we may learn how wretched is the situation of impenitent sinners; of those who cannot remember God without being troubled. 3. How great are our obligations to God for the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of reconciliation! Were it not for this, the remembrance, and still more, the presence of God, would have occasioned nothing but pure unmingled wretchedness to any human being. 4. Is sin alone the cause which renders the remembrance of God painful? Then let all who have embraced the terms of reconciliation offered by the Gospel, all who desire to remember God without being troubled, beware, above all things, beware of sin. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *Trouble at the thought of God:*—I. **THE STRANGENESS OF SUCH AN EXPERIENCE**—that a man should remember God and yet be troubled. 1. Such an experience is against all that is made known to us of the nature of God. Many think the Bible hard because it speaks so of sin and the sinner's doom. But let it be borne in mind that the Gospel finds the disease in our world; it does not make it. "I am come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Is it not, then, strange that there should be men who, with this Word before them, can remember God and be troubled?



2. It becomes strange when we reflect on His promises. They are so universal, so free, so full, that they seem fitted to meet every want and satisfy every yearning of the human soul. 3. Trouble at the thought of God is declared to be against the experience of all sincere seekers. God's own declaration is, "I never said to any of the seed of Jacob"—to any of those who wrestled as he did in the dark with God—"Seek ye My face in vain." 4. Such an experience is against all that we can reasonably believe of the nature of the soul of man. Out of God no full satisfying end can be found for it. II. SOME OF THE REASONS THAT MAY BE GIVEN FOR SUCH AN EXPERIENCE. 1. Many men do not make God the object of sufficient thought, and so they hang in wretched suspense, remembering God only to be troubled. 2. Another reason why many are troubled at the thought of God is that they are seeking Him with a wrong view of the way of access. The most frequent mistake of all is that men think they cannot look God in the face without trouble, unless they have some good works or good thoughts, some outward reformation or inward repentance. They do not perceive, or at least they do not feel, the all-sufficiency of Christ as a Saviour. 3. A third reason why some are troubled at the thought of God is, that they are seeking Him with some reserved thought of sin. 4. Some have a mistaken view of God's manner of dealing with us in this world. There are so many things in the world most dark which He permits—so much of difficulty in the Bible which they feel He could have made more clear—such troubles in our life, in what we may call our true life, our spiritual life, which we long to have ended, and which still go on. These questions of God's ways are still for our study, for nothing that belongs to Him can be indifferent to us, and earnest souls will thirst for light on all that concerns Him. But we shall not wait for the answer before we embrace Him; we embrace Him first that we may find rest, and from that centre pursue our search, or calmly wait till God disclose it. (*John Ker, D.D.*) *The remembrance of God:*—I. THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD.—1. There is a necessity for constantly urging this duty, inasmuch as the cares and occupations and temptations of this present life are constantly more or less shutting out from our memory the truths of the Divine existence and presence. 2. Apart from all judgments as to the consequence of forgetfulness of God, consider the naturalness of the duty. He should be remembered as our Father, as the best and the most faithful of friends, as the Redeemer of our souls by the blood of His Son, and as the everlasting portion of all His believing and enduring people. 3. Consider, too, that the duty of remembering God is imperative. It is a law which is enforced by the most positive commands and illustrated by examples of the most illustrious character. We can not only point to these in the Scripture testimony of patriarchs, kings, prophets, and apostles, but also to the usages of enlightened governments, to the kings, nobles, warriors, and statesmen. II. THE EFFECTS WHICH THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD PRODUCES. 1. The effects are various, and depend in a great measure upon the character of the individual, and the particular circumstances and seasons in which the memory of God operates. Their memory is uninfluential, cold, inactive for good, and dead as regards any practical and lasting result, except when some sudden calamity visits them, or when some visitation of disease sweeps their immediate neighbourhood, or when death itself knocks at the door of their own hearts. In such seasons the memory of God wakes up from its long slumber, and the image of wrath breaks upon it with an untold terror. But again, there are persons to whose hearts the Almighty is no stranger, and consequently when any trouble overtakes them and they are brought low like Jonah, they can say with him—"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord." To such persons, in the darkest hour of their trials, the memory of God is attended with much comfort. 2. Another result of this remembrance may be traced in its expediency. It becomes the means of leading us to the consummation of our highest purposes and ends. Perhaps there is no stronger faculty than that of memory, nothing more adapted to call into exercise the affections, and to wind its way into our deepest sympathies. How wonderfully it acts in the hour of danger, in the time of estrangement, from home and kindred, and in the closing scene of all. Thus as a means to an end, what better calculated to bring back the wanderer, to overthrow the intrigues of an enemy, and to restore the soul to its proper place in its relations to the Father of all our mercies! It is the memory of God in His relations to our past days of childhood, and to the years through which we have passed, which induces a feeling of gratitude, and which supplies a motive-power for the future obedience and dedication of our lives. 3. The remem-

brance of God disturbs the rest of a false security. It produces the effect of breaking up the illusion of a peace founded upon a mistaken notion of the Divine character. In other words, it leads the mind of a thoughtful and honest professor of religion to the conclusion, that it is impossible to serve God and mammon, to make a compromise with principle and inclination, and to unite the Church with the world. 4. To the humble and penitent; to the man who honestly rejects all false subterfuges, and with a trustful heart seeks for mercy through the sacrifice and intercession of Christ, there is much comfort in the remembrance of God. (*W. D. Horwood.*) *On the advantages of affliction* (P.B.V.): "When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God":—I. THE HAPPINESS AND REASONABLENESS OF TURNING OUR THOUGHTS TO GOD IN GENERAL. II. ADVERSITY HAS ITS PECULIAR ADVANTAGES, TO BRING US TO A JUST SENSE OF GOD, AND OUR DUTY TO HIM. 1. Adversity will make us, however unwilling, reflect and descend into ourselves. 2. Adversity puts our virtue to the test, and proves the sincerity of it. 3. Adversity is of service to disengage our minds from earthly pursuits, and to fix our thoughts where true joys are to be found. Convinced by melancholy proof of the insufficiency of worldly things, we take sanctuary in the fulness of the Divine sufficiency. (*J. Seed, M.A.*) *The thought of God, the stay of the soul* (P.B.V.):—I. THE THOUGHT OF GOD AS THE REMEDY AGAINST DESPONDENCY. "When I am in heaviness;" whenever that may be, or whatever may be the character of my woe, I have one and only one method of meeting it, and that is, by the thought of God. II. Consider, then, HOW THIS THOUGHT WILL ACT. When we first look at it, we deem it almost impossible that it should be the remedy which it is here declared to be. For what is the thought of God naturally? It is the thought of One infinitely above us, transcendently great and good, fearful, indeed, from His very holiness, as well as from His power. Yet the very greatness of God in the majesty of His outward creation is a comfort to a thoughtful soul. True, I am insignificant, and as a shadow before Him; but I feel that He is the author and the fountain of my being. If I die, therefore, must I not be before Him, just as I am now? Wide, therefore, and great, and awful, as the universe may seem, there is no terrible void in it, for He who made it fills it; and everything that it contains, the smallest particle of dust, yea, even such a worm as I am, is ever under His immediate eye, and must be the object of His special protection. III. REVELATION CONFIRMS THIS THOUGHT. From first to last, God manifests Himself as our Father, yea, and our Friend. Friends may be false, and earthly streams grow dry; but the Lord God is my sun and my shield: I cannot be sad while He smiles on me; I will dread no danger while He defends. Only remember this. While He is ever ready to help even those who have marred their own happiness; yet it is they who walk with Him, to whom He is a special source of peace. An allowed sin will drive Him away. He cannot dwell in the same heart with a cherished lust. (*C. E. Kennaway, M.A.*)

Ver. 5. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.—*Lessons drawn from Scripture history*:—From the history of the Bible we may learn much concerning—I. THE CHARACTER OF GOD. 1. His wisdom. 2. His power. 3. His holiness and justice. 4. His goodness. 5. His faithfulness to His promises. 6. His unchangeableness. II. THE VALUE OF THE BLESSINGS OF REDEMPTION. 1. The greatness of the preparations made to obtain it. 2. The greatness of the sacrifice made to purchase it. 3. The greatness of the means used to proclaim it. III. THE CONDITION, CHARACTER, AND FATE OF MAN. 1. In his natural state. 2. As redeemed. (1) The way of salvation. (2) The failings of the people of God. (3) The sorrows and fears of the godly. (4) The Christian's reward. (*W. Dickson.*)

Ver. 6. I call to remembrance my song in the night.—*The song in the night*:—Among all those pains and pleasures which make up so large a part of every human lot, none are more real and more vivid than the pains and the pleasures of memory. Much that is sad, and tragic, and lamentable in the past would die but that it is kept alive in the memory, and much that is joyful and inspiring would perish out of life altogether but that it has become a property of the memory. There is not a little courage implied in this testimony of the psalmist: "I call to remembrance my song in the night"—for you cannot recall the song without recalling the night. And the song seems so slight a thing—some poor, thin, quavering notes that perhaps aimed to be melody and were not. But the night—that was vast and awful. Its gloom was absolute; its darkness a darkness that

could be felt. It wrapped the spirit round until heaven and earth alike were lost, beauty a dream, and light a legend. That was the night upon which that trembling song broke; and into the depths of which it wandered. And to recall the song is to remember the night. It needs some courage deliberately to do that. There is something in this well worthy of our thought. There should be nothing in life we are afraid to recall. Even our sins should be so associated with memories of penitence and God's pardoning mercy that there is room for the note of praise even out of so desolate a night as that. We are not really "more than conquerors" until we can dare to look steadily at the darkest dispensations of earth. The suggestion with some people is that they can only continue to believe by hiding some of their trials out of sight, and resolutely refusing to think of them. If this be so, the victory is surely against them. Will you now take yet another point in our meditation? It was the night that made the song. Not entirely, of course, for have we not already seen that the song had been impossible but for a communication of the reality of the Divine love. But the fact remains that but for the night the song had not been what it was. He whose love-song is the eternal inspiration and solace of our race was the Man of Sorrows, and His life was a song in the night. (C. S. Horne, M.A.) *The song remembered in the night*:—He looked out of the bars of his window of darkness, and thought of the old light of bygone times. For there are times when the soul cannot sing, the heart cannot be glad. Yet even then the old days may be thought of. A man may get up out of the darkness unto the light of another man's window, and take comfort from that. So this is what this wise soul did. He goes to the window, he knows where it is, and looking out through the great darkness, he says—"I call to remembrance the days of old, the years of ancient times." For, thank God, to-day's darkness blots not out yesterday's light, and in the depth of winter it is oftentimes pleasant to remember the summer glory; so the uses of darkness are sometimes to make men value the light. Now, this is the remedy. He called to mind olden days, and so by degrees the light came. He speaks most pathetic words. It is so dark, I cannot sing, I have nothing to say to Thee, O God, but I will call to remembrance the song I did sing once. And so the memory does what the heart could not do at the time; and even from this little beginning victory commences: "I call to remembrance my song in the night." And the tongue, too dumb to sing, still perhaps whispers to itself the old song; and there mark amongst many other things the uses of learning, and singing when you are glad, teaching songs; they get into the memory, and lie there till they are wanted. Now, in calling to remembrance the old song, he called to mind that he had once sung it. What had been may be; yesterday is as to-morrow; old summers foretell future summers; and therefore he says, "No light now; but there was light once, I will call that to remembrance." But some of you may say that the very fact that you have known better days and know them not now, is a source of deeper trouble. Not at all. A thing that hath been may be. It is the very fact of the fickleness of the weather that gives us hope. It is now night, I call to remembrance the song I have sung in summer days. I have seen sweet times of peace; they are gone now, they will come again. Ask me about next year's swallows, I call to remembrance the swallows of the past. They have been, they are not now, but they will come again. Their being gone is the warrant of their coming again. A man sometimes is disappointed, disheartened; somebody who has been a friend has deceived him, and he says, "There is no such thing as honesty," and the man turns cynical, scornful, and denounces his fellows as being false. Think of the utter gloom that comes when a man has been thoroughly deceived. How hard it is to believe in the eleven, when the twelfth is a rogue. That is a terrible night for a man. But call to remembrance the song of the souls we have known that have loved us truly, purely, honestly, even to the end. Open the great book as the king did who could not sleep. Read of those who were true, think of all those you have known (now gone to rest), who were staunch, honest, and faithful; and though there is no song possible just now, yet "I call to remembrance my song in the night," and the men that were a comfort are amongst the men that are. So, far away from the land of his birth, a man, perhaps in exile, sits down in a foreign land, it may be Babylon, but he cannot sing there, his heart is sad, and his harp hangs on the willows; though it is all night, he can call to remembrance the song he used to sing at home. Though unable to sing (for it needs a glad heart to make a very merry tongue), he can do as those Jews did, who opened their windows and looked towards Jerusalem, that even if they could not see the

wroath of the smoking sacrifice ascending upward, they could remember the time that had been, and so take comfort from that. It is good to sing, but the next best thing is to think of the time when you have sung; for through the words which the heart utters it will become quiet and calm. (*G. Dawson, M.A.*) **I commune with mine own heart; and my spirit made diligent search.**—*Man, "know thyself"!*—Communion with ourselves! that is surely something very wonderful; and evidence enough of a sublime nature. "I commune with my own heart: and my spirit diligently explores her own hidden world." Why, nothing in the whole compass of nature can do that. A wise man will surely say, "I am not going to analyze creatures who are lower than myself to know myself; but I must commune with myself, and make inquiry of the measureless capacities involved in my personal spirit." Now, whoever thus searches into himself is constrained to search after the living God. Unless a man is under the influence and control of his inner and diviner nature he inevitably leads a life and acts a part which degrades and ruins him. God, the Father of his spirit, is infinitely averse to this, which He has most affectingly shown and proved by that great mystery of Love, God manifest in man's flesh. Bethlehem, Calvary, and Mount Olivet simply mean God's infinite concern for man's redemption. If Christ's Ascension does not signify the possibility of man's ascension to God and the angel world, it signifies nothing. To be destitute of self-knowledge is, strictly speaking, to be destitute of all true and right knowledge. If we know not ourselves, nor the end of our being, we shall fall into many foolish and hurtful snares, and mistake the value of everything. We shall take appearances and sophistries for truth, and regard God's truth as dreams. And worse than all, we shall misuse ourselves; thinking that we are wise when we are foolish, and that we are doing well when we are perishing. For we may take every possible care of the corruptible body of our flesh, while we are destroying the health and happiness of the precious inner man. Self-knowledge will inspire more than dignity and self-respect; it will inspire awe and a sublime hope. There will be no self-adulation in this knowledge; on the contrary, self-knowledge is always associated with sweet, restless, childlike humility. For right self-knowledge recognizes the Infinite Father-Spirit to be alone great and worshipful. We all share in Divinity; that is the one great human inheritance. To claim direct relationship to the Infinite Spirit is not presumptuous: "Our Father, which art in heaven." And the one tremendous thought is that our Divine birthright is for eternity. The Everlasting Christ, as the ideal of our own humanity, is not only revealed to us; but the breath of His power is within us all. (*John Pulsford, D.D.*) **Self-companionship.**—Often reflect upon thyself, and observe what company is with thy heart. We may know by the noise in the school that the master is not there; much of the misrule in our bosom arises from the neglect of visiting our hearts. (*W. Gurnall.*)

Vers. 7-12. **Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will He be favourable no more?**—*Against excessive grief.*—I. THE GRIEF WHICH NATURE DICTATES, AND WHICH, IN MODERATION, THE GOD OF NATURE DOES NOT PROHIBIT, BECOMES, IN ITS EXCESS, A PRACTICAL ACCUSATION OF THE CONDUCT OF PROVIDENCE. The psalmist admits, that in uttering his complaints, he was showing his infirmity; and it must appear an act of the greatest weakness to bewail events, which, in the common course of things, must happen, and against the occurrence of which we cannot promise ourselves the security, not even of a single hour. But our merciful Father makes allowance for that depression of spirits, which sometimes breaks out in all the bitterness of lamentation; and instead of stifling complaint by arguments from necessity, he answers them in accents of tenderness and love; soothing the heart amidst its deepest sorrows, and binding up its wounds with all a parent's tenderness (*Isa. xlix. 15*). This is speaking to nature the language of nature—not with a view to stifle sorrow in those moments, when feeling is too strong for reason; but to lull the bosom to peace, till reason is enabled to regain her ascendancy. But if this sentiment is willingly encouraged, after the mind becomes capable of meditating calmly upon the Divine goodness; nay, more, if it is not firmly combated and gradually subdued, we shall be chargeable with fostering a spirit, hostile to all the means, which a gracious Father is employing for our present improvement and future happiness. How do we judge of that child, who, after needful correction for his own good, mingled with salutary admonition against the offence that occasioned it, instead of kissing the rod and submitting to him who applied it, becomes furious in resentment; or yet worse, retires from a father's presence

to cherish that sullenness of spirit which refuses to yield. Is not such a child guilty of despising paternal wisdom, of resisting paternal authority, of abusing paternal kindness, and of finally unfitting himself for paternal protection and forbearance? II. In order to justify Providence, and to perceive the unreasonableness of protracted grief, we have only to follow the example of the psalmist; to resolve, as he does, that he will REMEMBER THE YEARS OF THE RIGHT HAND OF THE MOST HIGH; those years during which we have seen that hand guiding us in the way of safety and peace; delivering us from impending danger; relieving us amidst pressing embarrassments; and, instead of the evil which we feared, conforning an extent of good, which we could not have ventured even to anticipate. He who thus looks back upon the multitude of God's mercies, and compares his past pleasures with his present trouble, will be in a proper frame to commit himself in humble resignation to the care of that Providence, which has never failed him, even in his utmost need. (*John Lindsay, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. **Hath God forgotten to be gracious?**—*A question for a questioner*.—The question before us is what the logician would call a *reductio ad absurdum*; it reduces doubt to an absurdity; it puts into plain words the thought of an unbelieving mind, and at once it is seen to be a horrible notion. "Hath God forgotten?" We stumble at the first word. How can God forget? "Hath God forgotten to be?" We snap the question at that point, and it is blasphemous. It is no better when we give it as a whole—"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" The bare idea is bold, ridiculous and blasphemous. I. TO THE MAN OF GOD IN DISTRESS this question is commended, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" What kind of distress is that which suggests such a question? Where had Asaph been? In what darkness had he wandered? I answer, first, this good man had been troubled by unanswered prayers. "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord"; and he seems to say that though he sought the Lord his griefs were not removed. He was in darkness, and he craved for light, but not a star shone forth. Nothing is more grievous to the sincere pleader than to feel that his petitions are not heeded by his God. Besides that, he was enduring continual suffering. "My sore ran in the night." When Asaph had prayed for relief, and the relief did not come, the temptation came to him to ask, "Am I always to suffer? Will the Lord never relieve me? It is written, 'He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds'; has He ceased from that sacred surgery? 'Hath God forgotten to be gracious?'" In addition to this, the man of God was in a state of mind in which his depression had become inveterate. He says, "My soul refused to be comforted." Many plasters were at hand, but he could not lay them upon the wound. More than that, there seemed to be a failure of the means of grace for him. "I remembered God, and was troubled." Some of God's people go up to the house of the Lord where they were accustomed to unite in worship with delight, but they have no delight now; they even go to the communion-table, and eat the bread and drink the wine, but they do not receive the body and blood of Christ to the joy of their faith. At the back of all this there was another trouble for Asaph, namely, that he could not sleep. He says, "Thou holdest mine eyes waking." It seemed as if the Lord Himself held up his eyelids, and would not let them close in sleep. Moreover, there was one thing more: he lost the faculty of telling out his grief: "I am so troubled that I cannot speak." To be compelled to silence is a terrible increase to anguish: the torrent is swollen when its free course is prevented. A dumb sorrow is sorrow indeed. Now, let us attend to the amendment of the question. Shall I tell thee what the true question is which thou oughtest to ask thyself? It is not, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" but "Hast thou forgotten to be grateful?" Why, thou enjoyest many mercies even now. Grace is all around thee, if thou wilt but open thine eyes, or thine ears. Thou hadst not been spared after so much sin if God had forgotten to be gracious. II. THE SEEKING SINNER IN DESPENDENCY. He makes you nothing that He may be all in all to you. He grinds you to the dust that He may lift you out of it for ever. Meanwhile, I do not wonder that the question crosses your mind, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Let me show how wrong the question is. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" If He has, He has forgotten what He used to know right well. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Then, why are all the old arrangements for grace still standing? There is the mercy-seat; surely that would have been taken away if God had forgotten to be gracious. The Gospel is preached to you, and this is its assur-

ance, "Whosoever believeth in Him is not condemned." III. THE DISAPPOINTED WORKER. You say, "I do not feel as if I could preach; the matter does not flow. I do not feel as if I could teach; I search for instruction, and the more I pull the more I cannot get it." "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Can He not fill thine empty vessel again? Can He not give thee stores of thought, emotion, and language? Oh, perhaps you say, "I work in a back street, and everybody is moving out into the suburbs." You have lost your friends, and they have forgotten you; but, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" You can succeed so long as the Lord is with you. Be of good courage; your best friend is left. He who made a speech in the Academy found that all his hearers had gone except Plato; but as Plato remained, the orator finished his address. They asked him how he could continue under the circumstances, and he replied that Plato was enough for an audience. So, if God be pleased with you, go on; the Divine pleasure is more than sufficient. "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Did not Wesley say when he was dying, "The best of all is, God is with us"? (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Hath God forgotten to be gracious?—I. ALL COMPLAINTS AGAINST PROVIDENCE PROCEED FROM WEAKNESS AND THE INFIRMITY OF HUMAN REASON.* 1. The first of this sort, which naturally presents itself to the mind, when we consider God and ourselves, is this, That God is too great and too excellent a Being to humble Himself to behold the things that are on earth. Epicurus and his followers, who denied God's government of the world, denied also that He made it. So far, at least, they were consistent; for, if they thought it too much trouble for God to govern the world, they could not consistently put Him to the trouble of making it. But if we turn the argument, and begin with considering the works of the creation and "call to remembrance those years of the right hand of the Most High," we shall from these works of God be led to just conclusions with respect to the methods of Divine Providence, less obvious to our observation, in the government of the world. 2. Another reason which some have for suspecting that the affairs of the world are not under the conduct of Providence, is, that they cannot discern any certain marks of God's interposing. On the contrary, they think it evident that all the inanimate and irrational parts of the world follow a certain course of nature invariably; and that men act with all the signs of being given up to follow their own devices, without being either directed or restrained by a superior power. But in this way of reasoning there are two great mistakes—(1) That the conclusion is not rightly drawn from the observation, supposing the observation to be true. (2) Supposing the conclusion to be true, it will not answer the purpose intended. And whatever inequalities may appear to us in the distribution of good or evil in this life, they cannot stand as objections to God's government over the world, unless you can prove that there will be no day of reckoning hereafter. II. A SETTLED PEACE OF MIND, WITH RESPECT TO GOD, MUST ARISE FROM A DUE CONTEMPLATION OF THE GREAT WORKS OF PROVIDENCE, WHICH GOD HAS LAID OPEN TO OUR VIEW FOR OUR CONSIDERATION AND INSTRUCTION. Happy are they who listen to this still voice! they will act not only the safest, but the most rational part; whilst others, full of themselves and their own wisdom, are daily condemning what they do not understand. And if ever they recover their right reason, the first step must be to see their weakness, and to join with the psalmist in his humble confession, "It is my own infirmity." (Bp. Sherlock.) *Adversity comes not always from Divine displeasure.*—Let us rest assured of this, that the roughest of God's proceedings do not always issue from an angry intention: it is very possible, because very usual, that they may proceed from the clean contrary. The same clouds which God made use of heretofore to drown the earth, He employs now to refresh it. He may use the same means to correct and to better some that He does to plague and punish others. The same hand and hatchet that cuts some trees for the fire may cut others into growth, verdure, and fertility. (R. South, D.D.)

Ver. 10. **I said, This is my infirmity.**—*Religious depression.*—I. THE SYMPTOMS OF RELIGIOUS DEPRESSION. A settled depression of mind, in a perplexing debility and agitation of spirit, an apprehension of God's indignation, a prevailing doubt of our pardon and acceptance before Him, a dark view of the events which occur in the course of God's providential dealings with us, a succession of gloomy forebodings as to our future circumstances and destination, and a sinking of the heart, especially when we turn to subjects connected with our personal interest in the blessings of redemption. II. THE CAUSES OF IT. 1. Bodily distemper. 2. An

overscrupulous conscience. 3. A misapprehension of the doctrine of the remission of sins. 4. Some wilful sin, secretly cherished in the heart, or practised in the life. 5. Long-continued affliction. 6. The temptations of Satan. 7. Desertion, or the hiding of God's countenance. III. THE CURE. If the distressed Christian seems to labour under bodily maladies, or the effects of superstition, the minister will recommend in the first instance, A due attention to the health, and a more correct knowledge of the will of God. In cases of distress which seem to spring from a misapprehension of the plan of the Gospel, the minister will delight to expatiate on the love of God in Christ Jesus. This he will display to the fainting heart of the penitent. But, in the case of dejection of mind arising from some course of sin, which has been secretly or openly committed, the minister of God's Word must adopt another method. "Repent, and do your first works." Thus will the privileges and mercies of the Gospel be once more yours, and God will "restore to you the joys of His salvation." Should, however, long-continued afflictions be the principal cause of depression of mind, the Christian minister will, with the psalmist, endeavour to take off the sufferer's view from his own particular calamities, and direct it to God's general dealings with His servants. Lastly, in the case of desertion, and, indeed, in all the preceding cases, the important suggestion is to be made that resignation to God's holy will must be added to the humble use of all the means of grace. (*Daniel Wilson.*) *The best saints imperfect*:—I. THE FACT THAT THE PEOPLE OF GOD, IN THE PRESENT WORLD, ARE THE SUBJECTS OF MANIFOLD INFIRMITIES. II. THE REASONS FOR WHICH THESE INFIRMITIES ARE PERMITTED. 1. To promote a spirit of humility and self-abasement. 2. To excite in us a spirit of watchfulness. 3. To increase our sympathy and compassion for others. 4. To induce us to make frequent application to the Great Physician. 5. To render heaven more attractive and endearing. (*Expository Outlines.*) *Spiritual infirmities*:—I. THE NATURE OF THE PSALMIST'S INFIRMITY. 1. A proneness to live too much on frames and feelings. 2. Forgetfulness of past mercies. 3. Distrust with respect to future appearances. 4. Refusing to be comforted in times of distress is another of the infirmities of good people. 5. Giving vent to distrustful thought in unbecoming language too frequently accompanies despondency. II. THE REASONS WHY GOD SUFFERS SUCH INFIRMITIES TO ATTEND HIS PEOPLE IN THIS LIFE. III. CONCLUSION. 1. We see that the best of saints have their infirmities. The most fragrant rose has its thorns, and the most shining Christian his shades. 2. There is some particular infirmity which every good man may call his own. 3. It becomes us well to know our particular infirmity, that we may guard against it; for to be without defence is the way to be overcome without resistance. 4. Having discovered what is our easily-besetting sin, let us bewail it before God, and seek for help against it. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *Technical training in the spiritual life*:—Whilst through the changing years we discover in ourselves many failings, most of us are humbled and distressed by special faults which tenaciously cling to us. These characteristic defects arise from personal temperament, or they are occasioned by circumstances, or perhaps they are the consequences of both. 1. We can sometimes effectually restrain personal faults by wisely determining our circumstances. Sick people are careful to choose for themselves a special climate when they are at liberty to do so. Ought not spiritual men to study "climatology," escaping as far as possible the circumstances that would naturally develop their constitutional failing, surrounding themselves with the influences which heal and help? It is something more than folly, for the sake of taste, pride, or gain, to remain voluntarily in positions which are spiritually unfavourable. 2. We may observe this technical culture by abstaining from certain courses, legitimate in themselves, but which are dangerous to us. John Wesley relinquished the study of mathematics on this ground. Angelico would not paint a secular subject. Miss Havergal would not sing a secular song. Many Christians deny themselves in matters of appetite, being conscious that the indulgences which prove perfectly harmless to many are inexpedient to them. 3. We may discipline ourselves by persisting to do right things which are difficult and uncongenial to us, even when we do them with the least willingness and freedom. A German physician says: "Precipitate men should accustom themselves to write and walk slowly. The irresolute should endeavour to perform their acts with rapidity. The gloomy, romantic dreamer should be trained to walk with head erect, to look others straight in the face, to speak in a loud, distinct tone of voice. Such habits exercise a great influence on both mind and body." The reasoning of this physician is, that right action has a tendency

to induce right feeling. And there is a real place for such training in the spiritual life. "Do good, even when your heart is not free to it." With a painful lack of sympathy, still do the right act, speak the proper thing, form the correct habit, follow the true course; and this method will exercise a most salutary influence, awakening and strengthening the soul, and at last filling the just form and action with the reality and force of life. 4. We ought to take special precautions against our characteristic failing. The man who sins with the tongue ought to set an express watch over the door of his lips. He whose peril is temper must keep his mouth as with a bridle. The man given to appetite must put a knife to his throat. He who suspects a snare in the cup is bound to fortify himself with vows and pledges. The slothful must set themselves large tasks, and rest not until they are discharged. (W. L. Watkinson.) *Temperamental limitations*:—We usually think of the world about us as being the chief arena in which we fight the battle of life, but really our greatest difficulty is with ourselves. Our constitutional temper and bias are the chief matters, and they very largely determine what our trouble shall be both as to its nature and degree. 1. Feebleness of constitution is a limitation of which many are painfully conscious: a frailty of physique which prevents them doing much that they would desire to do, and which betrays itself in nearly all that they manage to do. When Henry Ward Beecher was exhorted to take care of his health and strength, he replied, "I have already more than I know what to do with." Many noble people are far from this enviable state. They take their place in the ranks and attempt their daily work, but with a lack of force that makes life much of a burden, and duty rarely a delight. They do not fulfil their promise, they start well and finish poorly, the outline they strike is beyond the picture, they are spasmodic, uncertain, ineffective. This is not exactly an intellectual defect. And it is just as little to the point to say that these people lack conscience or will; they want neither conscience nor will, they are simply destitute of that constitutional robustness and force of which Beecher had more than he knew what to do with. It is not a mental or moral defect, but purely a bodily infirmity which mars life and work that otherwise would give entire satisfaction. Resolute spirits surprise us with the wonders that can be wrought by frail mechanism, but many know by painful experience that a deficiency of native force has marred their whole life, spoiling thoughts, faculties, opportunities, and purposes which a flush of animal spirits would have converted into splendid achievement. 2. An intensity of constitution is the real infirmity of others. They are alarmingly vehement in speech and action. They flash in ordinary talk, and discharge the common business of life with explosive energy. Science has recently discovered that our hive-bees exhaust themselves prematurely by abnormal industry; they are not native to this country, and not having yet adapted themselves completely to a new environment, expend an excessive amount of force which involves their destruction. It is much the same with human beings of impassioned temperament. They do not so much burn out, as blaze out. No doubt they ought to restrain themselves, to check their rage, and act with becoming moderation; but of what use is advice of this sort? The Pacific Ocean may counsel the tempestuous Atlantic to cultivate stillness, and the Atlantic retort on the stagnation of the Pacific; but each remains true to its character. We can no more change our special constitutional qualities than we can change the colour of our eyes. The ardent temper, of which we are speaking, is attended by sorrows of its own. It is impossible to live an impulsive life without serious mistakes and bitter regrets. That temper also involves painful reactions and dejections. And it has its own subtle temptations and perils. 3. The hyper-sensitive constitution is another organ of martyrdom. Like Cowper, many noble souls are morbidly sensitive and shy. They seem born with a skin short, and feel with grievous acuteness a thousand things of which the ordinary man is positively unconscious, or to which he is practically indifferent. God alone understands what these neurotic, nervous, shrinking souls suffer in a rude world like this. 4. Only One knows all the mysteries of our personality, and we cannot live with Him too much. Let us go to Him for sympathy. Let us seek in His grace the strength to deal with the special need and peril of our nature. He can impart to the will of the delicate a force independent of bodily conditions; He can chasten the self-confident; endow with a saving instinct the impulsive; and the easily-wounded, weeping in secret places, He can sweetly soothe. He can so discipline us that our very defects and excesses may be made to yield the riches and beauty of moral and immortal



perfection. (W. L. Watkinson.) **I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.**—*The years of the right hand of God.*—Here the eternity of God is contrasted with the hand-breadth measure of man. The Right Hand of the Most High; its work through the years that are past; what suggestions are here, to silence weak complaint, to lift the soul far up above the trouble of this world! Think of the right hand, and of what it can do; that most wonderful member of this body. Its offices are numberless; it is like the executive function in the political system. Whatever the mind think, whatever the will decree, whatever the heart desire: heart, will, mind, must wait till the hand can act. To tell the uses of the hand, and the purposes it serves, would be to give a catalogue of great part of the intelligent and conscious actions of men, wherein, to some extent or other, that member is employed. Even so wide is the scope of those acts of the Almighty, which are included in the symbolic speech about His Right Hand. It is, indeed, a glorious study, that of the years of the Right Hand of the Most High. They are long, very long; from them unroll, panorama-like, the events which make history; stamped on them everywhere is the impress of mind, design, force; knowing what may be, ordering what shall be, compelling every other power to yield at last, vanquished in its death. And against them appears what? The bubbles which men blow of the froth of their conceits; the vapour which our life is; the rise and fall of upstart opposers of God; the wiping out of kingdoms, philosophies, systems, as a man turneth a dish upside down. Fast do the adversaries fade away; they do but little harm; the cord is broken, the thread soon cut; the world forgets them, or remembers but to chide their folly. The eternal years of God drink up these little lives of ours, and all in them that is not made secure by faith and religion, even as the sun drinks up the mist, or the ocean takes in the drops from the passing clouds which break above it and vanish for ever. This is the way to confidence and rest. Retire within yourself, and meditate of the infinite power, the sure providence, the unchangeableness of the Most High. Consider the days of old, the years of His Right Hand. (Morgan Dix, D.D.) *The true focus.*—The psalmist really said, "This is my infirmity—the years of the right hand of the Most High!" He does not announce his intention to dwell upon them, but he announces the character of the years themselves. It is the suddenness of a quick appreciation of the true view of things. Do you not know what it is to suddenly adjust a picture, by the slightest touch of the hand, so that the whole thing is seen in its true focus? Yes, you have gained the real point of view. So it is here. From the midst of a God-questioning disposition, in which hope is lost, he suddenly says, "This is my infirmity—the years of the right hand of the Most High!" Now, what do you find? The second half of the psalm is the same picture in focus. The right hand is a symbol peculiar to Hebrew thought and literature, and is used perpetually to mark some great fact in the character and person of God. Law and righteousness, salvation and strength, action and love, and the deep, full satisfaction of every necessity of human life, in pleasures for evermore,—all these things, to the mind of the Hebrew, were wrapped up in that magnificent figure of the right hand of the Most High. "The years of my life," now says the psalmist, "are years conditioned in law and righteousness—years in which there is the perpetual outworking of salvation and the unceasing manifestation of strength; they are years in which God is active for me, years in which I am perpetually caressed by the love and tenderness of the Divine heart, years which, because they come from the hand of God, are years of the making of eternal and undying pleasure." It was a new light upon his own life, a new point of vision, a new outlook. The things which had issued in his dirge of wailing and sorrow were suddenly seen, from this new point of vision, to be working together for his good, thus giving a forecast of the New Testament statement. "The years of the right hand of the Most High." There is a point of vision from which we may look upon the selfsame things, and may catch on them already the light and gleam of morning; a point from which, even to-day, I can look upon great grief and overwhelming sorrow, saying, "Yes, that happened, not upon such a day of such a month, in such a year, but in one of the years of the right hand of the Most High. It was a part of the fiery law, a method of the Divine righteousness, a ministry of salvation, a manifestation of strength, a Divine action, a touch of the Divine love, it had within it the creation of joy for evermore." We can only say these things by faith to-day; not yet by sight, not yet by personal realization, but by faith. There is no agony of heart that we endure, if we know how to take it, that has not in it the element that shall make heaven. "The

years of the right hand of the Most High." I do not see the hand, I have only the years; but I know the hand is there. I know that somewhere beyond this, when the mists have rolled aside, and the life I am conscious of to-day shall have passed into fuller realization, then out of the darkness will the light come, and out of the agony of the moment will heaven's pleasure have been evolved. (*G. Campbell Morgan, M.A.*) *Holy remembrance a means to recover out of distrust*:—I. **THE SIMPLE PROPOSITION.** "This is mine infirmity." 1. The saints and servants of God themselves have their infirmities. (1) The reliques and remainders of the old man still abiding in them. (2) Grace is wrought imperfectly in them. 2. Commonly they have some one more especially which they are addicted and inclined unto. 3. From the context we see what to judge of staggering at God's promises and providences. It is a very great weakness and infirmity. (1) There is ignorance and want of understanding. (2) Infidelity. (3) Impatience. II. **THE PERSONAL REFLECTION.** "I said." 1. The quickness of his apprehension, in that he spies and discerns this weakness and infirmity in himself, while he says it, it is evident he spies it and finds it out. 2. The tenderness of his conscience, not only in that he discerned this distemper and infirmity in himself, but likewise that he checked himself for it, for so we must here take it. 3. The ingenuity of his spirit. I said it not only to myself, and in mine own heart, but as there was occasion for it, I said it to others also, and acknowledged it likewise to them. 4. The ground hereof in the servants of God is—(1) That wonderful exactness and curiousness and sincerity which is remarkable in them. Tender consciences lament even infirmities, whilst hardened hearts go away with greater sins. (2) It proceeds from that love and entireness of affection, which a good Christian bears to God. Love is shy of anything which may be offensive to the party beloved, not only of greater injuries, but of smaller unkindnesses. It is troubled when it is anything defective in the expressions of love, where it is due, and it concerns it to be so, and so it is also here. A godly man has his heart and his soul full of the love of Christ, and therefore is troubled for anything which is displeasing to Christ; not only for unsavoury speeches, but for unruly affections, not only for ungodly deeds, but for ungodly thoughts, which have a mark also of sinfulness upon them. (3) It arises also from Christian prudence, as considering whither infirmities tend, and what they will come to if they be not better prevented. III. **THE PITCHING OR FASTENING UPON THE REMEDY.** "I will remember," etc. 1. Take it according to the former translation, as it does exhibit to us the power of God. "The right hand of the Lord can change all this." This was that whereby David did support himself in his present affliction, that the Lord was able to change and alter this his condition to him, and that for the better. Though God Himself be unchangeable considered in His own essence, yet His works and providences and dispensations have a variety in them, and all such as do perfect and accomplish His most unchangeable purpose and decree which He has set down with Himself. God does never less change His mind than when He does most change His carriage and practice and outward administrations, as being able from contrary means to bring about the same gracious ends and effects which He hath appointed to accomplish, so that this expression hath no repugnancy or inconsistency with it at all, but is freely admitted by us, and to be improved as it is here by the psalmist. 2. For this last here before us, that is this, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High," where the word remember is borrowed from the next-following verse to supply the sense of this, as otherwise being not in the text. Now, here David fetches a ground of comfort from God's practice, as before he did from His power; there, from what God could do; here, from what He had done already in former times, and ages, and generations; he was resolved to reflect upon this, as a relief to him in his present infirmity. Now, there were two things especially which David here did reflect upon to this purpose, for the quieting of his spirit. The one was God's dealings with His people formerly, as to point of seeming desertion and outward discouragement; and the other was God's dealings with His people formerly, as to seasonable recovery and final acknowledgment. To each of these purposes would he remember the years of the right hand of the Most High, and each of them were a relief unto them. And there is very good ground to do so, because God is still the same; yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. He has the same love to His people still as ever, the same wisdom to advise them, and the same power to be active for them, and He will, therefore, change their conditions, because He does not change Himself. (*T. Horton, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. I will remember the works of the Lord.—*Time past, present and to come* (with Ps. xxxix. 4). We are so made that we live between an unalterable past and an uncertain future, with no time in our possession except that changing line which we call the present. Every present, as we live on, becomes a past; and so we are drawing continually on the future; we are carrying it over to the past in the great account-book of our existence, until the future of this world all becomes a past; and we enter the future of eternity. In this respect though made in God's image we are unlike Him. For to Him all is one eternal Now. He "inhabith eternity." But to us time in its three stages clings to our very nature and colours all our conceptions. We cannot conceive of God as eternally Now, it is too much for us. Time seems to us to be a power, a something that has life and force in it, though it is nothing apart from the events that make up our lives; nothing but a condition of our thought. It is nothing to the forgetful animal, or to the vacant mind, which looks not forward nor backward. But to a finite soul, born yesterday to die to-morrow, time is everything; and you may say that in proportion to the nobleness of a soul will be the value it sets on time. Compare time with space. Space is nothing but a receptacle to hold material objects, and a room for their activity. It is wholly outside of souls. A man shut up in a chamber ten feet square may fill the world with good thoughts and great plans. But a bird flies across a continent and no trace is left. What has space to do with character? What has time not to do with character? I. **MEMORY EXTENDS OUR EXISTENCE BACKWARDS.** This is the closest analogy in man's nature to God's. He can go back far into the past—his own, and that of the world. He can listen, as it were, to the tumultuous waves of chaos. Memory has far more materials to work upon than belong to anticipation or foresight of the future. It is the treasure-house of our experience, and of the experience of mankind. Prediction, indeed, is possible by the help of what the past has afforded us, although the time that the present order of things shall last cannot be predicted. How many great events have happened which a few years before we had no apprehension of. If we had lived ages of agony we should remember them, but we cannot foretaste a distant joy. Memory causes the entire past to bear on our present lives and future destiny, for—1. It can carry forward the knowledge of past misdeeds through the boundless future. Good deeds, also, it can remember, but the most pressing thought for us as sinners is, that it surely takes with it all our misdeeds. It drops nothing like a careless messenger, but saves all as a trustful steward of God. It can compress our past lives into a moment like the photograph of an immense landscape brought within the compass of an inch. The fact is, we have in us the materials for the judgment day. They lie now piled up in dark chambers; they will be brought from their chests, and their forgotten testimony will shine like fire. The day of judgment is no appointed, instituted thing; it is the necessary sequel of a life of the thinking man under the righteous reign of God. You, then, who sin and forget it, who appear to yourselves far from danger, because you have hid your sin from your own eyes as men hide live coals under the ashes, what will you do when you find these coals to be still alive ages hence, and when they are freed from the rubbish that covered them? Can you make God forget? That would be something to the purpose, were it possible. Can you expect that feelings, such as the sense of ill-desert, which are immutable records of your own against yourself, will be blotted out by time? Even sin, then, has, in a sense, an eternal life. It can never grow old and vanish away. II. I remark again, however, that there is a wise provision by which, according to the ordinary laws of this life, **THE EVENTS OF THE PAST DO NOT STAY WITH US, GENERALLY, IN ALL THEIR FIRST VIVIDNESS.** In other words, the actual weaknesses of memory are in part calculated for our moral as well as mental benefit. If we remembered everything as it was when it occurred, such vividness might render impossible a better life. All common sights, sounds, and actions—all such things as make up the mass of events, it is a blessing to have forgotten. This is of vast importance in reference to our spiritual and moral nature. A sincere penitent cannot well forget the great sins he may have fallen into. Yet such a penitent, by keeping in mind past sins with their aggravation, may be prevented from using his active powers. Remorse might reign in our souls to the exclusion of the purpose of amendment. Now, there must be hope and vigour in every mind that successfully strives to amend. Ever brooding on the past brings nothing but despair. The difficulty of a new life is almost hopeless if we remember nothing but past ill success, broken resolutions, and resisted motives to good. It is manifest also that this weakening of the hold of

the past on us—owing to the defects of memory, within certain limits—helps on all improvement. Minds of finite capacities, if every past thing was continually fresh, would be full of details without the power of making principles prominent. But when we remember principles, and general strains, and life-currents of action, we can, without the burden of too great details, purpose in view of our past and live for our future. To this it should be added that there is a compromise effected in our nature—so to speak—between the present and the past by the power of recollection. We hunt up stray thoughts by using the laws which associate them with one another. And they also come back without our search. Thus sin becomes its own punishment. We try, but fail, to drown such thoughts. III. WE OUGHT TO LIVE FOR THE PRESENT AS WELL AS FOR THE FUTURE. Moralists talk of the present as a point in an endless path, and they represent the future of that path as being alone of importance. But this is not altogether true. To live merely for the present is doubtless ruinous, but to live only for the future is no virtue. What is the future but a run of moments which are to be present, and what worth can there be in any of these, if they are worth nothing while they are with us? It would be as if a man passing through grand scenery should not look on the beauties before his eyes because finer points of view were coming, and he should so act until the journey's end. If the future always remained future, it would be valueless. But let us test these remarks by scriptural truth. What can trust do—that is worth anything to us—if it cannot lay our interests for the future in the hand of God, and thus prevent the crowd of cares from coming to lodge with us before their time? And does not Christ say, "Take no thought for the morrow, for," etc.? How unlike is this peace of souls to our feverish haste, our inability to enjoy life until it settles on its dregs; our insurances and provisions against evil; as if each of us were a castle besieged by enemies. Of course our Lord's meaning is, "be not solicitous for the morrow." It is anxiety that He condemns, which is the foe of a quiet trust in God. He would have us plan great plans, embracing all the future, as He did Himself; but He wants us also to possess profound peace within our souls. A life of faith will furnish the only true reconciliation. All progress depends on acting at the right time. You may have known persons who put off work until to-morrow, for the sake of amusement, and when the weight of the past, besides that of the present, came on their backs, it crushed them. Or you may have known those who were too provident, who sought to rob the future of its office, that it might furnish them rest, or better opportunities. But this overtasked them, and wore them out. Neither of these courses is wise; every moment has its rights. This is true in things spiritual as in things temporal. IV. AND THUS WE DISCOVER THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FUTURE TIME. Who would desire a never-ending existence such as is one's now? Who could endure it, except by an act of religious resignation like that of a monk in his cell? And if this be so, why is it so? It is so because it is an essential part of the plan of our earthly condition that it should end. It is not too bold to say that a superior being, who knew nothing of our destiny as it respects life and death, would conclude that death ought to be man's lot, and that he was made to finish his existence in some other sphere. This he would find out as soon as he perceived what man could do, and what his earthly limitations prevented him from doing. Death seems to be the most suitable event for an immortal placed on earth, more suitable for him than for the beast which may have no hereafter. This, then, is the true significance of future time, that, as it unrolls, a great change is to come over us—a change unlike anything in the past. For this futurity, life and death are preparations; it is this that makes life a great something, full of praise or full of shame. It is this that makes the world a theatre for an immortal. For every living man, then, the future has one thing in it wholly unlike in kind all the events of the past. Birth, or man's entrance into a world of time, was strange; that is the unique event of time gone by. Death, which is called for and made suitable by the whole meaning of life, is the unique event of time to come. And this unique event ought to throw a new power and energy into all our passing moments. I ought to feel that, because I am going to die, I am a privileged person. To what may I not rise? But for this I must be trained in time, and the future, by its one great event, ought to sober me, and train me as much as I could be trained by all the experience of the past. But do I ask, how can the unknown act in me except through my fears? The hope of that future will, and does, influence men. To souls who take in the whole of existence, the great contrast is that of this present time and the eternal life on high. And so habits, characters, choices of

action, estimates of pleasure, as well as hopes, are all chastened, ennobled, beautified; they are clothing themselves for the presence of the King eternal, immortal, invisible. And when they hear the death trump calling them to come away, its clang, fearful to so many, turns for them into the voice of celestial music. (*T. D. Woolsey.*) *Recollection, reflection, and declaration*.—I. RECOLLECTION. "I will remember," etc. Memory may be regarded in several aspects—1. As a source of pain. Tennyson has beautifully and truthfully said:—

"A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

And Goldsmith:—

"Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,  
Swells at my breast, and turns the past to pain."

2. As a source of pleasure. "A memory without blot or contamination," said Charlotte Brontë, "must be an exquisite treasure,—an inexhaustible source of pure refreshment." 3. As an aid to faith. So the psalmist uses it on this occasion. (1) God's works are wonders. What marvellous things He is ever accomplishing in the material world! What wonders He wrought on behalf of His ancient people! How wonderful are His doings now in the experience of His people—sanctification and glorification! Truly, "the bright glories of His grace, beyond His other wonders shine." (2) God's wondrous works should be remembered. He who does not remember them overlooks the most glorious of records; and cannot be held guiltless of ingratitude. (3) God's wondrous works remembered are calculated to inspire confidence. They reveal a Being who is supremely trustworthy. II. REFLECTION. "I will meditate," etc. By means of reflection we are enabled to realize the facts recalled by memory, to perceive their significance and applications. And the emotions which naturally spring from the facts remembered are excited by reflection. Recollection is of little worth comparatively, unless accompanied and followed by meditation. It was by the exercise of both these faculties that the troubled heart of the poet grew calm and victorious. III. DECLARATION. "I will talk of Thy doings." A good man, having passed through experiences similar to those of the psalmist, should talk of God's doings. After his trouble, recollection, and meditation, his talk would be—1. Intelligent. He would not utter crude or rash statements concerning God and His providence. 2. Trust-inspiring. His own faith would grow stronger as he recounted to others, etc. The faith of those who heard him would also grow as they thought of his conflict, and how he won the victory. (*W. Jones.*) **I will remember Thy wonders of old.**—*Wonders remembered*.—When the Christian takes a retrospect of his spiritual life, there is much that he remembers with gladness, and much that he remembers with sorrow. The lovingkindness of the Lord which has been manifested towards him—upon this memory can dwell with unalloyed delight. But the coldness of his own love, the frequency of his backslidings, the tardiness of his progress—when memory presents these, he is no true believer in Christ if he do not mourn at the recollection. I. In the first place, we shall speak of **THE THINGS TO BE REMEMBERED**. Now, it would appear, upon an attentive examination of this passage, that the psalmist does not mean to draw a distinction between the works and the wonders of God; but, rather, to state that all God's works are wonders. "I will remember the works; surely I will remember the wonders." The latter clause is only an emphatic repetition of the former. The works of the Lord are all wonders. Such is the assertion—an assertion which is to hold good, not merely when the spectacle is presented of some unusual setting forth of the energies of Omnipotence; but when the attention is turned towards those displays of glory and wisdom, which are furnished by the ordinary routine of God's providence. What we call natural and what we call supernatural—there is full as much of the miraculous in the one as in the other. If we moved on a wider sphere of being and were not shut up within the material framework, we should probably discern that the finger of God is equally active in every occurrence, and that the very name of miracle would hardly find place in our vocabulary. But we wish to speak on spiritual rather than on natural miracle, more especially as the expression, "Thy wonders of old," seems to point to those purposes of mercy which God from everlasting entertained toward His Church. We need not tie ourselves down to a survey of works which caused the wonder of the psalmist. We enter best into the spirit of the passage by supposing the writer to occupy the same position as is occupied by ourselves, and then reviewing those works which on this supposition would have crowded

his retrospect. If we take the individual experience of the Christian, of what is that experience made up? Of wonders. The work of his conversion, wonderful!—arrested in a course of thoughtlessness and impiety; graciously sought, and gently compelled to be at peace with God, whose wrath he had provoked. The communication of knowledge, wonderful!—Deity and eternity gradually piled up; the Bible taken page by page, and each page made a volume which no searching can exhaust. The assistance in warfare, wonderful!—himself a child of corruption, yet enabled to grapple with the world, the flesh, and the devil, and often to trample them under foot. The solaces in affliction, wonderful!—sorrow sanctified so as to minister to joy. The foretastes of heaven, wonderful!—Angels bringing down the clusters of the Lamb, and the spirit walking with lightsome tread the crystal river and the streets of gold. Wonderful that the Spirit should strive with man; wonderful that God should bear with his backslidings; wonderful that God should love him notwithstanding his pollution; wonderful that God should persist in saving him, in spite, as it were, of himself. II. THE ADVANTAGE WHICH MAY BE GATHERED FROM REMEMBERING THE WORKS OF THE LORD. Such advantage is obvious. It is by musing on God's works that we learn God's character and attributes; it is by remembering what God has already done that we are encouraged to hope for future interferences in our behalf; it is by calling to mind that "God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all," that we are sustained by the animating belief that "He will with Him also freely give us all things." It is by bringing forth the catalogue of wonders which the Lord hath wrought, the deliverance which His right hand hath achieved for His people, and the desolation which He has dealt out to their foes, that we are made confident that there are more with us than there are against us—that greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. And it is, moreover, by strenuous and deliberate acts of memory that the importance of Gospel truth is kept vividly before us, and the mind prevented from dwelling on one part to the exclusion of any other. (H. Melville, B.D.)

Ver. 12. **I will meditate also of all Thy work.**—*Meditation*:—I. MOTIVES TO MEDITATION. 1. It is the proper occupation of the mind. 2. Our character in the sight of God depends on the character of our thoughts. 3. Meditation is essential to the success of God's Word. II. SUBJECTS FOR MEDITATION. 1. God's existence and attributes. 2. His works. 3. His claims. Their comprehensiveness, their spirituality, their perpetual obligation. Our guilt in neglecting them. 4. Your future. (*Evangelical Preacher*.) *The need of meditation*:—In mere apprehension, whether through reading or hearing, there is little or no profit. The profit begins when that which is apprehended is so pondered as to become part and parcel of the man's inner nature. A man may run through a picture gallery so as to see every painting it contains, and to derive from the sight a certain amount of pleasure; but he alone profits by such an exhibition who pauses and studies each worthy work of art, and gathers ideas from it which enrich his mind, or learn lessons from it which refine his taste. "It is the settling of milk," says an old writer, "that makes it turn to cream," and it is the settling of truth in the mind that makes it turn to spiritual nutriment. (W. L. Alexander.)

Ver. 13. **Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary.**—*God's way revealed in the sanctuary*:—I. God's way of CREATION. II. His way of PROVIDENCE. III. The way of GRACE. IV. The way of HUMAN WELL-BEING. The light that is run up at the masthead does not require the vessel to stop sailing in order that it may shine. And so a living religion will show the light in the shop, in the street, in the business, in town to-morrow as well as in the sanctuary on the Sabbath day. And so the Church must stand closely related to all that is dear to the interest of humanity. The sanctuary, then, is the way of highest happiness; it is the way of joy and peace. It is the way of consolation, for evil and distress haunt every pathway of life, but God's house is the house of comfort. Again, it is the way of communion with God. Jehovah says, "There I will meet with thee," etc. (H. Johnstone, M.A.) *God's way in the sanctuary*:—I. SECRECY. 1. In nature. 2. In providence. Pain and misery abounding; virtue suffering; vice triumphant. 3. In grace. God is behind the veil. Your best knowledge is the consciousness of ignorance, and your privilege it is to be sure that he who believes honours more than he who understands. II. BEAUTY. The loveliness of nature we all have seen; the bloom of infancy, the fresh flower of the early spring, or the wavings of

the yellow corn. And some of us have felt the greater loveliness of grace; the unfoldings of the Christian character; the budding of a soft and tender gentleness; the humility; the chastened love; the hope that soars away to brighter worlds;—but has it ever occurred to you to think, if that is the porch, and this the holy place, what must be the sanctuary of God? What shall be that world which is as far better than grace, as grace is better than nature? III. HOLINESS. There never went a prayer from earth fit to be presented before God in the sanctuary—there never passed a thought through your soul to which there was not clinging a sin; for nothing is pleasing before God, not the sanctuary itself, except as He sees it in Christ; and all this is true of our holiest action, were it ten thousand times holier than ever it was. IV. REFUGE. The self-condemning soul flies from the holiness to the love of God, and seeks a shelter from His wrath by throwing himself on His mercy. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *God's way in the sanctuary*:—God designed, in the fulness of time, to gather all things into His Son, and to set Him forth as the alone source or channel of blessing; therefore did He make the temple, which typified that Son, the home of all His operations, the focus into which were condensed, and from which diverged, the various rays of His attributes and dealings. And this suggests to us a point of great importance, the consistency of the several parts of revelation. There is never the point at which we are brought to a pause by the manifest contradiction of one part to another. But we would now observe that, by the sanctuary, we may probably understand the holy of holies; for it was in that veiled and mysterious recess that the *Shekinah* shone, the visible token of the Almighty's presence. He who thought on the holy of holies thought on a solitude which was inaccessible to him, though close at hand; inaccessible, even as the remotest depth of infinite space, though a single step might have taken him into its midst; but, at the same time, a solitude where, as he well knew, everything breathed holiness, everything glowed with the lustre of that Being who is of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity. And to say of God that His way was in this sanctuary, what was it but to say that God works in an impenetrable secrecy, but that, nevertheless, in that secrecy He orders everything in righteousness? Certainly it is not the obscurity which there may be round the ways of the Lord which should induce a suspicion that those ways are not righteous. If God work in a place of secrecy, we know that it is equally a place of sanctity; we can be sure, therefore, of whatsoever comes forth from that place, that, if involved in clouds, it is invested with equity. We may not be able to discover God's reasons: but we can be certain from His attributes, attributes which shine through the veil, though that veil be impenetrable, that we should approve them if discovered. And if it be an evidence of the greatness of God, that His way is hidden, we scarcely need say that it is a further evidence of this greatness, that His way is holy. He contracts no impurity, but keeps travelling, as it were, "in the sanctuary," even whilst moving to and fro amid those who have defiled themselves and their dwelling-place—what is this but proof that He is immeasurably separated by difference of nature, from all finite being? The veil, whilst it hides, reveals Deity: nay, it reveals by hiding; it teaches the sublimity of God, inapproachable; His independence, none with Him in His workings; and yet His righteousness, for it is the awful purity of the place which warns back all intruders. Then there is enough to make us both discover, and rejoice in, the supremacy of our God. With a tongue of fear, for we are almost staggered by the mysteriousness of His workings, we will confess, "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary"; but with a tongue of triumph, for His very concealments are tokens of His Almightyness, we will give utterance to the challenge, "Who is so great a God as our God?" But there can be no reason why we should confine the illustrations of our text to the Jewish temple and dispensation. We may bring down the verse to our own day, understand by the sanctuary our own churches, and still found on the confession in the first clause the challenge which is uttered in the second. His "way is in the sanctuary." It is in buildings devoted to the purposes of His worship, and through the ministrations of His ordained servants, that He commonly carries on His work of turning sinners from the error of their ways, and building up His people in their faith. We are always much struck with the expression of St. Paul to Timothy, "in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." If God worked by mighty instruments such as angels; if the engines employed were, to all appearance, adequate to the ends to be effected; the honour of success would at least be divided, and the ambassador might be thought to have helped forward, by his own power, the designs of Him by whom

he had been sent. But, as the case now stands, the services of the sanctuary all go to the demonstrating the supremacy of God, because, while undoubtedly instrumental to the effecting vast results, they are manifestly insufficient in themselves for any such achievement. And not only does God employ men in preference to angels, but He commonly acts through what is weak in men, and not through what is strong. It is, perhaps, a single sentence in a sermon, a text which is quoted, which makes its way into the soul of an unconverted hearer. God will oftentimes pass by, as it were, and set aside an array of argument which has been constructed with great care, and, seizing on the sentence which the speaker thinks the weakest, or the paragraph, will throw it into the soul as the germ of a genuine and permanent piety. And all this goes to the making good what we are anxious to prove, that the challenge in the second clause of our text is altogether borne out by the assertion in the first. There is no finer proof of the power of an author, than that he can compass great designs by inconsiderable means. Now, we think that in the successive illustrations of our text, which have thus been advanced, there has been much to suggest practical reflections of no common worth. Was God's way in the Jewish temple of old? Was He passing, in all the sacrifices and ceremonies of the temple, to the completion of the work of our redemption? Then let us not fail to study with all diligence the law: in the law was the germ, or bud of the Gospel; and it will aid us much in understanding the system, when fully laid open, to examine it attentively whilst being gradually unfolded. Is it again true that God's way was "in the sanctuary," in the holy of holies, that place of dread secrecy and sanctity? Then let us be satisfied that God's dealings are righteous, however incomprehensible. And lastly, is God's way still "in the sanctuary"? Is it in the sanctuary, the house devoted to His service, that He specially reveals Himself, and communicates supplies of His grace? Shall we not then learn to set a high worth on the public services of religion? (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

**Vers. 19, 20. Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known.**—*The perplexing force in human life*.—I. THERE ARE EVILS IN OUR WAY, UNSEEN BY US, FROM WHICH IT WILL BE GOD'S CARE TO DELIVER US. 1. An evil may be in our way, but too far off for us to see. It does not need to be very far off, to be beyond the range of our vision. If it lies only just outside the boundary of the day through which we are passing, it is as completely beyond our vision as if it were in another world. God sees the threatening danger, and in love, perhaps, turns our feet for a day or two out of the path we were treading, by bringing about some change in our course that we did not anticipate, and cannot understand. As we saw not the danger, we cannot understand God's way with us, in leading us safely past. To us, "His way is in the sea." 2. An evil may be also springing up at our side, unknown to us. Evils do spring up—in habits—acquaintanceships—local surroundings, etc. Being blind to the danger, the event that takes us out of its way is a mystery. 3. Moreover, according to the teaching of the Scriptures, there are plots and designs formed against us by the powers of darkness. Of these we are necessarily ignorant. Lord Raglan suddenly ordered the English lines to divide, when they were marching,—as far as the English soldiers knew,—right upon the Russian forces. But they soon perceived that the Commander-in-Chief had divided them only because he saw more than they could see, viz., that a company of the enemy was marching round the side of the hill, to take the English unawares on the flank. May not God do something like this with us, that we may escape snares laid for our feet; His movements being mysterious and perplexing to us, simply because we see not the snare out of which He is seeking to keep us? II. THERE IS ALSO GOOD, UNPERCEIVED BY US, UNKNOWN TO US, WITH WHICH GOD IS SEEKING TO ENRICH US. Standing in the light of the Cross, we are driven to conclude that God's first purpose with us must be to bring us into a state of reconciliation with Himself; and having accomplished that, by winning us to a personal acceptance of the Saviour, His next purpose with us must be our sanctification: the filling of us "with all the fulness of God." But how shall this be done? The Spirit of God is the efficient cause of all spiritual growth, but the gracious Spirit may, and will, work along the lines of that wonderful providence which we are apt to speak of as a sphere lying outside the operations of Divine grace. III. THERE ARE BEARINGS AND CONNECTIONS IN OUR LIFE AND LOT, OF WHICH WE KNOW VERY LITTLE. In the wise adjustment of these, God's way, to us, must often be "in the sea." A gardener sometimes removes a plant,



not because it needs removing for its own sake, but because it is keeping the air or sunlight from some other plant near. So possibly the Great Husbandman treats us, bringing about some change in our life and lot that is to shield another from harm or to further their good. Our one great need is faith in God. He "guides his hands wittingly." "He is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." "As for God, His way is perfect." (*Henry Starmey.*) *The way, path, and footsteps of God*:—I. GOD'S WAY IS IN THE SEA. The affairs of life are in many cases manifestly beyond our own control; it is true, that much of the evil that befalls us is owing to our own improvidence; and to all appearance, our own energy and foresight have much to do with success in our career; still, are there not abundant fluctuations and changes, all of which tell us that we are not the masters even of our own affairs? Ask any one who has had much experience of life, and he will tell you that, like the ocean, it is full of changes and of storms. Nor are God's children exempt from these; their experience of life is the same as that of others: they are carried by these storms where they would not be; and where they would be, blither they cannot go. Now, for us it should ever be sufficient, that we know "His way is in the sea." II. GOD'S PATH IS IN THE GREAT WATERS. He not only acts, but does so according to a fixed and definite plan, His course of action being spoken of as a "path." Now, we know well that when men navigate the sea, they must do so by a compass and a chart; that they cannot expect to find a path upon the waters within the bounds of which they are to sail; but God has His own path marked out, and He sees it as plainly amid all fluctuations, and despite all enemies, as we do the track of an ordinary road. III. GOD'S FOOTSTEPS ARE NOT KNOWN. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter," is said to us, even as it was to the disciples of old. There are times when it must be enough for us simply to know that He is acting, and that on our behalf, and for our good. At such seasons we must pre-eminently "walk by faith, and not by sight." He chooses that the method of His dealings should be hidden, and we have no right to urge Him to withdraw the veil. And how often has there been a footstep of God where we have not discerned it! We had an illness, or a bereavement, or a disappointment, or a loss; the world said, "How unfortunate!" but God passed our way; the world could not see His foot-print—blessed were we if we could. (*P. B. Power, M.A.*) *The mysteries of Providence*:—I. GOD EXERCISES A CONSTANT PROVIDENTIAL SUPERINTENDENCE OVER THE AFFAIRS OF HIS PEOPLE. This is evident from—1. Scripture. 2. Experience of men in all ages. II. THE SUPERINTENDENCE OF GOD OVER THE AFFAIRS OF HIS PEOPLE IS ATTENDED BY MANY DISPENSATIONS OF INSCRUTABLE MYSTERY. This ought not to appear surprising, and ought not to produce any emotion of repining or of discontent, if two facts be considered and duly weighed. The first is, that our faculties are naturally imperfect and beclouded, physically and morally incompetent to understand much of the dispensations of a Being like the Almighty; and the second is, that the Almighty has reasons, doubtless sufficient and important, for designedly concealing from ourselves a large proportion of the course of His providence, both for designs associated with His own glory, and our future and eternal welfare. III. THE MYSTERIOUS DISPENSATIONS ATTENDING THE PROVIDENTIAL SUPERINTENDENCE OF GOD ARE REGULATED BY WISDOM AND BY GRACE. Consider this in the cases of Jacob, Joseph, and Job. And the time is not far distant when we, in the enjoyment of the good land and the large "which God has prepared for them that love Him," shall be called to "remember the way" by which He has been pleased to lead us, "to humble us and to prove us, to know what was in our hearts, whether we would keep His commandments or no," and to recollect that "as a father chasteneth his son, so the Lord our God hath chastened us"; and then it will be proved, if we believe it not now, that the "light afflictions, which were but for a moment," have wrought out for us that "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." IV. THE CHARACTER THUS ASSIGNED TO THE MYSTERIOUS DISPENSATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DIVINE SUPERINTENDENCE OUGHT TO PRODUCE POWERFUL RESULTS UPON ALL CHRISTIAN AND PIOUS MINDS. 1. We should exercise a spirit of entire contentment under the most severe dispensations, which Divine Providence may impose. 2. We should carefully apply all the dispensations of Divine Providence to the practical improvement of our own characters. (*J. Parsons.*) *God's way unsearchable*:—I. THE DOINGS OF GOD EMBRACE A WIDE RANGE. Science has established the fact, that you cannot disturb the smallest part of the watery or atmospheric world without disturbing the whole of it. So in the moral world; all events, however small, have a bearing on events great and distant. God

governs the life of one man in connection with all men. What happens to-day is only one link in the chain, which stretches through ages, and is connected with events, it may be, of distant lands. II. THE TRACES OF GOD'S DOINGS ARE NOT CONSECUTIVELY SEEN. Earthly soil which receives an impress retains it, but what impress can water retain? You may make the impression, but you cannot fix it. So may you interpret a sorrow; but its connection with your future history you may not see. The mark of God's finger you may see to-day, but to-morrow the impress is gone. Providence, like a vast and complicated machine, can only be comprehended, in all its complex arrangements, by Him who framed it. III. THE REASON OF GOD'S DOINGS IS OFTEN BEYOND ALL HUMAN COMPREHENSION. "His paths are in deep waters." The origin of moral evil—the access of fallen spirits to, and their mode of operation on, man's spiritual nature—human responsibility, and God's eternal decrees, involve questions which by man may never be answered; but enough for us should it be that His footsteps are in deep waters. The mysteries of heaven, however, we must believe to conduce to universal good. Some we know to be positive blessings. Great, indeed, is the mystery of godliness; and yet what fact is more glorious in its character, and more blessed in its practical bearings? (*W. Bealby.*) *Divine providence incomprehensible*:—I. GOD DOES EXERCISE A UNIVERSAL PROVIDENCE OVER THE WORLD. No material object can move, and no living creature can act, without the constant and controlling agency of Him who made and preserves the world. They must all necessarily live and move, as well as have their being in Him. II. GOD IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE IN THE EXERCISE OF HIS UNIVERSAL PROVIDENCE. This appears from—1. Scripture. 2. Reason. As all the motions in a watch originate from the mainspring, so all the reasons of God's conduct, in preserving and governing the world, originate from His ultimate design in creation, which is too great, too wise, and too good, for any created being to grasp, and therefore must necessarily and for ever remain incomprehensible. 3. Fact. The ways of Providence have always been found to be unsearchable by all intelligent creatures. Scarcely a day passes but every person sees something in respect to himself, or in respect to others, which excites his admiration, and surpasses his comprehension. III. IMPROVEMENT. 1. If God be incomprehensible in the government of the world, then this is a complete answer to all the objections that have ever been made against His universal providence. 2. If God be incomprehensible in His providence, then it is as difficult for mankind to know why He bestows favours upon them as why He takes them away. 3. If God be incomprehensible in all the ways of His providence, then all the dispensations of His providence towards mankind are proper trials. 4. If God be incomprehensible in His ways of providence, then there is the same ground of submission under heavy, as under light afflictions. 5. If the ways of providence are incomprehensible, then all things in this world are suited to make all men religious. God carries them all in His holy and sovereign hand, and is practically speaking to them every day and every moment. 6. If God is incomprehensible in His providence, then it is easy to see that He can order things, so as to bring light out of darkness, good out of evil, and joy out of sorrow. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *The teaching of the tides*:—I. THE TIDAL WAVE. Just as there are high and low tides of the ocean, so we have periods when everything is apparently in our favour, wind and wave working conjointly to bring us to our desired haven. It is also true that in the spiritual life we have our neap tides and spring tides. Seasons of enervation, when scarcely a ripple can be recognized on our monotonous life, energy is almost spent, faith is weak, God seems afar off, and we find it hard to pray, and life with its care and sin presents almost a dead calm. However, we have not always this experience of creeping slowly along; we have also our spring tides when we are carried forward as by a mighty flood. With a renewed energy, life is made worth living, irksome tasks become easy, a gracious influence fills our soul, and in an ecstasy of joy we are borne onward and upward. II. HIGH TIDES. Have we not had our exceptional experiences when God came preciously near, and gave us visions and revelations of Himself? These are seasons of purity of life, devotion of service, implicit confidence in God. We discover at such times that we possess faculties of which we were ignorant. The whole of our spiritual being is made receptive. III. TIDE OBSTACLES. There are several obstacles which vary the regulating tides; *e. g.* the stars, contour of the land, seasons, conflicting currents, etc., affect the tidal wave more or less, varying its progress and force. Let us guard against placing, or allowing to remain, any obstacles in the entrance of our souls, but with a full surrender to the will of God, allow Him to

have entire control of our lives. Let us open our hearts to receive the highest floodtide which He may send, even the very presence of God Himself—the Spirit of God dwelling in us. IV. **TIDELESS RIVERS AND INLAND SEAS.** Such rivers as the Nile, Rhone, and Po feel no effect of the tidal wave, beyond their mouth, whilst in the case of the Thames its force is felt as far as Teddington, about eighty miles from the sea. Persons living on the banks of the Severn may sometimes see a head of water forty feet high rushing up the river with great violence. The effect of the tide is to prevent the accumulation of mud and formation of ice at the mouths of the river; it also makes the river more useful, being navigable. In a similar manner as the high tides of spiritual influences flow into our lives, they rid us of collected debris—hindrances which choke our lives and mar our usefulness—evil habits, questionable amusements, shady practices, of which we could not ordinarily strip ourselves, are all swept away under such gracious influences.

V. **TIDE-TABLES.** In almanacks and elsewhere we find tables which give with fair accuracy time and place of these exceptionally high tides, as well as the ordinary spring and neap tides, but no means of thus calculating times and seasons of spiritual visitation. We can doubtless aid the tide of power and usefulness by obeying the Divine laws which have been made known; and certainly guard against any obstacles and hindrances to its flow. It is "they that wait upon the Lord" that "shall renew their strength." (*J. B. Evans.*) *The mysterious dealings of God:*—Our daily papers are full of sad histories. One day it is "an accident in a coal-pit: one hundred lives lost." Another day it is some frightful disaster on a railway, or a shipwreck, or an outbreak of disease in some place. And when we look at "the daily history of the world," we read of earthquakes, wars, pestilence, and massacres. And as we read, the question arises in our minds—why does the compassionate All-Father permit these horrors to take place? And if we, mere spectators of these afflictions from afar off, are ready to ask this question, with what agonized earnestness must it rise up in the breasts of the sufferers themselves! And looking closer and inquiring into the lives of our fellow-men, does not the same startling problem constantly appear? How often we see the desolate widow with her crowd of helpless children! How often we notice good and useful lives taken away whilst the worthless are still permitted to live! Now, all these cases bring us to this point—do calamities and afflictions happen by chance or are they appointed by a great Ruler of the world? And as Christians we answer, that "affliction cometh not forth of the dust," but comes from the hand of God; but when we are further pressed to explain God's dealings, we can only reply, "His path is in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known." And next, we may remark that this apparent contradiction between the character of God and His dealings with individuals, leads us to feel the need and value of a revelation. God has not left us to the stammering voice of "natural religion," but He has drawn aside the veil and revealed Himself. He has sent us a letter, in which He tells us of His love, and bids us trust in Him, through the gloom and darkness, and He will bring us into the perfect light; that though His footsteps are not known, yet He leads Israel by the hand. And as we reflect on these mysterious points of God's dealings with men, we see how they bring into light and accentuate the great doctrine of the faith; the truth that there is a future existence, when the sorrows of this life shall be balanced by the joys which cannot yet be conceived. It is the last great Day of Judgment which will declare the justice and righteousness of God. Thus, when we hear of terrible accidents and wholesale suffering we can take comfort in two ways—firstly, that God may overrule evil for good, by arranging that the accident or the misfortune may lead to good results. Thus the terrible disasters from fire-damp led Sir Humphrey Davy to invent the pitman's lamp, which has saved so many lives. The dangers of high-pressure engines, and the fearful explosions of the American steamboats, made the safety-valve popular and universal at last. The cruel ravages of disease and infection have taught men, by the very motives of selfish dread, to take up sanitary cares for others. And looking beyond these advantages which result in this world, we secondly can see how, in the longer sphere of a better world, God can compensate those who have suffered here. This fills us with confidence and hope, though as yet we cannot trace "His footsteps," for the dark waters roll over them. (*J. W. Hardman, LL.D.*) *The trackless ocean and its master pilot:*—I have taken a great interest in pilots, in their office, and in their work. After a long and monotonous voyage it is quite an event, as you may judge, to find a fresh face on board. Every eye is strained to look at the pilot as his little boat comes dancing over

the waters; and when he springs on board we feel almost inclined to caress him, and we wish to know what is the latest news. I like to see him standing on the bridge, or on the quarter-deck, in command for the time being. Even the captain must take second place now. I like to feel the sense of perfect security which comes when the pilot is on board. He knows the place so well. It is his business to steer the ship through the narrows and up the tortuous channels. He has been at it for years. He can, as they say, almost feel his way up that channel in the dark; and as we draw near the shore, the passengers feel that the time of anxiety is over. A sense of relief goes all over the ship. We had every confidence in the captain when there was plenty of sea-room, but on our coming near the harbour, it was some comfort to find on board a man who knew its every turn and twist. Since God's way is in the sea, I want to ask you whether He is your pilot, or whether you are trying to steer yourself. (*Thomas Spurgeon.*) *God's way incomprehensible to man:*—Take a little lad of ten years, and put him into an assembly of statesmen discussing the gravest questions of diplomacy and international law, to carry documents and messages from one desk to another. In that assembly the lad has a definite place and a definite duty which he can understand and do. But suppose he should refuse to carry a paper of which he did not understand the meaning and bearing. Suppose he should throw up his position as page, on the ground that he was not made acquainted with the whole course of complicated negotiation carried on in that chamber. Would any sane man regard the boy as an injured being? Would any one think of reproaching those statesmen with unkindness or injustice? Would not the lad be simply laughed at? Even supposing that every man in the chamber were disposed to grant his ridiculous demand and to explain the business to him—could they do it? Could the child's mind grasp the destinies of nations? And yet, if this is absurd, what shall be said of a finite being, with his scanty knowledge, with his limited capacity, with his little range of experience, refusing allegiance to a God whose purposes comprehend eternity, and move in orbits vaster than his utmost reach of thought can even begin to conceive; in whose plan the countless details of all being in the eternity, past and future, are grouped and unified—what, I repeat, shall be said of the stupendous folly of a poor little man, the difference between whom and God is barely shadowed by the difference between a statesman and a babe, yet who refuses allegiance to God because he cannot, by searching, find out the Almighty to perfection? (*Marvin R. Vincent, D.D.*) *Thou leddest Thy people.*—*The true philosophy of life:*—"Thou leddest Thy people." The whole philosophy of life is here, here for us no less than for Israel. If we think we need some other theory of living because the Israelites were only poor slaves, and we intelligent nineteenth-century Christians, we are greatly mistaken. After all these centuries, God has nothing to add to this, that men let Him lead them, in His own way, through the sea if so He will it. The true philosophy of life is summed up here, in simply following God. Over the Apennines there is a wonderful railroad, on which, in a space of less than seventy miles, one passes through forty-three tunnels, some of them of very great length. The road is full of magnificent outlooks, but every few moments you go plunging into a tunnel. And certainly the traveller over this road would show his good sense by sitting still and being carried along the line of the rail; and not by getting out at the first station, and striking into the mountains to find another path, because he did not like the tunnels. He would be almost sure to be lost and to starve to death. The road has been built to carry him to his destination by the shortest way, and he will get there more quickly and safely through the tunnels than in any other way. Oh, if we could only believe the same thing of God's way! We want to build our own road, all out in the light; and the consequence is, it is much less direct than God's, and much more dangerous, and we cannot bring it out where we wish. And remember, it is not all tunnels either: in the regions of the high rocks, where the tunnels are needed, are the most glorious prospects. If God's way is partly in darkness, the light places are full of beauty, commanding such outlooks of mercy and love as ought to reconcile us to the intervals of darkness. I remember once, in Italy, climbing a mountain up which a broad, fine carriage road led almost to the summit; but there the road suddenly ceased, and nothing appeared but a narrow footpath leading round the shoulder of the mountain, and that soon dwindled into a sheep-track; and the sun beat down with terrible power, and the way was rough, and more than once I was tempted to go back; but never shall I forget the vision which burst upon me as at last I reached the end of the narrow way: it repaid all the toil. So, I

say, do not be afraid of the narrow way if God turns you into it. The great thing is that He lead you; and if He lead, even though His footsteps are not known, you know that His way is in holiness, and ends at last in eternal good. (*Ibid.*)

# PSALM LXXVIII.

**VER. 1. Give ear, O My people, to My law; incline your ears to the words of My mouth.**—*The obligation to obey God's law:*—I. IT IS THE LAW OF YOUR NATURE. The foundation of morality is laid deep in human nature; its principles result from the constitution of our frame; and its authority will be supreme, while there is a mind to discern, or a heart to feel, or a conscience to judge. II. IT IS THE LAW OF HEAVEN. III. IT IS THE LAW OF SOCIETY. Public depravity paves the way for public ruin. IV. IT IS THE LAW OF HAPPINESS. What does it forbid? Desires, passions, and vices, from which for our own sakes we should abstain, though there was no such prohibition. It forbids the gratification of desires which would lead us to ruin; the commission of vices which waken remorse, and deliver us up to the tormentors. What does the law of the Lord command? What is lovely, and pure, and praiseworthy; what tends to make men peaceable, gentle, humane, merciful, benevolent, and happy. (*John Rogan.*)

**Ver. 2. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old.**—*The nature and design of parabolic teaching:*—The word here translated parable did not probably convey to the mind of the psalmist the signification which we ordinarily attach to it. It might mean nothing more than a sublime, figurative, and sententious manner of stating facts or imparting moral lessons; or nothing more than a poem in which this style should prevail. I. THE NATURE OF PARABOLIC TEACHING. It is that which discerns most deeply and employs most judiciously these manifold analogies and comparisons, more or less partaking of what we understand by a continued metaphor. And he who has the greatest moral perfection will assuredly be the best adapted to the discernment of the lessons they imply. The Lord Jesus Christ, then, must be, from His very character and offices, best acquainted with this method of instruction. He who made all things and without whom not anything was made that was made, He is not only the Word, but the Wisdom of God—pronouncing His dark sayings and forming His secret things in the progress of the world and the Church, so that Egypt is still the type of bondage, and Israel's journey through the wilderness to the land of promise one long parable, as Asaph saw darkly, of God's dealings with His saints in the latter day. Every hour we behold Him illustrating the nature of this varying and marvellous instruction; aiding us to its definition; supplying the materials of which its innumerable comparisons are formed. II. THE ADAPTATION OF PARABOLIC TEACHING TO THE CONDITION OF MANKIND UPON EARTH. The human mind is so constituted, as to be unable to comprehend essences, properly speaking. The principles of causation are a sealed book to us. The progress of language, the manner in which we give names to objects, are of themselves sufficient proofs of this view. In everything pertaining to our moral conduct and choice, we follow another kind of evidence, and are influenced by another kind of reasoning. We determine what shall be our preference, not because we know absolutely the best course, but because our minds remark that what we are about to do bears a likeness to some other event or circumstance, which on another occasion, we have observed, came to pass. The rule and measure of our hopes and fears concerning the success of our pursuits; our expectation that others will act so and so under such circumstances; and our judgment that such actions proceed from such principles—all these rely upon our having observed the like to what we hope, fear, expect, judge; we say, upon our having observed the like, either with respect to others or ourselves. Our very life, then, is guided by a sort of parable, and hence the adaptation of its formal development to our circumstances and condition. But that propriety is illustrated not only by the connection of reasoning on probabilities, or likelihoods, or parallel courses of events, with the teaching by parables. We prove it also by the shortness of human life. A moral question comes before us; we make a parable to ourselves; we compare the subject on which we

want to learn with another, where the decision and propriety is obvious. We do this involuntarily, because our time is so short; it is now or never. Here is another ground of arguing the adaptation of parabolical teaching to the necessities of mankind. We have said, what must the case be with the masses of which the world is constituted! Engaged as they are from morning to night in obtaining a scant supply for the wants of their bodies, they have no time or opportunity to rise, were the rising possible, above the range of this kind of information. But to them it seems strangely forcible. It strikes a chord in their understanding and heart. Metaphors are ever popular with the multitude. Children (and the mass of mankind are but children of a larger growth) love to be instructed by a similitude. It casts them on a new field of discovery; it opens their mind to a fresh series of glorious thoughts and feelings. And is it presumptuous to suppose that all this was part of ancient and venerable design on the part of our Lord Jesus Christ the Creator, and by creating the Teacher, as well as the Redeemer of our species? (T. Jackson, M.A.)

Ver. 4. We will not hide them from their children.—*Children*.—I. THE INTERESTING OBJECTS OF OUR SOLICITUDE MENTIONED. Consider—1. The love which welcomes them. 2. The evils which surround them. 3. The possibilities which await them. II. THE SACRED DUTIES WHICH WE OWE TO THEM. 1. They are weak; we must protect them (Gen. xxxiii.). 2. They are helpless; we must provide for them. 3. They are ignorant; we must instruct them. III. THE OBJECT WHICH WE HOPE SHALL BE REALIZED. 1. The knowledge of truth shall be perpetuated. 2. Our children will put their hope in God. 3. They shall be better than their fathers. (*The Study*.) *The knowledge of national benefits and deliverances transmitted to the rising generation*.—I. POINT OUT A FEW OF THOSE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE HEARD AND KNOWN, OR WHICH OUR FATHERS HAVE TOLD US, and which we, with the psalmist, may style "The praises of the Lord, and His strength, and the wonderful works that He hath done." II. RECOMMEND AND ENFORCE THE RESOLUTION IN MY TEXT. The great God may justly expect that we acquaint ourselves with His ways and works; that we endeavour to trace Him in the natural, providential, and civil world, and in the world of grace; and that we treasure up in our hearts each signal deliverance He hath wrought. But a genuine disciple of Jesus, and a child of God, will neither wish to live nor to die unto himself. What we have known of the wonderful works of God in favour of our fathers, of ourselves, or of ages to come, we should transmit to the rising generation. I am apprehensive that one cause of the languishing state of public spirit, and of pious zeal, in this age, is the want of knowledge. Had the minds of persons in the present day been early and deeply impressed with the conduct of God to this highly favoured country, the privileges they enjoy would be more dear and important in their esteem, and patriotism would not be that empty boast which we have too much reason to apprehend it now is. With the knowledge of those "things we have heard, and known, and which our fathers have told us," transmit, as far as possible, the things themselves. On our part let nothing be left untried, that they who are soon to fill our places in civil and religious life, and that their descendants, even to the world's last period, may stand forth, under God, the guardians of each important and sacred right, and approve themselves the unshaken friends of their country, of Jesus, and of the Gospel. (N. Hill.) *The transmission of Scriptural truth to posterity*.—The text presents four grand arguments why we should zealously devote ourselves to this duty. I. THE PECULIAR CHARACTER OF SCRIPTURAL TRUTH. Consider it—1. As a revelation of God. 2. As a law of duty. 3. As a history of God's conduct. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH WE HAVE BEEN PUT INTO ITS POSSESSION. As we have received the knowledge of God and the way of happiness from our fathers, who showed us by their lips and their lives the way of happiness, we are bound, by every consideration of gratitude, to give to others what has been so freely given to us. III. THE DIVINE ARRANGEMENTS AS TO ITS TRANSMISSION. Fathers are commanded to make known the commands and the character of God to their children. Various powerful reasons might be assigned for this infinitely wise arrangement. The young come into our world with an awfully strong bias to evil, and it is unspeakably important to check the workings of their depravity by presenting the most powerful considerations which tend to the accomplishment of such an end. Nor must it be forgotten here, that, as immortal creatures, the character of man is usually formed in youth for eternity. IV. THE GREAT RESULTS WHICH IT IS INTENDED TO ACCOMPLISH. Every individual who

receives the knowledge of God, in the love of it, becomes a moral sun, diffusing light and warmth around him, the glorious effects of which shall be felt through all the changes of time, and in eternity itself. (J. Belcher.) *The true method by which generation helps generation*:—I. TRUE RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE IS A THING IMPARTED TO MAN. It is that "which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us." It is not inbred nor discovered. Without denying that man has a capacity to discover God as the Creator, all history shows that he has never done so; and as to His redeeming capacity, that, in the nature of the case, transcends all human conceptions. As sinners, this is the knowledge of God we require, and it involves the former. And we have it, not by intuition or discovery, but by impartation. It has been transmitted to us through many generations. 1. They have handed it down to us by inspired documents. 2. They have handed it down to us by their own teaching. II. TRUE RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE IS IMPARTED TO US, NOT TO MONOPOLIZE, BUT TO TRANSMIT (vers. 5-8). The transmittory arrangement implies—1. That the children of every generation have a capacity for receiving this knowledge. There is no danger of teaching religion too soon. 2. That the children of every generation will require this knowledge. Coming generations may not require our philosophies, poetries, and governments; they may out-grow our sciences, and despise our civilization, but they will require our religion. Though they may not require our lamps, they will need our sun. 3. The eternal harmony of all God's operations. The Eternal does not contradict Himself. The first Divine act on earth's theatre will harmonize with the last. The whole will form one great anthem filling eternity with music. III. TRUE RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE IS TO BE THUS TRANSMITTED IN ORDER TO ELEVATE POSTERITY. 1. The grand result aimed at is threefold—(1) Rightness of intellect. "Not forget the works of God." A constant recognition of Divine agency. (2) Rightness of heart. "That they might set their hope in God," and "set their heart aright"; the heart fixed on God as the supreme Good. (3) Rightness of conduct. "Keep His commandments." To bring immortal man to this sublime rightness—this rightness in thought, feeling, and action, is the grand and ultimate end of all this teaching. Glorious end! 2. It is coming slowly but surely. Humanity is rising, and every true thought and virtuous act helps it on. (Homilist.)

Vers. 5-8. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel . . . that they should make them known to their children.—*The parents' prerogative: how is it used?*—Dr. Adam Clarke reminds us that there are no less than five generations specified in these verses. God has blessed no age for its own sake only. There is a chain of Divine purposes in the history of God's dealings with men, one link of which joins another in continuous progression until all, in their united and related capacity, present one completed purpose which is all-embracing and Godlike. This truth was repeatedly emphasized in the earliest days of God's special dealings with the Jewish people. Moreover, the duty of handing down to succeeding generations the truth which they had received was specially enforced in the case of parents, the natural guardians of the rising race, and, therefore, according to the law of Moses, the first special custodians of Divine truth. It is important to notice how tenaciously the Jewish people clung to the title "the Children of Israel," and how frequently in later days, when the title "Children of Israel" had fallen into comparative disuse, they nevertheless clung to the memory of their "fathers," especially the three great primitive fathers of the race—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. All this shows what a large place the family and its associations and relationships occupied in the life of the nation. There can be no doubt that it is God's will that the parent should be the first teacher and guide of the family, and if this is neglected by the parent no one else can fully compensate for that neglect. Hence the repeated emphasis placed in the Old Testament on the duties of parents. I say "parents" because the law demanded filial honour alike to "father and mother." Now, in the household of the Jew there were certain religious duties to be performed by the mother. For instance, the lighting of the Sabbath lamp, as also the preparation of the Sabbath meal, and the fastening of the scroll of parchment upon the door-post, was done, not by the father, but the mother. Thus Jewish children from their earliest age learnt to associate certain religious acts commemorative of great facts in the history of God's dealings with the nation with some of the mother's duties. The child would ask, "Mother, what are you doing?" She would reply, "Kindling the Sabbath lamp," or "Preparing the Sabbath meal," or "Fastening the parch-

mont upon the door-post so that all may know we love and serve the Lord God of Israel." She would also tell the child the spiritual significance of all these customs. Thus the mother was a mighty power in Israel in forming the character, and determining the destiny, of the rising race. Moreover, the mother was the privileged teacher of the child during the earliest and most impressionable period of his life, and, oh, how wonderfully the Jewish mother availed herself of this opportunity! We find a striking instance of the mother's influence, even in a home, far away from any synagogue, where, moreover, the father was a heathen man, in Paul's allusion to Timothy, who from a child had known the Holy Scriptures. Now, parents, will you relinquish that vantage ground upon which God has placed you? Will you give it up instead of availing yourself of your prerogative to the full? Are you willing to send your children forth to the world without the advantage of your unique influence? Is it your will that, though you have the power placed in your hands so to influence your children that they shall find it exceptionally difficult to forget you and your teaching, they shall yet go forth into this fashionable, giddy, sinful world without the advantage of any such training as God calls upon you to give them, and all this because you idly trust that somehow or other some self-denying teacher may compensate for your neglect? Oh, parents, to have a conscience void of offence, and our hands clean so that not a spot of their blood shall remain upon us! (*D. Davies.*) *Bible education, and its safest guarantee*.—I. THE REAL GROUND OF THE DUTY OF TRANSMITTING KNOWLEDGE FROM MAN TO MAN. It is not a work of choice, to be done or not done, to be done partially or done heartily and entirely, at our option and after our judgment; but a positive duty laid down and imposed upon us by the express command of the Most High. II. WHAT KIND OF KNOWLEDGE GOD HAS COMMANDED TO BE IMPARTED. 1. God has specially honoured and particularly prescribed religious knowledge. Indeed, what can be more inconsistent or unwise, than to educate man for time, and to leave his soul unfitted, unstored, untaught for the measureless eternity through which it will endure? 2. God has not excluded other instruction. III. THE TIME WHICH GOD PARTICULARLY SPECIFIES FOR IMPARTING INSTRUCTION (*Deut. xi. 18, 19; Isa. xxviii. 9, etc.*). (*C. Hebert, M.A.*) *Children to be instructed in the Scriptures*.—I. THE PECULIAR BENEFIT WHICH THE LORD CONFERRED UPON ISRAEL. "He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel." The law and the testimony may now be said to belong to us, and to belong to us in a far more eminent sense than they ever did to Israel. The canon of Scripture is now completed. We have not only Moses and the prophets, but also the evangelists and the apostles. We are favoured with all the revelations which in different ages of the world it has pleased God to communicate to His Church, and particularly with the glorious gospel of His grace. II. THE IMPORTANT DUTY WHICH GOD REQUIRED ISRAEL TO DISCHARGE IN VIRTUE OF THE BENEFIT CONFERRED UPON THEM. Having established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, "He commanded the fathers," etc. In proportion as the glory of the Gospel excels that of the law, are our obligations to see that the minds of our children are well imbued with its truths. And is not a knowledge of those truths absolutely necessary to their well-being and happiness? Can they be saved without it? Must they not perish without it? What is the body to the soul? Or what are the concerns of time compared with those of eternity? Let us weigh them in the balances of the sanctuary, and we shall find them to be lighter than vanity. Shall these, then, engross our cares in reference to our children, while we overlook their best and highest interests? (*D. Rees.*)

Vers. 7, 8. That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.—*On the deceitfulness of the heart, in disregarding providential dispensations in general*.—I. SHOW WHAT IS IMPLIED IN A DILIGENT OBSERVATION OF PROVIDENTIAL DISPENSATIONS. 1. A close investigation of the various steps of Providence towards us. 2. Attention to the temper of our hearts, to the dictates of conscience, and to the motions of the Holy Spirit, which concur with these dispensations. 3. An accurate trial of the meaning of all dispensations by the infallible standard of revelation. 4. An earnest desire of perceiving God's design as of a loving nature. 5. A faithful recording of these dispensations. II. ILLUSTRATE SOME OF THE DECEITS PRACTISED BY THE HEART, IN ORDER TO PREVENT A DILIGENT OBSERVATION OF PROVIDENTIAL DISPENSATIONS. 1. It entices us to indifference about practical religion. 2. It represents them as uncertain. 3. It represents many events as trifling and unworthy of attention.



4. It opposes this exercise, as if it unavoidably tended to enthusiasm. 5. It is represented as a great bondage to ourselves. 6. The heart may perhaps plead that this course is neglected by many who are as good Christians as we. III. **ADVERT TO THE DESIGNS OF THE DECEITFUL HEART IN DISSUADING US FROM OBSERVING DIVINE DISPENSATIONS.** 1. It wishes to deprive God of the glory resulting from this exercise. 2. By this inexcusable negligence the delusive heart designs to deprive believers of much real comfort. There are two channels in which the Lord communicates consolation to His people. These are His Word and Providence. But we lose much of our comfort if we keep these separate. (1) Diligent observation would eminently open up the mystery of Providence. (2) It tends to increase a holy fear of God. (3) It is an illustrious means of discovering Divine love. (4) It tends greatly to strengthen faith. (5) It is a great inducement to live closely with God. (6) This practice must throw great light on the evil of sin, by discovering providential frowns and chastisements for those parts of our conduct that might otherwise appear trivial. IV. **SUGGEST SOME MOTIVES FOR ENCOURAGING CHRISTIANS TO THIS EXERCISE.** 1. The command of God (Deut. iv. 9). 2. God has pledged His faithfulness for the success of this work. 3. The example of the saints. 4. The consideration of God's constant and tender remembrance of you may encourage you to this exercise. 5. The recollection of former mercies will afford you an argument with God for renewed instances of His love. V. **CONCLUDING CAUTIONS.** 1. Beware of making Providence the rule of your conduct. This would be to put it in the place of the world, which is not merely the principal, but the only rule. 2. Judge not of providential dispensations by their outward aspect. 3. In all your observation of Divine providence, still remember that the ways of God are unsearchable. His judgments are a great deep. 4. Beware of forming a rash judgment with respect to God's designs. "He that believeth shall not make haste." 5. Be especially on your guard against harsh and uncharitable judgment. (*J. Jamieson, M.A.*) *Memory, hope and effort*:—My text tells us how past, present and future—memory, hope and effort—may be ennobled and blessed. In brief, it is by associating them all with God. It is as the field of His working that our past is best remembered. It is on Him that our hopes may most wisely be set. It is keeping His commandments which is the consecration of the present. I. **ASSOCIATE GOD WITH MEMORY BY THANKFUL REMEMBRANCE.** We can see His presence more clearly when we look back over a long connected stretch of days, and when the excitement of feeling the agony or rapture have passed, than we could whilst they were hot, and life was all hurry and bustle. II. **LIVE IN THE FUTURE BY HOPE IN HIM.** Hope owes to Memory the pigments with which it paints, the canvas on which it paints, and the objects which it portrays there. But in all our earthly hopes there is a feeling of uncertainty which brings alarm as well as expectation. And he whose forward vision runs only along the low levels of earth, and is fed only by experience and remembrance, will never be able to say, "I hope with certitude and I know that my hope shall be fulfilled." But they whose hopes are set on God have a certain hope, a sufficient one, and one that fills all the future. III. **LIVE IN THE PRESENT BY STRENUOUS OBEDIENCE.** After all, memory and hope are meant to fit us for work in the flying moment. Both should impel us to this keeping of the commandments of God; for both yield motives which should incline us thereto. A past full of blessing demands the sacrifice of loving hearts and of earnest hands. A future so fair, so far, so certain, so sovereign; and a hope that grasps it, and brings some of its sweet fragrance into the else scentless air of the poor present, ought to impel to service, vigorous and continual. Both should yield motives; both should impel to such service. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Vers. 9-17. **The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.**—*God in human history*:—I. **A PEOPLE IN A COMMUNITY THAT ARE MOST FAVOURED WITH PRIVILEGES ARE OFTENTIMES THE MOST SINFUL.** Ephraim was not only one of the largest, but one of the most favoured of the Jewish tribes. He descended from Joseph, the highly favoured of God. He received the benediction from the lips of Jacob; and yet this tribe was so prominent in the rebellion that it stands as the representative of the ten rebellious tribes. Two of its sins are referred to here. 1. Cowardice in battle (ver. 9). They had weapons for battle, but they had not the patriotic bravery to use them. 2. Disobedience to God (ver. 10). II. **GOD WORKS SPECIALLY IN HUMAN HISTORY FOR MAN'S ADVANTAGE** (vers. 11, 12). III. **HIS SPECIAL WORKINGS ON BEHALF OF MAN,**

WHILE THEY SHOULD DETER FROM SIN, FREQUENTLY FAIL OF THIS PURPOSE (ver. 17). "When God," says an old author on this verse, "began thus to bless them, they began to affront Him." As sin sometimes takes occasion by the commandment, so at other times it takes occasion by the deliverance, to become more exceedingly sinful. (*Homilist.*) *Cowards in battle*.—I. THE HISTORICAL ADVANTAGES OF THESE MEN. "Children of Ephraim." 1. This gave them the advantage of having had brave ancestors. Joshua and Samuel were Ephraimites—noble sires; this a great honour; a correspondingly great responsibility. Blood is much; grace is more. 2. This gave them the advantages of a central location. After settlement in Canaan, Ephraim, numerous and powerful, occupied the central portion of the land. In its territory were Shiloh, with the tabernacle and ark; Shechem, with its holy and tender associations. 3. This gave them prominence and power. But they were false to their great mission. They were leaders, and leaders in evil. "Being armed and carrying bows." II. THE MILITARY CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE. 1. They were defensively armed. So is the Christian. 2. They were offensively equipped. 3. They were skilful in the use of their weapons. We must know how to use this one offensive weapon. III. THE COWARDLY CONDUCT OF THESE MEN. They "turned back in the day of battle." 1. They turned back. Weapons worthless if courage be wanting; courage is wanting if God be absent. 2. They did this in the day of battle. They betrayed their trust. 3. They brought disastrous consequences upon themselves. Merited doom. Sanctuary transferred. God's rejection secured. We need bravery. Dare to be like Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Paul, Luther, Bunyan. Alas! that in these evil days—days of spiritual declension—there is so little genuine heroism in the Church. (*R. S. McArthur, D.D.*) *Turning back in the day of battle*.—I. WHAT THESE MEN DID. They turned their backs when the time for fighting came, and fled. This, I am sorry to say, is not an unusual thing among professing Christians. Some do this at the first appearance of difficulty. Timorous and Mistrust come running down the hill crying, "The lions! the lions!" and thus may a pilgrim turn back towards the City of Destruction. Others are somewhat braver. During the first thrust they stand like martyrs and behave like heroes, but very soon, when the armour gets a little battered, and the fine plume on their helmet a little stained, they turn back in the day of battle. Some professors bear the fight a little longer. They are not to be laughed out of their religion; they can stand the jeers of their old companions. "Cowards," say they, "are those who flee; but we shall never do this." But by and by the skirmishers have done their work, and it comes to a hand-to-hand fight; the struggle begins to be somewhat more arduous, and now shall we see what metal they are made of. We have seen grey-bearded apostates as well as juvenile ones. II. WHEN THEY DID IT. "In the day of battle." 1. At the only time when they were of any sort of use. If the Christian soldier never fights, of what good is he at all? Take off his colours, play "The Rogues' March," and turn him out of the barracks! And this is what will come to some professors who turn back in the day of battle! Their regimentals will be torn off, and they will be excluded from the Church of God because they turned back in the day of trial and at the time when they were needed. 2. They turned their backs, too, like fools, in the day when victory was to be won. The soldier wants to distinguish himself: he wants to rise out of the ranks; he wants to be promoted. He hardly expects an opportunity of doing this in time of peace; but the officer rises when in time of war he leads a successful charge. And so it is with the Christian soldier. I make no advance while I am not fighting. I cannot win if I am not warring. 3. They turned back, when turning back involved the most disastrous defeat. The ark of God was taken. "Ichabod," the enemy cried, for the glory was departed from Israel, because the children of Ephraim turned back in the day of battle. And so, dear friends, unless God gives you preserving grace to stand fast to the end, do you not see that you are turning back to—what? To perdition. III. WHO THEY WERE THAT TURNED BACK. 1. Men of a noble parentage. "Children of Ephraim." 2. They were armed, and had proper weapons, weapons which they knew how to use, and good weapons for that period of warfare. And as Christians, what weapons have we? Here is this "Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Here is a quiver, filled with innumerable arrows, and God has put into our hands the bow of prayer, by which we may shoot them, drawing that bow by the arm of faith. 3. Another translation seems to show that these Ephraimites were very skilful in the use of the bow, and yet they turned back. Oh! may God grant that none of us who have preached to others, and preached

to others with fluency and zeal, may ever have our own weapons turned against us. IV. **WHY DID THEY DO IT?** 1. "They kept not the covenant." Oh! that great covenant, "ordered in all things and sure," when you can fall back upon that, how it strengthens you! 2. "They refused to walk in His law." When we get a proud heart we very soon get beaten, for with the face of a lion, but the heart of a deer, such an one is afraid of the world. If I am willing to do what God tells me, as He tells me, when He tells me, and because He tells me, I shall not turn back in the day of battle. 3. They also seemed to have turned back because they had bad memories. "They forgot His works, and the wonders that He had showed them." Some of you have had very wonderful manifestations of the Lord's kindness, and if you forget all these I should not wonder if you should prove to be a mere professor and turn back. V. **WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THEIR TURNING BACK?** 1. Their father mourned over them (1 Chron. vii. 22). What a lamentation it brings into the Christian Church when a professor falls! 2. Owing to their turning back, the enemy remained. It is our turning back in the day of battle that leaves Canaan unconquered for our Lord. 3. But, worse than this, the ark itself was actually taken. Those of you who are armed and carry bows, men of learning, men who understand the Scriptures, I do pray you, do not turn back just now, for just now seems to be a time when the ark of God will be taken. It can never really be so, but still we must mind that it be not the tendency of our actions. We must all of us hold fast the truth now. If there is a man who has got a truth, let him draw his bow and shoot his arrows now, and not turn back in the day of battle. Now for your arrows! Now for your arrows! The more our foes shall conspire against Christ, the more do you make war against them. Give them double for their double; reward them as they reward you. Spare no arrows against Babylon. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Turning back in battle:*—True religion brings with it a courageous heart, and Dr. South has well and quaintly said, that "since Christ has made a Christian course a warfare, of all men living a coward is the most unfit to make a Christian." And yet it is mournful to think that, of the great army of Christians who enrol themselves under the banner of the Cross, in Baptism and Confirmation, and who wear the uniform and carry the sword of Christian soldiers, so many resemble the ill-starred men of Ephraim, who, "being armed, and carrying bows, turned themselves back in the day of battle!" Courage can only be kept alive by zealous action. We can readily imagine a gallant regiment riding into the very valley of death at a dashing gallop, but it would be simply absurd to picture them crawling at a snail's pace towards the expectant foe, coolly calculating the chances of disastrous defeat. As Christians, we profess to be engaged in a warfare against something, even the enemies of our salvation, the world, the flesh, and the devil—three most formidable and deadly foes. The office for the Lord's Supper opens also with a prayer "for the whole state of Christ's Church militant"—the Church which is engaged in open and determined war. We can all well afford to do good service for Christ and His kingdom, since the end draweth near. Here is the battlefield, and the land of the sword and the spear. There, already is sight to the eye of faith, in the triumphal procession of the conquerors, and the land of the wreath and the crown. (J. N. Norton.) *Our proneness to forget past mercies:*—We can see His presence more clearly when we look back over a long connected stretch of days, and when the excitement of feeling the agony or rapture have passed, than we could whilst they were hot, and life was all hurry and bustle. The men on the deck of a ship see the beauty of the city that they have left behind better than when they were stumbling through its narrow streets. And though the view from the far-off waters of the receding houses may be an illusion, our view of the past, if we see God brooding over it all and working in it all, is no illusion. The meannesses are hidden, the narrow places are invisible, all the pain and suffering is quieted, and we are able to behold more truly than when we were in the midst of it the bearing, the purpose, and the blessedness alike of our sorrows and of our joys. Some of us are like people who, when they get better of their sicknesses, grudge the doctor's bill. We forget the mercies as soon as they are past, because we only enjoyed the sensuous sweetness of them while it tickled our palate; and forgot, in the enjoyment of them, of whose love it was that they spoke to us. Sorrows and joys, bring them all in your thanksgivings, and "forget not the works of God." (A. Maclaren, D.D.)

Ver. 14. In the daytime also He led them with a cloud, and all the night

with a light of fire.—*Day and night leading*:—Did some man imagine this? I thank him. It was worth being born to imagine this conception of God. It is so tender, so fatherlike; it is charged to the full with inspiration of the best kind; it makes all things feel securer; it brings to the soul contributions from all quarters, contributions that increase its wealth, that improve its quality, that inspire its courage. 1. A startling statement that people were led in the daytime. Surely there is no need for leadership in the season of light. We have reason, experience, natural sagacity, human society, a thousand other ministries all operating in the daytime: what need have we for divinity, supernaturalness, providence—that higher rule which is called Divine? A very proper question, admitting of a very satisfactory reply. It is in the daytime men go most astray. Very few people go astray at night. There is a natural fear, which becomes a natural caution and restriction of liberty, and men say they had better wait until the light comes before they go out on any adventure. How tempting is the daylight! How well it would have been for some men had there been no daylight! How much there is in that daylight to excite the spirit of adventure! Yet, properly used, it is the very blessing of God, the great opportunity of life—so nearly do death and life lie together. God led His people in the daytime with a cloud. It required a poet to think of that. 2. Even the night need not shut out the light of God: "all the night" He led them "with a light of fire." There must be night. That is strange, but true. There must be darkness. Why cannot we always have holiday, festival, noontide? If we close the Bible, we do not alter the facts of life. Better keep the Bible at hand as the deepest and wisest interpreter of all the mystery of existence. The Bible comes into the night of our experience, and says, I will set it with stars all over, so that there shall not be room to put another diamond in all the coronal; and as for this cold night, I will light a fire—not a crackling flame, but a glowing fire—and the darkness shall make it the more precious. How Providence adapts its communications to circumstances. A cloud would have been no use at night; a fire would have been wholly out of keeping with the poetry of daylight. Providence knows what is best. The fitness of things is a religious argument. There is a shaping Hand about. What is my proof of the existence of God? My own lifetime, that is a tract I never bought, and cannot sell, and the more I read it the more I pray. Providence brings with it not only a light at night-time, but "a light of fire." It might have been another light, but it would not have fitted all the occasion with so exquisite an adaptation. The night is cold, so the light is of fire. Other light may glare and dazzle, gleam upon the eyes so as to hurt the vision, but oh! there are two comforts in the household fire—the warmth and the light; not a light that could be seen afar, but a light just adapted to the next step or two—and so warm, it makes the house. And the fire is the crown of the winter. It is the very centre and joy of our Christmas festivity. However far you stray away in the snow it is the fire in the house that is getting ready for you the very delight of your enjoyment. There may be more barbarism than civilization, there may be more wickedness than goodness, there may be more desert than garden; and it is not for us to explain why these things should be or how they came to be; the counsel is in heaven, and we are living from without and from above, and by and by we shall be called in to hear how it all came to pass, and how the very darkness was made into a temple, how the very wilderness was needful for the culture of our life, and how our necessity was one of our chief riches. How regularly the day comes, how regularly the night; how regularly, therefore, the cloud and the pillar of glowing, illuminating fire. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God's unceasing care*:—"All the night!" how much is often conveyed in that word "all": to have lain awake all night without one snatch of sleep; to have tossed to and fro, all night, wondering how long the hours are; these are some of the experiences of those who are familiar with this little word "all" in connection with "night." The soul has its seasons of protracted trial, when it speaks of "all" night. Long-continued temptations, or depressions, or struggles, make it talk of "all night." And now, that which so cheers us is the thought that there is no night too long for God. He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep; whatever may be the length of our night the Lord is unwearied through it all. Man's watching is exemplified by the disciples in Gethsemane; God's by the pillar of fire. "Could ye not watch one hour?" is the record of the one; "all the night" is the record of the other. Is it not a blessed thought that, however much we may weary our fellow-watchers, so that one by one they drop off, by

reason of the weariness of the flesh, we never weary out our God! And as God watches with us if we be wakeful, so also He watches over us if we be at rest. We never can enjoy any real repose of soul unless it be in the consciousness that God is near us, above us, manifesting Himself for us. A watchful and a watching God is the believer's warrant for repose; we repose beneath, when we are sure that He watches above. And God's watch is an undivided one—"all the night." He does not take us up, where another has laid us down. We have not to do with a new watcher, who has to learn from his predecessor all the peculiarities of our condition; where we are sore; how we must be handled; what are our peculiarities; what our special needs; it is the one watcher all through. And hence may God's people be assured of true tenderness; and consummate skill; and an anticipation of all their needs; our Divine Watcher has been too long with us not to know all we want. (P. B. Power, M.A.)

Vers. 15, 16. **He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths.**—*Streams from the rock*.—I. CONSIDER THE ROCK AS A REPRESENTATION OF CHRIST. 1. What does a rock remind us of? (1) Solidity and firmness. Christ is "the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever." (2) Power of defence. Christ is "mighty to save." "Able to save to the uttermost." (3) Power of support. "Upon this rock I will build My Church." (4) Power of refreshment. This is desirable; but how is it with regard to Christians as to their relation to Christ? "By believing they enter into rest"; they feel "a peace that passeth all understanding"; in all their afflictions, tribulations, and trials, whether personal or relative, they find here "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." 2. We pass from the image to its condition; we mean with regard to its being smitten. And how did the Lord Jesus become the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him? Not only by the dignity of His nature, though this was necessary; not only by the innocence of His life, though this was necessary; and not only by the perfection of His righteousness, but by suffering and by death: "He was wounded for our transgressions," etc. 3. It was not only smitten, but smitten by Moses—a type of the law. "The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "He redeemed us from the curse of the law," etc. 4. The last article of conformity is the result, for from this rock, as smitten by Moses, streams flowed. "He brought streams also out of the rock." II. TO SURVEY SOME OF THE FINE STREAMS WHICH FLOWED FROM IT. 1. The promises. These are "exceeding great and precious"—"exceeding great," because of their contents; exceeding "precious" to the Christian, because of the estimation they are held in by him. All these "are Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus." 2. Pardon-ing mercy. His blood "cleanseth from all sin." 3. Sanctifying grace. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature." 4. Spiritual consolation. "It is I, be not afraid." 5. Future blessedness. "Fulness of joy." "Eye hath not seen," etc. III. THE QUALITY OF THESE STREAMS. 1. They were marvellous and unlikely. Who ever saw a stream of water rising out of a flinty rock? How much more supernatural is the stream of redemption! 2. They were gratuitous. "He did not deal with them according to their sins, nor reward them after their iniquity," but furnished them with those supplies they needed. And how was it with us? for they were an exact counterpart of us. It was "not by works of righteousness that we have done" that He saved us, "but by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost"; thus showing the "exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us by Christ Jesus." 3. They were copious (ver 16). So in regard to the waters of life, there is enough and to spare; enough for you, enough for others, enough for all. "Ho, every one that thirsteth; come ye to the waters." 4. They were constant, at least enough so to furnish an exact representation of the waters of salvation, for you have heard how far the reality has the pre-eminence. This rock in its streams followed them partially, and only for a while; and the people moved on in another direction, leaving these streams, and then they thirsted again. But it is true, perfectly true, without any exception, that this rock, or the streams thereof, follow Christians in all their travels in the wilderness, and it will never leave them, nor forsake them. When they look forward, therefore, they may say with holy confidence, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life"; and the meanest of them feels assured that he shall dwell for ever in God's house above. (W. Jay.)

Ver. 17. And they sinned yet more against Him by provoking the Most High in the wilderness.—*Sin multiplying with mercies*:—The more copiously the showers of mercies fell upon the Jew in the wilderness, the more abounding his sins. I. This is a LAMENTABLY COMMON character. Seeds of sin innumerable are imbedded in every depraved heart; and the sunbeams and showers of mercy often develop them into harvests, whose ripened grains fall down into the soul to be multiplied again, etc. II. This is a MONSTROUSLY UNNATURAL character. The eternal design and the essential tendency of Divine goodness are to quicken all intelligent spirits into gratitude and virtue, to waken them into hallelujahs. "The goodness of God should lead to repentance." Man is somehow denaturalized, dehumanized; he pursues a course hostile to the constitution of things. III. This is a TREMENDOUSLY GUILTY character. It is "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath." (*Homilist*.)

Vers. 18-72. And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust.—*The conduct of God towards the world, and the world's conduct to Him*:—I. GOD'S DISPENSATIONS TOWARDS DEPRAVED MAN. 1. Wonderful mercies (vers. 12-15, 24, 25, 27, 44, etc.). There are Divine deliverances, guidances, protections, and rich and varied supplies of goodness in the life of every individual man, as well as in every family, community, country, age. His mercy is in every breath of air, in every ray of light, in every pulsation of health, in every particle of food, in every pleasant sensation, in every happy thought, in every uplifting hope. 2. Disciplinary chastisements (vers. 21, 34, 44-51, 61, etc.) ever mingle with all His mercies towards men—physical pain, social bereavement, secular trials, intellectual anxieties. II. THE CONDUCT OF DEPRAVED MAN TOWARDS GOD. 1. They insulted Him (ver. 18). 2. They slandered Him (ver. 19). 3. They doubted His truthfulness (ver. 22). 4. They hypocritically praised Him (vers. 36, 37). Alas! how prevalent is this sin. What a contrast between the weakly conduct of men in relation to God and the words of adoration and praise which they address to Him on Sunday in the devotional services of their Church! 5. They apostatized from Him (vers. 41, 42). (1) They "turned back" in their hearts. Often did they express their desire to return to the flesh-pots of Egypt. (2) In doing this they practically "limited" the power of God to help them through. (3) This they did because they practically ignored "His past mercies." Is not this apostasy of heart an evil almost as wide as the race? 6. They persisted in their rebellious conduct like their ancestors (vers. 56, 57). III. THE RETRIBUTIVE PRINCIPLE IN HUMAN HISTORY (vers. 29, 30, 61-64, etc.). 1. It often works through material nature. Furious beasts, poisonous reptiles, pestiferous atmospheres, withering blights, devastating storms, etc., the retributive principle of the Divine government is ever acting through these. 2. It works always for beneficent purposes. (1) To prevent the spread of sin. (2) To reform the sinner. Prevention and reformation, these are the two great elements in God's retributive government. 3. Its greatest prodigies often fail in converting souls (vers. 17, 32). Sin cannot be crushed, nor virtue generated by coercion. Blocks of ice defy the face of the mightiest storms that ever shook the earth; but before the gentle sunbeam they give way and run into sparkling streams. (*Homilist*.)

Ver. 19. Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?—*A table in the wilderness*:—Here is—I. A BASE INGRATITUDE. He had done so, and they had participated in the banquet. II. A MISERABLE SCEPTICISM. Can He do it? He who peopled immensity with innumerable worlds and systems, etc. What an insane and imbecile scepticism is this! not worth argument. III. A LIVING REBELLION. The question shows that rebellion was a rampant spirit within them. (*Homilist*.) *The resources of God*:—I. THE NATURE AND IMPORT OF THE QUESTION. It is not the language of faith, but of doubt, distrust and unbelief. II. THE RESOURCES OF GOD. 1. As the God of Nature. "The heavens declare the glory of God," etc. 2. As the God of providence. To the Christian believer this doctrine is an un-mixed source of Divine consolation. He believes that the same providing mind which bestowed "the unspeakable gift" is engaged to supply his daily bread. 3. As the God of grace—enlightening, preventing, convincing, justifying, sanctifying and comforting and strengthening grace. III. A GOD INFINITE IN HIS RESOURCES, AS HE IS ABLE, IS ALSO WILLING TO COMMUNICATE HIS BLESSINGS TO HIS NEEDY CREATURES. He is a sun of brightness and a sea of fulness. IV. THERE IS AS MUCH WISDOM, MERCY AND GOODNESS IN WHAT HE WITHHOLDS as in what He

gives. The state of probation allotted to the Christian is of a mixed character. The brightest day has the pillar of a cloud, and the darkest night a pillar of fire. The unmixed wine of the kingdom is reserved for the kingdom. The withheld mercies of our God are frequently blessings in disguise, so disguised that only the eye of faith can see through it. (W. B. Browne.)

Ver. 20. **Can He give bread also? can He provide flesh for His people!**—*The cry of unbelief and presumption.*—I. THE CRY OF UNBELIEF. The question presupposes a negative; they practically said, "We do not believe that He can do any more than He has done." The whole nation missed the meaning of history, and thus lacked all stimulus to hope and confidence. How often that is the case! It is most important that our children should learn history, and learn it as those grand inspired historians of the Old Testament wrote it, and as the father of each Jewish family taught it. They should learn not to see a human Colossus, astride all time, but to see God in every great development of history, in every change and every transition, and thus working out His purposes in all. What we need is simplicity of trust in God. God delivers just at a time when man cannot deliver himself. When, therefore, you are brought to trouble, look in the one direction where there is deliverance. You will never find God to fail you; and when once you have been delivered, do not forget it. II. THE CRY OF PRESUMPTION. Why should they dictate to God what He was to do? Why should they stake the honour of God upon the mere coincidence whether He thought the same as they did or not?—that is, whether He considered that the best thing that could happen to them was that they should have an abundant supply of bread and meat, and taste of the flavour of the old flesh-pots of Egypt for which they longed? In connection with this, read Exod. xiii. 17, 18. Oh, how many of us are like them! We seem to presume upon what God has already done. I have heard many a man say before now, "I was born in a good family, and here are poor people, who were born in cots, getting on, while of late I have had nothing but disappointments and losses. I do not see why the Lord should permit all this." What would you have the Lord do? Is there any special reason why you should be free from all trouble? Why, some men have trouble from their cradles to the grave. God never made a special arrangement with your parents that you should go through your life without any anxiety, or sorrow, or disappointment. If He had, I am afraid it would have been the greatest curse you could have had in your life. God never sends sorrow to any of us more than we need. It is not only wrong, but also foolish, to dictate to God what He shall do with us. Leave it to Him. If many prayers we uttered in bygone days were but written up to-day on a tablet, we should each say, "Ah, me, I must have been mad when I uttered that prayer. If God had granted me that, it would have been my ruin. He did not grant it, and I was disappointed; but now I see that was the greatest mercy He has ever shown me." (D. Davies.) "**Can He provide flesh for His people?**"—This is an instance of man's attitude towards God in the presence of miracles. Miracles have either marked distinct starting-points in the history of revelation, or have been given as Divine adaptations to the peculiar needs of the people to whom they were granted. They have been necessary as special proofs, but not as continuous manifestations. 1. This is an instance of the misuse man can make of a glorious history. The first part of the verse seems to prepare us for something sublime. Could a people who could relate such a history, who could record such facts of Divine intervention as these, finish up with anything but a hallelujah of praise? And yet these people who had a great history, and a history in which God's power ever flashed forth in deeds of exceptional love, missed the meaning of all, were caught by the splendour, and only sufficiently caught by the splendour to yearn for other manifestations still more startling, and more gratifying to their animal passions. The love and patience of God revealed in the miraculous provisions of the past were lost upon them. 2. Thus, too, this is an instance of the misuse men can make of miracles. This was not peculiar to the ancient people. Look at the New Testament. There is one striking instance in John xi. 37. Thus these words, in common with the words of our text, reveal another fact. 3. That miracles thus misused by men not only failed to satisfy, or to ennoble their hearts, but also that they made men more exacting in their demands and more shameless in their requests. 4. Thus God, in dealing with men, has given miracles to convince them of His power only as the occasion demanded, and as the nature of the revelation which He gave required. He has never given miracles

of which there has not been supreme need. There has been a Divine economy in miracles throughout the ages. It was necessary that they should cease, or they would cease to be miracles. God now works in another way, not less Divine or even less mysterious. The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation. (*Ibid.*) *Divine sufficiency ample for all our needs*:—God is a spring, this day and to-morrow. The God of Isaac is not like Isaac, that had one blessing and no more. A believer's harvest for present mercies is his seedtime for more. God's mercies when full-blown seed again and come up thicker. Can the creature want more than the everlasting fountain can supply? What an irrational way of arguing was that! "He smote the rock that the waters gushed out; can He give bread also?" As if He that filled their cup could not spread their table; as if He who had a hidden cellar for their drink had not a secret and as full a cupboard for their meat. (*S. Charnock.*)

Vers. 21, 22. *Therefore the Lord heard this, and was wroth . . . . Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in His salvation.*—*Mistrust that destroys*:—There are morbid growths in the human frame which our doctors divide into two groups—benign and malignant; and the distinction often comes to mean the distinction between life and death. In dealing with the unbelief which crosses our pathway and even creeps into our homes, it is most important that we should observe the same principle of minute and discriminating classification, and beware of confusing things that entirely differ. Some phases of scepticism are chiefly intellectual; morbid, weakening, and hurtful all the same: phases which begin to assume a moral complexion when a man parades them as a beggar parades his sores, and it may be frets and keeps them open when they tend to heal. And on the other hand there are scepticisms which are moral in their beginnings and which tend to destroy the most vital fibres of conscience and character. 1. Unbelief is malignant when it is a product of the flesh and its tyrannous appetites. Of that we have an instructive example in the text. Our fleshly passions always tend to make us distrustful of the spiritual and the unseen, and this drift in the passions sometimes warps the reason and deflects the moral sense, and has done so for generations, so that we inherit a maimed aptitude for faith. It is only by the subjugation of the flesh that we become susceptible of the faith that God seeks from us. Men may be mistrustful malcontents because they do not find themselves in the kind of world upon which they have set their foolish desire. The atheist is occasionally a person who cannot get all the beer he wants. Now and again men gnash their teeth upon religious belief because Divine law puts restraint upon their lusts and upholds the strict sanctities of marriage and the home. The ideal world that would convince them of the Maker's benevolence would be a world fluttering with hosts of unclaimed hours. 2. Another sign of malignant unbelief is that it thwarts men in working out the appointed problems of life and salvation. We find the scientific mind smouldering with resentment because unscientific definitions of the supernatural have been current in religious circles, just as if such accidents were of the essence of faith. The mind trained to methods of historical research is exasperated to contempt by the uncritical methods of pietists who do not grasp the human part in revelation, and the Bible is despised because of the narrowness and illiteracy of some good Christians who honour it. The man needs our richest pity over whom, for any of these reasons, the Bible has lost its authority. But the obligations of faith are first of all those which present themselves in the pathway of our common duty, and when those obligations are met, we shall probably find the further claim the Bible makes upon our faith easier of fulfilment. 3. That unbelief is malignant which impeaches a God who is in the very act of proving His covenant and friendship with us and leading us forth into freedom, privilege, blessedness. Our vaunted doubt is an affront to a living Benefactor, a stab at the warm love that is ever brooding over us, a gross filial impiety; for the signs that our lives are under covenant guidance are as indisputable as those vouchsafed to Israel of old, however much they may differ in form. If you flatter yourself that it is only the God of an empty tradition you disparage in your modes of unbelief, you eliminate the most noteworthy facts from your experience of life, and judge with disastrous prejudice. God is nearer to us than all others, directing our steps to right ends, moulding our characters by wise chastisement, and clinging tenaciously to the faint promise of better things that may yet be in us; and it is all this which puts the culminating blackness upon our unbelief. 4. Unbelief is malignant when the



most memorable experiences of our history furnish sufficient warrant for the faith we are required to exercise. Such was the case with Israel in the wilderness. Such unbelief as they avowed might have been less unseemly before the first plague alighted upon Egypt, and the first wonder had been wrought for their salvation. God never asks from men an arbitrary and impossible faith, and it will always be found that He has prepared us by the lessons of our previous history for the next heroic act of trust that is required. In God's order for our education in this cardinal virtue, the intricate, the complex, the formidable do not come first, although misguided men do not always respect God's order. The duties of faith are graded just as carefully as a child's scales in music or his first exercises in reading. The infant who can scarcely climb up-stairs is not set to scale Mount Ararat. God's providence puts the demands of faith in a rational series, and we must rise in harmony with our personal experience of His grace and power. High destinies are in store for you, and you must needs believe in God's continuous salvation through every step of your pilgrimage, and let Him shape the plan of it in His own way. Why should your whims and weaknesses and insistences forsooth be sacred in His sight? Be content to have them set aside. When you believe in God's salvation as it persists through your life and breaks out into floods of ever-growing illumination, you will find it easier to believe in the history of salvation preserved for us in the sacred book; and mounting those ascents of faith, made ready for your steps, you shall find that nothing is impossible to him that believeth. (*T. G. Selby.*) *Israel's sin and danger*:—I. THE SIN CHARGED. 1. They believed not in Jehovah as contrasted with idol gods, or as the only living and true God. 2. They believed not in His great salvation to be achieved by the promised seed. II. THE CONSEQUENCES. 1. Because men believe not in God, they are left to become the dupes of delusion and error. 2. Because they trust not God, they remain slaves of sin. 3. Because they believe not in God, they taste not joy, peace, and true felicity. 4. Because they believe not in God, they are subject to fear of death, and despair of eternal happiness. 5. They will be subject to the wrath of God, and will be outcasts from Him for ever. III. THE REASONS WHICH SHOULD INDUCE US TO BELIEVE IN GOD. 1. The essential immutability of His nature. 2. The infallible certainty of His Word, and the preparation He has made for our salvation. 3. The impossibility of finding salvation in any other way. IV. THE MEANS TO BE EMPLOYED. 1. Contemplation of our own weakness and inefficiency. 2. Study of His character and faithfulness, His Word and grace, His gospel, etc. 3. Diligent attendance upon hearing, for "faith cometh by hearing." 4. Fervent prayer for His Divine assistance. (*The Evangelist.*)

Ver. 24. *And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of Heaven.*—*The manna in the wilderness*:—That this miraculous provision was designed to be an emblem of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of those precious blessings of which He is the Author, is evident from His own declaration—"I am the living Bread," etc. 1. The manna in the wilderness was the bread which the Lord gave the Israelites to save them from perishing. Even so Christ crucified is the heavenly bread which God hath given to "save our souls alive"; to preserve them from that eternal decay, which, through sin, would otherwise have been their portion, and to nourish them to eternal life. 2. The manna descended freely, as the gift of God; and so the blessings of salvation through Christ are offered freely in the Gospel. Desert is no more required in the one case than in the other. "By grace ye are saved," etc. The Gospel salvation is no less freely offered than it has been provided. It is a gift for which no price is demanded, and which looks for nothing in its recipient but want and misery. Though unspeakably precious, it is placed within the reach of all; and if we do but ask in faith, it will be made ours. Those, therefore, who refuse to partake of it are entirely without excuse. 3. The manna was suitable alike to all; and so the blessings of Christ's purchase are precisely such as are suited to the circumstances of His people. In their natural condition they are hungering and thirsting after true happiness; but nothing in the wide range of the universe can ever satisfy the cravings of their immortal spirits. But that satisfaction which all created objects are unable to yield is to be found in Jesus Christ—"He that cometh to Me," He declared, "shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." How diversified soever their circumstances, they find in Him that spiritual food which is fitted to satisfy all the wants of their souls. Are they guilty? "In Him they have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of

sins, according to the riches of His grace." Are they estranged from God? They are "made accepted in the Beloved." Do they need deliverance from the power of sin? He "gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto Himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Are they doomed to die, and moulder away into dust? He "is the resurrection and the life," and has promised to "redeem them from death, and ransom them from the power of the grave." 4. It was necessary for the Israelites to gather the manna, though freely given of God; and it is required of us that we believe to the saving of our souls. Nor is the faith by which we obtain a personal interest in Christ's salvation a mere transient act. As the Israelites gathered the manna daily, so we must be daily feeding upon the heavenly Bread offered to us in the Gospel. Our whole life must be a life of faith upon the Son of God. And blessed be God! we may always have the grace that we need. 5. As the manna sustained the Israelites from day to day, so are they supported and strengthened who live by faith upon the Son of God. By believing on Him who is the living Bread that cometh down from heaven, they dwell in Him, and He dwells in them. He that eateth this Bread shall live for ever. 6. The appointed mode of distributing the manna among the Israelites is not without its significance. Some gathered more, and others less, according to their activity, but all received a plentiful supply. So believers receive liberally out of the "exceeding abundant grace" of Christ. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell"; and if we only come to Him, we shall receive "out of His fulness grace for grace," abundance of every kind of heavenly and spiritual blessings. 7. A portion of the manna was laid up in the golden vessels of the tabernacle, where it remained for ages without suffering corruption. Even so, Jesus Christ liveth for ever in the heavenly sanctuary, as the "hidden manna," which He promises for the support and nourishment of His conflicting and overcoming people. And as He is represented in Scripture as "dwelling in their hearts by faith, the hope of glory," should not the purity of the golden vessels, in which the manna was hidden, teach us to cleanse our hearts from all sin and corruption, that they may be fit receptacles for Jesus Christ our heavenly manna? (*P. Grant.*) *The manna a type of Christ:*—We observe, first, that the food was supernatural. The Israelites were sustained by nourishment furnished them immediately from heaven. And did not this represent that the food of the soul was to be holy and good, and that the bread of life, whereof all men must eat who would not everlastingly die, must descend from heaven and fall around the camp?—that the person of Christ should not be produced in the ordinary course of nature, and that His birth should not be as the birth of other men? The manna, in the next place, sufficed for the whole multitude; there was enough for all, and it was suited to all, so that the old and young, the rich and the poor, partook of the same food and were equally benefited. Jesus Christ hath given Himself for the ransom of the world, and there is not an individual in the wide family of man for whom provision has not been made in the rich supplies of the Gospel. It may be further observed that the manna, before it was eaten, was ground in a mill, or broken in a mortar; so ere Christ could become the food of the world He was bruised and put to grief, became a curse and was pressed down by the weight of God's wrath against sin. There is something so remarkable in the direction that the manna should be used on the day it was gathered. In spiritual things God supplies our wants as they occur; He does not give strength till He gives the trial, "As is thy day, so shall thy strength be." If I may use such an expression, we have no stock in hand, but when the necessity arises we must apply afresh to the Saviour; yet practically we often endeavour to set aside that law. We distress ourselves with thinking that if such and such troubles overtake us we can never endure them, thus calculating on to-day's strength for to-morrow's trials; or because we have been diligent in prayer, and feel we have obtained a communication of grace, we are apt to suppose with the psalmist, "that our mountain stands strong and can never be moved." All this is but laying by till to-morrow the manna of to-day: and while experience teaches us that we cannot carry with us the provision, but must have recourse in every want to the Saviour, we learn the lesson which is typically taught in the inability of the Israelites to secure out of what God gave them on one day sustenance for the following. There is, however, another striking particular in which the manna was typical. It fell only when the Israelites were in the wilderness, ceasing as soon as they crossed Jordan and reached the promised land. And is not the type to be also traced in the food being given throughout the journey, but withheld on its comple-

tion? We shall have no more need of sacraments when once we are admitted into the kingdom of heaven. It is one of the finest descriptions given us by the evangelist of the new Jerusalem, "I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." (*H. Melville, B.D.*)

**Ver. 25. Man did eat angels' food.**—*Angels' food*:—I. There are in the universe HIGHER ORDER OF INTELLIGENT CREATURES THAN MAN. "Angels." The proofs, the nature, the functions, the varieties of their existence abound in the Scriptures. II. This higher order of intelligences REQUIRE FOOD. No creatures, however exalted, can be self-subsisting, i.e. can live of themselves or from themselves; they must appropriate something from without. III. Of this food MAN TO SOME EXTENT IS A PARTAKER. Revelations of truth, beauty, God, are the food of souls in all worlds, and this food is universal. (*Homilist.*) *Angels' food*:—We soon tell by our appearance what food we have been eating. You cannot hide the bill of fare. The face is a tell-tale. The more the sensualist eats the greater a sensualist he appears to be. He feeds the flesh. He gets coarser every day; what little music there was in his voice is all dead and gone; he has choked it with the food of beasts. Once there was a little child in him, well spoken of, thought to be the germ of a fine man; but that child-angel is dead. Every mouthful of meat the man now takes makes him more beast-like. Say not that it is of no consequence what a man eats. It is of vital consequence. The mystery, however, is this, that even the best food may be turned into evil nutriment, according to the nature of the man who partakes of it. The lion grows as a lion the more he eats; though it be of the daintiest food it all becomes lion. So with us bodily, intellectually, spiritually: we tell what our food is. Under what circumstances may men be said to eat angels' food, corn of heaven, bread sent down from God? When earth cannot satisfy him any longer, the good food is beginning to tell upon him. Growing in spirituality is not a metaphysical process; it is concrete, intelligible, patent to the observation; it is not a growth in mere sentiment, it is not an enrichment of the nature in mere foam of ecstasy and rapture: it is a larger outlook, a firmer grasp of things eternal, a clearer view of distant things; it is a growth in preparation, in the estimate of relative values, in sympathy with God. Growing so, the whole world changes; its duties become light, its burdens become comparatively easy, its wealth a handful of dust that may be thrown up and caught again and laid down with a conjuror's ease. Growth in spirituality means larger intercourse with God, keener perception of religious essences and moral affinities. Growth in spirituality means a throwing-off of mere burdensomeness and ceremony and ritual; a forsaking of the fleshpots of Egypt, and a yearning for the society of angels and spirits, blessed and immortal. We can now do better than eat angels' food, a larger feast has been prepared for us—we can eat the body and drink the blood of Christ. Faith takes the bread, and turns it into the flesh of Christ; faith takes the emblematic wine, and makes it sacrificial blood. Lord, increase our faith! (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **He sent them meat to the full.**—*The blessing of harvest*:—View this verse as applicable to all time and all generations of men; for, just as surely as God fed Israel in the wilderness with manna, so surely is He feeding the whole human race to-day by a miracle not less wonderful. I. IN WHAT SENSE THE STATEMENT OF THE TEXT IS TRUE, AS APPLIED TO ALL MEN. Look at the variety of the food God gives us. It is not merely the one food sent directly from above, but we can use a hundred kinds of food, so we cannot comment upon the poor character of the products of the earth. The courses of Nature bring round the seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and point the Christian back to the God who lies behind them; and he who has the heritage of the Christian has a fountain of gratitude in his soul, because he recognizes that these come from above, for they tell the man who believes and trusts in God that these things are but another sign of that eternal love which has watched over us from infancy, and cares for us all the years of our life. II. IN WHAT SENSE THE STATEMENT APPEARS NOT TO BE TRUE. How is it that in a world in which there appears to be plenty, or at least in which there is the possibility of plenty, there should be a vast number in every town and city kept pinched and bare? I believe, in many instances, because of their own mismanagement and misconduct. Idleness will clothe a man with rags. It is one of the wise provisions of God's providence that the earth surrenders her products only to those who work. There is also another explanation. Intemperance is the cause of a vast deal of the want that lies around us. Again, God has never said He will give a successive continuance of rich seasons,

and commerce in its whole history has never gone straight on. It has always gone by leaps and falls, and there have been times of scarceness and plenty. But God means every prudent man to lay by in times of success and fulness for a time of scarcity, and I think it is nothing less than sacrilegious for men to blame God for want and poverty if they allow times of fulness to pass without laying by for a time of need. There are, however, some causes outside of a man's or woman's own control which lead to poverty and something approaching want. For instance, too many men rush into one trade, possibly because they think it a prosperous one. The result is, that the trade is overstocked, and there is not sufficient work for every one, and a great deal of pain and scarcity often follows, until matters right themselves—and they don't right themselves in a year. Or, again, the greed and cruelty of some may act as a pressure on those who are weak and unable to defend themselves, and because of this injustice and greed of gain they are not able even to make their bread. Or, again, bad economic laws, such as our Corn Laws that Cobden and Bright did so much to abolish, may raise the price of God's grain to a fictitious value. There is another cause of poverty and want that is perhaps more directly traceable to God Himself, and that is famine. God's universe is spiritual, and the powers that conquer in it must be spiritual, and famine itself is, I believe, one of the methods by which God seeks to work out one of the spiritual purposes of the universe. See, for instance, how famine may bring a nation back to simpler and truer modes of life. See how famine disciplines men by bringing out generosity in them, making them go to the help of other nations. I believe that, too, may be the explanation of the fact that there is poverty among us. Does not God seek to lead us, by poverty, to think of that bread which perisheth not? (*D. Woodside, B.D.*)

Vers. 30, 31. **They were not estranged from their lust.**—*Dissatisfaction with plenty*:—God gave them plenty, and they ate "and were filled." He gave them what they sought, flesh; feathered birds came in abundance. Notwithstanding, they were not satisfied, "were not estranged from their lust"; they had still a craving for something more. Here is dissatisfaction with plenty. I. This is a very PREVALENT experience. Men in plenty are everywhere in dissatisfaction. Where there is (1) Plenty of food, (2) Plenty of money, (3) Plenty of books, (4) Plenty of popularity, (5) Plenty of amusements, men cry everywhere, "Who will show us any good?" II. This is a very SUGGESTIVE experience. It implies—1. Something bad that is existing. Conflicting passions, compunctive consciences, moral forebodings within, prevent the possibility of satisfaction. 2. Something good that is lacking. What is the deep hunger of the soul? God. (*Homilist.*) **But while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them.**—*Kibroth Hattaavah*:—Fleshly lust not only "wars against" but kills men. I. Slays PHYSICALLY. An inordinate gratification of animal appetites saps the constitution and brings the body to a premature grave. II. Slays INTELLECTUALLY. It slays the elasticity, the freedom, the vigour of the intellect. How often, in the case of the gourmand and the voluptuary, does the brain run into fat, and the whole intellect into greasy mud. III. Slays MORALLY. It slays—1. Purity of love. 2. Tenderness of conscience. 3. Force of moral purpose. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 32. **For all this they sinned still.**—*Sinning still*:—1. God's revelation of His power, goodness, love and grace to the sinners of our day, in the completed canon of the Holy Scriptures, infinitely transcends anything made to ancient Israel. And yet, in the noonday light of that full and august revelation, they sin still and remain stout in their rebellion. 2. God incarnate in humanity, dying on the cross, and rising from the dead, with all their attending marvels, is the most stupendous event in human or in angelic history; and yet in full sight of the cross, and of eighteen centuries of redeeming grace and triumph, the sinners of this generation scoff and revile. 3. The dispensation of the Spirit, the ministry of the Word, the Sabbath and other Christian institutions, are powerful factors in God's plan of redeeming agencies; and yet, under the full force of these mighty Divine agencies, the sinners of this favoured day go on to sin and harden their hearts in iniquity. 4. The discipline of Divine providence has been tried again and again upon these rebellious, unrepentant souls; and still they sin on and wax worse and worse. Mercies do not soften their hearts, and judgments do not deter them. (*Homiletic Review.*) **What God does to keep men from sinning**:—God

does a great deal to arrest the sinner and bring him to repentance. All His dispensations and dealings propose the sinner's repentance and salvation, until that period when his Spirit, which He says shall not strive always with man, ceases to strive with him (Hos. iv. 17). 1. He proclaims His own infinite abhorrence of sin. And will you persist in the love and practice of that which He abhors; is it not reason enough why you should hate and eschew it, that He hates it in its most plausible form, and in its mildest degree? 2. In the exercise of His sovereign authority He positively and pointedly forbids it; and dare you do what God forbids, knowing, too, that He forbids it? Fear you not Him who can not only kill the body, but destroy both body and soul in hell? 3. He has annexed to the commission of sin a penalty, deep as hell, enduring as eternity, inexhaustible as infinitude. He has declared His inflexible determination to inflict that penalty without abatement. He can do it, for all power is His. He will do it, for there is no change in Him; "hath He said, and shall He not do it?" 4. He has not only threatened, but begun to execute His threatenings. The weight of His indignation long suspended, has fallen on many and buried them in the bottomless pit. Man's life here below is made up of vanity and labour because of sin. 5. But He has adopted a different set of measures; measures inviting, attracting, winning, melting; measures of mercy. He would draw by cords of love; He would overcome by methods of kindness. He declares His reluctance to punish. He proclaims His willingness to forgive. (*W. Nevins, D.D.*)

Vers. 34-37. **When He slew them, then they sought Him: and they returned and inquired early after God.**—*Israel's hypocritical repentance.*—I. THE ACTS OF REPENTANCE WHICH THEY PERFORMED. 1. Seeking God. 2. Returning. 3. Inquiring. 4. Remembering (ver. 35). 5. Renewing their covenant with God (ver. 37). II. THE DEFECTS OF THEIR REPENTANCE. 1. It was untimely; a fore-slowed, and delayed repentance: that is implied in this word, "when"; not till such a time; then, not till then. 2. It was enforced repentance, not ingenuous and voluntarily undertaken; it was extorted by plagues. They repented when they were under the rod; nay, under the sword. 3. It was an unsound repentance; not true and sincere, but feigned and acted only: it was a flattering and lying repentance. 4. It was a momentary, transitory, unsettled, unconstant repentance, not firm and lasting. And these four are usually linked together, one draws on the other. These four twists make up Essay's cart-ropes of sin. What, then, is wanting? The main of all is, that the heart must be changed. A true convert hath an inward principle of repentance planted into him; grace is a second nature, and works constantly, as Nature doth; but an hypocrite in his actions of reformation and repentance is moved not by an inward principle of God, but by some outward motive. When that ceases his conversion fails. The motions of piety in a good Christian are like natural motions; the motions of an hypocrite are as artificial motions. The motions of the sun and the motions of a clock keep time alike; and for a time, we will say, the clock goes as true as the sun. Aye, but here's the difference, the one moves out of an inward principle naturally; the other, the clock, is moved by an outward principle; the weight and plummet makes it go; and when that is down the clock stands still. Or, as in waters, a natural stream flows always, it is fed with a spring; but a sudden land-flood, though it runs strongly for a while, yet it will dry up; it hath no spring or fountain to feed it. (*Bishop Browning.*)

Ver. 36. **Nevertheless they did flatter Him with their mouth.**—*Flattering God.*—I. Here is a WORLD-WIDE ENORMITY. 1. It is rampant in heathendom. Men "flatter" their gods. 2. It is prevalent in Christendom. Looking at the moral character of England, for example, who can doubt that the vast majorities of all Churches "flatter" God by the use of the hymns they sing and the prayers they repeat? II. Here is a MONSTROUS ABSURDITY. Poor man is so vain that he likes flattery, and is deceived by it. But to use it to Omniscience is the height of preposity. He knows what is in man. He "abhors the sacrifice where not the heart is found." III. Here is a MORAL ABOMINATION. What an insult to Omniscience! (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 38. **But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not.**—*All good rewarded.*—The whole Book of Judges may be said to be a commentary on these words, for it is a record of successive instances of idolatry

and wickedness into which the people fell, of Divine judgments which in consequence overlook them, of partial and temporary repentance produced by those judgments, and of relapses into sin when the judgments were withdrawn. The people are said, in our text, to have "flattered God with their mouth," and "lied unto Him with their tongues." There was no sincerity in their repentance, for "their heart was not right with Him." And nevertheless, the repentance, hollow and transient as it was, had its effect. Moved by their distress and their cry, God "many a time turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath." Now, so far as the Israelites themselves were concerned, there is nothing in this dealing of God which is inconsistent with His character and government. If not spiritually excellent, and therefore not likely to have been recompensed with spiritual blessings, the humiliation of the Israelites had a natural or moral excellence; and, though it could do nothing towards securing a reward hereafter, it might do something like the humiliation of the Ninevites towards procuring a respite from a threatened visitation. We have no right to suppose that the Ninevites when preached to by Jonah, any more than the Israelites referred to in the text, repented in such a sense that they finally separated themselves from idols and joined themselves to the worship of the one true God. But they recognized in a very striking manner the supremacy of that Being who had rescued Jonah from the deep, and sent him among them with a prediction of woe; and, though their cry may have been wrung from them by the fear of punishment, yet was that cry as fine a witness as ever went up from this sinful creation to the awfulness and resistlessness of its Maker. And, seeing that we live beneath a retributive economy, we might almost affirm it a maxim in the Divine dealings with men, that they leave nothing of good without reward and recompense from God. You will remember that our Lord, when denouncing the hypocrisy of those who prayed and gave alms that they might be seen of men, says, "Verily, they have their reward." There seems in this something more than a declaration that what they were in search of was the praise of men; it is rather a declaration that it was this praise on which they had fixed their desires, and that God permitted them to gain it, because outwardly, at least, they did Him reverence. It is the fixed end and decree of God's government to reward every man according to his works, and therefore may He award temporary advantages to those who yield Him some temporary obedience. The greatest share of public approbation, and the most desirable portion in this world, certainly appear to be reserved for those who are signal in the duties and warm in the charities of life. And if this be true, how are we to explain it but by declaring that God is not unmindful of the least thing which may seem to be done in obedience to His will; and that, since the men who are merely earnest in curbing their passions and zealous in benefiting others are to have no future recompense, He resolves to reward them with a large measure of temporal good, and thus to allow nothing to be overlooked by His retributive government? Just as there are actions which God punishes, so are there also actions which God rewards in this life; and the reward will be more conspicuous, because the man who receives it is not one who will be accepted at the judgment. Tremble ye who are men of virtue but not of piety, whom the world is applauding, and upon whom fortune, as it is called, is continually smiling. We put no slight upon your virtues; we do not refuse to admit your integrity, your honour, your warm-heartedness, your liberality; nay, we will not even say that these virtues are without worth in God's sight, and will not receive a recompense at God's hands; rather we say unto you, "Verily ye have your reward." You read in the Book of Psalms of men who have their portion in this life. Oh! think with yourselves whether this may not be your case. Is it not too possible, that whilst what is naturally excellent obtains for you a measure of happiness here, the want of what is spiritually excellent may cause you to be consigned to misery hereafter? You live beneath a retributive government; you shall not have to say you do well for nothing; but the retributions of good may last only for a few years, and then the retributions of evil will crowd upon you in eternity. But, on the other hand, though it may be indirectly that there is encouragement in the text for the contrite in heart, the true disciple of Christ may draw comfort from the case of the Israelites. If God would not leave the show and semblance of contrition without a recompense, will He be unmindful of real penitence? If "many a time turned He His anger away" from those who "did but flatter Him with their mouths, and lied unto Him with their tongues," has He nothing in store for those who are humble in spirit and who come to Him with the sacrifice of a

broken heart? (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *The wondrous compassion and forbearance of God*:—The Israelites sinned in the face of abounding mercy. Their providences were special and peculiar. For them God clave the sea and rent the heavens. Angels' food dropped daily round their tents, and the rocks ran with living streams. God rebuked kings for their sakes. The ancients said that Venus never looked so fair as when she sat beside Pluto. I suppose that Pluto never seemed so swarthy as when contrasted with the white-armed goddess. Sin looks its blackest when set against the lovingkindness and tender mercy of a long-suffering God. Yet even such enormities as black ingratitude and rank rebellion were "forgiven hitherto." Here is the record—is it not wonderful? "He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned He His anger away and did not stir up all His wrath." (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

**Ver. 39. For He remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.**—*The frailty of human nature*:—I. The frailty of human nature IMPRESSIVELY DESCRIBED. Two terms are used—1. "Flesh"; not granite, iron, or even oak, but a sentient, weak, constantly-dissolving organism. 2. "Wind." (1) Mysterious. "We know not whence it cometh, or whither it goeth." (2) Fleeting. Wind is a rapid wave of air that rolls over you and is gone. A vapour, a shadow, wind, such are the symbols of life. II. The frailty of human nature DIVINELY REMEMBERED. This being so—1. He will not require from us more than we are able to render. 2. He will not lay upon us more than we are able to endure. (*Homilist.*)

**Ver. 41. Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.**—*Limiting God*:—I. We limit the Holy One of Israel by DICTATING TO HIM. Shall mortal dare to dictate to his Creator? Shall it be possible that man shall lay down his commands, and expect the King of heaven to pay homage to his arrogance? Will a mortal impiously say, "Not Thy will but mine be done"? 1. O heir of heaven, be ashamed, and be confounded, while I remind thee that thou hast dared to dictate to God! How often have we in our prayers not simply wrestled with God for a blessing—for that was allowable—but we have imperiously demanded it. Christ will have nothing to do with dictatorial prayers, He will not be a partaker with us in the sin of limiting the Holy One of Israel. Oftentimes, too, I think, we dictate to God with regard to the measure of our blessing. We ask the Lord that we might grow in the enjoyment of His presence, instead of that He gives us to see the hidden depravity of our heart. The blessing comes to us, but it is in another shape from what we expected. We go again to our knees, and we complain of God that He has not answered us. You must leave the measuring of your mercies with Him who measures the rain and weighs the clouds of heaven. Beggars must not be choosers, and especially they must not be choosers when they have to deal with infinite wisdom and sovereignty. And yet further, I fear that we have often dictated to God with regard to the time. We pray again and again, and at last we begin to faint. And why is this? Simply because that in our hearts we have been setting a date and a time to God. 2. I will address myself now to those who cannot call themselves the children of God, but who lately have been stirred up to seek salvation. There are many of you who are not hardened and careless now. Sinner, what hast thou been doing, while thou hast said, "I will restrain prayer because God has not as yet answered me"? Hast thou not been stipulating with God as to the day when He shall save thee? Suppose it is written in the book of God's decree, "I will save that man and give him peace after he has prayed seven years," would that be hard upon thee? Is not the blessing of Divine mercy worth waiting for? II. We limit the Holy One of Israel by DISTRUST. 1. Children of God, purchased by blood and regenerated by the Spirit, you are guilty here; for by your distrust and fear you have often limited the Holy One of Israel, and have said in effect, that His ear is heavy that it cannot hear, and that His arm is shortened that it cannot save. In your trials you have done this. You have looked upon your troubles, you have seen them roll like mountain waves; you have hearkened to your fears, and they have howled in your ears like tempestuous winds, and you have said, "My bark is but a feeble one, and it will soon be shipwrecked. It is true that God has said that through tempests and tossings He will bring me to my desired haven. But alas! such a state as this was never contemplated in His promise; I shall sink at last and never see His face with joy." What hast thou

done, fearful one? O thou of little faith, dost thou know what sin thou hast committed? Thou hast judged the omnipotence of God to be finite. Thou hast said that thy troubles are greater than His power, that thy woes are more terrible than His might. I say retract that thought; drown it and thou shalt not be drowned thyself. Give it to the winds, and rest thou assured that out of all thy troubles He will surely bring thee, and in thy deepest distress He will not forsake thee. 2. And now I turn to the poor troubled heart, and although I accuse of sin, yet I doubt not the Spirit shall bear witness with the conscience, and leading to Christ, shall this morning deliver from its galling yoke. Poor troubled one, thou hast said in thy heart, "My sins are too many to be forgiven." What hast thou done? Repent thee, and let the tear roll down thy cheek. Thou hast limited the Holy One of Israel. Thou hast put thy sins above His grace. Thou hast considered that thy guilt is more omnipotent than omnipotence itself. He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Christ. Thou canst not have exceeded the boundlessness of His grace. Be thy sins ever so many, the blood of Christ can put them all away; and if thou doubtst this, thou art limiting the Holy One of Israel. Another says, I do not doubt His power to save, but what I doubt is His willingness. What hast thou done in this? Thou hast limited the love, the boundless love of the Holy One of Israel. 3. If you will now consider how faithful God has been to His children, and how true He has been to all His promises, I think that saint and sinner may stand together and make a common confession and utter a common prayer: "Lord, we have been guilty of doubting Thee; we pray that we may limit Thee no longer." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Limiting the Holy One.*—I. Men do it in their INTELLECTUAL THEORIES. In their theories they limit Him—I. In the sphere of His agency. 2. In the range of His mercy. 3. In the sovereignty of His action. II. Men do it in their RELIGIOUS FORMALITIES. 1. In their prostration before material representations of Him. 2. In stereotyped forms of worship of Him. 3. In specially identifying Him with certain places of worship. III. Men do it in their MORAL HABITUDES. 1. By their sins they exclude Him from the temple of their nature. 2. By their sins they obstruct His influence upon their sphere. (*Homilist.*) *Unbelief limiting God.*—I. IN WHAT WAY WE MAY LIMIT THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL. To limit is to set bounds to His operations; to circumscribe or confine Him in His ability to effect certain purposes or works. Now, God is often limited—1. In the extent and freeness of His mercy. The Jews could not conceive of publicans and sinners being interested in Messiah's regards. 2. The penitent sinner often does this as to the ability and willingness of God to save. 3. The believer in trouble often does this in confining God to a certain mode of deliverance. 4. We often do this in the contractedness of our prayers. II. THE EVIL OF LIMITING THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL. To limit the Holy One of Israel is—1. To bring down the Creator to the standard of the creature. 2. Disbelieving His Holy Word. 3. Ungrateful reflection upon Him for past mercies. 4. To limit our mercies and enjoyments. He says, "Be it unto you according unto your faith." (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *Limiting the Holy One of Israel.*—I. This is the crime of IDOLATRY AND HEATHENISM. Let us beware how we create an image of God in our minds, dishonourable to Him, and, by its limitation to our poor faculty, become the means of limiting the Holy One of Israel. II. Idolatry is the growth of a seed deeper than itself, and that seed is SIN. Sin limits the Holy One of Israel; the corrupt influence in the mind—in the heart, the perverted imagination, the perverted will. Sin closes the avenues by which God enters the human soul, and narrows the Divine Being in the conception. How dreadful does it seem, that man should build for himself a prison in which he shelters himself from the Almighty! Here at least the Almighty cannot come, hither He cannot penetrate; into the malignity of this heart, into the impurity of the world, He cannot descend. III. By UNBELIEF, OR DOUBT, we limit the Holy One of Israel. Doubt is constantly taking the circumference of God with the compasses of man, and measuring His movements by earthly mathematics, and estimating His force and His ages by our notations and mechanics. How frequently men, Christian men, walk amidst the very mysteries and eternities of Godhead only to limit the Holy One of Israel. You talk of the boundlessness of His being—they run to and fro with a measuring line to take the dimensions of it. They limit the Holy One of Israel. IV. There is a disposition in some philosophers to limit the Holy One of Israel even in the OPERATIONS OF NATURE. "Night," it has been eloquently said, "has had three daughters, Religion, Superstition, and Atheism." The firstborn, the eldest and loveliest, is Religion; it is



through her guiding that all the "stars are heard to sing together," and it is her voice which proclaims, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmaments show His handiwork." But Superstition was early born of the visions of the night; she named the Zodiac—she named the longest known of the planets—she hung over them the veil of fate, and made them the arbitrary mistresses and ministers of Destiny. But these latter ages have given birth to the third daughter of the dark hours—Atheism. (E. P. Hood.) *The sin of limiting God*:—I. THE BEING AGAINST WHOM THE SIN IS COMMITTED. It is no one less than God Himself. He is here called "the Holy One." God is essentially holy. He is holy in His law—as poor thoughtless sinners, that trifle with His law and disregarding all the claims of conscience, shall find either in this world or the next. He is still more manifestly holy in the Gospel; in which every doctrine, every promise, every precept, is but one glorious manifestation of His holiness. Now, that there should be even in the true Israel a proneness to "limit the Holy One"—that when they come into some new trial, into some new emergency, into some untried state—when they come to that stage in their journey that they have never travelled before, then there should be a proneness to "limit the Holy One"—oh! it marketh out that which should cause you and me to lay our mouths in the lowest dust. II. THE SIN (vers. 19, 20). 1. To limit God is to limit His power; and He is omnipotent. There is nothing difficult with God; alike easy were it, to utter a promise or create a world. To limit the Omnipotent is another word for denying Him to be God. 2. To limit Jehovah is to limit His wisdom; and He is omniscient. He knows every thought, every desire, every misgiving, every infirmity, every sinking of heart; He knows it all. But this is to deny Him, as such. 3. We limit Him when we have misgivings as to His faithfulness. He has given a promise; and how seldom can you and I say, "I believe it simply because God says it; I do not take it now on the testimony of saints, I take it simply because God says it; God declares it, and I believe it!" But when we do not so, how is there a secret limiting of the faithfulness that is truth!—for "He cannot deny Himself"; He not only does not, but He cannot. 4. We limit Him when we mark out a line for His sovereignty, whereas "He gives no account of any of His matters." 5. And if we are brought into the region of a dark Providence, when everything seems against us, when our most favourite desires seem to be blasted, when we are touched the most sensibly where we the least desired it—because the Lord seems to thwart one, one seems to limit His goodness. As if there could be an unkind thought in God; as if there could be any want of willingness in God to bless His child; as if He could withhold any good thing. III. THE CAUSE. "They remembered not His hand." The immediate cause of their "limiting the Holy One of Israel" was, no doubt, their unbelief; but this their unbelief seemed to have a cause, and that cause was their forgetfulness of God's mercies. "They remembered not His hand"—the outstretched hand. What! when the poor soul first felt its weight and burden of sin—when the secrets within were developed—when the man began to see himself a sinner—and when there was the outstretched hand, and "Come unto me," and "Him that cometh I will in no wise cast out!"—the hand that still sustains! that tender hand, that gentle hand, that strong hand, that broad hand, enough to cover us amidst the storm and the tempest. Oh! it is no small sin "not to remember the hand of our God." We thereby "grieve the Spirit"; we thereby strengthen unbelief; we thereby weaken faith; we thereby displease our Heavenly Father. (J. H. Evans, M.A.)

Vers. 51, 52. **And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; . . . but made His own people to go forth like sheep.**—*God's dealings with Egypt and Israel*:—I. THE PUNISHMENT OF EGYPT. Egypt, through its kings, had become the determined adversary of God. "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey His voice?" was the challenge flung down by Pharaoh in defiance; and the Lord, who is a man of war, was not slow to accept it. Let us learn from this that, when God comes to try conclusions between Himself and His enemies, He may allow a certain time to elapse before He overthrows them, He may for a while smite gently, and so give opportunities for repentance; but if they be not accepted, we may depend upon it that God is not playing with sinners. In the case of Pharaoh, it was his own chickens that came home to roost; his sins brought their own punishment. He had slain many of the children of Israel, and God had, in effect, said to him, "Israel is my firstborn; let my people go"; and as he would not let God's first-

born go God's stroke of judgment came upon his firstborn. This is, perhaps, the most dreadful truth about future retribution that a man will see his own sin in his suffering just as he sees his face in a glass. There is no escape from God's judgment and no recovery from His blows. II. **THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL** (ver. 52). 1. God has His people to this day. Their distinguishing mark is faith. 2. God brings these people out from among all others. He brought Israel up out of Egypt; and if you are one of His people, He will fetch you out of the world. God did not drive His people out of Egypt, but He led them; they came willingly and gladly, for Egypt had become a place of misery to them. So does the world become, with all its sinful pleasures; its fine glories turn to emptiness and vanity to the true child of God, and God fetches him out of it all. 3. The Lord not only brings His people away from others, but He brings them to Himself: "He made His own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock," He Himself going before them through the desert way like a shepherd. O poor wandering souls, come to God through Jesus Christ His Son, follow where He leads, and walk ever in His way! 4. Further, in bringing sinners to Himself, God will also bring them to one another. "He made His own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock." He does not say that they should be like a solitary dog that comes at his master's whistle, but like a flock of sheep that move together in one direction. It is one of the marks of God's people that they love each other; He leads them forth like a flock of sheep, He brings them into union with one another: gives them happy fellowship in His Church, and so guides them to heaven. 5. The Lord brings His people out from the world, and brings them to Himself, and to fellowship with one another, and then He guides them to a place of rest, even as He led Israel into Canaan. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Vers. 56, 57. **And kept not His testimonies: but turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers.**—*The deceitfulness of the heart as to duty*.—I. **AS TO THE PERFORMANCE OF DUTY**, the heart discovers its power of deceit. 1. By diverting a person from those duties that are most spiritual in their nature. It will plead, as to self-examination and meditation on the Word, that these duties are of too difficult a nature; that they require too close an attention; that it is very provoking to God to perform them carelessly; and therefore insist for the neglect of them, and for giving a preference to those of a more general nature. 2. By endeavouring to prevent any real communion with God, and to distract the mind by wandering in duty. 3. By inciting to hypocrisy. The people of God are sometimes disposed to appear to Him more fervent in duty than they really are, to make professions of love to Him which they do not presently feel, to express a hatred of sin and desire of His favour, without the immediate sense of either in their hearts. 4. By prompting the possessor to retain sin in his heart, even when he draws near to God. 5. By exciting a person to rely on his own strength. 6. By pleading uprightness of intention as an apology for a multitude of defects. 7. There are many, on the other hand, who please themselves with the form of duty, without any regard to the intention. 8. By stirring up the believer to spiritual pride after enjoying the Divine presence in duty. 9. By dissuading the Christian from duty, when the observation of it is attended with no comfort. 10. By making the person seek comfort from the mere performance of duty. 11. By inspiring one with greater boldness in duty, because of former comfort in the observation of it. II. **WITH RESPECT TO OMISSION**. 1. The heart urges the delay of duty, and thus discovers its deceitfulness, by promising a future opportunity. 2. It persuades us to omit duty by calling in the world to its aid. This is a faithful ally to the corrupt heart, always willing to lend its aid in turning us away from God. 3. It presents evil in opposition to present duty. When God presents an opportunity of serving Him, to which the renewed will consents, the deceitfulness of the heart offers a temptation to evil; and by the artfulness or force of the temptation endeavours to divert the believer from the good that he designs. 4. It dissuades from duty, because of insufficiency for performing it aright. The deceitful heart will often contradict itself, rather than fail of its intention, to baffle all the attempts of the believer in the service of his God. If engaged in duty, it persuades him to depend on his own strength. If he be convinced of the folly of this proposal, it will try to hinder him from duty, because of felt inability. 5. It prompts the Christian to resist the present call to duty, for want of a proper temper. By this is meant a right disposition of heart, liveness of affections, a

present feeling of the comforts of religion. A comfortable warmth of affections is most desirable, indeed, in the service of the Lord. But it is not essential to acceptable worship. A duty may be performed in the exercise of faith, while no sensible comfort is attained. But wilfully to omit any one for want of this is to renounce the true foundation of our access to God, which is only through Christ. 6. It dissuades from duty, by representing that an eminent measure of holiness is not necessary to salvation. 7. It inclines to the neglect of duty, lest others should construe it as presumption or hypocrisy. This is a modesty, for which God may be provoked so to chasten His people as to give them just cause of shame, and to cover their faces with deserved confusion. We shall conclude with the following directions:—1. Beware of neglecting the season of duty. God's time is always the fittest for His own service. 2. Do not plead the world as an excuse for the omission of duty. God hath given you abundance of time to yourselves. "To everything there is a season," etc. You may easily accomplish all your worldly business, and yet devote that time to God which He requires. 3. Be extremely suspicious of every excuse that your heart offers for the neglect of duty. 4. Quench not the Spirit, when exciting you to duty. This is grieving to the Holy Ghost, by whom you are sealed to the day of redemption. 5. Carry on, in the strength of promised grace, a constant war against the carnality of your hearts, against that opposition which is in them to duty. (*J. Jamieson, M.A.*) *The unfaithfulness of God's people*:—When the bow is unbent, the rift it has may be undiscerned, but go to use it by drawing the arrow to the head and it flies in pieces; thus doth a false heart when put to the trial. As the ape in the fable, dressed like a man, when nuts are thrown before her, cannot then dissemble her nature any longer, but shows herself an ape indeed; a false heart betrays itself before it is aware, when a fair occasion is presented for its lust; whereas sincerity keeps the soul pure in the face of temptation. (*W. Gurnall.*) *Disobeying the King*:—To break the king's laws is punishable, but to pull him out of his throne, and set up a scullion in it and give him the honour and obedience of a king, this is another kind of matter, and much more intolerable. The first commandment is not like the rest, which require only obedience to particular laws in a particular action, but it establisheth the very relations of sovereign and subject, and requires a constant acknowledgment of these relations, and make it high treason against the God of heaven in any that should violate that command. Now, this is the sin of every worldling: he hath taken down God from the throne in his soul and set up the flesh and the world in His stead; these he valueth and delighteth in; these have his very heart, while God that made it and redeemed it is set lightly by. (*Richard Baxter.*)

Ver. 69. **He built His sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which He hath established for ever.**—*The Gospel palaces*:—"He built His sanctuary like high palaces"; look through this very country, compare its palaces with its cathedrals and churches, even in their present state of disadvantage, and say whether these words are not more than accomplished; so that the palaces of England should rather, by way of honour, be compared to the cathedrals, than the cathedrals to the palaces. And rightly so; for our first duty is towards our Lord and His Church, and our second towards our earthly sovereign. And still more strikingly has the promise of permanence been fulfilled to us. For what were the years of Solomon's Temple? Four hundred. What of the second Temple? Six hundred. These were long periods, certainly; yet there are Christian temples in some parts of the world which have lasted as much as fourteen hundred years. Surely, then, when Christ multiplied His sacred palaces, He also gave them an extended age, bringing back under the Gospel the days of the antediluvian patriarchs. What a visible, palpable specimen this, of the communion of saints! What a privilege thus to be immediately interested in the deeds of our forefathers! and what a call on us, in like manner, to reach out our own hands towards our posterity! Freely we have received; let us freely give. See what a noble principle faith is. Faith alone lengthens a man's existence, and makes him, in his own feelings, live in the future and in the past. Men of this world are full of plans of the day. Even in religion they are ever coveting immediate results, and will do nothing at all, unless they can do everything—can have their own way, choose their methods, and see the end. But the Christian throws himself fearlessly upon the future, because he believes in Him which is, and which was, and which is to come. He can endure to be one of an everlasting company while in this world, as well as in the next.

He is content to begin, and break off; to do his part, and no more; to set about what others must accomplish; to sow where others must reap. None has finished his work, and cut it short in righteousness but He who is One. Thus were our churches raised. One ago would build a chancel, and another a nave, and a third would add a chapel, and a fourth a shrine, and a fifth a spire. By little and little the work of grace went forward; and they could afford to take time about it, and be at pains to do it best, who had a promise that the gates of hell should not prevail against it. Thus the temples of God are withal the monuments of His saints, and we call them by their names while we consecrate them to His glory. Their simplicity, grandeur, solidity, elevation, grace, and exuberance of ornament, do but bring to remembrance the patience and purity, the courage, meekness, and great charity, the heavenly affections, the activity in well-doing, the faith and resignation, of men who themselves did but worship in mountains, and in deserts, and in caves and dens of the earth. They laboured, but not in vain, for other men entered into their labours; and, as if by natural consequence, at length their word prospered after them, and made itself a home, even these sacred palaces in which it has so long dwelt, and which are still vouchsafed to us, in token, as we trust, that they too are still with us who spoke that word, and, with them, His presence, who gave them grace to speak it. In heaven is the substance, of which here below we are vouchsafed the image; and thither, if we be worthy, we shall at length attain. There is the holy Jerusalem, whose light is like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and whose wall is great and high, with twelve gates, and an angel at each;—whose glory is the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb is the light thereof. (*J. H. Newman, D.D.*)

Vers. 70–72. **He chose David also His servant, and took him from the sheep-folds.**—*David, the shepherd, called to be king:*—A keeper of sheep, suddenly becoming conscious that he was chosen for a great yet terrible destiny; being gradually fitted among the quiet hill-sides to meet this mighty calling; and then, rising to the throne, so gifted with kingly power that he guided the people through their days of peril, and established them in a strength that outlived the wear of centuries—this man (so called) seems to stand far off from ourselves in a distant world of wonder. And yet, if we ask how he was trained unconsciously for his calling—how he was strengthened to discharge it, we shall find that the same Divine hand is shaping our career; the same Divine voice calling us; and the same Divine Spirit willing to fit us for our part in the battle of life. I. **THE DIVINE CALLING OF DAVID.** 1. How was David's shepherd-life an unconscious preparation for his calling? Amid the stillness of the ancient hills, David, the shepherd youth, was learning to feel a presence which "surrounded him behind and before," and to realize the nearness of One who read his thoughts in the silence, when the beatings of his own heart were audible, and who watched over him when the great night with its gleaming worlds gathered over valley and hill. 2. How did the Divine summons fit him for his vocation? The hour came when he was to know that through all his years he had been trained for it, when the "Spirit of the Lord came upon him from that day forward." And now observe—he was sent back to his flocks; in the full knowledge of his grand destiny, sent to pass years of silent waiting. He knew that a Heavenly will had chosen him for his work; that a Heavenly eye was marking his way; that a Heavenly hand had arranged every trifle in his destiny; and therefore, let the future threaten and storm as it might, he could stand firmly on that rock of belief, amid the whirling tides of trouble. II. **ITS MODERN LESSONS.** 1. There is a Divine plan in every life. We cannot guide ourselves. Great events which we never foresee, or trifles which we despise, are the powers that seem to influence irresistibly the current of our earthly years. And, even when our cherished schemes succeed, they are never what are expected. Now, behind these mysterious forces, and acting through them—controlling these strange disappointments, and rendering them blessings—is the plan of God; which plan, proceeding from the everlasting past to the everlasting future, makes the individual life of every man, as it made that of David, a Divine education. 2. There is a Divine vocation for every man. A Heavenly Spirit is near us all. There are hours when His light flashes consciously across the soul, calling it to arise. Like David, every man was meant to be a king—to be a king in heaven, by becoming on earth a priest in the sacrifice of himself. 3. There is a Divine Shepherd for every man. "He gave His life for the sheep." That

tells us who was the Shepherd whose presence David felt—the Christ, who came into this wild wilderness to seek and to save the lost. (*E. L. Hull, B.A.*) *David's training*:—I look on David as an all but ideal king, educated for his office by an all but ideal training. A shepherd first; a life—he it remembered—full of danger in those times and lands; then captain of a band of outlaws; and lastly a king, gradually and with difficulty fighting his way to a secure throne. This was his course. But the most important stage of it was probably the first. 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. For the greedy and tyrannous, he has indignant defiance; for the weak and helpless, patient tenderness. For there is in this man (as there is said to be in all great geniuses) a feminine as well as a masculine vein; a passionate tenderness; a keen sensibility; a vast capacity of sympathy, sadness, and suffering, which makes him truly the type of Christ, the Man of sorrows; which makes his psalms to this day the text-book of the afflicted, of tens of thousands who have not a particle of his beauty, courage, genius; but yet can feel, in mean hovels and workhouse sick-beds, that the warrior-poet speaks to their human hearts, and for their human hearts, as none other can speak, save Christ Himself, the Son of David and the Son of Man. A man, I say, of intense sensibilities; and therefore capable, as is but too notorious, of great crimes, as well as of great virtues. We may pervert, or rather mistake the fact in more than one way, to our own hurt. We may say cynically, David had his good points and his bad ones, as all your great saints have. Look at them closely, and in spite of all their pretensions you will find them no better than their neighbours. And so we may comfort ourselves, in our own mediocrity and laziness, by denying the existence of all greatness and goodness. Again, we may say, sentimentally, that these great weaknesses are on the whole the necessary concomitants of great strength; that such highly organized and complex characters must not be judged by the rule of common respectability; and that it is a more or less fine thing to be capable at once of great virtues and great vices. But if we do say this, or anything like this, we say it on our own responsibility. David's biographers say nothing of the kind. David himself says nothing of the kind. He never represents himself as a compound of strength and weakness. He represents himself as weakness itself—as incapacity utter and complete. To overlook that startling fact is to overlook the very element which has made David's psalms the text-book for all human weaknesses, penitences, sorrows, struggles, aspirations, for nigh three thousand years. (*C. Kingsley, M.A.*)

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## PSALM LXXIX

**VERS. 1-13. O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance.**—*The inhumanity of man and the mixture of good and evil*.—I. Here is a fact revealing the INHUMANITY OF MAN and the PERMISSIVE GOVERNMENT OF GOD. 1. What inhumanity is here! (vers. 1-3). (1) It is opposed to our *a priori* ideas of God, as a Being of infinite love. (2) It is repugnant to that moral sense that is implanted in every man. 2. What Divine permission is here! Why does the Almighty allow such enormities to occur? (1) Perhaps because of the respect He has for that liberty of action with which He has endowed mankind. (2) Because of the existence of that state of retribution which He has appointed to succeed the present life. II. Here is a PRAYER REVEALING THE MIXTURE OF GOOD AND EVIL IN HUMAN PIETY. 1. Mark the good that is in this prayer (vers. 8, 9, 11). In these sentences there is—(1) A prayer to be delivered from the iniquities of froward men, that is, the bad influence of their sinful lives. (2) A prayer that Heaven would vouchsafe His compassion to us. "Let Thy tender mercies speedily prevent us;" which means, "hasten to meet us with Thy mercy." (3) A prayer for those of our fellow-

men who are in distress. "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee." All these aspirations command our admiration and are worthy of our imitation. 2. Mark the evil that is in this prayer (vers. 6, 10, 12). In all these clauses there is the hot flame of revenge, and this certainly is an evil. (*Homilist.*) *Good men God's inheritance*.—Good men are here, as in many other places in the Bible, spoken of as the inheritance of God. They are His property, His portion. I. He has no property to which He has a **STRONGER RIGHT**. Whilst good men are His, as all things are His in the universe, by creation, they are His also—1. By special restoration. They were lost as slaves, aye, as prisoners condemned to death are lost; but He redeemed them by a stupendous sacrifice. "Ye are not your own," etc. 2. By voluntary consecration. They have given themselves up to Him, body, soul, and spirit, which they felt to be their "reasonable service." This is the one constant act of religion. II. He has no property that is **MORE VALUABLE**. 1. A soul is more valuable in itself than the material universe. A soul can think upon its Creator and love Him, can alter its course, can change its orbit, but matter cannot. 2. A soul is more serviceable to its Owner than the material universe. (1) It gives Him a higher revelation. There is more of God seen in one soul than in all the orbs of immensity. (2) It renders Him a higher homage—of free-thought, conscience, heart, life. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 8. O remember not against us former iniquities.**—*The hereditary principle in God's moral government of mankind*.—The proper translation of this would be, "Remember not to us the iniquities of former men." The text recognizes the fact that men suffer for the iniquities of their fathers and their forefathers. This is an undoubted fact. We may just state five practical purposes which this principle of the Divine government serves to answer. I. It serves to show the **RIGHT WHICH EVERY PHILANTHROPIST HAS TO PROTEST AGAINST THE SINS OF INDIVIDUALS**. If evil is handed down from sire to son, the sinner has no right to say, How does my sin concern you? To such we may say, You have no right to do that which injures your brethren; and, in the name of humanity, every man has a right to protest against your sins and to endeavour to restrain you by all moral means from their commission. II. It serves to show the **SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PARENTAL CHARACTER**. As our dispositions will be reproduced, and our deeds retransacted, our actions will vibrate on the hearts of unborn men and women. Man lives, thinks, and throbs in the life of posterity. III. It serves to show that the **BEST WAY TO ELEVATE THE RACE IS TO TRAIN THE YOUNG**. As one generation so forms another, the best way to serve the whole race is to make a generation, physically, intellectually, and morally, what it ought to be. But there is no chance of thus forming a generation, except in the first stages of its life. Concentrate your efforts on the young. IV. It serves to **THROW SOME LIGHT UPON WHAT IS CALLED "ORIGINAL SIN"**. V. It serves to **INDICATE THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION**. "To destroy sin in the flesh." To do this, not merely in theories, books, or speech, but in actual human life, is the grand condition of the world's salvation. But inasmuch as sin, by this hereditary principle, is transmitted through physical relationship and social influences, it seems necessary that He who would destroy it, should become a link in the great chain of humanity, identify Himself with the race, and originate the counteracting influences of truth and righteousness. Hence the world's great Deliverer became the Son of Man. (*Homilist.*)

**Ver. 9. Help us, O God of our salvation.**—*The highest Divine title, and the highest human privilege*.—I. The highest **DIVINE TITLE**. "God of our salvation." God in creation appears transcendently great; but in salvation we see—1. A higher kind of power: moral power; the power to manage, master, and mould free rebellious intelligences. 2. A higher love. The love of compassion, forbearance, forgiveness. II. The highest **HUMAN PRIVILEGE**. To be saved involves the restoration of—1. A lost moral life. 2. Lost harmony. 3. Lost usefulness. (*Homilist.*) *A nation's prayer in time of distress*.—I. **THE PETITION ITSELF**. 1. It is very fit for nations under heavy pressures and calamities to confess their sins to God publicly. 2. It is very proper for such an afflicted nation to pray earnestly to God for help and deliverance. II. **THE MOTIVE OR ARGUMENT USED**. 1. By the Name of God, in Scripture, is frequently to be understood God Himself in all His excellences, attributes and perfections; and the glory of His name is the rendering those perfections conspicuous and observable; so that to move God for

His name's sake, or the glory of His name, is to move Him, that the effects of His Divine attributes may be made visible and illustrious in the sight of men, so that they may be had in just esteem and veneration. 2. What particular reasons the Jewish nation had to petition God, to glorify those His attributes on their behalf. (1) As they were a nation selected from the rest of the world, and made the peculiar people of God. (2) As the people of the Jews were politically united to God, their Sovereign in a national bond, or covenant, so He expressed Himself frequently to have a particular kindness for them, giving them many repeated promises of establishing their government and the succession of their kings in the royal line of David to perpetual generations. 3. Inquire what general encouragement there is for other nations to address to God upon the same motive. And the encouragement is sufficient, in that God has upon occasions declared by His holy prophets that He is not a little concerned for His own honour, He would have His name known and published in all the world, He would have that honour given to Him, which is due unto His name, to all His names; for He is styled in Scripture by many names, not only with respect to His essence, and existence, but also to His supereminent attributes and properties. 4. Inquire, as far as it is fit for us, upon what occasions, and at what seasons it may be proper for a nation to use this motive in their addresses to God. (1) When the existence and providence of God is called in question, denied by some, and exposed and profaned by others. (2) When they themselves or others, whom common humanity and Christian charity oblige to commiserate, lie under great oppressions; in this case men may confidently apply themselves to God, for the sake of His honour and for His holy name.

**III. APPLICATION.** 1. If Almighty God have such a respect to the honour of His name, as to accept the addresses that are made to Him upon that motive, it is a great encouragement to us to make use of it upon all occasions; especially upon occasion of using some extraordinary offices of devotion. 2. Let us be careful that we do not as publicly dishonour Him by our sins as we pretend publicly to honour Him by our devotions. (*Bp. Gardiner.*) **Deliver us, and purge away our sins.—Sins forgiven for Jesu's sake:**—There is an old book in Paris called the "Chancellerie Book." It is like our own "Doomsday Book," in which all the records are inscribed—all the records of William the Conqueror's division of the land of England. The Chancellerie Book does likewise for France. It has the record of the cities, towns, and villages, with the amount of taxes to be paid by each. As you turn over the old pages of that book, you come to "Domremy," and, behold! there are no taxes to be paid by Domremy. Across the page there is written in bold writing, "Free, for the maid's sake." No taxes for the sake of Joan of Arc, the heroine who flung the English out. Ah, me! when those books are opened when the Lord takes His place on the great white throne, and He comes to my life on earth, behold! across the otherwise condemning page there is written, with letters of His own atoning blood, "Sins forgiven for His name's sake."

**Man's need of cleansing from sin met in Christ:**—A rough parable of Luther, grafted on an older legend, runs somewhat in this fashion:—A man's heart is like a foul stable. Wheelbarrows and shovels are of little use, except to remove some of the surface filth, and to litter all the passages in the process. What is to be done with it? "Turn the Elbe into it," says he. The flood will sweep away all the pollution. Not my own efforts, but the influx of that pardoning, cleansing grace which is in Christ will wash away the accumulation of years, and the ingrained evil which has stained every part of my being. We cannot cleanse ourselves.

**Ver. 10. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God?—A bad spirit and a theological error:**—I. A BAD SPIRIT. "Where is their God?" 1. There is a tendency in wicked men to deal in it. This spirit always indicates—(1) A mean nature. (2) A malignant nature. (3) A haughty nature. 2. There is a susceptibility even in good men to be pained by it. This is no sign of strength and greatness, but the reverse; the really great and strong man will feel no more the most cutting gibes of scorners than granite the drops of morning dew. II. A THEOLOGICAL ERROR. The question implies that the true God would not allow His people to suffer oppression and death at the hands of others. 1. The creatures whom God has created with an inner sovereignty, He allows to act freely both for good and evil. 2. All the evil that comes into the universe in this way He overrules for good. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 11. **Let the sighing of the prisoner come before Thee.**—*The prisoner's sigh:*—How difficult is it in earthly courts for the poor and sick to get access to the monarch's ear! There is a fearful contrast between the king thus surrounded with magnificence and pomp, and the prisoner alone in his sad dungeon, the prey of hunger, of nakedness, and cold—the music of the monarch's court, the silence of the captive's cell, the monarch's prospects of power and glory for to-morrow, and the prisoner's that the morrow will be even as wretched as to-day. But what we cannot contemplate in things temporal is oftentimes plainly shown in things spiritual. The court of the Most High is unlike all others, for there the poor, the wretched, and the sad have entrance when they will. I. **THE PRISONER.** 1. There is the prisoner under forced bondage to sin, who is held in degrading thralldom against his will, perhaps by some peculiar effort of the devil, perhaps by some evil habit which he has allowed to become ascendant in his heart. Be encouraged, we say to such an one, with all your sins you are not shut out from life and hope, your state is dangerous but it is not desperate, provided that you make God's throne the destination of these sighs. 2. The prisoner under the bondage of conviction. Whilst you are sighing in your captivity, our message is to sustain you, not to do away with your convictions, or bid you cease to sigh, but to make your convictions lead you to the Cross, and to tell you that your sighs are surely heard. 3. The prisoner in the dungeon of despair. We approach such an one and say, "How earnest thou in hither? Who has denied the entrance of hope into thy cell, and fast bound thy soul in iron? Why shouldest thou at one time rage, and at another time be sullen? Hast thou ever petitioned for thy relief?" We tell this man of Christ, and of the free love of God, and of mercy shown to such sinners as David and myriads more, and exalting the power of the Cross; we show how "Jesus is able to save even to the very uttermost all that come unto God by Him"; but what the immediate effect of this might be none can tell. At the sound of this Gospel's trumpet, the walls of some men's dungeons will immediately fall flat, as Jericho's fell prostrate at the sounding of the priests. Then the captive of despair, seeing that there is salvation in Christ, will be set free by the Son, and so be free indeed. II. **THE PRISONER'S APPLICATION FOR RELIEF.** 1. A sigh is an unexpected declaration. Although we do not speak, still we can tell a long tale of sorrow with a sigh. 2. An unexpressed wish for deliverance. A sigh indicates a condition of the mind: it tells us that there is sorrow there. Do you indeed feel this? If you do, is it possible that you can thus express your sadness without God's being well acquainted with it all? Surely not; and if God knows this, is His heart hardened that He will not feel; is His hand shortened that it cannot save? III. **THE SOURCE FROM WHICH THIS PRISONER LOOKED FOR HELP.** "According to the greatness of Thy power." This preservation shall be vouchsafed to every one of you who sigh for it to God. He will deliver you from the place where you are confined with a sentence of death upon you, and will altogether reverse the sentence itself. It were of no use to escape from the prison-house with our sentence still impending over us; we might be apprehended again, and lose our life at last. Deliverance, however, and remission, shall both be yours; and the greatness of the power you have invoked shall be seen in each. And who will come forth, and bring you from your captivity, but Jesus Christ Himself? (*P. B. Power, M.A.*) *The condemned prisoner:*—I. **OUR SAD AND GLOOMY CONDITION AS FALLEN CREATURES.** There are many sorts of prisoners; some are so from debt, some by being taken captive in battle, some for criminal offences. The sinner is all these. He is, as the word may be rendered, a son of death; a criminal, respited, but not pardoned. He is as one waiting for execution. His doom is delayed, but not averted. II. **WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES TO DELIVERANCE?** In the King who can relieve he sees the adversary whom he has wronged, and the Judge who has appointed him to die. Omnipotent power, injured dignity, and immutable justice are leagued against him. What can the prisoner do? III. **THAT THERE IS A WAY OF ESCAPE.** In the face of every obstacle, deliverance is attainable. In proof of this we may notice—1. The infinite knowledge of God. "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee." From whatever depth of guilt and misery you breathe the prayer of a broken and contrite heart, that prayer is heard by a gracious God. 2. The Almighty power on which the plea is founded—"According to the greatness of Thy power." This must be exercised. (*Anon.*)

Ver. 12. **And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach.**—*Vengeance:*—This is the same spirit as is breathed out in ver. 6. It is



revenge. We have here two things. I. A NOBLE instinct. It is an instinct of justice, a cry against wrong. As an instinct, it is a spark from the Divine nature, a spark that reveals the justice which is at the head of the universe. Observe, the revenge here was not breathed for personal enemies, nor for bad men in the neighbourhood, the land, or the age, but for bad men in a distant land and in a remote time. It was the breaking forth of that instinct of revenge which is in all our natures. II. A noble instinct **WRONGLY DEVELOPED**. It was a prayer that God would punish with "sevenfold" the sufferings which their enemies had inflicted on them. 1. It was a personal, not a public, development. We are commanded not to return evil for evil, etc. 2. It was an exaggerated development. It is not merely, treat them as they are treating us, but with seven times the cruelty. 3. It was an impious development. It was asking the God of Infinite Love to act cruelly, it was to dictate to Infinite Justice the method of avenging the wrong. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." "If," says Sir T. Browne, "thou must needs have thy revenge of thine enemy, with a soft tongue break his bones, heap coals of fire on his head, forgive him, and enjoy it." (*Homilist*.)

Ver. 13. **We will show forth Thy praise to all generations.**—*God's people should speak God's praise*.—Dr. Parkhurst says he loves to think that every man is sent into the world with something to tell. "That is what makes of any man a prophet, being filled with a story too big for his own soul to house," a story he cannot, dare not, keep to himself. This truth God has given you to utter makes you a witness. You may be a false witness, and no witness is more than he who says nothing; or you may be a true and faithful witness, testifying to the best you know by your face and hands, your smiles and deeds and words. That is a startling thought of Andrew Murray's: "God does not ask us to hide Christ away in our impure hearts." Christ gives Himself to us constantly, but in order that we may as constantly give Him to others. Truth is like the water pressed upon the foul garments, that cleanses them if it is forced out again, but rots them all the more if it is allowed to remain. So is the religion that we selfishly cherish unexpressed. Indeed, is there a worse form of selfishness than that? (*Amos R. Wells*.)

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### PSALM LXXX.

**VERS. 1-19. Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock.**—*The Almighty in relation to erring man*.—I. As a **SHEPHERD** (ver. 1). 1. His flock indicated. "Joseph" may stand for all Israel, and Israel as an illustration of the moral condition of men everywhere. (1) **Rebellious**. (2) **Discontented**. (3) **Pursuing a perilous journey**. 2. His dwelling-place described. Dwelt in symbol on mercy-seat. Now, God is in Christ, reconciling the world. 3. His interposition invoked (ver. 2). (1) **The end**. "Save us." (2) **The means**. Divine strength. Divine turning. Divine favour. II. As a **CHASTISER** (ver. 4). God's chastisements are—1. **Always deserved**. 2. **Often very painful**. Physical anguish, moral distress, social bereavement, disappointment, persecution. 3. They sometimes stimulate prayer. However great our afflictions, if they but send us in prayer to God, they are blessings in disguise. III. As a **CULTIVATOR** (vers. 8-13). 1. The work He does. (1) He prepares the soil. There is only one moral soil in the universe in which dead souls can be quickened and be rightly developed, and that is the Gospel of Christ. Souls are seeds. (2) He deposits the seed. God alone can bring the soul into the soil of Gospel truth and root it there. (3) He trains the plant. "The hills were covered with the shadow of it." The Jewish people became a grand nation under His training. So do human souls become under His spiritual training. 2. The evil He permits. "Why hast thou then broken down her hedges?" etc. He did not do it by His direct agency, only by permission. He could have prevented it. He could have crushed the invaders. But He did not. For wise and beneficent purposes, He permitted it. So it is in the department of spiritual culture. He permits evils. IV. As the **RESTORER** (vers. 14-19). 1. He restores by special visitation. "Look down from heaven," etc. Dead souls are restored to life because God visits the world. "He bowed the heavens and came

down." He appeared in Christ. 2. He restores from apparently the most hopeless condition (ver. 16). "There is nothing too hard for the Lord." "He is able of those stones to raise up children," etc. "Can these dry bones live?" you say. Yes, they can. 3. He restores by quickening the soul into devotion (ver. 18). (*Homilist.*) *The relative Deity*:—I. HERE HE IS PRESENTED IN HIS RELATIVE CHARACTER. He is a "Shepherd." As a Shepherd He has universal knowledge, self-sacrificing love, and almighty power. II. HERE HE IS PRESENTED IN HIS RELATIVE AGENCY. "Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock." He leads us now by the dictates of moral reason, the events of His providence, the revelations of His book, and the influence of His Spirit. (1) The insufficiency of human reason. (2) The free agency of man;—He "leads," not drives. (3) The considerateness of His compassion. III. HERE HE IS PRESENTED IN HIS RELATIVE POSTURE. "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth." Man, from his nature, requires a place for his God—some point in space where he may meet Him. Under the old dispensation this want was met by His appearing in the Shekinah over the mercy-seat. In the new it is met in Christ, of which the old manifestation was but the symbol. Christ is the "Mercy Seat" where man meets his God. IV. HERE HE IS PRESENTED IN HIS RELATIVE LIGHT. "Shine forth." We want Him to shine forth upon us through Christ. (*Ibid.*) *Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.*—*The mercy-seat*:—The prayer in the text may be offered—1. When we are seeking the pardon of our offences,—when our hearts are stricken with conviction,—when we understand and feel that it is an evil thing to sin against God. 2. When we are oppressed by spiritual adversaries. 3. When commending particular efforts for the advancement of the Saviour's kingdom to the Divine regard. 4. When we contemplate the general condition and wants of mankind. (*J. Parsons.*) *The God that dwelleth between the cherubims*:—I. THE CHARACTER OF GOD represented by this phrase. 1. A God of glory. 2. A God of holiness and justice. 3. A God of mercy, full of love and goodness. 4. A God of condescending intercourse. God might be approached with safety and success as He sat upon the mercy-seat sprinkled with blood (Exod. xxix. 43-46). II. THE IMPORT OF THE PRAYER IN THE TEXT. "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth," smile upon us with Thy heavenly favour; cast away all our transgressions from Thy sight; break in upon our darkened souls with the light of Thy truth, and cause us to see and know the truth with enlightened understandings; chase away with Thy bright beamings the gloom of sin and unbelief; and let Thy peace "which passeth all understanding," and the "joy of the Holy Ghost," dwell within us, to be our portion at all times. Guide us by Thy unerring counsel here, and receive us to Thy eternal glory hereafter. (*J. S. Broad, M.A.*) *The word "God" means the Shining One*:—Special reference is probably made to the Shekinah. God under the Old Testament was manifesting His presence in a cloud of dazzling light. The name, therefore, by which He was known was the Brilliant or Shining One. It was long supposed that God etymologically meant good. God, good—they were believed to be one and the same word. But further investigation seems to point out that the English God, the Latin Deus, the Greek Theos, the Welsh Duw—all come from an old Aryan root signifying "to shine." Men thought of God, and to what could they compare Him? To nothing else than the shining splendour of the light. God is light, God means the "Shining One." (*Cynddylan Jones.*)

Ver. 2. *Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up Thy strength, and come and save us.*—For understanding of this verse we must remember that, when the ark of the covenant rested, or marched, in the wilderness, these three tribes were in the rearward of the host of Israel, or on the west side thereof, as is set down (Num. ii. 18, 19). When the host marched, and the ark set forward, Moses said to the Lord, "Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee"; answerable to this, doth the sixty-eighth psalm begin, when the ark removed, and was carried up to Mount Zion; now, the people of God being in distress here, do call those days to remembrance, and do request the Lord, that as He had in the eyesight of those three tribes here mentioned, manifested Himself many a time to be the leader and defender of His people, so He would now also in this their lamentable condition stir up Himself for their relief and safety. Whence learn—1. The remembrance of the Lord's humbling Himself to be familiar with His people, and how sweet and glorious communion His people have had with Him, may, and should, encourage believers in Him to

seek and expect new experience of the like mercy in their need, as here the Israelites do pray for new proof of that favour, which their ancestors did find sometimes. 2. The posterity of those who have been in fellowship with God should pray for themselves, and be prayed for by the Church, that they may have room in the Lord's host, and have God their leader, as their godly fathers had before them. (*D. Dickson.*)

**Ver. 4. O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of Thy people?—God's anger:**—The Lord God of hosts is not properly a title of creation, but of providence. All creatures have their existence from God as their Maker; but so have they also their order from Him as their Governor. So that here, God would be respected, not as a creator, but as a general. His anger, therefore, seems so much the more fearful, as it is presented to us under so great a title, "The Lord God of hosts is angry." They talk of Tamerlane, that he could daunt his enemies with the very look of his countenance. Oh! then what terror dwells in the countenance of the offended God! I. GOD MAY BE ANGRY; and sin the cause of His anger. He hath scourged some in very mercy, till they have smarted under His rod (*Job vi. 4; Ps. lxxxviii. 15, 16*). If He will do thus much in love, what shall be the terrors of His wrath? If the sun were wanting, it would be night for all the stars; and if God frown upon a man, for all the glittering honours of this world, he sits in the shadow of death. Thus terrible is the anger of God; now, what is He angry withal but sin? That is the perpetual make-bate between God and us; the fuel of the fire of His indignation (*Isa. lix. 2; lxiii. 10*). II. GOD MAY BE LONG ANGRY. It is some favour when we have the respite to cry, "How long, Lord, wilt thou be angry with us?" There is some hope of remedy when we once complain of our sickness. Yet God may be long angry, and long continue sensible testimonies of His anger (*Ps. xcv. 10*). But how, then, doth the prophet say "that he retaineth not anger"? Well enough; for He never retaineth it one moment longer than we retain the cause of it. So soon as we ever cease sinning against Him, He ceaseth to be angry with us. III. GOD MAY BE ANGRY WITH THE WHOLE PEOPLE. The universality of sin calls for the universality of repentance, or else it will provoke God's anger to strike us with universal judgments. If the whole people be guilty, the whole people must fall to deprecation. Such was the Ninevite's repentance, "every man turning from his evil ways." IV. GOD MAY BE ANGRY WITH HIS OWN PEOPLE. Yea, their sins anger Him most of all, because, together with wickedness, there is unkindness. As dearly as He loves them, their sins may provoke Him. Our interest in God is so far from excusing our iniquities, that it aggravates them. The nearer we are to Him, the nearer do our offences touch Him; as a man more takes to heart a discourtesy done by a friend than a great injury by a stranger. V. GOD MAY BE ANGRY WITH HIS PEOPLE THAT PRAYETH. 1. There may be infirmities enough in our very prayers to make them unacceptable. 2. But such is the mercy of our God, that He will wink at many infirmities in our devotions, and will not reject the prayer of an honest heart because of some weakness in the petitioner. It must be a greater cause than all this that makes God angry at our prayers. In general, it is sin (*John ix. 31; Ps. lxxvi. 18; Isa. i. 15*). God will have none of those petitions that are presented to Him with bloody hands. 3. In particular, it is the hypocrisy of sin, or the sin of hypocrisy, that makes God so angry with our prayers. (*T. Adams.*) **Obstructed prayer:**—I. IN WHAT SENSE GOD MAY BE SAID TO BE ANGRY WITH OUR PRAYERS. 1. When He denies our requests. 2. When He delays His answers. 3. When He bestows blessings under a different form, and in a different manner from what we expected. II. SOME OF THE CAUSES FOR THIS. 1. Our desires may be, and no doubt often are, improper. 2. Desires, not in themselves improper, may be unsuitable to us, such as would not, if granted, become our case or circumstances. 3. Prayers may be ill-timed. 4. They may be polluted and spoiled by sins. 5. They may be incompatible with the plans of infinite wisdom. III. IMPROVEMENT. 1. Instead of restraining prayer, this should make us more importunate. 2. Though we should not give over praying, we ought to give over sinning. 3. Acquiesce in all the Divine proceedings. 4. Be thankful that whatever favours God may see fit to withhold or suspend, He bestows far more than we have deserved. (*Essex Remembrancer.*)

**Ver. 13. The bear out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it.—People to be feared:**—By this homely but expressive figure, the

text sets forth the bad influences which in olden time broke in upon God's heritage, as with swine's foot trampling, and as with swine's snout uprooting the vineyards of prosperity. What was true then is true now. There have been enough trees of righteousness planted to overshadow the whole earth, had it not been for the axemen who hewed them down. I. I propose to point out to you those whom I consider to be **THE UPROOTING AND DEVOURING CLASSES OF SOCIETY.** 1. First, the public criminals. What is the fire that burns your store down compared with the conflagration which consumes your morals? What is the theft of the gold and silver from your money safe compared with the theft of your children's virtue? 2. Again: in this class of uprooting and devouring population are untrustworthy officials (Eccles. x. 16). It is a great calamity to a city when bad men get into public authority. Too great leniency to criminals is too great severity to society. 3. Again: among the uprooting and devouring classes in our midst, are the idle. When the French nobleman was asked why he kept busy when he had so large a property, he said: "I keep on engraving so I may not hang myself." I do not care who the man is, you cannot afford to be idle. It is from the idle classes that the criminal classes are made up. Character, like water, gets putrid if it stands still too long. 4. Again: among the uprooting classes I place the oppressed poor. While there is no excuse for criminality, even in oppression, I state it as a simple fact that much of the scoundrelism of the community is consequent upon ill-treatment. There are many men and women battered and bruised, and stung until the hour of despair has come, and they stand with the ferocity of a wild beast, which, pursued until it can run no longer, turns round, foaming and bleeding, to fight the hounds. I want you to know who are the uprooting classes of society. II. Because I want you to be more discriminating in your charities. Because I want your hearts open with generosity, and your hands open with charity. Because I want you to be made the sworn friends of all city evangelization, and all news-boys' lodging houses, and all Howard missions, and Children's Aid Societies. But more than that, I have preached the sermon because I thought in the contrast you would see how very kindly God had dealt with you, and I thought that you would go to-day to your comfortable homes, and sit at your well-filled tables, and look at the round faces of your children, and that then you would burst into tears at the review of God's goodness to you, and that you would go to your room and lock the door, and kneel down, and say: "O Lord, I have been an ingrate; make me Thy child." (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Ecclesiastical ruins:*—Whatever may have been the period when this psalm was written, it is a remarkable fact that it has been suitable for every age, from the days of the Judges until now, and been found expressive of the prayer and outlook of the people of the Lord. Failure has ever attended the ecclesiastical systems of earth. The theocracy which Joshua left was soon in ruins. The magnificent and well-ordered temple ritual organized by David and established by Solomon did not continue in its glory for one generation. Again and again it was restored by reforms, but grew worse and worse till the Lord Christ came. Then followed the Christian Church; but as that slowly rose into power it became a degenerate vine, and Catholicism grew to be such a curse that one-third of the Christian world rose in open protest, and the revolt of another third was stifled with blood. Then came the Reformed Churches. For a while they flourish, but full soon when the Master looks for fruit they bring forth wild grapes. The holiest souls in each to-day are crying, as they have through all the ages, "The forest bear rends it, and the wild beast feeds upon it." This continued failure is solemn and instructive. As yet every religious system has sooner or later degenerated. Its fence has been broken down and wayfarers have mocked. Man was not made for ecclesiastical organization, but ecclesiastical organization for man. The work of the Holy Spirit of God is upon separate souls, and sometimes ecclesiastical failure drives the soul into closer communion with the true God. Grand spirits, like Asaph, are developed amidst Church disorder. Let the psalmists and the prophets, let the heroes of successive reformations, Columba and Patrick, Wickliffe and Luther, Wesley and Whitfield bear testimony to this. (*J. H. Cooke.*)

**Ver. 17. Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand.**—*Christ made strong for God:*—Of Jesus only can it be unreservedly said, that He is the man of God's right hand, and that He hath made Him strong for Himself. Of all the terms in the passage, we may indeed say that they are peculiarly emphatic, and embody views of character and position which could only be realized in the person and work of Christ. I. **THE IMPORT OF THE DESIGNATIONS HEREIN GIVEN TO CHRIST.** 1. The

Man of God's right hand. Inasmuch as a seat at the right hand among men is esteemed the place of honour and power, so the act of elevating to dignity and authority by Jehovah is spoken of as a placing at His right hand; and accordingly Jesus is referred to as sitting at His right hand, or as described in one instance, "the right hand of power." This leads us at once to perceive that the personal and official dignity of the Saviour are explicitly alluded to in our text, in His being called "the Man of God's right hand." 2. The Son of Man. Whilst the title in question implies the doctrine of Christ's perfect manhood, it equally implies that He was more than a mere man. Differing hence in those respects from all the sons of men—though still a man in His creature existence—with much expressiveness could He be called "the Son of Man." II. THE APPOINTMENT OF JESUS TO THE OFFICE OF REDEEMER. Such appointment is expressly involved, if not explicitly stated, in the words, "whom Thou hast made strong for Thyself"; for God is thus represented as having chosen or designated "the Son of Man" to the office He thus holds. In this sense He "made Him" or appointed Him for Himself, to the office of Redeemer. III. THE PECULIAR FITNESS OF THE MAN OF GOD'S RIGHT HAND TO DISCHARGE THE DUTIES OF THE OFFICE TO WHICH HE WAS APPOINTED. It is impossible for any created intelligence to say what strength, or amount of spiritual power, was required on the part of Jesus—the Man of God's right hand—to accomplish the work of redemption; but it behoves us not the less to direct our attention as closely as possible to the specific difficulties we know He had to encounter, that we may arrive at a fair estimate of His endurance; and hence of the greatness of that love and mercy by which these were animated. IV. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THIS PETITION, requesting God to let His hand be upon the Man of His right hand. 1. A perception of danger. 2. A consciousness that man's help is not to be found in himself. 3. A willingness to rely for salvation on the means appointed by God, through the Son of His love. 4. Full persuasion of God's willingness to confer the blessing thus sought. (J. Allan.) *A prayer for the Messiah*.—1. In all ages the saints have greatly longed for their Saviour. Abraham saw His day afar off, and rejoiced that a child was to be born unto him, in whom all nations of the earth should be blessed. And the godly in this verse long for Him, and pray for His coming. 2. He is here shortly three ways described. (1) First, He is called the Son of God's right hand, for three causes: first, in respect of His marvellous generation in both His natures: in the one, without a father; in the other, without a mother. Secondly, He is called the Son of God's right hand, for that singular love and favour which the Father carries toward Him; for the right hand of God signifies His power, or His favour and love. It is true every Christian man is also the son of God's right hand; by nature his name is Ben-oni, the son of sorrow; but his father hath changed his name with his estate, called him Ben-jamin, the son of his right hand. But in a more special sense doth this title belong to the Lord Jesus. Thirdly, He is the Son of the Father's right hand in respect of his most perfect obedience and ready willingness to do in all things the will of His Father. (2) They call Him the Son of Man; He is in such sort the Son of God, that He is also the Son of Man, not begotten by man, yet formed, and conceived of the seed of man; He is the companion of Jehova; He is also, as Job calleth Him, our Goel or kinsman. Doubtless this is a strong bulwark of our faith, since we see that the Son of God is become the Son of Man, clothed with all the infirmities of our nature, except sin; since we see the God of glory humbled to the ignominy of the cross, why should we doubt that the sons of men shall also be made the sons of God, and that these vile bodies of ours shall be changed, and fashioned like unto the glorious body of Christ, especially since for no other end became He the Son of Man, but to make us the sons of God? (3) "Whom Thou hast made strong for Thyself;" this respecteth His threefold office, and His unction to them all (Isa. lxi. 1; John vi. 27; i. 14; iii. 34). Of all these it is plain how the Father is said to have made His Son strong for Himself; that is, He anointed Him, He sealed Him, He put His Spirit into Him, not in a measure, but communicated the fulness of grace to Him, that He might be strengthened to do unto us the office of a king, to deliver us from our enemies, or a prophet, to teach us the whole counsel of God, and of a priest, to offer Himself in a propitiatory sacrifice for us. In all these appeared His wonderful strength; when He suffered like a weak man, then He wrought like a valiant man. Every way the mighty strength of our strong Redeemer is to be admired, but specially His conquests by suffering, there did appear the weakness of God stronger than man; yea, then all those principalities, powers, and spiritual wickednesses that were opposite to Him. (Bp. Cowper.)

Ver. 18. **So will not we go back from Thee.**—*Apostasy from God*.—I. WHEREIN LIES THE TRUE NATURE OF APOSTASY FROM GOD. 1. Every failure and defect in the exercise of grace is not to be reckoned as an apostasy. The soul may faint and flag in the pursuit of God, and yet not be carried off so far as to steer a contrary course. 2. Every positive discovery of corruption in the actual commission of sin is not apostasy. A man may halt and slip, yea, he may stumble, and fall, and yet not go back. 3. Apostasy from God includes not only a deviation in the life, but an alienation of the heart (Ps. xcv. 10; Acts iii. 39; Ps. xlv. 18). 4. Apostasy from God is really an undoing of all the good which we have done. It is ending in the flesh, after we have begun in the Spirit; when our faces have been towards Zion, and our doings framed to turn to God; this is a revoking and disannulling of all, and driving towards hell. II. OF WHAT CONCERNMENT AND IMPORTANCE IT IS TO BELIEVERS TO BE SECURED AGAINST SUCH APOSTASY. 1. How much they are in danger of it, viz. if left alone, and abandoned to themselves. (1) Grace in us is very weak. (2) Corruption in us is very active (James i. 14). There is folly enough remaining in the wisest and best of men to prevent and mislead them. (3) The temptations which come upon us are very numerous. Every place, every condition, every employment, every relation is full of them. 2. How much danger they incur by apostasy, if they should be left to be guilty of it. (1) They must needs at the present lose all comfortable communion with God. (2) They can never see the kingdom of God, unless they remember from whence they are gone back, and return and do their first works. (3) If they come back to God again, it must be by very bitter and sorrowful repentance. III. HOW IS THE STRENGTH OF CHRIST OUR SECURITY IN THIS CASE? 1. Omnipotence belongs to Christ, on the account of His Godhead, and this shall be exerted on the behalf of them that believe, as there is occasion. 2. Christ was anointed with power, as Mediator, the improvement whereof is not to His own advantage, but the advantage of those that believe in Him (Isa. lxiii. 1; Luke i. 69). 3. Christ hath destroyed the power of the devil by a power superior to him. This is meant by His dividing the spoil with the strong (Isa. liii. 12). 4. Christ, by the matchless efficacy and merit of His blood, hath purchased for us confirming grace, and the perpetual presence of the Spirit with us. 5. Christ's prevailing intercession secures to us the needful, actual succours of grace, while we are here in this world. IV. WHY HATH GOD ORDERED IT SO, THAT BELIEVERS SHOULD BE SECURED AGAINST APOSTASY BY THE STRENGTH OF CHRIST? 1. This agrees with God's general design of heaping all the glory possible upon Jesus Christ. 2. This suits with God's design of grace in our eternal election; for we are chosen in Christ (Eph. i. 4). Therefore it is fit that we should be also preserved in Christ (Jude 1). 3. It is necessary that we should be secured against apostasy by the strength of Christ, because He is the First and the Last in our sanctification. 4. It is necessary that Christ should secure us in our way to glory, because it is His business to receive us into the possession of that glory at the close of all (John xiv. 3). 5. The wisdom of God is hereby seen in a most shameful baffling of the devil. 6. Believers could not have a better security than that whereof there hath been a visible experiment in the Person of Christ Himself. V. USES: 1. This lays open the ground of the devil's enmity against Christ, which hath been always most extreme and implacable. 2. It is inexcusable folly for any one in the world to lean to his own arm. 3. Make no promises of perseverance in your own strength. 4. Look to your faith as the principal grace, which contributes to your establishment (Isa. vii. 9). 5. Do not arrogate the honour of your standing in Christ, and abiding with Christ, in the least measure to yourselves. Let Christ have all the glory of your setting out, and holding out; let Him have it now, and let Him have it at the last. (T. Cruso.) *Backsliders and their guilt*.—I. POINT OUT THOSE WHO MAY BE JUSTLY CHARGED WITH GOING BACK FROM GOD. 1. Those who, having been once instructed in the Gospel, and having enjoyed the benefits of its means of grace, and continued for some time professors of Christianity, have afterwards renounced the faith through an evil heart of unbelief. The religion of Jesus presents insurmountable objections to fraud, deceit, or dishonesty—to the indulgence of sinful passions or of unlawful pleasures; yet they are attached to their worldly enjoyments, and, desirous of shaking off the restraints of religion, they begin by impugning particular doctrines, and imagine that the precepts of Christianity are not so strict, or its denunciations against sin so very positive as they seem, and fancy that they shall find some way of escaping punishment not commonly understood, some easier way than passing through the strait gate which Christ has pointed out. By degrees they go on to

deny religion altogether, and to magnify for themselves difficulties into serious objections. 2. Those who shrink from an open and fair avowal and confession of their faith. They are afraid lest they be accounted puritanical, singular, narrow-minded or superstitious; they dread the laugh, the ridicule, the contempt of weak and worthless mortals whom they cannot possibly esteem, more than the reproofs of a disapproving conscience, more than the awful displeasure of God. 3. There are many who, from pure fickleness and love of change, are carried about with every wind of doctrine; many have no root in themselves, and therefore become the deluded followers of every new instructor, of every arrogant pretender to superior knowledge or holiness. 4. There are also not a few who, influenced by worldly attachments and connections, accompany and follow their companions and friends, and separate themselves from others with whom they have had some trifling quarrel, or conceived something wrong. Those who thus act go in direct opposition to Christ's admonition. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God." 5. Those who act habitually inconsistent with their religious profession. A licentious and immoral Christian, a profane and ungodly believer, a false and deceitful follower of Jesus, a lover of God who is cruel or unjust to men, are characters which, by the very words of which they are expressed, involve a contradiction, and cannot by possibility have any existence. 6. They may be more especially charged with going back, who return to the wilful commission of sin, after having been engaged in the ordinances of devotion, namely, those professing Christians who have made public and solemn declaration of love, obedience, and attachment, to Jesus, and of a determination to act faithfully as Christians. II. LET ME ENTREAT YOU TO AVOID FOLLOWING THEIR EXAMPLE, because—1. It is weak and contemptible. In the most ordinary affairs of life can you ever have confidence, can you ever have esteem for the fickle, changeable, and irresolute? 2. It is very sinful to go back from God; for dishonesty and unfaithfulness to engagements are uniformly regarded as criminal, and are generally punished. Shall he, then, who vows, escape the vows he has made before heaven? III. LET ME ENTREAT YOU, THEN, TO FORM THE RESOLUTION HERE EXPRESSED BY THE PSALMIST, that you will not go back from God. Whatever your difficulties or trials, whether pleasures allure or dangers intimidate, it is yours to follow unmoved the great Captain of your salvation. Think of the recompense set before you—the crown of life set before him who shall be faithful unto death. (*D. Macfarlan, D.D.*) **Quicken us, and we will call upon Thy name.**—*The quickening necessary to prayer:*—Man requires spiritual quickening before he can pray. He must be quickened—I. With the sense of the DIVINE PRESENCE. Who can pray without the vivid realization of the Divine personality, the Divine presence, and the Divine entreatability? II. With the sense of MORAL OBLIGATION. Who will pray without feeling the strongest convictions of duty to love, serve, and honour the great God? III. With the sense of SPIRITUAL NEEDS. Sense of dependence underlies all prayer, all religion, all worship. This sense which, alas! is deadened within us, must be quickened before we can pray. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 19. **Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.**—*Divine greatness and Divine graciousness:*—I. DIVINE GREATNESS. "Lord God of hosts." What hosts are under Him? All the tribes of irrational life on this earth, all classes of men, all the stars of heaven, all the myriad systems of globes in space, all the innumerable armies of intelligent existences, both the happy and the miserable, He is Lord of all. How great is God! "To whom will ye liken Me? saith the Lord," etc. II. DIVINE GRACIOUSNESS. "Cause Thy face to shine." 1. The enjoyment of God's graciousness requires a Divine change on man's part. "Turn us." (1) Some do not see God at all. "God is not in all their thoughts." (2) Some see His frown. Their guilty conscience invests Him with terrible attributes and covers His face with the frowns of indignant justice. (3) Some see His shining face. "Thy face"—beaming face. Such are they whom He has turned to Him, by repentance towards Him and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 2. The enjoyment of God's graciousness involves the realization of man's highest hopes. "And we shall be saved." What is that? We know what it meant to the author of this poem; but it means infinitely more to all human souls. (*Homilist.*) *One antidote for many ills:*—This seems to be the only prayer the psalmist puts up in this psalm, as being of itself sufficient for the removal of all the ills over which he mourned. The reason is obvious. He had traced all the calamities to one source—"O Lord God, how long wilt Thou be angry?" and now

he seeks refreshing from one fountain. I. THE BENEFITS OF REVIVAL TO ANY CHURCH IN THE WORLD will be a lasting blessing. I do not mean that spurious kind of revival. I do not mean all that excitement attendant upon religion, which has brought men into a kind of spasmodic godliness, and translated them from sensible beings into such as could only rave about a religion they did not understand. I do not think that is a real and true revival. God's revivals, whilst they are attended with a great heat and warmth of piety, yet have with them knowledge as well as life, understanding as well as power. Among the blessings of the revival of Christians are—1. The salvation of sinners. For this we must, and will, cry, "O Lord our God, visit Thy plantation, and pour out again upon us Thy mighty Spirit." 2. The promotion of true love and unanimity in its midst. Oh, if God gives us revival, we shall have perfect unanimity. 3. The mouths of the enemies of the truth are stopped. 4. The promotion of the glory of God. If we would honour God by the Church, we must have a warm Church, a burning Church, loving the truths it holds, and carrying them out in the life. II. WHAT ARE THE MEANS OF REVIVAL? They are twofold. One is, "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts"; and the other is, "Cause Thy face to shine." There can be no revival without both of these. 1. "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts." (1) Your minister feels that he needs to be turned more thoroughly to the Lord his God. (2) But there are some of you who are workers in the Church. Large numbers are actively engaged for Christ. Now, what I exhort you to is this: cry unto God—"Turn us again, O God." You want more of the Spirit of God in all your labours. (3) "Turn us again" must be the prayer of all of you, not only in your religious labours, but in your daily lives. 2. The other means of revival is a precious one—"Cause Thy face to shine." Ah! we might ask of God, that we might all be devoted, all His servants, all prayerful, and all what we want to be; but it would never come without this second prayer being answered; and even if it did come without this, where would be the blessing? It is the causing of His face to shine on His Church that makes a Church flourish. A black cloud has swept over us, all we want is that the sun should come, and it shall sweep that cloud away. There have been direful things; but what of them, if God, our God, shall appear? III. Come, now, let me stir you all up, all of you who love the Saviour, to SEEK AFTER THIS REVIVAL. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

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PSALM LXXXI.

VERS. 1-16. Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.—A revelation of three great subjects:—I. TRUE WORSHIP (vers. 1-5). 1. True worship is the highest happiness, which consists in—(1) Right activity. Worthy of our nature. In harmony with all our faculties. (2) The highest love. (3) The sublimest hope. 2. True worship is a Divine ordinance, binding on all moral intelligences. (1) Right in itself. (2) Essential to their happiness. II. DIVINE KINDNESS (vers. 6-10). This appears in—1. Their deliverance from thralldom. God's mercy should inspire the soul with gratitude; and gratitude is an element of worship. 2. Answering their prayer. 3. Giving them direction. III. HUMAN FOOLISHNESS (vers. 11-16). By disobedience they lost—1. His superintending care. 2. Victory over enemies. 3. The choicest provisions. Disobedience to the Divine law is supreme folly. Sinners are fools. The Bible calls them so, and the experience of humanity proves them such. (Homilist.) *Exhortation to sing God's praise*:—If you begin praising God you are bound to go on. The work engrosses the heart. It deepens and broadens like a rolling river. Praise is something like an avalanche, which may begin with a snowflake on the mountain moved by the wing of a bird, but that flake binds others to it and becomes a rolling ball: this rolling ball gathers more snow about it till it is huge, immense; it crashes through a forest; it thunders down into the valley; it buries a village under its stupendous mass. Thus praise may begin with the tear of gratitude; anon the bosom swells with love; thankfulness rises to a song; it breaks forth into a shout; it mounts up to join the everlasting hallelujahs which surround the throne of God. What a mercy is it that God by His Spirit will give us greater capacities by and by than we have here! for if we continue to learn more and more



of the love of Christ we shall be driven to sore straits if confined within the narrow and drowsy framework of this mortal body. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

**Ver. 3. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon.**—*New-year resolutions:*—The savage and the child of civilization are alike in this, that they both draw their notions of time, and measure its lapse, by the movements of the heavenly bodies, thus fulfilling the primæval prophecy that the sun, moon and stars should be for ever the means of marking time. The easiest of measures, and the one which would make the deepest impression on man's mind, would be the circle of the moon's changes—the thin crescent, the half-circle, and the full orb. Next would be marked the course of the sun. This is most to be observed when the sun sets behind some cliff or precipitous range of rocks, and after a certain anniversary begins to daily sink behind the horizon beyond that point. The idea of a regular year would, when once suggested by the heavenly bodies, be aided in many lands by the altered appearance of summer and winter, and thus the prehistoric races found themselves supplied with sufficient chronology for their simple needs. But amongst those nations where the higher instincts of religion were felt there was a need for measuring the recurring periods of religious festivals. The Jewish people strictly observed the weekly festival of the Sabbath, which, by its very peculiarity of dividing time by seven days, seems to point at once to its Divine origin. But in keeping other festivals they were guided by a more complicated system to fix the feast of the Passover in connection with the Paschal Moon; and the other feasts, such as Pentecost, and that of Tabernacles, had a certain relation to the harvest season. In addition to these great feasts, it was ordained that sacrifices and offerings should be made in the Temple on the occasion of each new moon. It was also usual to summon worshippers to remember this duty by the sound of the silver trumpets echoing through the air, and blown by the sons of Aaron. In addition to the festivals observed at each new moon, there was a special day of solemn observation called the Feast of Trumpets, on the first new moon of the first month of the year—in fact, on what answered to our New Year's Day. This day was fixed with the Jews in September, and with the mediæval Christians it was observed on the 25th of March, and by modern usage on the 1st of January. It is of little importance on what particular day the year begins. The essence of the matter is that we are entering on a new cycle of days—on a new course of the earth's journeying round its great central sun; that another milestone on the road of life is passed; that another division of our mortal existence is entered on. The words of the text seem to call on the Priesthood of the magnificent Temple of Solomon to take up their trumpets and rouse the people to the great duties of offering sacrifice and acknowledging God. There is no other instrument of music that has such a wonderful power of rousing and exhilarating the soul as the trumpet. Its shrill, wild, exulting tones have ever been valued in martial music, and that person's feelings must indeed be cold and stagnant whose enthusiasm is not awakened by the clarion's sound. When the trumpet sounds the warrior ought to prepare himself for war. The imagery of the Christian conflict has lost its power by familiar usage, but it represents a great truth—the reality and force of temptation. Each new year will bring its temptations and difficulties. We should prepare to meet them by fresh resolves and more earnest prayers. (*J. W. Hardman, LL.D.*) *The new moon:*—The Jews thought a good deal of the new moon. When it first appeared they took note of it at once. Indeed, six times in the year they attached such importance to the appearance of the new moon that if any one saw it, and thought he was among the first to see it, he was expected to go to Jerusalem at once and state the fact to the Sanhedrim, who sat in the "Hall of Polished Stones" to receive the information. Those who went were carefully examined and cross-examined. If they had only seen the moon through a cloud, or anything like glass, or had only seen it reflected in water, their testimony could not be accepted. It was necessary that they should see it directly and clearly in the heavens above them. If no one saw the moon before the thirtieth day there was no special note taken of the fact, because they generally reckoned the month to be thirty days long, but if the new moon appeared on the 29th day of the month, special notice was taken of it, and a fire was lit upon the summit of Mount Olivet; then men who were on the watch on other summits kindled their fires, too, in order to show that they had noted the signal, and also in order to give the signal to those on other mountain tops; and thus from one end of the land to the other it was soon known that the new moon had appeared

before the thirtieth day. The Jews rejoiced exceedingly at the appearance of every new moon. It was a new beginning, and the Jews attached a great deal of importance to beginnings—the first fruits of the harvest, the oldest child in the family, etc. They consecrated the first of everything to God, and by so doing they felt they were consecrating all the rest. The first sheaves of harvest were consecrated for the whole harvest. They gave the first to God as an acknowledgment of His right to all the rest. And so with regard to the months, they consecrated each month to God, by specially consecrating the first day of the month. Now, we may well follow their example in presenting the first of everything to God. I should like you to feel that you ought to give the beginning of your life to God as the Jews gave the first day of every month specially to Him. It is wonderful what is done by giving the beginning: so much depends upon how we begin. If every little boy here would give his heart to the Lord Jesus just now at the beginning of life, oh, what a blessing it would be! (D. Davies.)

**Ver. 5. Where I heard a language that I understood not.**—*Ignorance of the language of a community*:—It is by no means uncommon for men to be thrown into a community of whose language they are entirely ignorant. Now, ignorance of the language of others is of two kinds, intellectual and moral. I. **INTELLECTUAL.** By this we mean entire unacquaintance with the sounds, construction, and laws of the language. This kind of ignorance reminds us of two things. 1. An abnormal condition of human society. It is natural to suppose that He who made us all of one flesh, endowed us all with social natures, and united us all to each other with tender relationships, such as parents, children, brethren, would have furnished us with a language which all could understand, and through which we could all receive and communicate the thoughts and feelings of each other. Instead of this, hundreds of languages abound, thus creating social divisions amongst the race almost innumerable. Now the Bible directs us to an event which shows that this variety of language is not an original state of things (Gen. xi. 1-9). 2. An enormous social inconvenience. The race, which should have been one harmonious whole, is split, through these many languages, into hostile sections, and become inaccessible to one another. "Languages shall cease." II. **MORAL.** Through the moral dissimilarity that exists amongst men it often happens that those who speak the very same language misunderstand one another. Put a pure Christly-minded man into the society of gamblers, mercantile speculators, and daring infidels, and he will say, "I heard a language that I understood not." The words honour, virtue, courage, love, justice, liberty, pleasure, happiness, which he might hear in these circles will not convey to him the ideas which they employed them to express. Again: imagine a thoroughly worldly and corrupt spirit transported into the heavenly regions, where all employ the language in which he was brought up, his vernacular, would he understand it? No; if he returned, he would say, "I heard a language that I understood not." Thus, wherever we go, we are constantly hearing a language we understand not. The lesson is—1. We must get Christ's Spirit in order to understand His words. We cannot reach their deep, fathomless meaning without it. 2. That we should be thankful to the great Father for not making our destiny to depend upon the right interpretation of a language. "He that believeth on me," etc. (*Homilist*.)

**Ver. 7. I answered thee in the secret place of thunder.**—*Answers to prayer often come mysteriously*:—God has a thousand "secret" ways of granting our requests. I. He may do it by a **WAVE OF AIR**. A man is the subject of a painful disease, that seems progressing to the utter extinction of his life; for the sake of others depending on him, he implores his Maker to restore him. A fresh breeze from heaven is let into his chamber, it not only sweeps his foul room, but heaves his lungs with a new force, oxygenizes his blood, and quickens his pulses with a new vitality. Wave after wave continues to play around him until he is able to rise from his couch and go into the open fields. God has answered him from "the secret place of thunder." II. He may do it by the **BIRTH OF A THOUGHT**. The good man may be enfolded in darkness, wrapped in perplexities, so utterly embarrassed by his circumstances that he knows not what step to take next. He cries to Heaven for guidance; all worldly resources have failed. A new thought springs up in his mind, solves his problems, scatters his darkness, removes his embarrassments, reveals a path to enter, safe and sunny, full of promise. He pursues it, and all is right. His prayer is answered from "the

secret place of thunder." III. He may do it by the VISIT OF A FRIEND. As he talks, the burden of sorrow falls from his heart, and he breathes once more the free air of hope. His prayer has been answered from "the secret place of thunder." IV. He may do it by a VERSE OF SCRIPTURE. (*Homilist.*) *The place of thunder:*—As there is a secret place of natural thunder, there is a secret place of moral thunder. In other words, the religious power that you see abroad in the Church and in the world has a hiding-place, and in many cases it is never discovered at all. I will use a similitude. Many years ago there was a large church. It was characterized by strange and unaccountable conversions. There were no great revivals, but individual cases of spiritual arrest and transformation. A young man sat in one of the front pews. He was a graduate of Yale, brilliant and dissolute. Everybody knew him and liked him for his geniality, but deplored his moral errantry. To please his parents he was every Sabbath morning in church. One day there was a ringing of the door-bell of the pastor of that church, and that young man, overwhelmed with repentance, implored prayer and advice, and passed into complete reformation of heart and life. All the neighbourhood was astonished, and asked, "Why was this?" His father and mother had said nothing to him about his soul's welfare. In the course of two years, though there was no general awakening in that church, many such isolated cases of unexpected and unaccountable conversions took place. The very people whom no one thought would be affected by such considerations were converted. The pastor and the officers of the church were on the look-out for the solution of this religious phenomenon. "Where is it," they said, "and who is it, and what is it?" At last the discovery was made and all was explained. A poor old Christian woman standing in the vestibule of the church one Sunday morning, trying to get her breath again before she went up-stairs to the gallery, heard the inquiry and told the secret. For years she had been in the habit of concentrating all her prayers for particular persons in that church. She would see some man or some woman present, and, though she might not know the person's name, she would pray for that person until he or she was converted to God. All her prayers were for that one person—just that one. She waited and waited for communion days to see when the candidates for membership stood up whether her prayers had been effectual. It turned out that these marvellous instances of conversion were the result of that old woman's prayers as she sat in the gallery Sabbath by Sabbath, bent and wizened and poor and unnoticed. That was the secret place of the thunder. The day will come—God hasten it!—when people will find out the velocity, the majesty, the multipotence of prayer. O ye who are wasting your breath and wasting your brains and wasting your nerves and wasting your lungs wishing for this good and that good for the Church and the world, why do you not go into the secret place of thunder? "But," says some one, "that is a beautiful theory, yet it does not work in my case, for I am in a cloud of trouble or a cloud of sickness or a cloud of persecution or a cloud of poverty or a cloud of bereavement or a cloud of perplexity." How glad I am that you told me that. That is exactly the place to which my text refers. It was from a cloud that God answered Israel—the cloud over the chasm cut through the Red Sea—the cloud that was light to the Israelites and darkness to the Egyptians. It was from a cloud, a tremendous cloud, that God made reply. It was a cloud that was the secret place of thunder. So you cannot get away from the consolation of my text by talking that way. Let all the people under a cloud hear it. "I answered thee in the secret place of thunder." (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 10. *Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.*—*The more morally hungry, the better fed:*—I. GOOD MEN ARE THE SUBJECTS OF MORAL HUNGER—a craving for the chief good, hungering and thirsting after righteousness. This implies—1. Health. The body without appetite for food is diseased; the intellect without appetite for truth is diseased; and the soul without appetite for righteousness is diseased. 2. Provision. The existence of any native desire, physical, intellectual, or moral, implies a corresponding object. Goodness, like the air we breathe, is ever at hand; it encompasses our path. If we really desire it, we shall have it. II. THE MORE HUNGRY, THE BETTER FED. "Open thy mouth wide," etc. The Great Father wishes His children to have the profoundest cravings, the largest expectations; for He has an infinity of blessings which it is His happiness to bestow. The more you desire from Him, the more you shall have.

(Homilist.) *Motives to enlarged prayer*:—I. EXPLAIN THE EXHORTATION. It implies—1. Warmth and fervency in prayer. 2. A holy fluency and copiousness of expression, so as to order our cause before Him, and fill our mouths with arguments. 3. Enlarged hope and expectation. II. CONSIDER THE IMPORT OF THE PROMISE. 1. If we open our mouths to God in prayer, He will fill them more and more with suitable petitions and arguments. 2. God will fill the mouth with abundant thanksgivings. 3. We shall be filled with those blessings we pray for, if they are calculated to promote our real good and the glory of God. III. NOTICE THE LIMITATIONS with which the promise requires to be understood. 1. Though God answers prayer, yet He will do it in His own time, and not always when we expect it. 2. He seldom answers prayer in the manner we expect. 3. He sometimes answers prayer gradually, and not all at once. 4. It is not our performance of duty, but the inviolable faithfulness of God that binds Him to the fulfilment of His promises. IV. INFERENCES. 1. It is no wonder that many continue in a destitute and hopeless state: they live without prayer, and so without supplies of mercy. 2. If God thus fills the souls of unnumbered millions, how full must He Himself be! (B. Beddome, M.A.) *An invitation to prayer*:—I. THE BASIS OF THE INVITATION. 1. "I am the Lord"—the Lord of the whole earth. 2. I am "thy God"—thy covenant God. 3. I "brought thee out of the land of Egypt." He appeals to what He has already done on our behalf. II. THE INVITATION: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." The invitation consists of an instruction and a promise: the instruction is, "Open thy mouth wide"; the promise is, "I will fill it." 1. The instruction instructs us in two things—the manner of prayer and the measures of prayer. The manner of prayer is this—"Open thy mouth." The measure of prayer is this—"Open thy mouth wide." 2. The promise refers to both temporal and spiritual blessings. (P. Prescott.) *God's gracious call and precious promise*:—I. WHAT IT IS TO OPEN THE MOUTH OF THE SOUL WIDE TO CHRIST. 1. A sight of wants. 2. A sense of need. 3. A holy dissatisfaction with all things beside Christ. 4. The soul's removing its desires from off vanities, and fixing them on Christ for satisfaction. 5. An assumed expectation of salvation from Christ. 6. A hearty willingness to receive Christ as He offers Himself in the Gospel. II. SHOW HOW CHRIST FILLS THE SOUL SO AS NO OTHER CAN DO. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." This promise imports—1. Such a suitableness in Him to the necessities of the soul, as is to be found in no other. 2. A sufficiency in Christ for all needs. 3. A communication of this suitable sufficiency unto that soul which opens its mouth wide to receive it. (1) Christ gives Himself to that soul, so that such an one might say (Song ii. 16). (2) Christ gives them all good with Himself (Rom. viii. 32; Ps. lxxxiv. 11). 4. The soul's satisfaction upon that communication. When all the cisterns are dried up, the believer has enough. He can rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of his salvation (Hab. iii. 17). He can say also with Paul (Phil. iv. 18), "I am full"; and no wonder, for the soul having Christ, has—(1) A fulness of merit to look to (1 John i. 7). (2) A fulness of spirit in Christ to take away the power of sin (Rev. iii. 1). (3) A fulness of grace in Him, lodged in Him as the common storehouse of all the saints (John i. 16; 1 Cor. i. 30). (T. Boston, D.D.) *Open thy mouth wide*:—I. THE ONLY SOURCE OF FULL SATISFACTION FOR HUMAN LIFE. 1. There is a recognition here of the vastness of human need. "Open thy mouth wide." Man has—and this is one of the evidences of his greatness—a vast capacity for desire. The mouth of desire in man is not satisfied though all the treasures of the earth be poured into it. 2. The words imply that man's vastest desires are not awakened until they are consciously turned God-ward. Israel will open its mouth "wider" if it turn to God than if it forsake Him. There is enough of desire for God in every man to make this world unsatisfying, but in the worldling this desire is undeveloped and shrivelled. The life that is fixed in God expands, and its desires become richer and vaster. God fills us, not by lessening our desires, but by enriching them. 3. The words imply that nothing less than personal union with God can satisfy the life. "I will fill it." II. THE CONDITION OF RECEIVING FROM GOD. "Open thy mouth wide." Probably the figure is taken from the feeding of young birds in the nest by the parent bird. The picture is one of simple dependence and trust. Proud self-sufficiency shuts out the fulness of God. The first step to strength is to realize our own helplessness, simply to "open the mouth wide," that God may fill it. III. THE MEASURE OF RECEIVING. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" According to the capacity for

reception, so is the gift. We have to recognize natural differences of capacity. As an eagle differs from smaller birds, so men differ from men. All are not, and cannot be, Isaiahs and Pauls. But, on the other hand, a man's receptive power may have its development hindered by his own worldliness or negligence. His spiritual desires may be narrower than they ought to be. Faith, love, and hope grow larger through service. (*J. Thomas, M.A.*) *Encouragements to prayer*:—In our text we have God coming very near to His people, and coming near them to encourage them to come nearer to Him. We have the Lord speaking to them, that they may speak to Him. He opens His mouth to them, that they may open their mouths to Him. I. GOD ENCOURAGING HIS PEOPLE by saying, "Open thy mouth wide." 1. I suppose that the Lord means by this exhortation, first of all, to help us to get rid of the paralyzing influence of fear. A man, in the presence of one whom he dreads, cannot speak boldly; and if he has been guilty of some great crime, and stands before one whom he regards as his judge, he is like the man in our Lord's parable, "speechless." A man on his knees, conscious of his sin, fearing the justice of God, would very naturally be unable to speak; and to encourage him God says, "Open thy mouth; be not afraid." 2. Next, "Open thy mouth wide"; that is, speak freely in prayer to God, be not hampered in thy pleading. I have known children of God who have felt a terrible awe in the presence of the Lord. We want freedom, and liberty of access to God, when we come before the mercy-seat; and the Lord therefore encourages His people to break loose from all their shackles when He says, "Open thy mouth wide." 3. It must also mean, ask great things: "Open thy mouth wide." The greater the thing that you ask, the more sure you are to have it. With men it is, usually, the smaller the favour you crave, the more likely you are to obtain it; but with God it is the other way. There is nothing greater to ask for than Christ, and thou mayest have Christ for the asking, for God has already given Him to all who believe. 4. I think that it also means that we are to feel intense desires: "Open thy mouth." Whenever a man speaks with very great earnestness, he opens his mouth widely. 5. Exercise a great expectancy. Consider—(1) God's greatness. (2) His goodness. (3) The channel by which mercies come to thee: Christ Jesus thy Lord. (4) That the Holy Spirit is the Author of true prayer. (5) The greatness of thy wants. (6) God's exceeding great and precious promises. II. OBSERVE GOD USING TWO GREAT ARGUMENTS. "Open thy mouth wide"—I. Because of what God has done. Child of God, this text belongs peculiarly to you. "I am Jehovah, thy God." He has revealed Himself to thee; He has chosen thee, and thou hast chosen Him. Now, canst thou not open thy mouth wide to thine own God, to Jehovah, the great "I am" the boundless, the infinite, the Almighty God, canst thou not speak freely to Him? And then it is added, "I am Jehovah, thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt." Now, that is the greatest thing that God could do for His people, and, if He has done that, will He not do the lesser things? 2. Because of what God will do. "I will fill it." The story goes that the Shah of Persia, a strange man altogether, on one occasion said to a person who had pleased him very greatly, "Open your mouth," and when he had opened his mouth, the Shah began to fill it up with diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and all sorts of precious stones. I feel morally certain that the man opened his mouth wide. Would not you do the same if you had such an opportunity? Now, the Lord says to each of His own people, whom He has so highly favoured, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Suppose you open your mouth wide in prayer. "I cannot," says one. Well, open your mouth, and God will fill it with prayer; and then, when you have prayed the prayer that He has given you, He will fill it with answers. God gives prayer as well as the answer to prayer. Only open your mouth, and, as it were, make a vacuum for God to fill. God loves to look for emptiness where He may stow away His grace. When you have done that, then open your mouth with praise. The praise of God is something like Mr. Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress.' He began to write, he says, and he does not know how he wrote so much; but he quaintly says, "As I pulled, it came"; and you will find it is so with the praise of God. Praise Him, and you will praise Him. If you do not praise Him, you never will praise Him. If you do not begin, you will never keep on; but once open the sluices of gratitude, and the streams will flow more and more copiously every hour. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Opening the mouth*:—I. THE EXHORTATION. 1. Labour after a great sense of

need. You are weakness itself, and emptiness itself, and a mass of sin and misery, apart from God your Father, and Christ your Redeemer, and the Spirit the indweller; and when you know this, then you will open your mouth wide. 2. Seek after an intense and vehement desire. "He that prays to God without fervour asks to be denied." 3. Ask for large things, remembering the greatness and goodness of God, and the great pleas you have to urge when you come before Him. 4. Ask for enlarged capacities. If we had more room for the Lord's gifts, we should receive more. II. THE PROMISE. "I will fill it." You might expect such a promise as that. You could not think it possible for the Lord to say, "Open your mouths for nothing." It would not be according to His usual way of procedure. He does not set His servants praying and then say somewhere behind their backs, "they shall seek My face in vain." Tantalus belongs to the heathen mythology, not to the Christian's experience. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." 1. It is a promise only made to those who do open their mouths wide. 2. It is a promise given by One who can fulfil it, and will. How? (1) With prayers. (2) With the actual blessings. (3) With praises. (*Ibid.*) *Affluence and receptivity*.—This is a figurative expression, and it indicates that man is a creature of vast spiritual capacity. Men are rarely in full consciousness of that deep, strong, original aptitude of human nature for the things of God. For sin has so deeply impaired our nature, that atrophy and nausea have fallen upon our spiritual faculties, and our moral perceptions have become gross and insensible. But the faculties are in us. The ideas of God and duty, the fitness for responsibility, the spring of the inner nature towards immortal life, the sentiment of love, with its boundless range—these inhere in the soul of every man. They may lie dormant in the inner caves of our personal existence, unused and encrusted by guilt, but they are integral qualities. Nothing—not guilt, not neglect, not the insane denial of these Divine qualities, not even the suicide's hand, can cast out of our being these exalted powers and prerogatives. There is a section of our being "which cannot, but by annihilating, die." It is a majestic fact, and it brings with it the most awful responsibility that we are beings of a constitution akin to the Divine, and that we shall live for ever! Now, the reference of the text, in its first section, is to this quality of our nature. When God says, "Open thy mouth wide," He refers to an actual capacity in us, latent though it be, which, quickened by the Spirit, may reach up to heaven in lofty aspirations, and take in all the things of God. So, too, the other portion of the text, for it has two terms: "open thy mouth wide," is one, and "I will fill it," the other. The promise here given us is equally as significant with regard to our nature as is the command. It is a declaration that when the immortal demands of our inner being are once quickened into life, that there is but one Being in the universe who can answer and supply them. Hence the entreaty, "Open thy mouth wide," etc., because God only can fill these infinite needs of the immortal soul. What, then, is the reach you are going to make in Divine holiness? How far will you stretch forth in godly desires and aspirations? First of all, if you would attain to a lofty, grand pre-eminence of spiritual growth, fix it in your minds to be men and women of a high order of morals. Not as though the advice be given to begin with morality. God forbid! The beginning of all true soul-life is in the spiritual; but, assuming that you are spiritual, that you have repented and believed, and that, having entered upon the Christian life, led by the Spirit of grace, you are anxious to reach the stature of perfect men in Christ. Lay the foundations of your piety deep in the purest morals! But observe, next, that another stretch of the soul to high spiritual excellence is to be attained by the exercise of duty, that is, the doing of good works. Practical goodness bears somewhat the same relation to eminent piety that husbandry does to the production of good crops, or the care of the gardener to the growth of beautiful flowers. It is, under God, the actual uplifting of the soul from one degree of holiness to another. It is the cultivation of the Christian graces; and, observe, all true cultivation tends to growth and expansion. By doing good to others for Christ's sake, we expand our own being; we multiply the force of our sympathies and affections; we reduplicate the power of our loving energy. And so it will follow that obedience to the text will show itself, in the purposed rise of the soul to a high spirituality. This topic is left for the last, because it is the most important; it is the very base of all spiritual acquisition. In the domain of the spirit, spiritual things, spiritual aims, spiritual efforts, spiritual longings, are the foremost of all things. So much, then, for the ideal or principle descriptive of

what is spiritual life. And now we can turn to the evidence that is to be found in ourselves that we have this principle implanted in us. That evidence discovers itself in those characteristic spiritual acts of the soul, into which, as sons of God, the saints are led by the Spirit of God. And here the whole field of saintly life lies spread out before us, so that we cannot err. All of its rich productiveness is the fruit of the Spirit. It brings to our sight, in exceeding brilliancy, the faith and prayerful mightiness of Abraham; the calm meditateness of Isaac; the crystal purity of Joseph; the serene and unspotted godliness of Samuel; the burning flames of Elijah; the calm constancy of David; the stern self-sacrifice and zealous fervour of the Baptist; the fiery ardour of holy Paul; the loveliness of St. John the Divine. The sum of what has been advanced may be stated as enforcing these two lessons. 1. That you must avoid as though it were death, the idea of spiritual finality, in the attainments of grace. Never think you have enough of God and God's Spirit. Never be satisfied with any successes you have reached in holiness. Never pause in your career, saying to the deceived and languid soul, "Rest and be thankful." But press on ever to higher, nobler, and more spiritual heights. 2. That there is a law of progress implanted in our nature, which has no limitation. No man here can tell how high he can go in excellence—how far he can reach in godly purity. In the very idea of immortality is implied somewhat that is limitless and unconfined; and so we can by God's grace stretch out further and further, until we are lost in God Himself. O grand and noble acquisition! O blessed and heavenly consummation! (A. Crummell, D.D.)

Vers. 11, 12. **My people would not hearken to My voice, and Israel would none of me: so I gave them up.**—*Danger of presuming on God's mercy:*—It is matter of painful observation, that very often when people enter on wrong courses, they think they shall be able to stop when they please. They don't pretend to be very good, and they don't mean to be very bad. Something between both contents them; and this they think is as much as can be expected of them, especially when vice and wickedness prevail in the degree they do. The root of this error, if we examine, seems to be want of love to God the Author of all good. Because if a person really loved God, or at least really desired to love Him, however he might fall short of accomplishing this his wish; yet at least he would not endure to do anything wilfully, which he might think would be displeasing to his heavenly Father, Redeemer, and Guide the supreme object of his affections. There is nothing about which we ought to be so watchful and suspicious of ourselves as of want of love, true and devoted love, to Almighty God. There are two great reasons why we should be thus watchful of ourselves in this respect. The one, because this Divine charity or love is the very life and soul of true religion: the other, because we are so peculiarly ready to deceive ourselves in our views of this; perhaps more than any other of the obligations of the Gospel. Every Christian is by his profession one of God's people—of His chosen Israel. If he labours and prays constantly to live up to this his high profession, then the Holy Spirit leads him as it were by the hand from grace to grace, till mortality be swallowed up of life. In God's dealings with such an one, the ancient and just rule is eminently fulfilled (Matt. xiii. 12). If, on the other hand, this same Christian, having it in his power to go wrong, does go wrong—neglects duties which he knows are agreeable to his Lord's will, and allows himself in thoughts, words, and actions which he knows must displease Him; then does the Holy Spirit after long forbearance withdraw His gracious aid, and leave us to go our own way, as we will not go His. There is not, perhaps, in all Scripture a more awful, startling, alarming passage than this; because it warns us so plainly, that our notion of keeping up a tolerable degree of goodness, and staying at a certain point, not intending to be very good, and resolving at the same time not to be very bad: that these kind of notions are vain and presumptuous, and, as we may with reason fear, will prove at last the ruin of many souls for whom Christ died. Can we then venture to stand trifling upon the edge of such a precipice? Are we to wait till the world grows better before we grow better? Are we sure that because we feel comfortable, therefore we are safe? If not, what are we trusting to? Our heavenly Father has in mercy warned us of our danger. He has warned us that even if we are His peculiar people, His chosen Israel, yet if we obey not His voice, He will give us up. (*Plain Sermons by Contributors to the "Tracts for the Times."*) *The day of grace:*—I. IT IS MATTER OF JUST COMPLAINT AND REPROACH FOR ANY PEOPLE OR PERSON NOT TO HEARKEN TO

THE VOICE OF GOD. 1. What it is not to hearken to the voice of God (Jer. vii. 23, 28). (1) His instructing and informing voice. That which discovers the nature of God, and our duty. (2) His commanding voice, unto the authority whereof we all owe utmost obedience and subjection. 2. How this appears to be such just matter of complaint from God, and reproach unto us, who are guilty of it. (1) Whose voice it is you refuse to hearken to (Heb. i. 2). (2) What kind of voice it is. How gentle, obliging, beneficent, condescending. (3) Who they are that are said to refuse to hearken to the voice of God. "My people Israel." Christians succeed in their privileges, not only as domestic servants, but as children, visibly related to God, as our Father by the covenant of baptism. And shall not children receive the instruction of a parent? II. FOR WILFUL SINNERS TO BE GIVEN UP TO THEIR OWN HEARTS' LUSTS, AND TO BE LEFT OF GOD TO WALK IN THEIR OWN COUNSELS, IS ONE OF THE MOST TREMENDOUS JUDGMENTS THAT CAN BE THREATENED OR INFLICTED IN THIS WORLD. 1. What it is for God to give up any to their own hearts' lusts. (1) Such persons are cast out of God's special protection and care, and so are exposed to wander and go astray, and so are more easily assaulted and overcome by the devil, who seeketh whom he may destroy. (2) They are left of God under the dominion and power and tyranny of their own lusts. 2. The severity and terror of this judgment (Prov. i. 23; Heb. x. 26; Luke xix. 41, 42). (1) Take heed not to pass a definitive sentence against yourselves concerning the state of your own souls as to this judgment. (2) Apprehend the danger of approaching to it if you are under any ill symptoms of that kind, and beware of those things that have a tendency to so sad a doom. (3) Diligently improve the means you are yet under by the warnings of the Word, convictions of conscience, and the motions of the Divine Spirit, that you may effectually prevent it. That as it is not your case for the present it never may be so. 3. By what steps or degrees God doth usually proceed in inflicting such a judgment as this. (1) When God forbears to afflict, and to restrain men from sin, by the rod of correction and the rebukes of His providence; or doth not sanctify such rebukes for their reformation. (2) By taking away the external means of knowledge and grace, or otherwise disposing of persons so as they cannot enjoy such seasons (Acts xix. 9). (3) God is said to pour upon men a spirit of slumber and deep sleep, to suffer them to harden their hearts, and stupefy their own consciences the more by everything they enjoy; so that though the external means be continued, yet none of the Divine messages will be received, nor the most useful ministry do them any good: nor the providential goodness of God lead them to repentance. Inferences:—1. How much to be pitied is the ignorance and folly of sinners that are afraid of any other calamity more than this. 2. How unreasonable is the displeasure and anger of men at the sharpest methods of Divine grace that would bring them to repentance. 3. How wretched and dangerous is their mistake who think their case good because their consciences now trouble them no more. (*John Shower.*) *The groundless doubts and mistaken apprehensions of some as to their being finally forsaken and left of God:*—1. To be under very great darkness, doubts, and fears, so as to create much trouble and torment to yourselves, will not of itself conclude your case desperate, and your souls finally forsaken. There are many reasons for soul trouble. Your own doubts and fears will not prove that you are given over, but rather the contrary. For—2. If you are given up to your own heart's lust, how is it that you thus mourn and grieve at the apprehension and fear of it? 3. Are you not resolved to hold on your fight and warfare against sin? To continue and maintain your conflict, notwithstanding all your doubts and all your complaints? You may sometimes take being tempted for being overcome. 4. You say you cannot weep and mourn and express your repentance as formerly, and as some others you know do; yet consider that it is the hatred of sin, and watchfulness against it, that is the truest sign of repentance and godly sorrow. 5. You may be sure that if you find your hearts penitent, and willing to return to Him, that it doth not reach you: it is not your case. 6. You that thus complain and fear, have you not many of the fruits of the Spirit visible and manifest in you? Therefore the Spirit of Christ hath not left you; God hath not given you over. 7. As to the complaint of a hard heart, remember it is the impenitent and the unpersuadable heart that is the only hard heart you need to fear. 8. That sight of sin, and sense of the burthen of corruption, which you complain of, as the ground of your fear, will argue the direct contrary to what you allege it for. 9. Though you cannot say so much as to present sense of your hatred of sin and loathing of it as you desire, yet examine yourselves as to the sins of



others, and what sense you have of the dishonour of God by them. 10. But I do not grow, I rather wax worse, will some say. The promises of growth and faithfulness are not absolute, but depend on the improvement of grace received, and the performance of many duties, with great watchfulness and diligence in our whole Christian course. 11. Moreover, consider there may be much more of blame and faultiness, of guilt and sin, in your unbelieving objections and despondency than you are aware of. Therefore while you complain of sin, take heed you do not increase and add to your sin by disobeying the command of God to believe and hope. 12. Lay this as a foundation truth and keep it, That you can never be more willing to come to Christ than He is to receive you. 13. As to the doubt concerning the sin against the Holy Ghost, I think such as make that objection do not well understand wherein it lies. Read Matt. xii. throughout, and Mark iii. 28, 30. Be sure none who own the Gospel to be true, and Christ to be the Saviour of fallen sinners, are guilty of that sin, though they may make dangerous approaches to it. Much less are they guilty of it who fear the guilt of this sin. 14. I do now tender you the grace and salvation purchased by Christ in His name. If now you are heartily willing to accept it, the case is determined: and determined in the best manner that can be. (*Ibid.*) **So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.**—*Deliverance to a man's own lust involves the greatest ruin:—I. MAN ABANDONED BY HIS MAKER.*

1. This abandonment must be very painful to the loving Father. Can there be a greater sorrow in the world than that of the human father who feels bound to shut his door against his own son and give him up? But what is a father's love to the love of God? 2. This abandonment must be very terrible to man. If the mother abandons her helpless infant, its condition is sad indeed; but a thousand times indeed sadder is the condition of a man whom God has abandoned. He is in a worse condition than the man in the furious and unabating tempest without a rudder or a chart, destined to sink into the fathomless abyss of ruin. II. Man abandoned by his Maker to his own LUSTS. 1. Such an abandonment man's conscience must approve of. He has always said, Self is everything to me, nearer than the universe or God. Very well, says God, you have yourself; I leave you with yourself. 2. Such an abandonment is inexpressibly terrible. "Unto their own hearts' lust." Let a man be given up to any lust—say avarice, drunkenness, sensuality, revenge, envy—and he is given up to the worst hell you can conceive of. (*Homilist.*) *Man Divinely abandoned to his lusts:—I.* It is an abandonment to a life most DEGRADING. In it the man sinks into a brute. The brutal appetites govern him; the brutal pleasures engross his power and absorb his time. II. It is an abandonment to a life MORALLY ABHORRENT. Is there a more loathsome spectacle in the universe to the rational eye of moral purity than that of a being having the moral attributes, relations, and form of a man living the mere life of a brute? III. It is an abandonment to a life OF RUIN. 1. The law of its enjoyments is decrease. The animal pleasures of men, unlike their intellectual and spiritual, decrease in their power of delectation by repetition. Age deadens the nerves, and "desire faileth," and gradually the once delicious palls on the soul. It gradually brings on the awful, crushing ennui. 2. The continuation of its enjoyments is necessarily short. Disease and death terminate them. 3. The memory of its enjoyments must become morally painful—"Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime," etc. (*Ibid.*) *The case of those who are given up to their own hearts' lusts:—1.* The first dangerous symptom is security, or a false, ungrounded peace of conscience. This is frequently the prologue and forerunner of judicial hardening. It is often a part of it and an evidence of it. 2. Another symptom of this judgment, or dangerous approach unto it, is when the ministry of the Word and Gospel of Christ becomes a tasteless, insipid, ineffectual thing; not attended with any such spiritual impressions as formerly. 3. When the Spirit of Grace gives over striving with the souls of men. This is a most dangerous case: for, except He return, they are irrecoverably lost. 4. Though the Spirit have not done striving; yet when the preaching of the Word, though you cannot resist the light of Divine truth, but somewhat of it shines into the mind and conscience; if yet your hearts stand out and will not yield, this is a dangerous case. 5. There are others, whose case is exceedingly dangerous, who, after some trial in the ways of God, for want of that sensible joy and comfort which they expected, grow weary of them and leave them off. 6. When men continue in sin, and put off their repentance and turning to God, with this thought and intention that they will some time or other repent and turn to God, but not

yet. One can hardly tell whether the provoking guilt and danger of such a case be greater than the horrid absurdity of it. And yet this is a delusion that has ruined thousands, and made ample harvests for the devil. 7. There is another sort, whose case is exceeding dangerous, viz. who often fall into the same sins which they repent of and are sorry for (James iv. 7; Luke xii. 49). 8. When, notwithstanding the profession of religion, and outward attendance on the duties of it, yet sin has the dominion and mastery in the soul; and sensual inclinations are indulged without restraint, even as to gross and notorious sins (Heb. vi. 4, 5). Their case is next to hopeless and desperate. And what reason have all backsliders to fear lest they sin themselves into such a dismal state? Use—1. To awaken apostates and backsliders to consider their danger. 2. See that your hopes be of a right kind, grounded on Scripture evidence, purifying the heart, conquering the world, exciting thy desires after Christ and heaven, making thee to sin less, and to please and glorify God more. Such a hope you may hold fast, it will not make you ashamed. (*John Shower.*) *Abandoned*:—There is always something very pathetic about anything that is abandoned; an abandoned farm, where the field used to be filled with busy activity in the springtime, and where later the waving billows of grain rose and fell before the wind; the orchard that once was kept neatly pruned, and where the children played and the birds built their nests, and all watched for the first ripe apples of summer; the garden near by, that once was the object of so much care, now desolate; the front yard that used to have its long rows of hollyhocks and sweet-williams; the porch where once hung fragrant roses; the house that was the abode of love and joy, where dwelt hearts full of all the hopes and fears, the plans and purposes, that animate men and women and little children, a house made sacred by births and marriages and deaths—all now desolate and despoiled. An abandoned ship is also a sad picture. It started out from port with laughter and joy and hope. It had a precious cargo. It carried passengers full of courage for the voyage. But the storm came up, the ship was driven out of its course, the captain lost his reckoning, his chart was swept overboard, and in the blackness of the night and the tempest the ship swung aground on a ledge of rocks; every effort was made to get her afloat again, but she only settled the more solidly into her rough bed. The priceless cargo was thrown overboard in order to save the ship, but even that failed. But all these are cheerful subjects for contemplation compared to the thought of an abandoned man or an abandoned woman—the soul made in the image of God; fitted for a high and lofty destiny; that might hold communion with heaven; that might live a life so sweet and pure, so brave and splendid, that the angels would look upon it with admiration and delight, and yet drifted from its course, with compass gone, with reckoning lost, stranded and broken, abandoned at last by God and man; given up to its own lusts, to perish in its own evil ways. Don't be deceived in thinking that it is a small thing when God says that He will turn you over to your own heart's lust. I can imagine that in folly some reckless soul might say, "What do I want better than that? Just let me have my heart's desire. Surely that won't be very bad." Ah, do you think not? To let the man who is getting fond of strong drink just go on getting more and more drunken, more and more like a beast, the hellish thirst for strong drink ever increasing in his parched and bloated body, his veins running with the fire of the insatiable longing until he cries out as others have done that even the fires of hell would be a refuge if it could quench this horrible and awful thirst—do you think that means nothing? To let the man or woman with impure thoughts and imaginations just go on thinking impure things, and meditating on wicked and evil pictures, until good thoughts come no longer; until the mind is full to overflowing with unholy and bestial imaginations; until after a while the soul loathes itself as a dirty thing; until the man or woman wallows in moral filth—do you think that means nothing? To let the greedy man go on with his greed, becoming more and more avaricious, until at last honour and love and faith and truth and goodness are idle words to him unless they bring him in money; until the soul is withered and dried up so that the one cry of the man's nature is for gain; and grim and miserly, unloving and unloved, the man gets old in a hard and bitter and greedy spirit—does that mean nothing? To let anger and hate have their own way; to let them brood in the heart and hatch their young; to let them seek for vengeance until a man watches on the path of his enemies that he may make life harder for every one who has offended him; until all love and generosity and forgiveness and gentleness are crushed down under the heel, and a gruff,

rough, brutal-hearted man hides in ambush waiting for revenge—does that mean nothing? Some of you, it may be, are quaffing the first draughts of sin, and the intoxication of it is in your blood, and you think the preacher maligns and slanders sin. May God save you from the bitter dregs at the bottom of the cup! (L. A. Banks, D.D.)

Vers. 13, 14. **Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways!**—*Jehovah's complaint against the condition and conduct of His people*:—I. **THE HUMILIATING POSITION** in which the Church is supposed to be standing towards its enemies. Think of the damnable heresies and apostasies from truth, which the abused name of religion is employed to cover, and the consummate wickedness with which the profession of Christianity has been converted by iniquitous laws into a tyranny and a trade. Look at every aspect of society, examine every walk of life, and what do you behold, but impiety triumphant in the very capital of Christianity? Take the most favourable estimate that Christian charity will allow, and yet how feeble in influence and numbers is the Church of Christ compared with its enemies! And if, after two thousand years, such be our position, how solemnly does it behove us to ask in what way this humiliating state of things is to be accounted for. II. **THE SINFUL CAUSE** to which its humiliation is ascribed. 1. God has commanded His ministers to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; and, in order that they might do so, His people are enjoined to send them forth, for "how," says the apostle, "can they preach except they be sent?" And when the Church, in the warmth of her first love, responded to her Lord's commands, consecrating her energies and her treasures freely to His service, city after city, kingdom after kingdom, and one system of error after another, fell vanquished at her feet. But, corrupted by covetousness and love of the world, His people grew weary of hearkening unto Him, and to walk in His ways, and consequently soon lost the conquests that apostles won. 2. But, besides sending forth ministers to preach the Word, God has commanded His people, individually, to labour for the spread of truth. But the individual responsibility of Christians has been almost forgotten; while a few are making personal exertions in God's service, how many hearers and even professors of the Gospel are no more concerned by any personal effort to extinguish the rebellion against God, than so many statues on a building wrapt in flames! 3. Again; as it is impossible by error to destroy error, and as the only antidote to darkness is light, Jesus Christ has commanded His followers to preserve the faith of the Gospel inviolably pure; warning them in admonitions of awful solemnity against adding to, or taking away, a tittle from His Word. And from how many sinful practices, how many debasing sentiments, how many idle ceremonies, how many bitter controversies and persecutions would the Church have been saved, had Israel walked in His ways, had His people hearkened to His voice. But, preferring the wisdom of man to that which cometh down from above, they have altered the constitution of the Church, perverted its ordinances, and corrupted its doctrines, suffering foreign mixtures, careless omissions, and presumptuous additions, to deface the beauty and destroy the simplicity of the truth. 4. Could the Christian Church, however, when she threw away the unity of faith, have preserved the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, she might, possibly, soon have recovered what she had lost; but converting every difference of creed into an occasion of division and strife, she advanced further in disobedience, and, consequently, further and further in weakness and disgrace. 5. Moreover, as the world is less likely to be subdued by precept than example, Christ has said to His disciples, "Let your light shine before men, that they seeing your good works may glorify your Father which is in heaven." And had the Church paid a becoming regard to His repeated injunctions upon this subject, she would have appeared in every conflict as bright as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners. 6. And along with a far higher degree of holiness, would there not have been among the people of God, had they hearkened to His voice, an infinitely larger amount of fervent and effectual prayer? III. **THE AFFECTING MANNER** IN WHICH BOTH THE CAUSE AND THE CONSEQUENCES ARE BY GOD HIMSELF DEPLORED. 1. From all that God has spoken or accomplished, it is evident that His love for His Church is infinite and unchangeable. It is His husbandry and His vineyard, the garden He delights to water, His inheritance, and the place of His rest, the wife of His bosom, His peculiar treasure, His crown, His portion, and His joy. Next to His own glory,

nothing, therefore, is so near to His heart, as the prosperity of His people; and while upon the warlike enterprises which historians and poets delight to celebrate, He looks with comparative indifference, the minutest victories of His Church have an everlasting record in heaven, and are celebrated by the angels of God in songs of ecstatic praise. 2. Nor must we exclude from our interpretation of this language the idea of infinite pity to a perishing world. In secular contests the triumph of one party is the disgrace, misery, or destruction of the other; and most justly and humanely has it been said by a great living warrior, nothing is so calamitous as a victory excepting a defeat. But to extend the conquests of the Church is to push forward the boundary of life and happiness into the realms of darkness and death; to subdue her enemies, to bring the haters of the Lord to submission is to save them with an everlasting salvation; to leave them unsubdued is to destroy them for ever. (*J. E. Giles.*)

**Ver. 16. With honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.—A little but wise teacher:**—You know it was said of the Holy Land, long before God led His people into it, that it was "a land flowing with milk and honey." Such it was and still is. That bees swarmed abundantly in the East many years ago, we may infer from the honey found in the dried remains of the lion which was killed by Samson. And in these modern days the wandering Arabs who live in tents, especially those who dwell in the wilderness of Judea, are said to support themselves by bee-hunting, bringing into Jerusalem jars of wild honey like that on which John the Baptist fed in the wilderness. The visitor to the Holy Land, when he sees the busy multitude of bees about its cliffs, cannot but recall to mind the promise, "With honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee." But then these words of Asaph mean far more than that those who love and serve the Lord shall be thus fed. They mean that God will surely supply all the wants of His people; that He offers all His infinite resources as a security that they shall not be left to "want any good thing"; and that, as honey in abundance is gathered out of the hard and flinty rock, so He will provide for those who love Him, even though they are brought into the hardest trials, where it might seem as if they were beyond the reach of help. But a promise so large and rich as this we cannot expect to have made good unto us, no matter what we are, or do. No! this is a promise with a condition. That is, there are some things which we must do, if we would claim the fulfilment of this promise for ourselves. The bee which stores up honey that is gathered out of the rock may so teach us that we shall be truly wise, and be able to secure all the earthly blessings and all the spiritual riches which are promised by the text. I. OBEEDIENCE. Do you know that in every hive of bees there is one which is called the Queen Bee? Those who have studied most carefully the habits of bees tell us that the Queen Bee is beloved and obeyed by all the others, who show in all ways that bees have a desire to please her. And if bees are thus obedient and devoted to their queen, how much more ought children to "obey their parents in the Lord!" II. CHEERFUL AND HAPPY INDUSTRY. How diligent and industrious the bees are in building the cells of the honey-comb, in storing them with honey, and in taking care of their young. They are not satisfied to work an hour a week, or an hour a day, and then dance away all the rest of the time in the warm and bright sunshine. They are not like some children that I have seen, who are hardly satisfied unless they can give themselves up to "all play and no work," which, as the rhyme says, "makes Jack a mere toy." But the bee works all the day long, day after day, bringing home full loads of honey. It finds pleasure in its work, singing continually as it goes about it. What a fine example for boys and girls! Our blessed Lord Himself, when still a little child, felt that He "must be about His Father's business." Every community of bees is apt to be afflicted for a time with what are called drones—that is, with bees that won't work. But the working bees very soon get rid of them, either by putting them to death, or by driving them out of the hive. And is not something like this the law of the Bible? Paul declared that, "if any would not work, neither should he eat," and Solomon says that "an idle soul shall suffer hunger." Idleness, then, brings a blight and a curse both upon the body and upon the soul. III. WE SHOULD GUARD WATCHFULLY AND WELL WHAT TREASURES WE HAVE. The bee uses all possible care and skill to protect from its enemies its stores of honey, and the wonderful cells in which that honey is laid up. It has many enemies, such as wasps, hornets, spiders, dragonflies, lizards, toads, and a kind of winged moth. This last is a

very dangerous enemy, for at night, when the bees are asleep, it creeps in at the door of the hive, and lays its eggs, from which little worm-like caterpillars are soon hatched, and these crawling things soon make such havoc with the waxen cells that the bees are obliged to desert. They do the best they can to defend their treasures from enemies without, but sometimes they are overpowered. My children, learn a lesson from them to guard and keep such treasures as you have; for you, unlike the bees, may effectually do this, with such help as God will give you, if you seek help of Him. IV. From the bee, again, we may learn the lesson **THAT WE CAN SERVE BUT ONE RULER AND SOVEREIGN AT A TIME.** I have spoken of the Queen Bee. It is the supreme ruler of the hive, whom all the bees delight to obey. Not till one queen dies do they transfer their allegiance to another. You know that there is only One who has a right to demand, as He does demand, that you shall serve and love Him "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." Jesus Christ Himself has said, "No man can serve two masters," etc. V. Another lesson, and a most important one, for us to learn from the bee, is, **NOT TO TRUST TOO MUCH TO APPEARANCES.** Many a bright and most attractive-looking flower does the bee pass by, to alight perhaps upon some plain and humble one that we would have thought altogether unworthy of notice. "All is not gold that glitters," and not even the marvellous skill of the bee can extract honey from flowers which, though they may appear very beautiful, have no sweetness, and perhaps only deadly poison in them. There are many things which, to young eyes, and sometimes to eyes not so young, appear very beautiful indeed. Not having them, we greatly covet, and having, we greatly prize them. VI. **WE SHOULD MAKE WISE AND TIMELY PROVISION FOR THE FUTURE.** The bees do not eat their honey as fast as they make it, but they lay by a store for winter. In this, they are unlike some young people, who are inclined to spend everything as fast as they make it, and sometimes faster. They lay up nothing at all to fall back upon in a time of need. This is more especially and sadly true with respect to religion. How many are there among the young who spend the best part of their lives in worldly pleasure. They think not of a future day, and are making no provision for needs of which they will soon, and may be suddenly, be made aware, when it will be too late to provide for them. (*G. C. Noyes, D.D.*)

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#### PSALM LXXXII.

**VERS. 1-8. God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; He judgeth among the gods.**—*The supremacy of God*.—I. **AS REDUCING UNJUST RULERS.** "How long will ye judge unjustly?" Here is a common crime. Human rulers, alas! through all times and the world over, have been prone to judge unjustly and to "accept the persons of the wicked." In proportion to the moral corruption of a man is at once his indisposition and incapability to deal out justice to others. II. **AS ENJOYING PITY FOR THE AFFLICTED.** "Defend the poor and fatherless." See that they have justice done them, deal tenderly with them. "Deliver the poor and needy." It argues bad for that ruler the poor and suffering of whose people are found in the heartless grip of wicked men. III. **AS CHARACTERIZING THE COURSE OF WICKED RULERS.** "They know not, neither will they understand," etc. These magistrates pursue their course of moral ignorance, they are blind to the eternal principles of right, to the transcendent claims of justice; only alive to their own ambition, aggrandizement, pleasures, and gratifications. What is the consequence? 1. Society is endangered. "All the foundations of the earth are out of course." All institutions are tottering. 2. Its rulers are doomed. "I have said, Ye are gods," etc. "But ye shall die like men." This language may mean—(1) I have regarded you as divinities; in consequence of your office, as far superior to all ordinary men. (2) I looked upon your appointment as Divine. "All of you are children of the Most High." Magistracy is a Divine appointment, into that magistracy you have been permitted to enter; notwithstanding this, in consequence of your unrighteous conduct, ye "shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes." IV. **AS THE GRAND OBJECT OF THE WORLD'S HOPE.** "Arise, O God," etc. There is

no hope for a corrupt world but in God. (*Homilist.*) *The utility of magistracy*:—Take government out of the world, and then take the sun out of the firmament, and leave it no more a κόσμος, a beautiful structure, but a χάος, a confused heap; without this men would be like Ishmael, wild men; every man's hand would be against his brother (Gen. xxvi. 12). It is reported of Maximilian the emperor, that as oft as he passed by the gallows he would put off his hat and salute it, with a *salve sancta justitia!* All hail, holy justice. Of all people, Christians have most cause to bless God for it; for they are exposed more to the malice of wicked men by reason of their profession and principles, which are so opposite to the ways of the world, so that they are as lambs amongst lions, as sheep amongst wolves, as a lily amongst thorns, which would soon be devoured, did not the great Shepherd of the flock raise up shepherds under Him to defend it. These are the ministers of God for our good—1. For our natural good, for our lives. 2. Civil good, for our estate. 3. Moral, for defence of us in goodness. 4. Spiritual, to protect the Gospel; and this good is reduced by the apostle to three heads (1 Tim. ii. 2), peace, piety, and honesty. They are a means under God to preserve the lives of us and ours; our goods, sabbaths, ordinances, and all that is near and dear to us; so that when government fails—1. Order fails; 2. Religion fails; 3. Justice fails; 4. Strength fails; 5. Wealth fails; 6. Honour fails; 7. Peace fails. As where there is no ministry, the people perish; so where there is no magistracy, the people come to ruin (Prov. ii. 14). These are shields to defend us, fathers to tender us, yea, nursing fathers to carry us in their bosoms, pillars that under God uphold the world, that it fall not into confusion, and the very life of the State (Lam. iv. 20). (*T. Hall, B.D.*) *Magistrates should esteem their office a Divine institution*:—Civil authority is a Divine institution. The man who holds municipal or political office is a "minister of God." One man may, therefore, have just as real a Divine vocation to become a town-councillor or a member of parliament, as another to become a missionary to the heathen. In either case it is at a man's peril that he is disobedient to the heavenly vision. The Divine right of kings was a base corruption of a most noble truth; so was the fanatical dream about the reign of the saints. We shall never approach the Christian ideal of civil society until all who hold municipal, judicial, and political offices recognize the social and political order of the nation as a Divine institution, and discharge their official duties as ministers of God. (*R. W. Dale, D.D.*)

**Ver. 2. How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?**—*Magistrates rebuked for unjust judgment*:—1. The sin reproved in general, and that is unjust judgment—a sin most peculiar to judges. To be covetous, envious, passionate, and proud, is evil; but to judge unjustly, to justify the wicked, and condemn the just is not only abominable, but an abomination in the abstract (Prov. xvii. 15). This is iniquity and perverseness with a witness. 2. The duration of their sin, implied in "how long?" It implies that they had for a long time persevered in this practice, and therefore he doth not simply say, ye do unjustly, but how long will ye do unjustly? The interrogation is a vehement negation, ye ought in no wise to continue so long in your injustice as you have done. 3. The generality of the sinners implied in "ye"; how long will ye, i. e. all of ye, judge unjustly? There might be some few, some gleanings, as the prophet speaks (Micah vii. 1, 2), of just judges, but the generality was very corrupt. 4. An exegesis, an illustration, or, if you will, an aggravation of what went before. "Ye judge unjustly." What is that? Why, ye accept the persons of the wicked, ye admire their persons, ye favour their faces, ye plead their causes; but the cause of the poor and the righteous man cannot be heard. In the original it is, Ye accept the face of the wicked. Now, to accept the face of a man is a Hebrew phrase, and signifies a showing favour and respect to a man (Gen. xix. 22). Observations: 1. Even great men, when they go astray, must be sharply reproved. But for this great wisdom and prudence is required. 2. Continuance in evil is a great evil. How long, saith God, will ye judge unjustly? To do an unjust act is ill, but to persevere for many years in acting unrighteousness is the height of evil. As perseverance in goodness is the crown of goodness (Job ii. 3), so perseverance in sin is sin in grain; it is of a deep dye; it is hardly, if ever, set out again. 3. It is no wonder to see judges judge unjustly. They did so here, and God complains of such elsewhere (Isa. i. 23; Jer. v. 1; Micah iii. 9). 4. Few great men are good men. They are subject to great temptations, and so to great corruptions. 5. Perverting of judgment is a great sin (Ezek. xxii. 6, 7; Isa. v. 6, 7;

Jer. v. 28, 29; Amos ii. 6; v. 6, 7, 11; Mal. iii. 5). 6. Magistrates must judge impartially. They must not respect persons but causes. They must look more on the face of the cause than the face of the man. This respecting of persons is not good, saith Solomon, that is, it is very bad (Prov. xxiv. 23). It is a sin oft forbidden (Deut. i. 17; xvi. 19; Job xiii. 8, 10; 2 Chron. xix. 6, 7; Prov. xviii. 5; xxviii. 21; James ii. 9; Jude 16). Men must not judge according to any outward appearance or quality of the person that appears before them, but according to the equity of the cause (John vii. 24). (*T. Hall, B.D.*) *Corrupt judges:*—Catiline, being prosecuted for some great offence, corrupted the judges. When they had given their verdict, though he was acquitted only by a majority of two, he said he had put himself to a needless expense in bribing one of those judges, for it would have been sufficient to have had a majority of one. (*Plutarch's Cicero.*)

Vers. 3, 4. **Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.**—*The magistrate's duty:*—This counsel of God, saith Luther, is worthy to be written in letters of gold on the walls of all judicatories. It may fitly be termed God's charge to magistrates. As if the Lord had said, This is your main business, and therefore let it be your great care, to defend the poor, succour the afflicted, and support the fatherless, and to help him who hath no helper. As the proper work of the physician is to cure the sick, and of a minister to comfort the weak, so of a magistrate to defend the poor, and vindicate the oppressed from the violence of the oppressor. 1. Magistrates must be a defence to the poor and fatherless, to the afflicted and the needy. They are that great tree which must shelter such as are under them from storms (Dan. iv. 20–22). 2. As magistrates must administer justice unto all, so especially to the afflicted and distressed. These are most liable to injury; and therefore, if justice incline to any side with favour, it should be towards the poor. This is the very end why rulers are set up, viz., to execute judgment, and do justice amongst the people (Isa. lvi. 1; Hosea xii. 6; Amos v. 24; Zech. vii. 9). Do justice—(1) Discreetly; (2) Speedily; (3) Impartially and universally; (4) Resolutely and courageously; (5) Righteously and exactly; (6) Soberly; (7) Diligently. 3. Good duties need much pressing. Such is the dulness and indisposition of our natures to the best things, that without much pressing they take little or no impression upon us; hence it is that the Lord here calls on judges again and again to defend the poor and fatherless, and to deliver the needy out of trouble. 4. Magistrates must administer justice orderly. They must not go preposterously to work, and condemn a man before he is heard. (1) They must fully, freely, patiently, with a sedate, quiet, composed spirit, free from passion, prejudice, and precipitancy, hear both parties speak for themselves, for the law doth not use to condemn men till their cause be heard (John vii. 51; Acts xxv. 15, 16). (2) When, upon hearing, he hath found out the depth and truth of the cause, then he must justify and absolve the innocent, and rescue him out of the jaws of the wicked, by executing justice on him according to his demerits. (*T. Hall, B.D.*)

Ver. 5. **All the foundations of the earth are out of course.**—*The radical wrongness of the world:*—I. The foundation of man's INDIVIDUAL character is "out of course." The true foundation of man's character implies the supremacy of the Divine over the human, the spiritual over the carnal. Instead of this, the character of mankind is generally organized on the principle that puts the carnal over the spiritual, the human over the Divine. II. The foundation of man's SOCIAL character is "out of course." The true principle on which society should be formed is, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Instead of this, alas! falsehood, fraud, cupidity, intensified selfishness, form the world's platform of social action. III. The foundation of man's POLITICAL character is "out of course." Righteousness is the only true and safe foundation of kingdoms. No human government can be safe or useful that aims not chiefly to develop the rights of men and to deal out justice to all. How often is it that the many are sacrificed to the few, the principles of rectitude for a miserable expediency. IV. The foundation of man's RELIGIOUS character is "out of course." Supreme sympathy with the supremely good is the foundation of all true religion. Instead of which, as a rule, the religions of the world,—even the religion of England,—are based on dogmas, or ceremonies, or on mawkish sentiment. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 6, 7. **I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High.**—*Human rulers*.—**I. THEIR OFFICIAL GREATNESS.** 1. They are here called gods. "Ye are gods." In what sense are they gods? (1) Not in the sense of mental superiority. There are some men, it is true, so far superior in mind to the average of their kind, that they move about like divinities. But human rulers are seldom found of that lofty type. (2) Not in the sense of moral superiority. The highest greatness is moral. In every age men have appeared amongst their fellows as moral divinities, they have reflected the rays of Divine purity and beneficence. But human rulers have seldom been of this class. (3) Not in the sense of their own estimation. It is very true that many worldly rulers have esteemed themselves as gods, and, like Herod of old, demanded the worship of their fellow-men. But in none of these senses does the psalmist say they are "gods." His sense is an official sense. "The powers that be are ordained of God." 2. They are here called, "children of the Most High." The kingly office is a Divine creation. He is the "minister of God," says Paul. **II. THEIR MORTAL DOOM.** "Ye shall die like men." (1) The most illustrious must meet with a common event. They "die like men." He who is chief in the most elevated ranks of life must die as the obscurest in life's lowest grades. "He bringeth the princes to nothing, he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity." Death mingles sceptres with spades. (2) The most illustrious will meet with this common end in a way peculiar to themselves. "Fall like one of the princes." There are feelings which a prince must have in dying, utterly unknown to the dying man in humbler life—feelings, methinks, that add agony and horror to the hour. Other things being equal, death would be easier in a hovel than in a palace. (*Homilist.*) *The magistrates' Scripture*.—I may call this text the magistrates' Scripture; considering the state of kings and governors, how much good they might do, and how little they perform, God becomes a remembrancer unto them. And first, shows what a high calling princes and rulers have, and then, lest they should be proud of it, and make their magistracy a chair of ease, he turns upon them again, as though he had another message unto them, and tells them, that though they be above others, yet they shall die like others; and though they judge here, yet they shall be judged hereafter. A good memorandum for all in authority, so to deal in this kingdom, that they lose not the kingdom to come. 1. "I have said, Ye are gods," etc. (1) This name informs us what kind of rulers and magistrates we should choose; those which excel all other men, like gods among men. For a king should be a man after God's own heart, like David. (2) This extollet the calling of magistrates. There is a difference between kings and inferior magistrates; for the prince is like a great image of God, the magistrates are like little images of God, appointed to rule for God, to make laws for God, to reward for God, to punish for God, to speak for God, to fight for God, to reform for God, and therefore their battles are called "The Lord's battles;" and their judgments, "The Lord's judgments;" and their throne, "The Lord's throne;" and the kings themselves, "His kings," to show that they are all for God, like His hands. By some He teacheth mercy, by some justice, by some peace, by some counsel, as Christ distributed the loaves and the fishes by the hands of His disciples (Matt. xiv. 18). This God requires of all when He calls them gods, to rule as He would rule, judge as He would judge, correct as He would correct, reward as He would reward, because it is said, that they are instead of the Lord God; that is, to do as He would do, as a scholar writes by a copy. (3) They are called gods, to teach them how they should govern. Howsoever other care for the glory of God, the performance of His will, the reformation of His Church, princes and rulers, which are gods themselves, are to do the business of God as their own business, God's law is their law, God's honour is their honour. (4) They are called gods, to encourage them in their office, and to teach them that they need not dread the persons of men; but as God doth that which is just and good without the jealousy of men, so they, upon the bench, and in all causes of justice, should forget themselves to be men, which are led by the arms between favour and fear, and think themselves gods, which fear nothing. 2. It followeth, "but ye shall die as a man." Here he distinguisheth between mortal gods and the immortal God. Ye have seen their glory; now behold their end. As if he would prevent some conceit that they would take of the words which he cast out before, he cools them quickly before they swell, and defers not to another time; but where he calls them gods, there he calls them worms' meat, lest they should crow between the praise and the check, "I have



said that ye are gods, but ye shall die like other men." But for this, many would live a merry life, and feast, and sport, and let the world slide; but the remembrance of death is like a damp, which puts out all the lights of pleasure, and makes him frown and whine which thinks upon it, as if a mole were in his eye. (Henry Smith.) *The dignity of magistracy, and the duty of the magistrate*:—

**I. THE DIGNITY OF MAGISTRACY.** 1. In receiving honour from others. 2. In giving laws to others. 3. In executing the law, punishing the guilty and acquitting the innocent. **II. THE DUTY OF MAGISTRATES.** They ought to resemble God in their execution of justice amongst men. 1. In not favouring any for their nearness. Pompey, aspiring to the Roman empire, and perceiving that Cato was against him, sent his friend Minucius to Cato to demand his two nieces, one for himself, the other for his son. But when the messenger had delivered his errand, Cato gave him this answer: Go, tell Pompey, Cato is not to be won by women. As long as Pompey shall deal uprightly, I shall be his friend, and in a greater degree than any marriage can ever make me. Surely this moralist will condemn many Christian rulers, of whom it is said that the sun might as soon be bindered from running his race, as he from doing what was just and upright. 2. In not sparing or fearing any for their greatness. Papinianus is worthy of eternal memory, who chose rather to die than justify or excuse the fraticide of Bossianus the emperor. (G. Swinnoek, M.A.) *Magistracy is of Divine authority*:—1. Their commission is from God (Prov. viii. 15; Rom. xiii. 1). 2. Their command to govern is from God (Deut. xvii.). 3. Their protection is from God. As a king defendeth his inferior officers in the execution of their offices, so the King of kings defendeth magistrates in the discharge of their trusts. "God standeth in the congregation among the gods" (Ps. lxxxii. 1), not only to observe whether they offer injuries to others, but also to take care that they receive no injuries from others. 4. The subjection of their people to them is from God. If He that ruleth the boisterous waves of the sea, and shutteth them up with bars and doors (Ps. lxxv. 7), did not put forth the same almighty power in quieting the spirits, and stilling the tumults of the people, it could never be done. Well might David say, "It is God that subdueth my people under me" (Ps. cxliv. 1, 2). (*Ibid.*) *Exhortation to magistrates*:—If the God of heaven have appointed you to be gods on earth, then it may exhort you to walk as gods, and to work as gods amongst men. 1. Walk as gods among men; your calling is high, and therefore your carriage should be holy. The greater your privileges are, the more gracious your practices should be. Remember whose livery you wear, whose image you bear, whose person you represent, whose place you stand in, and walk worthy of that calling whereunto you are called (Eph. iv. 1). Whether, saith one, a gangrene begin at the head or the heel, it will kill; but a gangrene in the head will kill sooner than one in the heel. Even so will the sins of great ones overthrow a State sooner than the sins of small ones; therefore the advice of Sigismund the emperor, when a motion was made for reformation, was, Let us begin at the minorities, saith one. No: rather, saith he, let us begin at the majorities; for if the great ones be good, the meaner cannot easily be evil. 2. Work as gods. (1) Execute justice impartially. It is a principle in moral policy, that an ill executor of the laws is worse in a State than a great breaker of them; and the Egyptian kings presented the oath to their judges, not to swerve from their consciences, though they received a command from themselves to the contrary. A magistrate should be a heart without affection, an eye without lust, a mind without passion, or otherwise his hand will do unrighteous actions. The Grecians placed Justice betwixt Leo and Libra, thereby signifying that there ought to be both magnanimity in executing and indifferency in determining. (2) As you should work like gods amongst men in executing justice impartially, so likewise in showing mercy: God is the Father of mercies (1 Cor. i. 3); rich in mercy (Eph. ii. 4); He hath multitudes of tender mercies (Ps. li. 1); He is abundant in mercy (1 Pet. i. 3); His mercy is free (Rom. ix. 15); great (Ps. lvii. 10); matchless (Jer. iii. 1); sure (Isa. lv. 1). (3) Work as God's in promoting piety to your power. Oh, consider, is it not reasonable as well as religious that you who rule by God should rule for God? that that power which you have received from Him should be improved mostly for Him? (*Ibid.*) *Magistrates are mortal*:—Death is to every man a fall, from everything but God and godliness. Ye that are magistrates fall more stairs, yea, more storeys, than others. The higher your standing while ye live, the lower your falling when ye die. If magistrates are mortal, observe hence death's prevalency and power above all the privileges and pre-

rogatives of nature. It is a memorable speech of Sir Walter Raleigh, Though God, who loveth men, is not regarded, yet death, which hateth men, is quickly obeyed. O mighty death! O eloquent death! whom no man could advise or persuade, Thou canst prevail with. Take notice from hence, that nothing in this world can privilege a man against the arrest of death. Are magistrates mortal? Let me then, in the fear of the Lord, beseech you that are magistrates, now presently to make preparation for the hour of your dissolutions. My counsel shall be, with a little alteration, in the words of the prophet Isaiah to King Hezekiah, "Now set your house in order, for you must die" (Isa. xxxviii. 6). I must tell you, all the time ye have is little enough for a work of this weight. In reference to this great duty of preparing for your dying day, I shall commend six particulars to your most serious thoughts. 1. Discharge your trust faithfully. The way to have great confidence when ye die, is to keep a good conscience whilst ye live. 2. Live among men exemplarily. Ye are the nurses of the people (Isa. xlix. 23), and our naturalists observe that what disease nurses have, the children will partake of. Now, how will it gall your consciences, when ye come to die, if ye have been ring-leaders in iniquity, and not patterns of piety. 3. Walk humbly with God. I have read of Agathocles, king of Sicily, that being a potter's son, he would be always served in earthen vessels, to mind him of his original. Some write of a bird so light and feathery, that it is forced to fly with a stone in its mouth, lest the wind should carry it away. The truth is, men that are high in place, are apt to be carried away with the wind of high-mindedness; they had need, therefore, to have earth in their minds, I mean their frailty, and it may prove, through the blessing of Heaven, a singular preservative. 4. Must ye die, and would ye prepare for it, then be active for God whilst ye live; the serious thought of death in your hearts will put life into your hands. This life is all your day of working, death is the night of resting. 5. Labour to find some inward work of grace wrought upon your hearts; be not contented with forms, but mind the power of godliness. A man may live by a form, but he cannot die by a form; when death cometh, when that damp ariseth, the candle of profession, separated from the power of religion, will first burn blue, and then go out; the bellows of death will blow the spark of sincerity into a flame, and the blaze of hypocrisy into nothing. 6. Make sure of an interest in Christ, in the death of the Lord Jesus. There is no shroud to this—namely, to be wrapt in the winding-sheet of Christ's righteousness. (*Ibid.*) **And fall like one of the princes.**—*On the death of a king:*—Death is the most awful of earthly things to all persons of all ranks; but there is something in the death of a king peculiarly solemn and instructive to all who are willing to consider matters with the fear of God before their eyes. It is a bad sign when people listen eagerly to the accounts of our King's sickness, death, and funeral, merely as to something new, and there an end. 1. First, a man must be cold hearted indeed, not to feel in such an event the touch of an Almighty hand, awakening him to consider the utter vanity and worthlessness of this life, considered in itself. 2. But, secondly, although the sight of a king's death is naturally apt to make us all have sad thoughts of our common mortality, yet the Scripture warns us that we think not rudely on it, as if it proved kings, while they lived, to be no more than other men. You perceive, that in this same place where kings are warned that they shall "die like men," they are nevertheless called gods, and are said to be all of them "the children of the Most Highest." Wherefore the death of one sovereign, and succession of another, may well cause us to have serious thoughts of the high and sacred office of our King; and to remember that he is "the minister of God"; a minister in somewhat of the same sense as bishops and priests are ministers. "Fear God, honour the King." 3. Thirdly, we learn to have due thoughts of the great anxiety of His Majesty's office, and the especial dangers, spiritual and temporal, which must needs wait upon so high a trust in this bad and unquiet world. "Ye shall fall like one of the princes;" evidently meaning that princes, as such, were in more than common danger of falling; their life, as it were, hung by a thread, so many and so restless were their enemies, and so wearisome their heavy duties. In our time, and in our part of the world, the personal danger of a sovereign may be much diminished; though many who now live may remember a King of France murdered publicly by his own subjects; a sad proof that good and great kings are not yet exempt from violent deaths. Let us, then, remember to join most earnestly in the Church's prayers for the sovereign; and let us learn to be more and more contented with our own condition. (*Plain Sermons by Contributors to the "Tracts for the Times."*) *The glory and the*

*vanity of earthly greatness*.—I. THE PICTURE. 1. Earthly greatness at its highest elevation. The persons addressed were the judges, rulers, princes of Israel, and they are entitled gods, sons of the Most High, as being, in the office they held, in the authority which clothed them, and in the powers they wielded, representatives of God among their brethren. The title bespeaks for them nothing of Divinity, or infallibility, or even personal goodness. It simply claims for their position authority and power as of God. 2. Earthly greatness in its vanity and failure. Each setting sun flames out in warning colours, that life's sunset is also at hand. Each autumn's decay, shedding leaves, and flowers, and fruit into a wintry grave, is a type to our saddened eye of the parallel scene, when all our honours shall be gathered into dust. Each night that receives us into its soft slumber, pictures the dreamless sleep that comes after the fatigue of life's battles and burdens. II. THE LESSONS. 1. The insignificance of all earthly distinctions. There is no sounder part of true wisdom than a just sense of the difference between the littleness of time and the magnitude of eternity. The deep, habitual sense of this difference is the necessary ballast of the ship that would safely navigate the perilous sea of life, swept by terrible tempests. 2. To cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils. What multitudes of the greatest have risen and fallen, and God's work has gone on as before. What a blow to the Church when Joseph, Moses, David, Paul, Luther died; yet the Church was blessed not only by their lives but by their deaths, as much by their deaths as by their lives. By the very force of affection with which the Church clung to them while living, was she constrained, when they died, to grasp with a mightier faith the living Redeemer. 3. To lead us to prepare for eternity—not only because we have no other time than the present should this be done, but because the only preparation is life-preparation. (*J. Riddell.*) *Mortality mocking earthly majesty*.—This is a short psalm, little quoted, and seldom used. Jesus quoted this psalm, and, in doing so, showed its meaning and reference. When the Jews pronounced Him a blasphemer, because He made Himself the Son of God, in condemnation of them, and in defence of Himself, He quoted this Scripture of their own, in which earthly rulers were called gods, and all of them children of the Most High, in the authorized, unobjectionable language of inspiration. The Saviour's argument was this, that if the powers that be, as ordained of God, might be so named, much more might He call Himself the Son of God, who, the Father's equal, came on His errand to put an end to sin, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness. In this way there is no doubt that these words call us to think of earthly kings and princes, judges and rulers of this world, and the great ones among men. I. OUR TENDENCY TO EXAGGERATE EARTHLY GREATNESS. Even to this hour, some among ourselves, contemplating those who bask in the sunshine of worldly prosperity—those who tower far above other men in the dignity, grandeur and influence of earthly station, so exaggerate the position, that if not applying to them the words of our text, and saying, "ye are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High," withal imagine that these are the special favourites of heaven, and that blessed of God, they are to be admired, if not envied of men! Let us beware of all such thoughts. Admitting the value of earthly greatness, and the worth of worldly glory in their own place—and to question either were to belie nature, and to contradict Scripture—there are better things than earthly greatness in its most attractive type; better things than worldly glory in its most fascinating form. It is only by faith in Jesu's name that either king or subject, potentate or pauper, can choose the good part which shall never be taken from them. II. THE CURE FOR THE ERROR OF EXAGGERATING EARTHLY GREATNESS IN THE FACT OF UNIVERSAL MORTALITY. Suffer me to handle in your presence those things which are the recognized emblems of earthly greatness and of worldly glory,—the crown, the coronet, the throne and the like. Shall I speak of them as baubles, toys, trifles? No; nature does not so regard them, nor do I find such names for them in the Word of God. Still—"Be wise, ye kings; be taught, ye judges of the earth." The throne!—it must be left for the tomb. So perish the things which are seen—for the things which are seen are temporal. But faith, hope, and charity, these three—the faith of Jesu's name; the hope which maketh not ashamed; charity, which is the bond of perfectness—there abideth these three. And, through grace, be these the heritage of kings and princes; and when their crowns and coronets fade and fail, these shall be for them in heaven a better and enduring substance. These, through grace, be the heritage of the poor of this world; and they, chosen rich in faith, shall inherit a kingdom that fadeth not away, and that cannot be

shaken or removed. (*John Smart, D.D.*) *How some princes have died*:—Cæsar was cruelly assassinated in the zenith of his glory. Casimir, King of Poland, died in the act of raising a jewelled cup to his lips. The Emperor Cæsar was put to death seven days after his election. Charles XII. descended from the position of a conqueror to that of a forlorn exile. On the 24th of February, 1848, Louis Philippe rose in the Tuileries the King of the French; before midday he was a fugitive. Napoleon is one day "the arbiter of the destinies of Europe," and the next a forlorn exile on St. Helena.

Ver. 8. *Arise, O God, judge the earth: for Thou shalt inherit all nations.—The true hope of the world*:—This cry is—I. One of the DEEPEST CRIES OF UNIVERSAL MAN. This cry, in some form or other, goes up to Heaven in every language under the sky. "Arise, O God." "There is no hope but in Thee, Thine arm is mighty," etc. II. Implies the WANT OF CONFIDENCE IN ALL CREATURE HELP. Men have tried to put the world right. Moralists, statesmen, philanthropists, saints, have all tried. Every age has been rife with remedial schemes, but all have proved ineffective. "Arise, O God," etc. III. INVOLVES A CONFIDENCE IN THE POSSIBILITY OF SECURING DIVINE INTERPOSITION. What rational spirit would cry to Him if it believed that His assistance was unattainable. Men have an instinctive faith in the power of prayer. Thank God, we have abundant evidence of its efficiency, in the Bible, in the memoirs of the good, and in our own experience. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble," etc. (*Homilist.*)

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### PSALM LXXXIII.

VERS. 1-18. *Keep not Thou silence, O God: hold not Thy peace, and be not still, O God.—An appeal to Heaven*:—I. A LAMENTABLE SOCIAL SCENE (vers. 2-8). The scene is that of men in tumultuous hostility both to God and His people. They appear developing all the leading characteristics of sin. 1. Boisterous. They "make a tumult." Sin is agitation. There is no serenity in it, no repose. 2. Haughty. "Have lifted up the head." They were bold, arrogant, defiant. The evil spirit is described by Milton as "defying the Omnipotent to arms." Sin intoxicates the soul with vanity and daring. 3. Intriguing (ver. 3). Sin works insidiously, and with all the subtilty of the serpent. It is never open, frank, and straightforward; it is artful and scheming. 4. Malignant (ver. 4). It is always in mischief. "The poison of asps," etc. 5. Antitheistic. "They have consulted together," etc. It is all against God. 6. Widespread. "The tabernacles of Edom," etc. II. A REPREHENSIBLE RELIGIOUS PRAYER. In this prayer there is—1. A savage revenge (ver. 13), etc. 2. Pious abomination. Their destruction is here invoked, what for? In order "that they may seek Thy name, O Lord." On what principle, either in ethics, or conscience, or sound philosophy, can such a prayer be justified? To me, I confess, it appears to be malice, inhumanity, and ungodliness in its worst aspect. (*Homilist.*) *Mental tendencies in relation to God*:—These words reveal two tendencies in the human mind in relation to the Creator. I. A NECESSARY tendency. By this, I mean, the tendency to think of our Maker as like unto ourselves. The psalmist here imagines Him to be silent and inactive, two conditions which belong to ourselves, but which are impossible to Him. Indeed, we cannot think of God in any other way. We invest Him with our own attributes, and thus we humanify Him. Hence, how infinitely more glorious is the God which Christ adored and revealed, to the God which even the best men ever had, even the prophet and the apostles. This fact—1. Accounts for the conflicting theologies of men. 2. Argues the necessity for following Christ. If we would reach exalted ideas of the Great Father, we must study and imitate His Blessed Son. II. A CULPABLE tendency. The culpable tendency indicated here is twofold. 1. A practical ignorance of God's unremitting communications and activity. "Keep not thou silence, O God." Silent! He is never silent. He speaks in all the sounds of nature, in all the events of history, in all the monitions of reason. 2. A proneness to regard Him as indifferent to us because we are in trouble. The psalmist seemed to think that because he and his countrymen were

in great trial, the Almighty was silent and indifferent. How often is this the case with us all! How often we are inclined to think in affliction that our Maker has forsaken us! (*Ibid.*)

**Vers. 3, 4. They have taken crafty counsel against Thy people, and consulted against Thy hidden ones.**—*The enmity of the wicked against the Church:*—I. **THE ENMITY WHICH THE WICKED BEAR TO THE CHURCH OF GOD,** and from whence it proceeds. 1. This proceeds from the craft and policy, the malice of the Devil, who, being a competitor with God for dominion in the world, and whose whole design it is to defeat Him in the good that He would do for mankind, doth perpetually labour to put a stop to whatever may be offered toward the delivering of the souls of men out of his snare. 2. It proceeds from the restless temper of wicked men, whose minds are set upon mischief, and that do catch at all opportunities for it. 3. It proceeds from the interest of wicked men (*ver. 3*). 4. It may proceed from the excellency of a Church, when it doth outshine them in the best and truest perfections, and that true goodness and substantial piety is there taught and practised. 5. It may proceed from the disposal of Divine Providence, that for the punishing of the sins of a Church, doth not only suffer others to afflict her, but turn their displeasure that way. II. **IN WHAT WAYS THEY SHOW THEIR ENMITY,** and what course they take to afflict and destroy the Church. 1. Slandering their adversaries, and raising false reports of them. 2. Dividing the Church, and setting one part of it against the other. 3. Downright force. III. **THE CONFIDENCE THEY HAVE OF SUCCESS.** This may proceed from the review which they have of their own policy and strength, and from the observation which they make of the weakness of their adversaries; weak, perhaps, of themselves; weaker, perhaps, with their divisions; weak because they are secure, and not aware of an assault; and weak because they have made no provision against it. Confident again they may be of success because the design lies out of sight. IV. **THE COURSE BY WHICH THE CHURCH AND PEOPLE OF GOD MAY AND SHALL BE SECURED.** Which is fervent prayer to God, and entire dependence upon Him. (*J. Williams, D.D.*) **Thy hidden ones.**—*God's hidden ones:*—1. We may find God's hidden ones where possibly you would least think of looking for them, amongst those who are about us most—the children. I often think of Charles Lamb's plaint over the wrongs and woes of children. 2. We may find God's hidden ones amongst the struggling souls so plentifully to be met with in society. Society, as such, frequently seems as if it were impossible for it to believe in penitence or amendment, as if it were impossible for it to exercise forgiveness, or hope, or charity. What God thinks of these hard-pressed, sin-tormented souls; how He cares for those who fail in the crisis, who sink in the depths, who lose name and character, and heart and hope, do we not see in His revealer and interpreter to mankind, His best gift to the world, the Lord Jesus Christ? 3. We may find God's hidden ones amongst the poorer, the obscurer, the unheard-of members of our Christian communities. Many a poor soul consigned to the free seats or the galleries loves the worship and work of the Church far more than those known of most or seen of all. Many a cottager, in proportion to his time or his means, denies himself more, contributes more, than those who take the chief seats, or are saluted as leaders. 4. We may find God's hidden ones in regions or atmospheres that may to us seem least likely to produce them. I have heard of some worthy Christian men who, if you had told them that God's good Spirit taught the Romans, or the Greeks, or the Assyrians, or the Egyptians in ancient days as well as the Jews, would have been tempted to charge you with blasphemy; or, if you had expressed the conviction that God was as much in Asia or Africa at this moment as He is in Europe or America, would have thought you well-nigh an atheist. 5. We may find the hidden ones of God without, as well as within, the pale of the Church. Where there is no declaration of faith on the lips, there may still be true loyalty in the heart; that where there is no outward profession, there may still be the sincerest inward service. (*J. T. Stannard.*) **The obscurity and security of good men:**—They are "hidden" in two senses—I. In the sense of **ONSCURITY.** The Divine motives that actuate, the sublime aims that inspire, the supernal joys that fill the souls of the genuinely good, are hidden from the eyes of worldly men. The world "knoweth us not." 1. The characters of good men are misjudged by the world. They have often been treated as fiends rather than as angels, hence martyrdom. 2. Their moral superiority is unappreciated by the world. II. In the sense of **SECURITY.** "In the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion."

"Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy presence." Your "life is hid with Christ in God." The "hidden" things are generally the most secure, the "hidden" roots, the "hidden" springs, the "hidden" substances, etc. "Hid with Christ in God." What enemy's hand can reach them there? (*Homilist.*)

*God's hidden ones*:—I know few studies that may be made more profitable to Christian people than the names and titles which are given to them in the Book of God. They are called the "flock of God," to intimate His care and their sure supplies; "trees of God," to intimate their hidden life, their growth and fruitfulness; His "jewels," to denote their preciousness and rarity; the "family," the "children," the "household" of God, to denote His Fatherhood and their happiness and home; the "priesthood of God," that they may be holy and separate, and present daily sacrifice to Him; "soldiers," in order to inspire them with courage to fight the good fight of faith. In the text they are called His "hidden ones." The name implies—

**I. THE SAFETY OF GOD'S PEOPLE.** Out of God and away from Him, man is exposed, without screen or shelter, to the storms of conscience, the tempests of sorrow, the blast of death, the winter of judgment and of doom. All round the world this shelterless condition is felt. Adam felt it, and tried to hide himself among the trees. The heathen fears the anger of the gods, and screens himself by cruel offerings to idols of wood and stone. Self-righteousness makes a fancied refuge for itself, but all in vain. But God Himself hath opened a hiding-place: His own infinite mercy, as manifest in the atoning death of Christ.

**II. THE CONCEALMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN.**

1. The godly are for the most part hidden, unnoted, and unknown. They are not appreciated. The spirit of the world is at enmity with them—refuses to rank them amongst those whom it delights to honour. It altogether undervalues them, and has little but sneers, contumely, and contempt to give.
2. Besides this, the bulk of God's people in this world are hidden in the obscurity of their condition. In the main, Christianity dwells among the brushwood. It is composed of the rank and file, and has its dwelling, as it had in Christ's time, in the homes of the poor.
3. Some of God's children are hidden by persecution. In the olden time, the faithful ones were hidden among rocks, and dens, and caves of the earth.
4. Many loyal and faithful disciples of Jesus are hidden by a constitutional diffidence. They shrink from any and all publicity. These hidden ones, quiet, silent, and reserved, may be doing a holy work in secret spheres.
5. Then, again, the Lord has His hidden ones, who are hidden by age, by sickness, and by the iron wall of duty, from which they cannot, ought not to break away. Depend upon it, this is a large and noble army.
6. Then I would not forget how many of the Lord's loyal disciples are hidden from each other by the thick, man-spun veils of opposing creeds.
7. Many of God's hidden ones are hid away in the shelter of the restful grave.

**III. GOD'S APPRECIATION OF HIS PEOPLE.** Nobody troubles to hide what is counted worthless. It either has an intrinsic value, like gold, or a circumstantial value, like an old letter or a lock of hair. Believers in Jesus are dear to Him, precious to Him. He hides them, guards them, keeps watch over them. "Where do you keep your jewels?" some one asked of a Roman matron. "In my heart," said she, and straight brought her children into view. They were her precious things, hid in her heart. "Thy hidden ones!"

**IV. THE ULTIMATE MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE.** Hidden, are they? Well, but "He that hides can find." The jewels are hidden in the casket till they are wanted; then they are brought out to flash upon the breast and to beautify the brow. The royal regalia is hid away under lock and key until another coronation-day comes round. (*J. J. Wray.*)

*God's hidden ones*:—

**I. WHY ARE THEY CALLED GOD'S HIDDEN ONES?**

1. Because He has put them out of the reach of their adversaries, and concealed them in a place of safety.
2. Because He gives them quiet and peace, even in the midst of turmoil and sorrow. The more of trial you have to endure, the more of communion you shall have to enjoy. This is the happy, happy case of a tried child of God.
3. Because they are not understood. He who has been made to live unto God lives a life that is quite incomprehensible to ordinary men.
4. Because they are obscure.
5. Because all the saints are at present unrevealed.

**II. WHAT IS THEIR SPECIAL HONOUR?**

1. He knows whom He chose and redeemed; He knows whom He has called; He knows whom He has justified. He has not done any of those things in the dark. He has a familiar acquaintance with all that His grace has done for you.
2. Though you are hidden, you are not hidden from the Lord. You are hidden by Him, but you are not hidden from Him. He can read your thoughts; He knows the troubles that

are yet to come as well as those that have come; He reads you as I read the pages of this Bible. 3. Some of God's hidden ones are among the very choicest of His children. I think there are some who are so very dear to God that He keeps them to Himself. 4. Hidden as you are, He has engaged to keep you. His very hiding of you shows that He means to keep you in safety. You shall never perish, for "He keepeth the feet of His saints." III. WHAT THEN? 1. Let us rejoice that the Lord has more people than we knew. 2. Let us look for these hidden ones wherever we are. 3. Since God has hidden ones, let us take care never to act or speak so as to grieve them. 4. Although God has His hidden ones, let not one of us hide himself more than is needful. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

**Ver. 16. Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek Thy name, O Lord.—Shame leading to salvation:—**I. **UNGODLY MEN HAVE GOOD CAUSE TO BE ASHAMED—**1. Because of the wrong they are doing to their Maker. You pride yourself upon your uprightness and integrity; but must God alone, then, be made to suffer through your injustice? Out of all beings, must He alone who made all other beings be the only one to be neglected? 2. There are many ungodly men who ought to be ashamed because they are acting in opposition to light and knowledge, contrary to their conscience, and against their better judgments. 3. Because of their postponements of what they know to be right. 4. Because of their violation of vows which they have made. 5. Because of their not loving the Lord Jesus Christ, and not trusting such a Saviour as He is. 6. A man ought to be ashamed who will not even think of these things. II. Now, concerning these ungodly people, let me show you that **SHAME IS A VERY DESIRABLE THING IF IT DRIVES THEM TO GOD.** Hence the prayer, "Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek thy name, O Lord." 1. Sometimes shame attends the breaking up of self-righteousness. 2. I have known this shame to operate in some when they have done wrong, and have lost the repute they enjoyed among their fellow-creatures. 3. So have I seen failure driving a man to the strong for strength. 4. I have also known men brought to Christ with shame of another sort, shame of mental error leading to a humble faith. III. **THE LORD IS WILLING NOW TO RECEIVE THOSE WHO ARE ASHAMED OF THEMSELVES.** 1. You are the sort of man to come to Christ, because, first, you have the greatest need of Him. In the time of famine, we give the meal away first to the most hungry family. 2. If you are ashamed of yourself, you are the man to come to Christ, because you will make no bargains with Him. You will say, "Save me, Lord, at any price, and in any way!" 3. And you are the man who will give Him all the glory if you are saved. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

**Ver. 18. That men may know that Thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the most high over all the earth.—The inner proofs of God:—**The age in which we live is frequently characterized as an age of unbelief. Certainly it is an age in which much unbelief comes to the front, aggressively; and hence it is an age of conflict in regard to fundamental verities. The question raised, then, is whether the possible God is unknowable. Is the Absolute unthinkable? From one quarter the response is affirmative. An innumerable host out of all kindreds, tongues, and nations confess that the thought of God is the strongest force in life, the purest comfort in sorrow, the one rock-idea which no storm shakes, as true, as real, as natural, as fruitful as any thought, and more. To them history without that word is a riddle, being a mystery, life a torment, and death a horror. The concurrent testimony of millions affirms the central fact that God is, and the affirmation rests upon the experimental knowledge that He is. The fact is the reality; the knowledge is man's recognition of the reality. Only the unreal is unknowable. It is not, however, a question of majorities. The real point involved is, why does the great mass of mankind think that they can and do cognize God as the focal reality, the spiritual sun in the firmament of being? The data of the theistic argument are all to be found in man. Mr. Morell, adverting to this fact in his "History of Philosophy," asks, "Do we wish the argument from being? Man in his own conscious dependence has the deepest conviction of that Independent and Absolute One on Whom his own being reposes. Do we wish the argument from design? Man has the most wonderful and perfect of all known organizations. Do we wish the argument from reason and morals? The mind or soul of man is the only accessible repository of both. Man is a microcosm, a world in himself; and contains in himself all the essential proof which the

world furnishes of Him who made it." And to those who with Schleiermacher accept the doctrine of immediateness, that is, the consciousness of God as an original and primary act of the soul antecedent to reflection or reasoning, man stands forth as the mirror of God, for it is in the depths of his nature that the two meet face to face. Man looks at himself, into himself, and by studied processes of thought or by sudden leaps of unconscious induction, he arrives at a knowledge of himself. He is not looking to see God in any mystic sense, but he is looking to see proofs of God. We come to the knowledge of God in much the same way as we come to the knowledge of our fellow-men. You could never know me if you did not first know yourself. The proof that I exist is in your existence. The evidence that I think is in your thought. That is to say, from the ascertained premise that you think you draw the conclusion that I think. "The Father in heaven," says Dr. Flint, "is known just as a father on earth is known." The latter is as unseen as the former. No human being has really ever seen another. No sense has will, or wisdom, or goodness for its object. Man must infer the existence of his fellow-men, for he can have no immediate perception of it; he must become acquainted with their character through the use of his intelligence, because character cannot be heard with the ear, or looked upon with the eye, or touched with the finger. Yet a child is not long in knowing that a spirit is near it. As soon as it knows itself it easily detects a spirit like its own, yet other than itself, when the signs of a spirit's activity are presented to it. The process of inference by which it ascends from the works of man to the spirit which originates them is not more legitimate, more simple, and more natural than that by which it rises from nature to nature's God. The argument for God is many-sided, but the one determining force in us is that which seems like an instinct, which is original, primary, universal. No formal demonstration of God by trains of syllogistic reasoning could maintain theism through the ages but for the help of this implanted aptitude of the soul to respond to the thought of God. Anselm's *a priori*, beautiful as it is, belongs to trained thinkers, while the millions assert their knowledge of God with the same spontaneous confidence with which a child trusts the proof of parental love. Nature is clearer-headed than philosophy. And is so because Nature looks with all her faculties at the broad landscape of truth, and believes that she sees it, every cliff and scar, every bend of the river and flowery meadow, every forest and nestling cottage. Philosophy, meanwhile, is busy with the mechanism of the eye, and announces that the landscape is a miniature picture painted on the retina—a scientific truth, no doubt! But we are not fashioned to contemplate objects under the lead of a single faculty. We could not appreciate beauty if we should always keep the structure of the organ of vision in mind. We look—we see—we rejoice; we believe that we see what we see, we know that we see, and we know that all men excepting those who have lost the organ of vision see; and if at any time the thought comes to us that what we see is a picture on the retina, we accept the reflection as demonstrating the reality of the landscape, which, however, we did not doubt existed in all its beauty. It was not necessary to corroborate the fact. From the data before us we naturally inferred the reality of the scene by the same law of thought as that by which we rise from the phenomena of our consciousness to the reality of God. Now let us examine some of these phenomena. 1. The great mass of mankind think that they can and do know that there is a God, because they find themselves reaching out into the realm of spirit after a power that is above them in the oft-recurring exigencies of their life, temporal and spiritual, in which they realize their own limitations in respect of strength, wisdom and foresight. This is not a mere impulse of unintelligent despair; it is quite as often the calm instinct of deliberation as the last resort of one who has no other source of help left. It is the refuge alike of childhood and age. 2. Another fact in our self-consciousness presents itself. When we walk out into a public park, the eye falls upon a splendid green sward, smooth as velvet, swelling into graceful curves, with head lands of noble forests jutting out, and islands of rarest flowers dotting its surface. The picture charms us and we seat ourselves in some shady spot to enjoy the Elysian scene. But we resume our stroll, and enter a densely populated slum of the city where the atmosphere is laden with poison, and where crime and vice eat like gangrenes into the souls and bodies of the miserable host. We hasten away with horror from the spot. The impression made upon us by either is distinct and influential, because there is in us an inherent capacity of admiring the beautiful and disliking the hideous. The same capacity exists in regard to the moral



quality of things. Some things we plainly perceive to be right and some to be wrong. Being wrong as an idea wears a storm-cloud on its brow, and when it passes into a concrete shape and becomes in us doing wrong, then the storm bursts upon the soul, and it trembles to think that it will be called to account. Deeply implanted in the solid rock of man's nature, these two granite columns ought and ought not rise and form the gateway, through which we pass up to the cognition of an Infinite Judge. 3. How unlike is man to the brutes beneath him! They have their planes, fixed and uniform as a floor of rock, and thereon, through all the circuit of their tame existence, they fulfil their simple destiny. They do not hunger for that which is beyond their reach, but are content to live and die just as they live and die. No dream of happier climes or kindlier destinies ever disturbs them. The fledgling is satisfied with the bough where he was hatched. The lion seeks no other lair than that where he was born. But the soul of man soon gives token of a strange discontent, and when he thinks to settle down, a dream of other things stirs his blood and disturbs his repose. It is as true in the spiritual as in the secular life. Men aspire to higher planes of moral attainment, and even sainthood forgets its grace as it presses on to sublimer achievements in the imitation of God. Does it impair this majestic argument of God drawn from the depths of human consciousness that it does not formulate its postulates in the language of metaphysics? Heine tells us that it was while he was climbing the dizzy heights of dialectics, that "the divine homesickness" came over him, and led him down to the levels of his kind, where he found God. There is a meadow-land of common-sense realism from which God has chosen to be more distinctly seen, and it is to that familiar spot we have led you to-day. It is there that our analysis of consciousness has revealed the indubitable phenomena that enables us to know that there is a God. The sense of dependence has led us up to a Power above us; the sense of obligation has pointed to an Authority above us; the sense of imperfection has ushered us into the presence of the Perfect Ideal, and the sublime inference of the race—the inference which has controlled history, created civilization, brightened the world with every virtue and grace of true nobility, thrown itself like a rainbow upon the storm of human sorrow, spanned the gulf of eternity with the bridge of hope, that inference is Jehovah. (Bp. W. E. McLaren.)

#### PSALM LXXXIV.

**VERS. 1-12. How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!—A good man in relation to the scenes of public worship:—**I. AS DEPRIVED of these privileges. In his deprivation he reveals—1. A devout admiration for them (ver. 1). It is the law of mind, that blessings when lost always appear to us more precious. Lost health, lost property, lost friends, lost privileges. 2. An intense longing for them (ver. 2). It is "the living God" that gives these scenes attractions to the soul. It is not the sublimity of the site, the splendour of the architecture, or the magnificence of the services, that the godly soul hungers for, but "the living God." 3. A high estimation of them (ver. 3). What the house is to the sparrow, and the nest to the swallow, true worship is to the devout soul—the home, the resting-place. II. AS IN QUEST of these privileges (ver. 5). Not only are they blessed whose home is in the sanctuary, and who spend their days in perpetual praise; but those also are blessed who, though at a distance, have God for their strength and help, and press on in pursuit of religious privileges. 1. Though they encounter difficulties, they are still blest (ver. 6). 2. Though they encounter difficulties, they shall with increasing strength pursue their way until they reach their blessed destiny (ver. 7). III. AS IN CONTEMPLATION of these privileges. 1. He prays (vers. 8, 9). He invokes the Almighty to attend to his prayers, and to "look upon the face," or to favour, His "anointed," that is, the king. What titles he here applies to the Almighty! "O Lord God of Hosts," "O God of Jacob," "O God our shield," etc. 2. He avows the transcendent privileges of public worship (ver. 10). 3. He exults in the relation and beneficence of God (ver. 11). (Homilist.) *Delight in God's house:—*I. LONGING FOR GOD.

1. Soul-hunger (ver. 2). A man in good health enjoys his food, and, when he is hungry, he desires it. But once the soul is quickened, it must have "bread to eat that the world knows not of." The "heart and flesh cries out for the living God." 2. God's altars (ver. 3). The altars of God are suggestive of the forgiveness of sins, of communion, and protection. For there were the various sacrifices made which brought the soul into communion with God, through the burnt offerings, the meat offering, the peace offering, and the sin and trespass offering; there the man who was fleeing for his life might ever find a place of safety and refuge. Having expressed this desire, he ascribes two other titles to the Lord: "my King and my God." He who would call God his King must yield himself by faith to God, as well as do homage to Him. 3. The blessings of God's house (ver. 4). "In God's house everything will be granted to the soul, and nothing be asked of it in return but the praise of Him." II. THE BLESSED MAN IS A BLESSING. 1. The blessed man described (ver. 5). His will and desire, all his powers and purposes are so surrendered to God, that God can use him in blessing others. 2. How the blessed man becomes a blessing (ver. 6). God has ordained that His people, especially those who themselves have been filled and refreshed by His own blessed life, by dwelling in His house, shall be the means of saving the world. What a blessed mission is this; what a glorious privilege! 3. Reflex blessings (ver. 7). (1) "They go from strength to strength." Every grace in us is increased by the use of it (Isa. xl. 29-31). (2) "Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God" (Matt. xxv. 23). 4. The prayer of the blessed man (ver. 8). III. THE BLESSINGS OF SALVATION (vers. 9-12). God is the complete protection of His saints. He is the whole armour with which we clothe ourselves. 1. Complete satisfaction. Sometimes the unbelieving world looks with pity upon the Christian who has turned his back upon all the carnal pleasures of the world; but the answer of the man who has found satisfaction in God and in His service is simple and emphatic (ver. 10). To be such a privileged servant of God is better than to be like Dives in the midst of all his feasting and revelling. 2. Every need supplied (ver. 11). Protection from all evil, and every needful thing He will supply out of His energetic goodness, as the sun causes the earth to be fruitful with every good thing by the power of his rays. Chief among these things is "grace" for the time being, and "glory" for the time to come. What can man want more? 3. A final beatitude (ver. 12). May the Lord of hosts, the God of Jacob, our King and our God, fulfil all His goodness to us in these things, by creating in us a longing thirst and desire, which shall be converted into prayer, and trust, and real possession. (*G. F. Pentecost, D.D.*) *Delight in God's house*:—The great truth which underlies this psalm is that God reveals Himself especially in the sanctuary. In the house of God we find—I. PARDON. II. PEACE. As its walls shut out the noises of the world, so its worship shuts out earthly confusion and strife. III. SPIRITUAL STRENGTH. Hearts fail, consciences yield, life-strings snap, because men do not seek the God of Jacob to strengthen them out of Zion. We must bear hardships and sorrows. Every road, from the cradle to the grave, leads through the valley of Baca; but pilgrims to Zion change barrenness to bloom, singing together as they go. IV. SPIRITUAL JOY. Such delight is wholly disconnected from earthly advantages; it flourishes upon their loss. Pascal wrote, "Happiness is neither within us nor without us; it is the union of ourselves with God." There is no necessary limit to this joy, none except the capacity of the human spirit. Practical inferences:—1. A church should be built to manifest God. 2. The worship of the Church should seek the same end. Music, Scripture, prayer, teaching, have but one object—to draw the soul nearer to God. 3. There is no substitute for the sanctuary. Bigotry may close its doors, but the early Christians consecrate a chapel in the catacombs, and Covenanters make cave or barn or sea-beach a temple. Neglect of the sanctuary proves not abundance, but lack of spiritual life. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *A psalm of exile*:—We seem to see here a spirit chastened by grief, taught by suffering to sing and to pray and to hope. And such is the general tone of the psalms of the dispersion. They remind us of the old and deep lesson, that the chastisements which seem not to be joyous but grievous in the present, will yield hereafter the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. The psalm falls naturally into strophes. 1. In the first of these, containing the first four verses, he calls to mind and enthusiastically describes his feelings in thinking of the Temple. Nothing is left to the exile but the solace of memory, faith and hope. And memory and imagination, acting by the law of association, call up the details of the scene.

He dwells fondly upon the birds nestling as they have been from time immemorial permitted to nestle in the Temple. This thought, that the God of the Temple afforded shelter to the birds of the precincts, swallows, doves, storks, etc., was held by Gentiles no less than Jews. Men of Kymé, says Herodotus, went to the Temple of Apollo, near Miletus, to inquire concerning one who had taken refuge with them from the Persians what they should do, and the oracle replied that he was to be given up to the Persians. One of the men of Kymé ventured to treat the oracle as false, and himself made renewed inquiry. But the same answer was returned. He then went round the Temple, and disturbed the sparrows and other birds who had built their nests in the Temple. Meanwhile there came a voice from the sanctuary to Aristodikos, saying, "Most profane of men, how durst thou do these things? Dost thou overthrow my suppliants from the Temple?" "O King," was the retort, "it is thus that thou succourest thy suppliants, for thou biddest the men of Kymé give up a suppliant." There is something very beautiful in the idea of the Divine Being as the protector of small, helpless creatures like the house-haunting birds, and we at once remember the words of Jesus, "Not a sparrow falls to the ground without your Father." If God takes thought for sparrows, much more does He for men. 2. From the birds his thoughts glances to the worshippers, who are still able to frequent the Temple; and he recalls the pilgrim throngs on their way thither. "Blessings on those who dwell in Thy house; still will they praise Thee. Blessings on the men whose strength is in Thee, who love to think of the pilgrim way." Those whom he mentions as dwelling in Jehovah's house—i. e. in the Holy City—are under the yoke of a foreign conqueror in these last years of Judah, and in a very depressed condition. Yet the psalmist anticipates that they will still be able joyfully to sing of the Divine victory. And then, as to the believers scattered about in foreign lands, and who will travel up to Zion by the pilgrim caravans, they will have manifold hardships by the way; but confidence in Jehovah will give them strength, and they will overcome them all. With lively sympathy he thus depicts them—"They, passing through the Baca valley," etc. We may compare the imagery with that in Isaiah where he depicts the desert solitudes as bursting out into rose blossoms, and being filled with songs; the parched land transformed into a pool; its thirst satisfied with springs of water; the haunts of dragons becoming green with reeds and rushes. Upon a great highway the ransomed people of Jehovah are seen returning, and coming to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads (Isa. xxxv.). And the thought and the imagery are very similar when the prophet Hosea speaks of the Valley of Achor (woe) being transformed into a Door of Hope, and the people singing there as they did in the days of yore when they came up out of the land of Egypt. These things are for us allegories or parables of the soul. It is in the soul, and the soul alone, that we are to look for these wondrous transformations of deserts into gardens, and parched valleys into springs of living water. It is through undying trust and hope and love, cherished in the midst of every suffering scene of life's pilgrimage, that these marvels must be wrought. 3. And now, from these soothing exercises of memory and imagination, the royal poet turns to himself, and composes his spirit in an attitude of deep humility and holy prayer. "O Jehovah, God of Hosts, hear my prayer: attend, O Jacob's God. O God, our shield, behold, look upon thine anointed's face!" This, then, is the language of a king. In virtue of his high office and dignity he would have enjoyed in former days a place of high honour in the Temple. But rather, he says, he would be as the humblest menial in a great house, and, after the Oriental custom, prostrate himself in the dust in the presence of his Master, than dwell, as he is dwelling now, possibly in circumstances of comfort or even of luxury, among the heathen. For supposing this psalm to have been composed by King Jeconiah, while he was in honour and esteem at the Court of Babylon, the language is peculiarly impressive as an evidence of the piety of his spirit. "Sun," he proceeds, "and shield is the eternal God! Grace, glory will Jehovah give; will not refuse happiness to those who walk in innocency." And then the psalm ends, as it were, with a sigh of relief and repose, betokening that the flow of feeling has found its true outlet and rest. "O Jehovah of Hosts, blessings on the men who trust in Thee!" We may draw a few simple lessons from the beautiful psalm. We need to see the blessings and the privileges of our life in perspective, at a distance, before we can truly realize their worth. The youth knows not how happy he has been at home, feels not in all its preciousness the blessing of a mother's love, till he looks back upon the early scene from some distant place,

and from amidst scenes that are strange to his heart. And so of those scenes of worship in which our spirit was educated for eternity. The afterglow of Sundays, the reflection amidst busy hours on songs and sermons that have been listened to not always with interest at the time—these are experiences often the most enriching. It follows that all our diligence in attending to spiritual things now must secure for us a far-off interest of good—memories of sweetness and refreshment, it may be, in some distant land or scene of suffering, like that of the psalmist in exile. But there are other lessons. The soul deprived of its wonted props, its associations of place and circumstance, is taught more entirely to throw itself upon the spiritual resources. His soul was cast down within him at the hill Mizar, and it is cast down in Babylon. Yet why so? He knows that God is to be sought and found there no less than in the Temple. What are space and time to the worship of the Spirit? And what is the use of the glorious faculty of imagination but that we may, in a sense, cancel time, and live in fellowship with the great and good of the past—that we may break down the bounds of space and pass to our friends across seas and deserts, and join with all saints in that worship which is invisible and unending, and is fixed to no particular spot of earth? As Fénelon says, "We may be very near to one another without meeting, or be far apart while occupying the same room." God unites all and obliterates the greatest distance where hearts united in Him are concerned. In that Centre he who is in China or Japan and those in France meet one another. But perhaps the thought that most naturally offers itself from the study of the psalm is the blessedness of religious memories. (*E. Johnson, M.A.*) *Mingled music*:—This psalm has well been called "The Pearl of Psalms." It shines with mild, soft radiance, comparable to that precious gem. I would myself speak of it as being full of mingled music, and mingled music is sometimes of the sweetest. For the most part the note is high, and the strain is sweet; yet there is a tone of sorrow underlying and interleaving all. David sings, indeed, but he sings of his sorrows. Happy is the man who can sing in the time of grief, and turn his very sadness into themes for melody. I. "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts." This is a *EULOGY* of the house and worship of the living God. Wherever David may have been in person, his heart was yonder. The windows of his soul were ever open towards Jerusalem. Is not the title which David applies to God instructive? "O Lord of Hosts." The tabernacle of the sanctuary seemed to David like the pavilion of the King or general, in the very centre of the camp, and he, as one of the King's mighty men, looked towards that pavilion, gazed at its waving signal, and longed to be soon beneath its very shadow. The Church of the living God, the God of Hosts—for He is still the God of battles, and a Man of war—is the place wherein the soldiers refurnish themselves, and refurbish their arms. The worship of His house, the means of grace, these are as the armoury whence the shield, the helmet, the breastplate, the sword, the preparation of the Gospel of peace for the feet, are all provided. It is also as the refreshment place, where God succours and sustains the weary warriors, wells breaking up and leaping forth at their very feet, as they did at Samson's, if needs be. II. Then follows an *ELEGY* (ver. 2). David was hereaved indeed. He had lost the sanctuary. He was away from the place where God revealed Himself particularly. They tell me that those who have dwelt among the glorious mountains of Switzerland cannot bear to live away from them. They pine and die, away from their native land. After some such fashion David looked Zionward. Absence made his heart grow fonder still. What was it that he longed for? For the courts of the Lord. Ah, but not for the sake of the courts themselves. What are the courts without the King? He seeks not the place, but the presence; not the courtiers, but the monarch; not the subjects, but the Lord Himself. III. AN *ALLEGORY* (ver. 3). The birds were free to visit the sacred place. "Oh," thought David, "would I were as privileged as they." He would not change places with them. He did not wish he were a bird, but he wished he had the access they enjoyed, and the familiarity and temerity that characterized them. What birds were they? Only sparrows, merely swallows, the one the most worthless and the other the most restless of birds; yet were they privileged to be where David at that time was debarred from going. Oh, prize your privileges. Make God's house your home. Love it not only for the benefit you may get from it yourselves, but for the blessing it may bring your children. "The swallow hath found a nest for herself, where she may lay her young." Thank God for the church, and the Sunday school, and the Bible classes. Despise none of them; they will bless both you and your

households. IV. AN AUGURY (ver. 4). The birds dwelt in the precincts of the Holy Place, and, according to their nature, they praised, they sang. Swallows and sparrows are not song birds, you say. Ah, but they chirped and chattered, and this was their best praise to God. Now just as the Roman augurs pretended to foretell coming events by the flight of birds and other means, so it seems to me—perhaps it is a quaint conceit—David ventures to prophesy that all who dwell in the Lord's house will be still praising Him. "Why," he says, "there are those birds chattering, chirping, twittering all the while. So long as they have so secure an abode, their hearts go forth in praise to God. There also are the priests, the levites, and the Nethinim, the servants of the priests, surely so long as they have a hand in this work they will be full of praise to God." Certainly this is true of the upper world. I do not know that I could suggest a better epitaph for the happy Christian who praised God on earth, but is praising Him better still on high, than this word or two from our closing verse. What are they doing yonder? "Still praising, still praising." I would fain have it on my own tombstone. I could not wish a better word than that, "Still praising." "Still praising." Yes, when eternity grows old, "Still praising." They practised here, and rehearsed on earth, and now they can see Him face to face, and praise Him more than angels can. Oh, begin His praises here, that you may continue them hereafter. (T. Spurgeon.) *The beauty of the house of God*:—I. WHEREIN LIES THE BEAUTY OF THE HOUSE OF GOD? It does not consist in mere outward loveliness. In proportion as one learns to worship God in the spirit he becomes unconcerned about the particular architecture of the building. As a piece of workmanship he may admire it as much as any, but as a place of worship it possesses no more charm than the country barn devoted on the Lord's Day to the preaching of the Gospel. I fear that in the present day reverence for mere bricks and mortar is becoming a very fashionable error. Beauty of design in the sanctuary walls is thought more of than beauty of holiness in sanctuary worship. This is the result of a religion that goes no deeper than the eye sees. But to the man educated of God, mere external symmetry will be powerless to evoke the psalmist's exclamation of "how amiable are Thy tabernacles." He wants something more. Something that touches the inner springs of the soul. A house of God without worship is a fiction and a lie. II. WHEN THIS BEAUTY IS MOST SEEN. The amiability of God's tabernacle is not always equally perceived. There are times when we are led to utter the words of our text with a deeper emphasis than usual. Seasons when an unprecedented glory fills the house. I will just mention a few times when God's house seems to possess a charm almost beyond description. Certainly we must place first on the list the few Sabbaths immediately following conversion. What a blessed freshness there is about the worship then; it is something so new, so different to any joy experienced before that its very novelty lends enchantment. The beauty of the sanctuary is also wonderful when there is that in the service specially suited to our present experience. III. THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE BEAUTY IS APPRECIATED, AND THE ONLY MAN WHO CAN APPRECIATE IT AT ALL. The first word of the text gives us an idea of the extent of David's appreciation, and well may the verse close with a note of admiration. The psalmist felt that it was impossible to tell in words the beauty of the place. He could but exclaim "how amiable" and leave it for hearts which have felt the same to fathom the depths of the word. This we know, however, that in his eyes the tabernacle made of skins outshone in beauty all the silken tents of luxury and sin, and one day in its courts was worth more to him than a thousand spent elsewhere. The "how" defies all measurement and description. The only man who can behold this beauty is also learnt from one word—the little word "thy." It was because the tabernacle was God's that its beauty appeared so great. Now, no alien from God can find a joy in anything because it is God's. He who loves not a person can never see a beauty in that person's house simply because it is his. Affection for the inhabitant must precede love for the habitation. (A. G. Brown.) *The believer's love for the sanctuary*:—The Christian loves the sanctuary—I. BECAUSE IT IS THE DWELLING-PLACE OF THE MOST HIGH. In the works of creation and providence we behold Him coming forth as a God of ineffable goodness, unable, as it were, from the graciousness of His nature, to withhold unnumbered good things even from the fallen. But it is the sanctuary which is the tabernacle of His glory. There He specially reveals Himself as the God of all grace; there is the mercy-seat; there, sinful though we be, we may draw nigh to the God of our spirits through the High Priest of our profession, the Son of His love. II. BECAUSE HE FEELS PLEASURE

IN ITS HALLOWED EMPLOYMENTS. He knows by experience that as in Ezekiel's vision the healing waters flowed from the sanctuary, and imparted life and fertility to every region through which they wound their way, so the gifts and graces of God's Holy Spirit, descending from the heavenly Zion, pour their refreshing and sanctifying current through the courts of the Lord's house, and that from its services, as from consecrated channels, he drinks of that stream which makes glad the city of God. III. BECAUSE IT IS THE SYMBOL OF BETTER THINGS TO COME. Our mental joys within these earthly temples are but the beginnings and the foretastes of the joys of heaven; our songs in the assembly of the great congregation, they are but the representative of the vast multitude who are even now singing the new song of the redeemed; and all the privileges which surround us, and in which we now delight, are the only outline of the final state of perfection when we appear in that land of which the Lord God is the light, and the glory, and the sanctuary. Oh! how glorious shall be that service compared with this! (S. Bridge, M.A.)

Ver. 2. **My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.**—*The profoundest hunger of human nature.*—The words "soul," "heart," "flesh," are here used to represent the whole man, human nature in its entirety; and this human nature is here longing, craving, hungering, crying out for the "living God," nothing less. This means—I. THAT NOTHING LESS WILL SATISFY HUMANITY. Not a whole universe, not a million pantheons of dead gods; it is the "living God." II. THAT HUMANITY REQUIRES NO LOGIC TO PROVE THAT THERE IS A GOD. So inwrought into man is the belief of His existence, that the whole being cries out for Him. III. THAT ANTI-THEISM IS ANTI-HUMANITY. Anti-theism is a lie to our common nature. (*Homilist.*) *The heart's cry after God.*—I. THE DESIRE OF HEART AND FLESH—THE LIVING GOD. Sibbes well observes that the desires of the heart are the best proofs of saintship; and if a man wishes to know whether he is really a saint or no, he can very soon find out by putting his finger upon the pulse of his desires, for those are things that never can be counterfeit. You may counterfeit words; you may counterfeit actions; but you cannot counterfeit desires. 1. Every saint has within his breast that which is actually born of God, and therefore it cries out after its own Father. 2. Every believer has the Spirit of God dwelling within him, and if he has the Spirit of God dwelling within him, it is only natural that he should desire God. 3. The experience of earth often makes you long more for God. After you have discovered the hollowness, the disappointing nature of the world. II. THE INTENSITY OF THIS DESIRE. 1. It is an intensity that drowns all other desires—"Crieth out for God." I passed a little child the other day being led by the hand by a kind-faced policeman; and as the little thing walked by his side, I could hear it, amidst its sobs, continually crying, "Father! father! father! father!" Yes, in this great city-full of people, the only face the child wanted to see was the face of its father. He knew he had lost a father's hand, for he had wandered from a father's side, and he wanted father back again. "My heart and my flesh crieth out for God." Just as a lost child cares not for a million faces it may meet along the road—it wants to look at its father's face—so the true born child of God can rest satisfied with nothing short of a sight of his God. "My heart and my flesh crieth out for God." 2. It is an intensity of desire that creates pain. The language of our text is the language of a soul which can bear its anguish no longer in silence. It is a cry extorted by inward pangs. (*A. G. Brown.*) *The soul's want of God.*—The chief want of man is God. The soul is for God, and God for the soul. What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. 1. The first step in this answer to the deepest want of human nature is the conviction that God is—that God lives. Heart and flesh cry; where is the response? Joyful is the moment in the soul's experience when the reality of God's being comes over us with its full power. The first need of the soul is to feel that God is real—the great reality and essence of all things. And if sin had not shut up and darkened the windows of our being, this gracious light would flow in on every side. 2. Then we are to feel that He is Present and Living. The belief of not a few seems to be in a past God, a deceased, departed Deity, and the world as a huge skeleton out of which all the soul has gone, not an abode for the indwelling Power, but the ruins of His former stately palace. But He has not made the world and then retired from it. He is not an absentee proprietor. He is the present Creator, the living God, as on the world's first morning. He dyes the flower, and ripens the corn. Laws are but His uniform modes

of working. Forces are but the heavings of the indwelling Almightiness. He is, and He is present. He overflows creation. He is all in all. 3. But the heart and flesh have another note in their cry, and it is for a Good Being, or, as our Saxon has it, God, that is, the Good, whom we may love. God, the Good, is in all systems, all beings, and in all working according to His own being, that is, for good. Father is His proper name. Nature, Providence, Jesus, all teach this comforting lesson. And when the heart in its hopes and affections, and the flesh in its griefs and pangs, cry, the response comes from every side, and is echoed and re-echoed in endless and harmonious sounds—God is good. 4. The want of the soul is not only for a good, but for a great God, whom we may adore. It admires greatness with an even earlier and intenser admiration than goodness. Our tastes change very much from youth onward. Things we once passionately admired cease to move us. The soul has got beyond them. It exhausts one thing after another. But there is one youthful sentiment that is never outgrown—that rises with our intellectual stature, and spreads with our moral expansion, and soars with our spiritual aspirations—and that is our faith in the Great God—

"And, as it hastens, every age  
But makes its brightness more divine."

5. The nature of man has been so created as to seek after a Wise and Infinite Intelligence. We admire with huge respect the men even who have been able to pocket a little science, who can read a dozen languages, who are largely conversant with affairs, and know things as they are. A skilful invention is heralded from hemisphere to hemisphere. He who has read one of the characters in Nature's alphabet, or spelled out a few syllables or words in her mighty lore, is hailed with all the titles of glory. But no libraries, geniuses, scientific or literary associations, no fragments and crumbs that fall from the table of knowledge, can meet the unextinguishable thirst of man for the spiritual and the immortal. Let him not think to fill an infinite craving with anything less than the Infinite. But if I have at all rightly interpreted the significance of this cry, which is for ever ascending from the breast, and seeking after God, you may ask, How shall it be satisfied? I would not dogmatize, and say by any one way, but rather by all ways. It is more in the waiting, receiving, and teachable state of the soul, than it is by methods, cultures, churches, and dispensations. Seek, then, for the truth, and in the truth God will ever be coming, and entering in and taking possession of the soul, and driving out every darkness and weakness. Rest not short of God. (*A. A. Livermore.*) *The religious sense* :—What is the secret of the enduring charm, the comforting and ennobling influence of the psalms? Is it not to be found, in part at least, in the frank revelation made by the psalmist of his own personal experience and aspiration? His prayers are not addressed to the congregation! In rapturous praise and in fervent prayer he pours out his soul unto God. So wide and varied is the range of his experience that alike in joy and sadness, in exultation or contrition, in victory or defeat, we find in his confession of sin, his jubilant gratitude, his martial ardour, his triumphant faith, the best statement of our own sin and failure, expectation and yearning. Thus to the very depths of our nature does he go down when, as in the text, he exclaims, "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." I. MAN HAS A RELIGIOUS SENSE. It is customary to speak of the "five senses"; but modern physiologists affirm the popular enumeration to be defective. It does not take into account, we are told, the sensations of heat and cold, hunger and thirst, or the sensations of organic life. Neither does it recognize the "muscular sense," whereby we measure and regulate our bodily activities. We hear also of an "internal sense," or the mind's knowledge of its own operations. Then, again, we occasionally hear of the "æsthetic sense," whereby we have the perception or feeling of beauty. Philosophers, as Shaftesbury, have affirmed the existence also in man of a "moral sense," meaning that moral distinctions are not due to reasoning processes, but are recognized by a kind of feeling, or "an immediate and undefinable intuition." In like manner may it be affirmed that man has a religious sense. Just as we are constituted to taste and touch, to have a sense of the beautiful, and to have a sense of right and wrong, so are we constituted to feel after God. "Wherever man is there religion is," said Max Müller, who also affirms, "I maintain that religion, so far from being impossible, is inevitable if only we are left in possession of our senses." Just because you are a man, made by and for God, the religious element within you constrains you, in spite of yourself, to exclaim of all earthly

pursuits and pleasures promising satisfaction and peace, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." II. **THE RELIGIOUS SENSE NEEDS TRAINING.** Whatever be the stage of moral and spiritual experience, the limits of development have not been reached. The religious sense can always be "touched to finer issues." By neglect it pines and withers. Through disuse the facility of speech in a foreign tongue lessens and disappears, and how completely the mastery has been lost may not be known till on some sudden emergency, to our utter humiliation, we find the words will not come when we "do call for them"; and we who once could swiftly weave our thought into speech, now stand in dumb imbecility. It is too often forgotten that a similar retribution, but infinitely graver in its issues, awaits the man who neglects to maintain his religious nature in healthful efficiency. When we call to mind the sure operation of this law, need we wonder that, spiritually, men differ so greatly, and that while some are keenly sensitive to the softer whispers of Divine love, others need the loud thunders of Heaven's artillery to rouse them to a consciousness of God? If the man of business give only the fragments of his time to the culture of his soul, what marvel that, whilst sagacious and successful in commerce, he should be weak, ignorant, and wayward in spiritual insight and service. If the student of Nature devote all his thought and energy to the investigation of her laws, what wonder that the penalty of excessive and exclusive study of physical science should be, as Darwin had to acknowledge with sorrow, the loss of relish for music, poetry, and the higher pursuits that refine and elevate life. If the intellect be trained and the affections neglected, what wonder that a Francis Bacon should show himself "wisest, meanest of mankind," ready and eager to sell his glorious birthright for a mess of pottage. O the pity of it, that men should so zealously train the understanding and so persistently neglect the heart, should suffer the cobwebs to darken the window of the soul, and allow the holy fire to go out! Yet is there no part of our nature we can so ill afford to leave undisciplined. If religion meant pardon only, even then delay would be dangerous, but if it mean the training of the soul, the development of character after the pattern of Christ Jesus, the discipline of the religious sense to swift, accurate, and joyous activity, is it not of all follies the greatest to neglect or postpone the culture of the soul? III. **WHAT IS THE METHOD OF TRAINING?** The answer is not difficult. It is one advantage of the line of thought pursued that the reply can be so easy and natural. How do men proceed to train their other senses? How is it that the dyer discerns varieties of hue unapparent to the untrained eye? How does the artist appreciate distinctions of shade invisible to the ordinary vision? Though there may sometimes be original and native superiority, it still holds true that "practice makes perfect." How shall the ear be trained to appreciate the subtle harmonies of music? Will it suffice to read treatises that describe the auditory and vocal organs? Will it be enough to study theories of musical composition? Will it not be needful to listen to music, to note the separate and combined effects, and ourselves to play and to sing if we are to possess executive skill and correct musical judgment? No one ever yet became a musical expert who did not use his ears! In like manner, it may be said, no man ever became an efficient public speaker by reading manuals of elocution, or treatises of rhetoric alone. There is needed intelligent and persevering practice for the attainment of the art to conceal art, and to speak with ease, clearness, and force. A man learns to swim not by perusing written instructions on natation, but by swimming. He learns to paint by painting. However useful theories of the various arts may be, in every sphere it is recognized that it is only by practice, wise and sedulous, the highest efficiency can be gained. It is that the simplicity of this has caused it to be overlooked when religious training is considered? How many appear to think that the mere reading of the Bible will discipline the nature! To study a chart is one thing, to navigate the vessel by its information quite another thing. To read the Bible is good, to act according to its directions is better. "Exercise thyself unto godliness," was Paul's counsel to Timothy. IV. **CAN WE BY INNATE STRENGTH OF WILL ACCOMPLISH THIS HIGH WORK?** For physical and mental training are not schools, colleges, teachers, and professors required? Can the irreligious man, by his own resolve alone, develop high religious sensibility? The uniform declarations of the Book of God concur with the humiliating testimony of personal consciousness, that it is not in man to direct his steps, to subdue his turbulent passions, to bring his motives and plans into harmony with the Divine will, to educate to unerring precision and robust energy his religious sense. Nor is there any need that he should attempt



the impossible task. The heart cries out for the living God, and His delights to answer its cry. (A. Cowe, M.A.)

**Ver. 3. Yes, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself.**—*Sparrows and swallows*:—These birds found in the sanctuary what we would find in God. **I. HOUSES FOR THEMSELVES.** That they should find houses in and around the Lord's house is remarkable, and David dwelt on it with pleasure. 1. Consider what they were. Sparrows. (1) Worthless creatures. Five for two farthings. (2) Needy creatures, requiring both nests, food, and everything else. (3) Uninvited guests. The Temple did not need them, it might have been all the better without them. (4) Numerous creatures; but none were driven away. 2. Consider what they did. "Found a house"—a comfortable, suitable abode. (1) They looked for it, or they could not have been described as having found it. (2) It was there already, or they could not have found it. (3) They appropriated it. Their right lay in discovery; they found a house and occupied it without question. O for an appropriating faith! 3. Consider what they enjoyed. Safety, Rest, Abode, Delight, Society, Nearness. All this in the house of God, hard by His altars. Thus do believers find all in Christ Jesus. And so, secondarily, they find the same things in the assembly of the saints, in the place where God's honour dwelleth. We come to the house of the Lord with joy. We remain in it with delight. We sit and sing in it with pleasure. We commune with our fellow-songsters with much content. **II. NESTS FOR THEIR YOUNG.** 1. Some persons are not so much in need of a house for themselves; for, like swallows, they live on the wing, and are active and energetic; but they need a nest for their young, for whom they are greatly anxious. They long to see the young people settled, happy, and safe in God. Children should be housed in the house of God. The sanctuary of God should be the nursery of the young. (1) They will be safe there, and free there. The swallow, the "bird of liberty," is satisfied to find a nest for herself near the altars of God. She is not afraid of bondage there either for herself or her young. (2) They will be joyful there. We should try to make our little ones happy in God, and in His holy worship. Dull Sabbaths and dreary services should not be mentioned among us. (3) They are near the blessing when we bring them near the house of the Lord. (4) They are in choice society; their companions will be the companions of Jesus. (5) They are likely to return to the nest, as the swallows do; even as the young salmon return to the rivulet where they were hatched. Young folks remember their first impressions. (6) Children truly brought to Christ have every blessing in that fact. They are rich: they dwell in God's palace. They are educated: they abide in the Lord's temple. They are safe for time and eternity. 2. The second blessing of a nest for our young often follows on the first, or getting a house for ourselves. But it needs prayer, example, and precept. Children do not take to religion as ducks to water: they must be led and trained with earnest care. Are you sighing after Christ for yourself and your children? Are you content without Christ? Then you are not likely to care about your children. Do you already possess a home in Jesus? Rest not till all yours are housed in the same place. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *More value than many sparrows*:—**I. A BITTER AND SIGNIFICANT CONTRAST.** "The sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself," while I! We do not know what the circumstances were, but if we accept the conjecture that he may have accompanied David in his flight during Absalom's rebellion, we may fancy him as wandering on the uplands across Jordan and sharing the agitations, fears and sorrows of those dark hours, and in the midst of all, as the little company hurried hither and thither for safety, thinking, with a touch of bitter envy, of the calm restfulness and serene services of the peaceful tabernacle. But, pathetic as is the complaint, when regarded as the sigh of a minister of the sanctuary exiled from the shrine which was as his home, and from the worship which was his occupation and delight, it sounds a deeper note and one which awakens echoes in our hearts, when we hear in it, as we may, the complaint of humanity contrasting its unrest with the happier lot of lower creatures. Be true to the unrest, and do not mistake its meaning, nor seek to still it, until it drives you to God. **II. A PLEA WHICH WE MAY USE, AND A PLEDGE ON WHICH WE MAY REST.** "Thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God." The psalmist pleads with God, and lays hold for his own confidence upon, the fact that creatures who do not understand what the altar means may build beside it, and who have no notion of who the God is to

whom the house is sacred, are yet cared for by Him. And he thinks to himself, "If I can say, 'My King and my God,' surely He that takes care of them will not leave me uncared for." The unrest of the soul that is capable of appropriating God is an unrest which has in it, if we understand it aright, the assurance that it shall be stilled and satisfied. These words not only may hearten us with confidence that our desires will be satisfied if they are set upon Him, but they point us to the one way by which they come. Say "My King and my God" in the deepest recesses of a spirit conscious of His presence, of a will submitting to His authority, of emptiness expectant of His fulness; say that, and you are in the house of the Lord. For it is not a question of place, it is a question of disposition and desire. III. A WARNING. Sparrows and swallows have very small brains. They build their nests, and they do not know whose altars they are flitting around. There are plenty of people who live like that. We are all tempted to build our nests where we may lay our young, or dispose of ourselves or our treasures in the very sanctuary of God, with blind, crass indifference to the Presence in which we move. The Father's house has many mansions, and wherever we go we are in God's temple. Alas! some of us have no more sense of the sanctities around us, and no more consciousness of the Divine eye that looks down upon us than if we were so many feathered sparrows flitting about the altar. Let us take care that we give our hearts to be influenced, and awed, and ennobled, and tranquillized by the sense of evermore being in the house of the Lord. Let us see to it that we keep in that house by continual aspiration, cherishing in our hearts the ways that lead to it; and so making all life worship, and every place what the pilgrim found the stone of Bethel to be, a house of God and a gate of heaven. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *The swallow's nest*:—The swallow, like the robin and the wren, is one of the sacred birds of Christendom. Its own beauty throws a shield of protection over it; and by rude and gentle natures alike it is regarded with a feeling of veneration akin to that which pervades the quaint rhymes of the "Ancient Mariner." It makes its nest under the lowly cottage eaves, almost within reach of eager childish hands stretched forth from the dormer window; but it is as safe and unmolested there as under the porch of the rural sanctuary, whose profound quiet is disturbed only once a week by feet of reverent worshippers. Nor can we wonder at this beautiful feeling which extends to a few favoured birds and flowers an interest in that blessed religion which guards and hallows everything that God has made, as an earnest that it shall yet embrace all nature. It has more and other beauty than the mere grace of its form and the glossy sheen of its plumage. All the past summers of life have shed their halo around it. To the careworn mind there is childhood in every twitter of its little throat, and in every flash of its purple wing. It is full of our own human heart. Scarcely less wonderful than itself is the nest which it builds, in defiance of the laws of gravity, against the smooth masonry of the gable. It attaches its frail nest to the enduring structure of man that it may share in its endurance. It seeks, as the psalmist tells us, the vicinity of the altar of God, the safe sanctuary of holy places. 1. And is there not a profound lesson for us in this curious contrast? We are migratory like the swallow; and the land from whence we have come and to which we are hastening is fairer than any tropical dream of groves of palm and violet skies of unfading summer. We wear immortal wings within; and no small part of the sadness of human life arises from the incongruity between our capacities and attainments, our longings and enjoyments; between the infinite duration of our immortal spirits and the transitoriness of all things here. 2. The swallow, aerial as is its flight, transient as is its stay, graceful and ethereal as is its form, nevertheless builds its nest of the common clay of the ground; but compensates for the seeming degradation by attaching that nest to the home of man and the very altar of God. And so God has made our bodies of the dust of the earth, and closely connected our life with it. We must make our nest of clay. But while by our bodies we belong to one set of circumstances, we belong by our souls to another and higher. We are immortal guests dwelling within a transient house of clay that must one day crumble and fall and be resolved into the elements out of which it was built. And we, too, must build our clay-nest against the house of God, near the very altar of heaven, if its vanity and insignificance are to be redeemed, if we are to learn most richly the meaning of our discipline, and find strength to endure unto the end, and lay up provision in a storehouse which death cannot rife. 3. The swallow's nest has a wise lesson for us in the building of many other structures, mental and

moral, as well as material. To labour steadily and to wait patiently is the precept which it enforces. Only by slow and cautious degrees can any human effort reach perfection. Especially in the growth of the spiritual being, the formation of the Christian character, do we need to act upon the swallow's motto of "Haste is slow." We must not force our higher nature into premature or impatient development lest it become weak and unstable. Like all Nature's operations, which proceed by a wise and orderly progression from the seed to the blade, and from the blade to the ear, and from the ear to the full corn in the ear, never anticipating at any stage what belongs to a more advanced one, never exhibiting an abnormal precocity, the kingdom of heaven in us should develop its germinating fulness with the same ease and quietude and steady progress. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

**Ver. 4. Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee.**—*The priest and the pilgrim*:—1. The means of grace are prized in proportion to the difficulty or danger in the way of their enjoyment. The Scottish Covenanters would not be absent from public worship, although to be present at a conventicle was to brave not only oftentimes winter cold and storm under the open sky, but as well the cruel death that threatened them as law-breakers. Shall we not appear to our less favoured brethren to be the spoiled children of too many mercies? 2. The psalmist's utterance also illustrates the universal disposition among men to think they see in the lot assigned to others benefits and advantages greater than anything they themselves enjoy. Much of this discontent and murmuring has no better justification than an erroneous estimate of the prosperity and happiness of others. A little reflection would show it to be unworthy and mean-spirited. Instead of saying, "Happy are those others," and allowing discontent to embitter our spirit, let us look around, and, seeing what others lack and suffer, say gratefully, "Happy are we." Not envy, but loving, self-forgetting sympathy will be the passion stirred in our hearts. The pilgrim is not justified in supposing that those who remain in God's house are so much better off religiously than himself. After all, it is not constant and close association with sacred things that makes a man blessed. The following three verses (5-7) effectively enforce this lesson. They are best understood as the reply of the Temple ministers to the pilgrim's exclamation, "Happy are they that dwell in Thy house!" These do not seek to make out that they are not happy, but with quiet dignity they perform the useful and needful service of drawing the man's attention to his own happiness. "Nay," say they, "not only those who dwell in God's house are happy. Happy is every man whose strength the Lord is, and very specially such as are pilgrims on the highways with gladness in their heart." The pilgrim limits the conditions of happiness unduly. All who put their trust in God, pilgrims like himself, are as fortunate as they. Happy is the priest and happy is the pilgrim! (*A. S. Laidlaw, B.D.*) *The blessedness of dwelling in God's house*:—I. THERE IS A PLACE PECULIARLY DISTINGUISHED AS THE HOUSE OF GOD. Jehovah planned, built, furnished and inhabits it. II. THERE ARE PERSONS WHO FIND AN ABIDING RESIDENCE IN IT. This implies—1. The most ardent attachment to it. 2. Constant attendance upon it. 3. The greatest enjoyment in it. III. SUCH CHARACTERS ARE TRULY BLESSED. 1. From the nature of their employment. Praise. 2. From its perpetuity. (*T. Spencer.*) *Blessings received in the sanctuary an incentive to special praise*:—I. A SACRED SCENE. What though wealth may have poured no tribute to enrich it? what though art may have conferred no labour to adorn it? what though nobility may have allowed no patronage to sanction it? what though royalty may have pronounced no decree to exalt it? what though there be no ceremonial of gorgeous pomp to decorate its ritual, and no thrilling notes of scientific harmony to reverberate through long-drawn aisles and lofty domes, melting the passions by its charm, and swaying the senses on the side of salvation?—yet let there be the open voice of inspiration, let there be the prayer of the penitent and the hymn of the grateful, let there be the voice of the living ministry "declaring the whole counsel of God," and expounding the Gospel of His grace—and there angel bands descend and hover, the "ministering spirits" of the place, and there God pronounces, as of old, in solemn approval, "This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it." II. A DELIGHTFUL FACT. The house of God is the scene of—1. Instruction. 2. Comfort. 3. Fellowship with God. 4. Preparation for heaven. Here it is, you plume your souls for "the glory, which is yet to be revealed in you"; and it is but a trifling distance that separates you from the consummation, when you shall stand in the

presence of God. "Blessed," then, "are they that dwell in His house." III. AN APPROPRIATE ENJOYMENT. "Still praising" God—1. When you tell verbally of His goodness. 2. As you render personal consecration to His service. 3. By advocating with others the claims of His house and cause. (*J. Parsons.*) *Contrasted lots*:—It is early morning. A party of pilgrims are drawing nigh to the Holy City. They have come from afar to pay their vows in the house of the Lord. They catch sight of the golden sheen from the eastern front of the Temple as it flashes in the morning light, and break out into song. "O how lovely are Thy dwellings, O Lord of hosts." But as the pilgrim still toils on his way and climbs the long ascent, hot, wearied, travel-stained, his throat choked with the sands of the desert, his tongue parched with thirst, he cannot help contrasting his position with that of the fortunate servants of the Temple. There they are constantly and without effort where he can be but once or twice in his life, and then only at great sacrifice of time, energy, comfort. It takes him days of wearisome and exhausting travel to come and pay his vows, while the priest, and even the doorkeeper have nothing to do but to tumble out of bed at the last minute and they are on the spot! He can only stay amid these delightful scenes a few days at the most, and must then return to the tents of wickedness, where it is so hard to keep a conscience void of offence. The Temple servants, on the other hand, can hardly fail to be good. They dwell always in the gracious and heavenly atmosphere of the Temple courts, and continually engage in sanctifying and delightful duties. How enviable their lot! "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, they are constantly praising Thee." The priest, the Levite, and the doorkeeper are at their customary duty. The pilgrim song strikes on their ear. They cannot help pausing a moment. How fresh and sincere it sounds! What genuine and holy passion! "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord." And now again that note of exaltation and rapture, "My King and my God!" The old doorkeeper looks at the aged priest. They are both in their fortieth year of service. They have never departed from the Temple, each engaged in his same round of duties all the time. They read and share each other's thoughts. "Ah!" sighs the priest, "for the pilgrim's experience! He is visiting the holy spot, not because he has to be here, but because he has a strong desire to come. What adventures he has had on the way! What perils confronted and difficulties surmounted! And now he is here, and sees everything for the first time. All is fresh, full of novelty and interest, reality and zest. I, poor wight, have been doing these same duties for forty years! And I am bound to fulfil them, whether in the mood or not. It is long enough since I had a new idea, or felt the breath of a fresh inspiration. Behold what a weariness in the monotonous reiteration of even holy duty! Would I could change places with these pilgrims!" "Blessed is the man who finds such strength in Thee, who has it in his heart to make a pilgrimage to Zion." So it is all the world over, in religious and in daily life! We see the desirable things of the lot of another and the hardships of our own. "To this side of the river," says the Hindu proverb, "that side looks green." But cross the river and see! Have you not in walking along a street after a heavy shower of rain often noticed that the other side was far drier than the puddly pavement you were treading? So to avoid walking in the water you have crossed the road, but your feet got wet nevertheless! Many a young Christian, harassed and tempted at his daily work, thinks how fine it must be to be a minister. Well, so it is. But the position must not be judged by the parade day. It might be a good thing for him to be a minister just for one week. Lots are more equally divided than we think, and it is well that we should be initiated into the secret of St. Paul, who had learnt in whatsoever state he was therein to be content. For we may be well assured that if we are not content in our own lot we never should be in that of any one else. From the opinion of others we may learn some of the advantages our own calling possesses. The pilgrim tells the Temple servant for what he envies him, the Temple servant can show the pilgrim the compensation of his position. And the wise-hearted will heed the criticism. The sage bids us not to leave the ills we have to fly to those we know not of. The pilgrim must see the grand compensation of his lot. He cannot always be engaged offering the sacrifices of the sanctuary. But let him remember that life's redeeming and renewing ministry is not confined to the hours or places of worship. "Look," says the priest, surveying the wilderness which the pilgrim has sorrowfully trodden; "passing through the valley of weeping they make it a place of springs." In the wilderness of the world, through which

God's people pass as strangers and pilgrims, their struggles are sacrificial, their tears life-giving. They wander in the wilderness in a desert way, hungry and thirsty, their souls faint in them, but as they go through it they turn the wilderness into a pool of water and the dry land into a spring of water. All that come after them bless God for the sighs and tears, the struggles and pains of those that went before, for they find that the desert has rejoiced and blossoms as the rose. You bewail the wickedness of your generation or the neighbourhood in which you live, or the business place you work in. You sigh and say, Woe is me that I dwell in the tents of wickedness; I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord. Already you are a doorkeeper of the house of the Lord. If ever the people among whom your lot is cast are to hear of Christ and see the Kingdom of Heaven opened, it is by your witness and Christly ministry among them. Christ is the Door, and, if I may so say, you are the Door-keeper. That is your privilege, your great opportunity. You may be the only one on the pilgrimage in your neighbourhood, or family, or place of business. But you will not long be. For as you pass on your way your cheery courage, your prayers, your sorrows and struggles shall, by God's grace, avail to change the face of the dark spot in the midst of which He has placed you and to make the wilderness into a fruitful field. (F. L. Wiseman.)

**Vers. 5-7. Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee.—Soul strength:—**I. IT SPRINGS FROM A SPECIAL CONNECTION WITH GOD. "Whose strength is in Thee." In what does a soul's strength consist? 1. Disinterested love. 2. Sympathy with right. The stronger the sympathy with right, the more mighty. 3. Concentration of faculties. 4. Uplifting hope. All these elements are to be found in God, must come from Him; and where they are there is strength of soul, the sublimest strength of all. II. IT CHANGES THE UNPROFITIOUS IN CIRCUMSTANCES INTO BLESSINGS. "Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well." III. IT INVOLVES A PROGRESS IN THE JOURNEY OF LIFE. "They go from strength to strength." The nearer the pilgrim advanced towards the Temple, the more strength he got, by companionship, exercise, and resolution. IV. IT ENABLES THE SOUL TO REACH AT LAST THE VERY PRESENCE OF THE ETERNAL. "Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." (Homilist.) **In whose heart are the ways.—Ways in the heart:—**This man's heart is not like the trackless desert or the wild waste. There are "ways" in it, "ways" of truth and righteousness and goodness, and these show that the spiritual and moral energies of the man have been, and are, at work. Now, the man is happy who has ways in his heart, for spiritual culture is the secret of spiritual blessedness, compared with which all other happiness is an empty dream, a passing shadow, and nothing more. Blessed is he "in whose heart are ways." I. THE WAY OF REPENTANCE. The work of grace begins with this. II. THE WAY TO HEAVEN. But when we speak of a thing being in the heart we mean more than that it is known to us; we mean that we love it. And in this sense the way to heaven is in the believer's heart. Every child feels happy when he is on his way home, and so does every true husband, and every true wife, and every true parent, and so does every pious pilgrim feel as he journeys to his home in the skies. III. THE WAY OF HOLINESS. IV. THE WAY OF PRAYER. Just as the quickened seed seems to know to grow upwards, or, at least, is drawn upwards, and gently finds its way through the soil, so the heart, quickened by grace, rises heavenward. (A. Scott.) **Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well.—The valley of Baca:—**"The pilgrim band," says Perowne, "rich in hope, forget the trials and difficulties of the way. Hope changes the rugged and stony waste into living fountains. The vale blossoms as if the sweet rain of heaven had covered it with blessings. Hope sustains them at every step. From station to station they renew their strength as they draw nearer the end of their journey, till at last they appear before God." Delight in the end is thus described as rendering the way to it, however toilsome in itself, delightful too. A deep religious sentiment—such is the thought—has power to change the mind's estimate of things without, and thus to render the painful pleasant and the pleasant doubly blest. I. WE MAY SEE THIS IN THE INCREASED INTEREST WHICH SPIRITUAL RELIGION IMPARTS TO THE IDEA OF LIFE, AND THE VIEW OF THE PRESENT WORLD. What the sun is to the earth, God is to the souls of His rational creatures. The soul has an atmosphere which behoves to be filled with Heaven's own sunlight. We cannot be blessed without Him. It is the opening of the eye upon His glory that changes the aspect of existence (Ps.

xxxvi. 9). II. WE MAY TRACE THIS FURTHER, IN REFERENCE TO THE EXERCISES AND DUTIES OF RELIGION. See Hannah—with what joy she anticipated the day when she should perform her vow. See that student in a far-off land toiling at the acquisition of a foreign and sometimes barbarous tongue, presenting little when acquired to gratify his taste, and nothing to gain for him the world's renown, but one in which he may be able to "preach" among the heathen the "unspeakable riches of Christ!" III. THE SAME PRINCIPLE APPLIES TO THE SADNESS AND SUFFERING THROUGH WHICH GOD MAY LEAD. The very thought is sustaining, that affliction, instead of "rising out of the dust, or springing forth out of the ground," comes from the hand of God. But this is not all. Piety, devout feeling towards God, looks at the ends to be attained by Divine dealings. It is to pass through the crucible of the Almighty refiner. It is to receive the discipline of "the Father of Spirits." IV. THIS EXTENDS ALSO TO THE HOUR OF DEATH. Humanity shrinks from dissolution; but religious feeling sustains even there, for now the aspect of death is changed. It is dissolution to the body, but it is emancipation to the soul. And it is the passage to life. It is the gateway borne to God, to the fatherland, to the joys unutterable and eternal. (*E. T. Prust.*) *The pilgrims in the valley of Baca*.—I. THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF THE RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE OF GOD. 1. The state of their souls before God. (1) Strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. (2) Thoughts and affections interested with Divine and spiritual subjects; conversation in heaven. 2. The general tenor of their conduct in the world. To all such men this barren wilderness becomes a place of spiritual refreshment and purification. (1) They cordially believe the assurance that, "though the Lord causes grief, yet doth He not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; that He chastens us only for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." Under this impression they are mainly solicitous that their afflictions should produce in them the benefit which is designed. (2) The mercies and comforts which God bestows, they receive with devout and thankful hearts, as designed to cheer and support them on their way, and to inspire them with a thirst for more exalted blessings. II. THE SUCCESS AND HAPPINESS WHICH ATTEND THEM (ver. 7). 1. Their successful progress. Whether the way be rough or smooth; whether their road now lies through the valley of weeping, or whether they are permitted to drink of the cup of heavenly consolation; in any case, we are commissioned to say to the righteous, that at least it is well with their souls. They are instructed how to derive spiritual support and nourishment from every circumstance of life; as the bee extracts its honey even from the most unsavoury flowers. 2. The happy termination of their journey. They may be scattered far and wide from each other, as they pass along their destined course: they must be prepared, from time to time, to lose for a season their friends and companions by the way. Some will get before, and leave us weeping in the vale. But still they all shall meet again. (*E. Whieldon, M.A.*) *Happy pilgrims*.—Rightly rendered, the first words of these verses are not a calm, prosaic statement, but an emotional exclamation. The psalmist's tone would be more truly represented if we read, "How blessed is the man," or "Oh! the blessednesses," for that is the literal rendering of the Hebrew words, "the blessedness of the man whose strength is Thee." I. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE PILGRIM-SPIRIT. "Amplius," the dying Xavier's word, "further afield," is the motto of all noble life—scientist, scholar, artist, man of letters, man of affairs: all come under the same law, that unless there is something before them which has dominated their hearts, and draws their whole being towards it, their lives want salt, want nobility, want freshness, and a green scum comes over the pool. To live is to aspire; to cease to aspire is to die. Well then, looking all round our horizon, there stands out one path for aspiration which is clearly blessed to tread. There are needs in all our hearts, deep longings, terrible wounds, dreary solitudes, which can only be appeased and healed and companioned when we are pressing nearer and nearer God, that Infinite and Divine Source of all blessedness, of all peace and good. To possess God is life; to feel after God is life, too. For that aim is sure, as we shall see, to be satisfied. II. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE PILGRIM'S EXPERIENCE. "Passing through the valley of weeping they make it a place of springs, the rain also covereth it with blessings." No doubt the poet is referring here to the actual facts of the pilgrimage to Zion. No doubt, on some one of the roads, there lay a gloomy gorge, the name of which was the Valley of Weeping; either because it dimly commemorated some half-forgotten tragedy long ago, or, more probably, because it was arid and frowning

and full of difficulty for the travellers on the march. The psalmist uses that name with a lofty imaginative freedom, which itself confirms the view that there is something deeper in the psalm than the mere external circumstances of the pilgrimages to the Holy City. If we have in our hearts, as our chief aim, the desire to get closer to God, then our sorrows and our tears will become sources of refreshment and fertility. Ah! How different all our troubles, large and little, look when we take as our great aim in life what is God's great purpose in giving us life, viz. that we should be moulded into His likeness and enriched by the possession of Himself. But that is not all. If, with the pilgrims' hearts, we rightly use our sorrows, we shall not be left to find refreshment and fertilizing power only in ourselves, but the benediction of the rain from heaven will come down, and the great Spirit of God will fall upon our hearts, not in a flood that drowns, but broken up into a beneficent mist that falls quietly upon us, and brings with itself the assurance of fertility. And so the secret of turning the desert into abundance, and tears into blessings, lies in having the pilgrim's heart. III. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE PILGRIM'S ADVANCE. "They go from strength to strength." I do not know whether the psalmist means to use that word "strength" in the significance which it also has in old English, of a fortified place, so that the metaphor would be that from one camp of security, one fortress, to another, they journey safe always, because of their protection; or whether he means to use it rather in its plain and simple sense, according to which the significance would be that these happy pilgrims do not get worn out on the journey, as is the wont of men that set out, for instance, from some far corner of India to Mecca; and come in battered and travel-stained, and half dead with their privations, but that the further they go the stronger they become; and on the road gain more vigour than they could ever have gained by ease and indulgence in their homes. But, whichever of these two meanings we may be disposed to adopt, the great thought that comes out of both of them is identical—viz. that this is one of the distinguishing joys of a Christian career of pressing forward to closer communion and conformity with our Lord and Master, in whom God is manifested—viz. that we grow day by day in strength, and that effort does not weaken, but invigorates. IV. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE PILGRIM'S ARRIVAL. "Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." Then there is one road on which whosoever travels is sure to get to his goal. On all others caravans get lost, overwhelmed in a sandstorm, or slain by robbers; and the bleached bones of men and camels lie there on the sand for centuries. This caravan always gets there. For no man ever wanted God that did not possess Him, and the measure of our desire is the prophecy of our possession. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *The vale of tears*:—1. Some have said that Baca is a real place—bearing, down even to modern times, a somewhat similar designation—a plain now called Wady Bakaa, lying in Northern Palestine, on the direct route of the pilgrims who came up to the Passover Feasts. In explanation of the name, which certainly means "weeping," they tell the story of a Bedouin who, fleeing before his enemy, lost here his favourite dromedary, and fell into tears, not only because of his broken attachment, but because of his inevitable capture in the deprivation of his means of escape. 2. Others have said that the reference is to any valley of Baca-trees, or mulberries. These would be of frequent occurrence on any line of travel around Jerusalem, and would be sought for defence in the middle of the day, when the sun's rays were hottest, and for the encampment at night, when the company made a halt. And in order to explain the allusion in the name, they remind us of the fact that the mulberry-tree, whenever any one of its twigs or leaves is wounded, exudes from the cut copious drops of thick sap, falling like tears on the sward beneath. 3. Still others say that this language is wholly figurative. There may, or may not, be an indirect allusion to some locality or some familiar landscape; but the meaning is simply tropical. It is intended to present an image of human life. The old Latin Vulgate, and all the ancient versions, render the expression—in *valle lachrymarum*. There originated our common metaphor, when we call this world "a vale of tears." I. EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN MUST EXPECT TO HAVE HIS OWN PRIVATE "VALLEY OF BACA." No two believers can see or travel the same path. Every Christian has his personal path of experience. But even this shows the intelligence which is resident in our trials. Nothing happens; all is ordered. And one of our arguments to prove we are in the true way is found in the discovery that it leads through roughness and confusion. If it ever grows easy and luxurious, we may fear we have wandered. And this is the way along which our Saviour went

before us. He was a "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." II. EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN MUST EXPECT "TO PASS THROUGH HIS VALLEY OF BACA." Jerusalem lay on the top of a hill. It was surrounded with mountains, traversed by ravines and gorges. Straight up over them the festival-pilgrims forced their advance. And these were the times when they sang their cheerfullest psalm—this one among them. There is no mountain without its valley. Our finest off-looks of experience are found when we have risen to the summit of the hardest passes, "And felt upon our foreheads bare the benedictions of the air." And by the grace of God rests have been allowed by the way. Notable seasons of remembrance have we all of halts for refreshment we have already enjoyed. III. EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN MUST EXPECT TO FIND A "WELL" IN EACH VALLEY OF BACA. In every sorrow there is some mitigation. Sometimes, again, trouble opens sluices of joy in our experience quite new. It was one of the incidents in the Crimean war, that a soldier lay famishing with thirst, and complaining bitterly, as a cannon-ball tore past him, that he was still left under fire. Meantime the missile of iron buried itself in the cliff-side behind him, splintered the rock, disclosed a spring, and sent close to his hot lips a full stream of water for his refreshment. Most of us have watched almost breathlessly as some tremendous providence shattered hope, or health, or comfort, or home, and yet found we were still alive afterwards, and indeed surrounded with blessings of which we never knew the existence before, and never felt the power till now. IV. EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN MAY FORCE EVEN THE VALLEY OF BACA TO BECOME HIS WELL. The moment any Christian in simple-hearted confidence commits himself to Divine providence, he discovers the absolutely limitless reach of that statement with which this wonderful old psalm closes: "The Lord God is a sun and shield," etc. This positive self-surrender is one of the conditions of forcing sorrow to minister comfort. It is compelling the weapon, which slays thousands of Philistines, to pour forth a fountain for our thirst. And the other condition is habitual repose on Divine wisdom. Trust in God cannot be exercised by fits and starts. It is not a thing of impulse, but of steady, every-day principle. With these two conditions met, any believer can turn his valleys of weeping into fountains of refreshment always. V. EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN WILL FIND HIS VALLEY OF BACA ENDING ON THE MOUNT OF GOD (ver. 7). Then he will understand it at last. It may not have been what he would have chosen; but its discipline was profitable, and now its end is peace—eternal, sacred, sure. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. *They go from strength to strength.*—*The theory of true progress:*—What is the true progress of man? We say progress of "man" in contradistinction to the progress of ideas, "graces," principles, faculties, or arts. 1. Progress in the accumulation of wealth is not the true progress of man. 2. Nor progress in the attainment of knowledge. 3. Nor progress in social influence. 4. Nor progress in theological zeal. 5. Nor the progress of any element in the soul distinct and separable from it. I. TRUE PROGRESS IS THE PROGRESS OF THE SOUL IN APPROPRIATING, WITH HAPPINESS TO ITSELF, ALL EXTERNAL OBJECTS TO ITS HIGHEST USE. But how is this appropriation to be made? How is this outward universe to promote the growth of our souls? Not without our willing and earnest effort. Put the acorn into a congenial soil, and external nature, by a necessity, will draw all the particles of vitality from its "milky veins," and elaborate them into majestic forests. The seed has no resisting force; it is passive in the plastic hand of nature. But it is not so with mind; it has a choice in the matter. There must be investigation and application. II. TRUE PROGRESS IS THE PROGRESS OF THE SOUL IN DISTRIBUTING, WITH HAPPINESS TO ITSELF, THE HIGHEST BLESSINGS TO THE CREATION. 1. Analogy indicates it. There is nothing made for itself—nothing whose powers and influences are entirely circumscribed to self. Whatever a creature receives it gives out, with the modification and increase of its own force. The clouds borrow water of the ocean, but they pour it forth again in refreshing showers upon the thirsty hills, which, in their turn, send them amongst the valleys. The tree borrows from every part of the world in order to build up itself, but it gives out, in return, beauty, fragrance, and fruit. Thus all things give what they appropriate. The material is but the emblem of the spiritual, and thus all nature typifies man's distributive function. 2. Its instinct suggests it. "There are," says Bishop Butler, "as real, and the same kind of indications in Nature that we are made for society, and to do good to our fellow-creatures, as that we were intended to take care of our own life, and health, and private good;



and that the same objections lie against one of these assertions as against the other." 3. It has a sphere for it. No two spirits, perhaps, throughout the intelligent universe are exactly alike: the one has what its neighbour requires, and thus to all there is a field for distribution. Now, true progress is, as we have said, the progress of the soul in distributing the highest blessings, with happiness to itself. What are the highest blessings? Spiritual thoughts. Ideas that will stimulate to duty, and nerve for nobler deeds; that will shed new light on being, and present the Eternal to the mind under aspects yet more lovely; that will guide to loftier walks of existence; that will touch new chords, develop new powers of being, awaken new hopes, and kindle higher aspirations; I call the highest blessings. III. TRUE PROGRESS IS THE PROGRESS OF THE SOUL IN BOTH APPROPRIATING AND DISTRIBUTING, UNDER AN EVER-HEIGHTENING CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE CREATOR'S PRESENCE AND APPROVAL. Neither of the two former instincts to which we have referred—that of self or society—is more real, deep, or universal, than the Divine. All men, in all periods, circumstances, and places, have developed their intuitive belief in the supernatural and Divine. This instinct is the ultimate fact in our spiritual constitution: it is the fountain-head of all religions. It has reared temples for the world, transformed men into priests, and wood and stone into gods. It is the breath of prayer, the song of thanksgiving, the soul of worship, through all lands and ages. To enjoy the approbation of the Deity is the grand desideratum of life. This last element of progress—namely, the ever-heightening consciousness of Divine approbation—transcends the other two, inasmuch as it involves them. It is only as this consciousness is felt that the spirit can succeed, either in the great work of appropriation or distribution. This is the spirit of advancement. (*Homilist.*) *Spiritual progress*:—Progress is the order of the day. It pervades everything. It is found in every walk of life. It is breaking up many of our old stereotype notions, and is forcing into notice and practice the newest and best discoveries. Who would not wish our age to be progressive in the useful and beautiful and great? So it is pleasant to see individuals progress—to see them rise step by step to the attainment of some great and worthy object.

I. THE CHARACTER OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS. 1. It is slow. From step to step Holiness and heaven are to be obtained slowly—little by little. If we cannot fly or run we must be willing to climb and walk, thankful to go forward, though slowly. 2. It is toilsome. Not only slow work, but hard work. The ascent is difficult and dangerous, like the ascent of some ice-bound mountains. Painfully does the traveller move upwards. 3. It is certain. "They go," etc. They rise. They are near heaven. They have more of Christ's likeness.

II. SOME OF THE INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCES OF CEASING TO PROGRESS. 1. Declension. If the soul is not gazing upward and Godward, it will gaze earthward. If Christ, the strong, loving magnet, does not draw the soul to Himself, the worldly magnet will draw it to itself. 2. Loss at every step; his prospects and hopes clouded, his peace gradually departs. (*W. Darwent.*) *From strength to strength*:—The old and the new man co-exist, and they bring antagonistic elements to bear, so that warfare and strife are the result. The spirit born of God is annoyed, and hindered, and offended, by the spirit born of Adam. But in this condition there is progression as well as conflict. The new man gains ground, and the victory is reserved for him; and on each successive collision his power is greater, and that of his adversary is enfeebled. Although he may win his way but inch by inch, he shall win it in the end. The signs of this progress are—I. A GROWING SENSE OF GOD. His faith in God is a belief which stirs his mind, which sways his conscience, which animates his soul. Impatient, sometimes, in his fleshly thralls, he breaks away from time and sense, and strives to get at God. If he digs deep, he digs for God; if he soars high, he soars for God. Does he range creation? He finds God everywhere—in landscape, in field, in flower, and in flood. Nature is full of Him. Does he rehearse the ways of Providence? He sees the methods of God's wisdom, and the traces of His care. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about" him. Not only does he think of Him as the God of his life, but as his "reconciled God and Father through Jesus Christ." The spirit of ostrangement is exorcised; and, in a filial and full assurance, he asserts his sonship by the cry of "Abba, Father!"

II. A GROWING DEPENDENCE UPON CHRIST. He strikes out the "I" both for the past and for the future, and puts in "Christ." It is not what I have done; but what Christ has done. Not what I can do; but what Christ can do. The Christian lives inversely, if we may so speak; the weaker he becomes, the stronger he becomes;—i. e. the weaker grows the man, the stronger grows the Christian. For

just in proportion as he realizes he is not only weak and helpless, but that he is absolutely nothing without Christ; in that proportion is he impelled to take the firmer hold upon Him, till he who was weak, helpless, and nothing in himself, grows mighty, able, and everything through Christ who strengthened him. This growth in grace, moreover, is accompanied by increasing spiritual discernment.

III. INCREASING STEADINESS AND SUCCESS IN THE RESISTANCE OF TEMPTATION. The natural man makes no stand. He rather goes over to the enemy. Neither does the converted man, all at once, attain the full power of resistance, because he cannot, all at once, learn to look entirely to, and lean entirely on, Jesus. The young conscript will often show more apparent zeal against sin than the advanced Christian. The old soldier does not battle the less valiantly when the enemy is before him, because he does not brandish his sword so swaggeringly on parade. It is purpose, and not impulse, by which the old soldier is guided. And it is the veteran, not the recruit, who makes the fewest relapses, is most seldom disgraced by a repulse, and who gains the more frequent and most signal victories.

IV. DECREASING ABSORPTION IN WORLDLY OBJECTS AND ATTRACTIONS. He puts things in their proper place, and in their proper order. God and heaven stand first; self and earth stand second.

V. AN INCREASED UNSELFISHNESS AND DISINTERESTEDNESS OF RELIGIOUS EMOTION. He sees spiritual things now, absolutely; not merely in their relation towards himself, but as they are in themselves. He sees Jesus in a higher light than as a mere personal Saviour; he elevates Him to a loftier throne, for, as he beholds His moral excellency, he loves to commune with Him, and grows restless to be with Him face to face. The fully renewed heart wants to see Him take all His power, and reign.

VI. A DEEPENED COMPOSURE IN ANTICIPATING DEATH AND ETERNITY. Talk to him of death, and you talk to him of liberty; you tell him of one who strikes off the dungeon bars, and unclasps the detaining gyves. (A. Murcell.) *The untiring travellers*.—I. THE PROGRESSIVE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S COURSE. His repentance will be characterized by a greater hatred to sin—not so much on account of its penalties as of its pollution—its opposition to the Divine nature. His love to God—his benevolence to his fellow-creatures—and his affectionate sympathy for the household of faith, will perpetually improve in fervour, activity, and enlargement. His fortitude, mailed with a growing conviction of Divine truth, will be displayed in a more uncompromising adherence to what is right—in a more unbending resistance to what is wrong. Thus will he go from strength to strength, while the beauty of holiness will be daily brightening upon him, and his affinity and relationship to heaven made thereby increasingly manifest.

II. THE MEANS BY WHICH HE GATHERS INCREASING STRENGTH AND ENERGY FOR ITS PROSECUTION. 1. What the vale of Baca was to the Jewish pilgrims, the word and ordinances of God are to the heaven-bound traveller. Just as the little pits in the desert contained the rain which came from above to confirm the ancient inheritance of the Lord when it was weary, so are ordinances the instituted receptacles of the descending influences of Divine grace which come down like showers that water the earth to revive and invigorate the soul that thirsts for them. 2. The Israelites, in going up to Jerusalem, were strengthened and encouraged by the society of their fellow-pilgrims, who divided the toils of the journey, and whose presence and converse animated them to prosecute it to the end. Union and co-operation are powerful stimulants in any pursuit. 3. In going up to Jerusalem from the several parts of their country, to worship the Lord in the place where He had recorded His name, the Israelites, we are told, cheered their spirits and beguiled the weariness of the way by certain sacred melodies which they sang at intervals and in concert as they travelled along. The psalms entitled Songs of Degrees are generally understood to have been sung on these occasions. Now, this was a fruitful source of solace and refreshment. This made the journey pleasant and delightful. It is thus that the joy of the Lord is the strength of the Christian pilgrim. Every grace of the Spirit gives pleasure in its operation. 4. The Israelites were animated to the prosecution of their journey by the hope of reaching Zion and the prospect of the sacred enjoyments which awaited them there. "I had fainted," says the psalmist, "unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." As he advances onward in his Christian course, with the glow of spiritual health and activity, every fresh triumph over besetting sin—every fresh act of self-denial increased—every new habit of goodness acquired—every Christian virtue striking deeper root in his character—and every known duty more faithfully, fully, and cheerfully discharged, bear him record that now is his salvation nearer than when he believed. While

he measures not his pace by his own strength, but leans upon the faithfulness of Omnipotence with all the confidence that one reposes on the arm of an old and well-tried companion, the oil of gladness is poured into his heart, and his soul becomes like the chariots of Aminadab, for he can run and not be weary, he can walk and not be faint. III. **THE BLESSED AND GLORIOUS TERMINATION.** The final issue of the Christian's course rests not upon a peradventure, but upon the omnipotent power and faithfulness of God, that they may have strong consolation who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before them. The same hand which gave the new bias to direct the soul in its heavenward motion will continue to quicken and secure its progress (Phil. i. 6; John x. 28, 29). (J. Anderson, M.A.)

**Ver. 10. For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand.—Time spent in worship is time best spent:—**I. There is no time like it for the **DEVELOPMENT OF THE HIGHEST THOUGHTS.** Mind quickens mind. The greater the mind with which we are in conscious contact, the more power it has to rouse the intellect and set the wheels of thought a-going. Conscious contact with God's mind is the strongest impulse to thought, and to thought of the highest kind. Thought upon Him, His attributes, operations, laws, claims, etc. Hence no engagement like that of genuine worship can evoke and develop the wonderful powers of human thought. It is by thought alone that a man rises. II. There is no time like it for the **EXCITATION OF THE SUBLIMEST EMOTIONS.** As our physical life is in the flowing blood, so our happiness is in the current of our emotions. 1. Gratitude is an element of happiness. The mind full of thankfulness is the mind full of joy. In true worship gratitude rises to the highest point. 2. Adoration is an element of happiness. When the mind is wrapped even in the admiration of physical or artistic beauty, it is happy; but when raised to an adoration of the highest moral beauty, its happiness is ecstatic. In true worship this is the case, the whole soul, so to speak, seems to float on the calm and sunny sea of infinite love. III. There is no time like it for the **PROMOTION OF SOUL GROWTH.** Our well-being consists in the healthy growth of all the wonderful germs of thought and feeling and faculty which are embedded in our spiritual natures. As there were in the earth when first it came from the hands of Almighty God the germs of all the vegetable and sentient life that have appeared during the untold ages that have gone, so in the human soul all the germs of power, greatness, and blessedness that a man will ever become are slumbering as embryonic germs in his soul. His paradise consists in their development. Now, genuine worship is the means, the only means, that can bring these powers out. It is only as the earth turns its face to the sun that its seeds of life are quickened, and it is only as the soul turns itself into conscious contact with God that its unbounded potentialities are quickened into vitality and brought into growth. (*Homilist.*) *Delight in public ordinances:—*The true servants of God may esteem a day in His courts better than a thousand—I. On account of the **DISTINGUISHING HONOUR** with which it is attended. II. On account of the **SUBLIME PLEASURE** which is there experienced. III. On account of the **HIGH ADVANTAGE** that results from it. The service of the sanctuary tends to—1. Improve the heart. 2. Regulate the conduct. 3. Afford comfort in affliction. 4. Prepare us for heaven. (*D. Dickson.*) *The Divine reckoning of time:—*The great need of the world is a vision of the vast unities of truth. Little thoughts make little lives. Vast inner apprehensions of truth are necessary to create a greater outer life. Now, it is clear that the psalmist in our text desires to lead us no little way beneath the surface of things. We have here first a measurement of time made in the light of the kingdom of God. It is the measurement of the sanctuary of the courts of the Lord—what we should now call the kingdom of God. In as far as we realize within our lives the power of this kingdom, we enter into the experience which the psalmist expresses in our text. Now, following the psalmist's suggestion, a little consideration will show that time is anything or nothing according to the intensity of our life. On the one hand you can conceive of a man's life becoming more and more vacant of thought and feeling and deed until time is scarcely existent for him. Such life is a living death, and death knows no dominion of time. On the other hand, you can conceive of a life so intense that vaster and vaster extents of life are crowded into a single moment, until length measurements of months and days and years are almost annihilated by depth, and time is on the verge of appearing as eternity. The fact that between these two extremes there are greatly varying measurements of time affects our

earthly life at every point. There are two or three simple facts concerning time related to our present subject which from their very simplicity may evade our attention. The first is, that our ordinary measurements of time are purely conventional, being taken from without us, and not from within our own lives. Another thing worth remembering is that time, whether inside or outside of us, is always measured by intensity, and can never be reduced to mere extension. Try as you will, you can only measure time by some expression of force, energy, power, movement. The next thing to be noted is, that the vast variations of intensities even in external things make any fixed measurement of time impossible. When we are told, for example, that certain rays of light are caused by some thousands of millions of vibrations in a second of time, thought has no possible way of reconciling the ordinary idea of a second with such an infinity of movement. The difficulty arises from the fact that the sunlight does not set its time by the revolutions of the earth, as we do, but by its own transcendent energies. Our thought is baffled because we try to measure the energies of one thing by the time of another. One day in the sunlight is better than a thousand. Yet all these external energies are as nothing compared with those that are possible for the human spirit. Here we stand in the very territories of the infinite. One great thought in a human heart has more intensity and mighty force of movement in it than all the forces of the external world put together. In human life, then, time has a completely new meaning, a meaning closely akin to eternity. But in human life also deep stretches beneath deep, and in man's grandest possibility, in the place where he feels the presence of God and consciously unites himself with the Infinite, time reaches its highest intensities. Here lifetimes are often lived in moments. One day in such a life and in such experiences is better than a thousand. What, then, shall we say to this? There are cases where men, seeking to live as long as possible, spare themselves the heat and the burden of the day, and reach their four score years and ten by contributing nothing of the blood of their heart to the healing of the world. There are others that burn with fiery zeal for God and His kingdom, with a great passion of love for men and of devotion to the cause of righteousness. To them length of days has been promised, yet the fires consume their life, and in the bloom of youth or the pride of manhood they are laid in the grave. This is, of course, not a universal rule, but appears often enough to demand our attention. It is just at this point that the psalmist intervenes, saying, "Be careful how you measure. This is not a question of the revolution of the earth, but of the history of a soul. Here the measurements of the days and years vary infinitely. You have written four score years upon the tomb of the man that spent his years like a living death. Tell the sculptor to chisel out the falsehood without delay. Time is movement and energy, and he has been an idler. Even this slow revolving earth has outstripped him. Write clearly above his grave so that all may read it, 'Time was within his reach for eighty circling courses of the earth around the sun. But he never grasped it, and he died an infant of days, an ephemeral creature without a life and without a history.'" And turning to the other tomb where lamentation is written for the brevity of a consecrated life, he would say, "Poor, blind calculators, to measure such a life by rising and setting suns, by changing moons, and by returns of summer and winter. In this life cycles of time gathered into single moments. For every day write down a thousand, and let the epitaph be, 'Died in fulness of days, according to the promise, 'With long life will I satisfy him.''" This measurement of time gives us also a new measurement of happiness. The Christian is sometimes scoffingly told by the sceptic that he, also, like everybody else, is simply seeking a maximum of pleasure, and working for a *summum bonum* of happiness. There is a plausibility in this accusation that makes it sometimes difficult to meet and refute. The first step towards meeting it is to make a great admission. Namely this, that the goal of the Christian life is unquestionably the point of highest and intensest happiness, and that such happiness is undoubtedly one of the glowing aims of the Christian life. It must further be allowed that, if anything called Virtue brought with it a maximum of misery and something called Vice entailed a maximum of happiness, the principles of Christianity would lead to the courting of vice and not of virtue. This apparent contradiction arises from the absurdity of the supposition that we have made concerning virtue and vice. To be flung into real and essential misery is an indication that the life is out of joint, that the unity of the spirit is shattered and lost, and its harmonies destroyed. To be really and essentially happy is an

indication that the life has attained its highest powers and its noblest harmonies. By whatever name you may call these, the Christian life is a strenuous movement towards the latter, and must therefore have the maximum of happiness for its goal, and therefore in part for its aim. But when the scorner proceeds to say that all pleasure is essentially of the same nature, and that the difference is not one of morality but of taste, he puts himself at our mercy to be smitten hip and thigh. The human spirit must measure its happiness as it measures its time, not by length, but by depth. By this measurement the meaning of happiness, like that of its sources, varies to infinity. It may either be an ephemeral thing on the surface of the life, or it may sing its eternal song in the infinite depths of the human spirit. It may be simply the expression of a passing harmony of quivering nerves, or it may be the expression of the eternal harmonies of the Godlike moral forces that make man Divine. (*John Thomas, M.A.*) *On the threshold*:—Literally, "I would rather lie on the threshold," rather fill the lowest place and execute the meanest office in God's house, than be the greatest and happiest of those found elsewhere. We sometimes say, "I have only a little religion, but I would not part with it for all the world"; and that is substantially what David says here. The meanest living member of the Church of God is greater than the most honourable outside. 1. The least of saints is superior to the world's greatest men. The doorkeeper represents the least glorious and least powerful member of the spiritual congregation; but even he is more influential than the richest and greatest of the children of ungodliness. The ultimate power in the universe is the power of righteous mind, the power of righteous character; and he who possesses these in the most modest degree is mysteriously noble and efficient. 2. The least of saints is superior to the world's happiest men. The position of the doorkeeper on the threshold is the least desirable of all positions in the spiritual kingdom. He has the faintest glimpse of the temple glories, hears the least of its music, tastes little of its delicacies; yet the psalmist in effect says, "I would rather be the saddest of the saints than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." And we feel that his judgment was just. Communion with God, however faint, faith in the promises, however feeble, a sense of infinite truth and love, however dull, and a glimpse of heaven, however dim, give us a satisfaction beyond all gratifications of time and sense. 3. The briefest life of goodness is better than the longest life of worldliness: "One day in Thy courts is better than a thousand" elsewhere. A life of worldliness and sin properly speaking is not life at all. When Lizio, an Italian, was told of the death of his dissipated son, he replied, "It is no news to me; he never was alive." A life destitute of the spiritual element is not truly life. To live is to feel the spirit in contact with God, to be filled with His light, to be thrilled with His joy, to be warmed by His love, to be satisfied with His likeness. This is life, and the youngest believer in Christ knows more of the quality and fulness of existence than does the voluptuous patriarch. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *The good man's love for the house of God*:—The good man loves the house of God—1. Because it is a constant testimony for God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. 2. Because it is a refuge to him from the inhospitable and uncongenial influences by which he is surrounded in the world. 3. Because it is a school in which he becomes more fully instructed in the truth as it is in Jesus. 4. Because it is the home where he enjoys the communion of saints. 5. Because there he enjoys fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 6. Because it identifies him more and more with the paradise of God above. (*W. Brock.*)

**Ver. 11. For the Lord God is a sun and shield.**—*God a sun and a shield*:—This is a startling conjunction of emblems. A "sun": the centre of a system of worlds—the very synonym for splendour—so glorious, that it has been worshipped by multitudes as Divine. A "shield": an implement in human war, at first simple and rude, made of twigs, or skins, or metal—a piece of merely human handicraft. What could the sons of Korah have meant when they sang that God was sun and shield? God is sun and shield—I. IN HIS DISTANCE AND IN HIS NEARNESS. The fiery globe ninety-one millions of miles distant, and the shield worn on man's left arm in battle, close to his very heart, are both emblems of Him of whom men often cry, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" and to bring whom near men sometimes use their telescope of logic; but who is moreover so near, that in Him we live, and move, and have our being. II. IN HIS GREATNESS AND IN HIS GENTLENESS. The sun so great, that if all the planets were fused into

one, six hundred would not give the bulk of the sun;—and that shield that shelters the bleeding brow or wounded limb, are both alike true figures of God.

III. IN HIS HOLINESS AND IN HIS BENEVOLENCE. God is light, dazzling, unapproachable. God is love, etc. In Him mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. The God I sometimes dread is the God to whom to cling. (*U. R. Thomas.*) *A feast for the upright*.—I. BLESSINGS IN THEIR FULNESS. "The Lord God is a sun." 1. Then, if God is mine, I have not only light, but I have the source of light. 2. God is a sun: that is infinity of blessing. There is no measuring it. 3. It is an immutability of blessedness (James i. 17). 4. There must be added concerning God as a sun—that He is for ever communicating His light and heat and excellence to all who are about Him. I cannot conceive the sun shut up within himself. An unshining sun is a sun unsummed; and a God that is not good and pouring forth His goodness has laid aside His deity. It is contrary to the very notion and idea of an infinitely good God for Him to restrain His goodness, and keep it back from His people. II. BLESSINGS IN THEIR COUNTERPOISE. One blessing alone might scarcely be a blessing; for in being too great a blessing it might crush us. We may have too much of a good thing. We want some other boon to balance the single benediction. So notice here, "The Lord God is a sun and shield." "Sun and shield" hang before my eyes like two golden scales. Each one adds value to the other. When God is a sun to His people it may be He warms them into temporal prosperity with His bright beams, so that their goods increase, their body is in health, their trade succeeds, and their children are spared to them: they are grateful to God, and joyful because of the blessings which He has bestowed upon them. When everything is bright with us the Lord knows how to sober His children's spirits so that they use, but do not abuse, the things of this life. Even when they most abound with worldly joys He makes His people feel that these are not their heart joy. He shades us from the noxious effects of wealth and content. He suffers not the sun to smite us by day. Is not this a gracious style of counterpoise? It is also a great mercy that when God gives His people great spiritual joys He usually gives them a humbling sense of themselves at the same time. He gives them grace so that they can be full of assurance, and yet full of holy fear; always rejoicing and yet never presuming; lifted up, and yet lying low before the Lord. III. BLESSINGS IN THEIR ORDER. The Lord is to us first a sun and then a shield. Remember how David puts it elsewhere—"The Lord is my light and my salvation." Light first, salvation next. He does not save us in the dark, neither does He shield us in the dark. He gives enough sunlight to let us see the danger that we may appreciate the defence. We are not to shut our eyes and so find safety, but we are to see the evil and hide ourselves. Ought we not to be very grateful to God that He so orders our affairs? Ours is not a blind faith, receiving an unknown salvation from evils which are unperceived; this would be a poor form of life at best. No, the favour received is valued because its necessity is perceived. The heavenly sun lights up our souls and makes us see our ruin, and lie down in the dust of self-despair; and then it is that grace brings forth the shield which covers us, so that we are no more afraid, but rejoice in the glorious Lord as the God of our salvation. Then notice the order of the next two things—grace and glory: not glory first: that could not be. We are not fit for it. Grace must first blot out sin and change the nature. We could not enter glory or enjoy it by any possibility while we are sinful at heart. Grace must renew us or glory cannot receive us. IV. BLESSINGS IN PREPARATION AND BLESSINGS IN MATURITY. "The Lord will give grace and glory." Grace is glory in the bud; you shall see the rod of Aaron full of blooming graces; but this is not all—glory is grace in ripe fruit: the rod shall bear ripe almonds. The Lord will give you both the dawn and the noon, the Alpha and the Omega, grace and glory. What is glory? He that has been in heaven five minutes can tell you better than the sagest divine that lives; and yet he could not tell you. Nay, the angels could not tell you, you could not understand them. What is glory? You must enjoy it to know it. Glory is not merely rest, happiness, wealth, safety; it is honour, victory, immortality, triumph. V. BLESSINGS IN THEIR UNIVERSALITY. "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." Is there some good thing which does not come to us by the Lord's being our sun? We shall not lose on that account. Is there another good thing which cannot be included in God's being our shield? We shall not be deprived of that. Is there some good thing that cannot be comprehended in grace? I cannot imagine what

it can be, but if there be such a thing we shall not miss even that. Is there some good thing that is not comprehended even in glory? Well, it does not matter, we shall have it; for here stands the boundless promise—"No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The privileges of the righteous*.—I. WHAT GOD IS. 1. A "sun." His people are not strangers to happiness, and they derive it all from Him. 2. A "shield"—always at hand, impenetrable by any weapons, capacious, encompassing, adequate. II. WHAT GOD GIVES. 1. Grace—Divine assistance and influence, springing from the free favour of God. It is often expressed plurally: we hear of the graces of the Holy Spirit. When it regards truth, we call it faith;—a future good, hope;—trouble, patience. 2. Glory. This denotes splendour, fame, excellency displayed; and the sacred writers apply it by way of distinction to the transcendent dignity and sublime happiness reserved in heaven for the righteous. III. And what does He WITHHOLD? "No good thing."—O how full and comprehensive is the language of promise! 1. Behold in it the grandeur of His possessions. He who engages to withhold no good thing must have all good things at His disposal. 2. Behold in this promise the wonders of His liberality. All earthly benefactors shrink from a comparison with Him. He acts by no ordinary rule of bounty, by no human standard of beneficence. "As the heavens are higher than the earth," etc. 3. Behold in this promise the wisdom of His dispensations. He has qualified His engagement, and regulated our hope, by the goodness of the things insured. Let us then drop not only our murmuring, but our anxiety. IV. WHOM DOES GOD REGARD in all these exceeding great and precious promises?—"Them that walk uprightly" in reference to self, others, God. (W. Jay.) *The Lord God a sun and shield*.—I. WHAT THE LORD GOD IS TO HIS PEOPLE. 1. A "sun." (1) Enlightening the dark mind. (2) Fertilizing the barren mind. (3) Consoling the cheerless mind. 2. A "shield"; protecting His people from the sword of Divine wrath, and from their spiritual adversaries. II. WHAT GOD WILL DO FOR HIS PEOPLE. He will give—1. Grace. (1) He gives the principle of grace. (2) He encourages the growth of grace. (3) He will reward the combat of grace. 2. Glory. (1) The glory for which grace prepares. (2) The glory which the saints in heaven now enjoy. (3) The glory which He has promised. (4) The glory that exceeds all conceptions. III. WHAT GOD WILL NOT WITHHOLD. 1. Any necessary instruction. 2. Any needful correction. 3. Any requisite support. (T. Dunn.) *God as a sun and shield*.—I. THE NATURE OF GOD IN GENERAL. 1. A "sun." (1) Illumination. (2) Calefaction. (3) Fructification. (4) All-sufficiency. What is it that makes the day? Is it not the sun? And so what is it that makes the happiness of the Christian but even God Himself? Seeing the Lord God is a sun, we should then hence learn to rejoice in that light and comfort which He does impart, and which we receive from Him. We should still desire that the light of His countenance may shine upon us more and more, and nothing should be more grievous to us than the withdrawing of this from us. 2. A "shield." (1) A large and broad shield, which is able fully to cover us, protect and keep us safe. (2) A strong and impenetrable shield. (3) A present shield. God is not a shield at large to all sorts of persons whatsoever, but He is a shield and buckler to His children, and to such persons as by faith cleave unto Him. To these He is a shield indeed, and it is that which is matter of great peace and encouragement to them, especially in times of danger and uncertainty. And accordingly, further, we should learn from hence to improve Him, and make use of Him upon all occasions: we should betake ourselves to Him for protection, who has expressed Himself ready hereunto, and drawn out that virtue which is in Him to this purpose. There are two attributes in God especially which render Him to us as considerable in this respect—His truth, and His power. The truth of God, He is a shield in regard of that (Ps. cxi. 4). All those gracious promises which God has made for the protection of His people, they are so many shields unto them, under which they may cover themselves. And then His power, that is another of His attributes which is useful in this regard: forasmuch as He is stronger than any evil which can happen unto them. II. THE PARTICULAR EXPRESSIONS OF GOD'S NATURE TO US. 1. Affirmative. "The Lord will give grace and glory." He might have said, has given for the time past, or does give it for the time present, but He chooses rather to set it in the future—will give for time to come, hereby to signify His constancy and unweariedness in this respect, and the continuation of His blessings to us. The gifts themselves here mentioned are of two forms: grace and glory, the one pertaining to this life present, the

other to that which is in heaven. 2. The negative. "No good thing," etc. (1) In regard of that right and interest and propriety which a true believer has in all good things. There is no good thing whatsoever but a child of God has right to as his own, and as belonging unto him (Rev. xxi. 7; 1 Cor. iii. 21). (2) All true believers as they have interest in all good things themselves from their relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, so they have likewise interest in that affection which might incline the heart of Him that has these things in His own disposing to bestow these good things upon them whatsoever they be (Rom. viii. 32). (3) There is no good thing whatsoever which the children of God can desire which God is not able to bestow upon them in regard of Himself. (4) As to the matter of actual performance. God does withhold no good thing from those that fear Him, in the event itself, but does indeed bestow it upon them, and does here by this passage in the text engage Himself to as much for them. This must again be taken with these explications. First, there is no good thing which God does withhold from all His children, take it absolutely and specifically in regard of the things themselves. There are some of the children of God which do partake of every good thing in kind, in one rank or degree or other, as some of them have riches; and some of them have none, and some health, etc. Secondly, there is no good thing whatsoever which God does withhold from any of His children either in the formality or equivalency of it. Let it be truly good, and He does not withhold it, or if He does withhold it in the kind, yet He does not withhold it in the analogy and proportion and equality of it. He gives them the sweetness and comfort of all these things in the denial of themselves; this we may see in that expression in Mark x. 29, 30. (T. Horton, D.D.) *The believer's blessings*:—Let us consider the several characters here given of God, and the several blessings which, in one way or another, these several characters ensure to the righteous. 1. It is the combination of characters which we regard as most deserving of attention: "The Lord God is a sun and shield." If we consider God as a "sun," there is much of grand and gorgeous imagery which comes sweeping before us. God is emphatically our "sun," our source of light, as showing us ourselves. Conscience is the candle of Deity; and it will burn long and brightly in the natural man, though he thicken the atmosphere with the impure vapours of passion and lust; but it is not the candle of Deity which can search the dark corners of the heart—it must be Deity itself. "O Lord," says the psalmist, "Thou hast searched me and known me"; and again he prays, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts." God, as a sun, saith, Let there be light, and there is light, and as it was in the first creation, this light discloses an unshapen chaos; and man looks into Himself thus suddenly and supernaturally illuminated; and everywhere may he discover nothing but moral confusion. Even the light itself is the only beautiful and glowing thing—all on which it rests is deformity, wildness, and corruption; and ever after God is a sun to the man, by enabling him to carry on that very process of research and discovery which is indispensable to all progress in righteousness. According to the expression of St. Paul—"He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts." And just as it is when the sunbeam finds its way into a darkened room, you see a thousand floating moats which would otherwise have escaped observation; so the piercing rays of Deity, entering the solitudes of the soul, will cause the chambers which had passed for cleansed and garnished, to appear full of the atoms of a widely diffused sinfulness. The light is carried into the corners which had been hitherto overlooked. 1. The sun shows him the hopelessness of the task in which he is engaged, and finds him fresh work to do, leaving him as far off as ever from completion. But now turn your thoughts on the combination of characters—"The Lord God is a sun and shield." As a sun He shows me more and more my sinfulness; but then as a shield He gives me power to oppose it, and an assurance that I shall conquer. As a sun He discloses so much of the enormity of guilt that I am forced to exclaim—"Mine iniquities are like a sore burden, too heavy for me to bear!" But then, as a shield, He shows me how He has laid the load on a Surety who can bear it away into a land of forgetfulness. As a sun He makes me daily more and more sensible of the utter impossibility of my working out a righteousness of my own; but then, as a shield, He fastens my thoughts on that righteousness of His Son which is mysteriously conveyed to all who believe on His name. As a sun, in short, He brings facts to my knowledge, inasmuch as He brings myself and mine enemies to my knowledge, which would make the matter of deliverance



seem out of reach and hopeless, if He were not at the same time a shield; but, seeing that He is a shield as well as a sun, the disclosures which He makes as a sun only prepare me for the blessings which He imparts as a shield; making me desirous, and fitting me to receive them. Who, then, shall wonder that under the combination of the characters of God the psalmist should break into expressions of confidence and assurance? Take the catalogue of things which inasmuch as we are fallen creatures, God as our sun instructs us to fear, and you find that, inasmuch as we are redeemed creatures, God as our shield enables us to defy. Who, then, shall doubt that there results from the combination of characters exactly that system of counterpoise which is generally to be traced in the dealings of the Almighty? Who can feel, if indeed he have been disciplined by that twofold tuition which informs man first that "he hath destroyed himself," and then that "God hath laid help on One who is mighty," the former conciliating, the latter encouraging—the one making way for the other, so that the sinner is emptied of every false confidence, that he may be tempted to courage—who, we say, can fail to draw from the combination of the Divine characters the inference drawn by the psalmist—to exclaim, that is, after recording that "the Lord God is a sun and shield, He will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." 2. Let us now examine more attentively the psalmist's expression of confidence, that "He will give grace and glory." Did David mean that God will "give grace here," and "glory hereafter"? No doubt the words are susceptible of this interpretation; and a very noble meaning it is—referring everything to the free gift of God, the power through which we become meet for heaven, and the heaven itself into which the righteous shall enter. And yet it would appear as though the psalmist were referring specially to what takes place upon earth. He applies the "shield" and the "sun" in his description of Deity, though it is only at present that God is as a shield to His people; in the higher state of being there will be no enemy, no difficulty, and, withal, no need of a shield. And if the "sun" and the "shield" may both be most properly referred to the Divine character, as a present display of grace, the "glory" may be presumed to belong to the Divine dealings, as at present experienced. In other words, "grace and glory" are represented as in some sense one and the same, as though grace were glory, and glory were grace. The truth contained in the clause is; then, that which may be derived from the saying of St. Peter, when he bids us "be sober, and hope to the end; for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ." "The revelation of Jesus Christ" is to be at the consummation of all things; when everlasting happiness shall be entered on by the faithful; and nevertheless it is grace, not glory, which, according to the apostle, is then to be brought to the Church—an intimation which is only to be explained by identifying grace with glory—by supposing, that is, that glory differs from grace in measure, rather than in kind. And this is what we consider is taught by David in our text: he speaks of what God now communicates to the believer; but he speaks both of grace and glory. He represents, that is, grace as glory commenced, and glory as grace consummated. We do not wish to confound the engine with the work, or to make out that the process is the result. Of course, in strictness of speech, grace is the instrument, glory the produce. But if the glory lie in the being freed from sin, and if it be grace which is gradually setting us free, the hope of grace is the true "hope of glory." Nor is it only freedom from sin which grace effects. It effects also consecration to the service of God. There are none but true Christians who really fulfil the great end of their being—that of promoting the glory of their Maker; and it is not through the working of any mere human principle that they propose to themselves so sublime an object. There must have been a change in the affections, a withdrawal of the heart from temporary interests, a vivid recognition of the position which we occupy through creation and redemption, ere the end at which our actions aim can in any degree be for the honour of God. It is therefore to grace, as a principle implanted by God, that we ascribe every effort to advance God's glory. If it be the direct result of the workings of grace that we are led to consecrate ourselves to the service of the Most High, let grace have unrestrained sway, and dust and ashes though we be, should we not become ineffably glorious? It will not be the robe of light that shall make us glorious, though brighter threads than sunbeams shall be woven into its texture; it will not be the palm and the harp that shall make us glorious, though the one shall have grown on the trees of paradise, and the other have been strung with the

Mediator's hands. We shall be glorious, as ministering to God's glory—glorious as devoted to the service of the Almighty—glorious as employed on the business, and delighting in the commands of our Maker—glorious with a more than angel's glory, because entrusted with more than an angel's freedom. And if this be our glory, yea, then, poetry may give her music to what she counts more beautiful, and painting its tints to more sparkling things; but Christianity, the scheme of human restoration, recognizes no glory but the living to God's glory! If this be our glory, where is the word which describes glory so emphatically as "grace"? Grace is that which produces consecration to God's service, and therefore is grace nothing less than glory begun. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *The sun and shield*:—The psalmist here embraces both nature and art in his illustration, setting forth what God is to His people. What the sun is to nature, what the shield is to the soldier, God is to His people: He also gives grace and glory. 1. God's blessing to His people set forth under the figure of the sun. (1) The sun is the centre of all beauty and glory. At first darkness was upon the face of the deep, but God gathered up the light and concentrated it in the sun, so that all the glory of the heavens and the beauty of the earth are but a reflection of the sun. So with the Sun of Righteousness (Col. i. 19). All the beauty and glory of the Church triumphant and militant, collectively and individually, is a reflection of the Sun of Righteousness. (2) The sun reveals and illuminates. We may pass along a highway surrounded with beauty on the one hand and dangers on the other, but all ignorant of it until it is revealed by the sun; so the plan of redemption by the light of the Sun of Righteousness reveals to us beauties that were hidden to the men of the world (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10). (3) The sun is the concentration of all power. Without Christ ye can do nothing, but with Christ all things are possible. (4) The sun is discovered by its own light. The same sun that looked down on the dial of Ahaz and painted the rose of Sharon in the days of Solomon, illuminates and beautifies the earth to-day, and is the only source of light, so the same Holy Spirit that inspired Samuel to teach and David to strike his lyre is the only source of instruction in the Church of God to-day. 2. The Lord is also a shield. This emphasizes the heroic side of the Christian's character. It means war, and protection in that war. God stands between His people and their enemies. 3. God will give grace. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." But we cannot work a thing out until it is first placed within. God gives us grace in the germ. Like the eagle that is in the egg, like the forest in the acorn, it takes time to develop. 4. God will give glory. The glory of creation is man. The glory of man is his soul. The glory of the soul is the grace of God within it. The kings of earth cause Daniel and Joseph to be clothed with royal robes, but God will clothe us with His own hands, with heaven's best wardrobe out of the ivory palace. (*W. N. Richie, D.D.*) *The privileges of the upright*:—I. WHAT IS GOD? 1. A "sun." The source of—(1) Light. (2) Prosperity. (3) Pleasure. 2. A "shield." (1) To your persons. (2) To your graces. (3) To your property. II. WHAT DOES GOD DO? He gives—1. Grace. (1) The goodwill of God towards us. (2) The good work of God in us. 2. Glory—the completion of grace. 3. All good things—everything necessary for life. III. WHO ARE THE CHARACTERS LIKELY TO SHARE THIS FELICITY? "Them that walk uprightly." (*M. Wilks.*) *The Lord God a sun*:—Perhaps no other object in nature has so many attributes that fit it to represent a supreme and invisible Source of power, and life, and government, as the sun. It has peculiar aptness in representing a pure and spiritual God. These silent, mysterious, rejoicing influences of sunlight, that give to the heavens and the earth a charm that no tongue or pen has yet expressed, symbol to us the universal influence of the Divine mind that pervades creation with silent, invisible, life-giving power. What other symbol could give such a conception of purity, vitality, diffusiveness, continuance, and life-imparting power? I. OBSERVE ITS UNIVERSALITY, AS A FIT EMBLEM OF THE UNIVERSAL POWER OF GOD. It is, in its centre and power, definitely located, as it were; and yet it reaches itself out, and fills immensity, and is as much in the east as in the west, in the north as in the south; and it pervades with endlessness, and, at the same time, every part of the vast physical domain of God. As much at night as by day is the stream falling down and beating upon this globe; and all the forces of light, its life-giving power, are borne, in this immeasurable flood, through infinite space. And is it difficult to rise from this glory of fulness to some faint conception of a mind that issues and impels streams of influence that go forth and fill the vast domain of existence? Is it impossible,

when matter so nearly takes the proportion of universality or omnipresence, that mind, more ineffable and subtle and mobile than matter, should be able to bear itself abroad into the infinite realm? II. CONSIDER, ALSO, THAT THIS FORTH-STREAMING OF LIGHT AND POWER FROM THE SUN HAS BEEN GOING ON THROUGH INCOMPUTABLE PERIODS OF TIME. The historic period of this earth—that, in other words, which records the appearance of the race of man upon it—is relatively short, being but five or six thousand years; while the scientific periods—namely, those which are known only by the interpretation of physical facts—are inconceivably greater. And through the one and the other, doubtless for millions of years, the sun has poured its vast stream of influence, undiminished. Nor is the source apparently wasted. For all purposes of illustration, it may be said that the sun gives without wasting, and is infinitely abundant, after measureless periods and spaces have been filled, in its luminous supply. Thus we rise to the conception of a mind that shoots forth creative and nourishing energy, and that pours it unwasted down through the ages of time, boundless, fathomless, undiminishing. III. CONSIDER ALSO WHAT AN IMAGE OF ABUNDANCE THE SUN AFFORDS. The leaves of the trees, the blades of grass, all the parts of the growing vegetable kingdom, and the infinite swarms of minor insect life—all of them go to illustrate the thought of abundance, of multitudinousness. But what shall equal in these things the abundance of that solar flood that fills the heaven and the earth, that penetrates the soil, that saturates with heat rocks and stones, and that moves on for ever and for ever with illimitable processions, and everywhere both carries life and finds it? And where else shall there be anything that at all, for an illustration, equals the conception which we strive to form of the creative abundance of God, whose thoughts are for ever brooding, and yet whose life for ever is developed, and who is perpetually changing chaos into organization, and making organization progress through endless cycles of evolution, and through an inconceivable multiplicity of details? IV. CONSIDER ITS STIMULATING AND DEVELOPING POWER. All things presuppose the sun. It seems to us unthinking, as though everything had been created with its life within itself; as though animals had their life within themselves; as though vegetation had its life in itself. Nothing has. That sun which the beast does not recognize, that sun which the insect does not know, is, after all, its father and its mother. I ask the daisy, "Who is your father?" and it speaks to me of the seed and the root; while I know that the unplanted sun is the father of the daisy. I ask the pastures, "Who has created you?" and they speak of the showers; no blade of grass speaks of the sun; but I know that the unbaptized sun has, by its light of fire, baptized these its children, and that there is nothing that grows in Nature, of animals, or birds, or insects, or plants, that is not the immediate result of that unconscious sun that works everywhere. And when men say to me, "Show me the presence of your God; show me some sign that He is in human affairs, guiding them: you talk of the Holy Ghost, of the Spirit of God, of the Divine inspiration, and of the soul of man as being born thereby; now, give me some token that it is so"—when men say this to me, I point them to all the world, and say, "By the same signs and tokens by which you recognize that the life of the globe is in the sun, that is a myriad of leagues distant; the sun, that sounds no trumpet and waves no banner; the sun, that steals silently through the air, and that works, though you see not the working, but only the fruit of working—by these same signs and tokens you may recognize that the life of the soul is in God." V. THE SUN IS THE CENTRE OF ATTRACTION, THE HOLDING-POWER OF THE UNIVERSE. Its invisible power harnesses all planets and stars. It guides the earth in all its courses. It is a government, in short. It not only gives vitality to all things of the earth, but it surrounds the earth, rendered vital, with guiding power, and holds it in its movements. So God is the centre of power, and the centre of government. By maintaining those eternal laws by which the human soul acts, He sits central. As the sun sits central in the solar system to hold the planets that roam only by its permission, so God sits central in the universe, holding this globe not only, but all its habiliments; and all its habiliments not only, but the soul of every man; and the soul of every man not only, but all that is in the human soul. VI. CONSIDER THAT GENEROSITY AND IMPARTIALITY WHICH THE SUN EXERCISES. It makes no discriminations and distinctions. I have growing in my garden the portulaca in beds, for the sake of its glowing colour. You know that it is first cousin to purslane—a weed that everybody who undertakes to keep a garden hates. I have hoed it, and pulled it up, and denounced it, and spurned it, and given it to the fire and to the pigs with maledic-

tions. But I cannot find out that the sun exercises any discrimination between the purslane growing in my garden and the portulaca. I call one flower and the other weed; but God's sun calls them both flowers. In this it is the emblem of God, who "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good," etc. VII. PROLIFIC AND INTIMATE IN BENEFIT AS THE SUN IS, IT IS OBSERVABLE THAT ONLY A PART OF ITS BENEFIT IS THRUST UPON MAN, AND THAT THAT PART IS MAINLY THAT WHICH CONCERNS HIS LOWER NECESSITIES. If we would go further, and use the sun as artists use it, and draw out its subtler elements of beauty, we must study its laws in that direction, and obey them. If we would derive from the employment of the sun its more perfect fruits and harvests, we must take the steps necessary to this end. Not upon every one does it thrust these bounties. They must be inquired for. So it is with the Sun of Righteousness. He sheds a providential watchfulness and protection upon all men, without regard to character; but if men would go higher, and perfect the understanding, refine the moral sentiments, purify the heart, and come to be God-like, developing the God that is in them, for this there is special labour required. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *The sun an emblem of God:*—What the natural sun is to material nature, God is to this world and its tenants, especially to those who fear His name. Of all the figures employed indicating some features of resemblance to God, there is none more beautiful and appropriate than the sun. "It is a pleasant thing for the eye to behold the sun," i. e. to enjoy the effect of his diffused and reflected radiance. Earth and its countless inhabitants are deeply indebted to his vivifying rays. He is the source of all that quickens and beautifies nature, and thus has become the emblem of many blessings. 1. In all probability he was the first natural object which had the religious homage of man, and this may suggest the thought that the human mind delights in mysteries—in the insolvable more than the apparent and simple—as man could not easily prostrate himself before any object more mysterious in its nature. There is no searching of the sun; our eyes are too weak to stand the ceaseless ocean of light that emanates from him. How much less can we search the sun's Creator. Contrasted with Him, myriads of suns are like so many dark bodies. His revelation of Himself in His works, and in His Word, in His Son, and in our souls, is more than sufficient for the comprehension of any finite mind and beyond the ken of the most philosophic eye. 2. The sun is ever the same. Ever since the Creator said on the fourth day, "Let there be light," he has faithfully performed his function. Generations live and die; empires wax and wane; but he is the same from age to age, and gives his light to the father and the son; and shines upon the babe in his cradle as well as years after upon his grave, when numbered with the tenants of mortality. Thus the psalmist, in speaking of the kingdom of Christ, says, "His name shall endure for ever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun." God is unchangeable. He is "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." His being fills every point of duration, "the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." His thoughts and purposes are immutable. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever; the thoughts of His heart to all generations." 3. The sun is larger than all the other planets.—It is difficult to conceive an adequate idea of his magnitude. If all the planets from Mercury, that receives a continual stream of light from him, to Neptune—that is three thousand and six hundred millions of miles distant from him, somewhere on the confines of creation—were made into one world, it is said that it would require six hundred such worlds to constitute one that would approach the sun in its dimensions. Infinitely greater than this is the disparity which exists between God and the highest, the mightiest, and holiest of His creatures. 4. Of all the works of God the sun is the most conspicuous. He occupies the most prominent position among the planets of heaven. Take him from the constellations of heaven, and all is darkness and confusion. What would this world be apart from God? Confusion, darkness, and unmitigated misery. Blessed be His name, He is here, as the cause of all causes, the force of all forces, the agent of all agencies, the breath of all life, and the source of all good. 5. The sun is most generous. He gives his all freely and impartially; he shineth on the just and unjust; his rays fall upon the sower of iniquity as well as the Christian in devout prayer and meditation. It is generally accepted now as being true that there are in the sunbeam three different principles, viz. the chemical, luminiferous, and calorific, and that each has a function to discharge in relation to the fruits of the earth. The chemical has to do with germinating the plant, the luminous assists in

secreting from the air the carbon essential to its growth, while the caloric, or heating rays, are required to nurture the seed, and form the reproductive elements. What wisdom displayed in the fact, that the first of these is more powerful in the spring than in the summer, while the second becomes more powerful in the summer, and that in the autumn both are lessened, while the third increases in force; i. e. each principle becomes potent at the time when most required. How eminently adapted to our wants as well as those of Nature. 6. The sun is a fountain from whence flows a perpetual stream of goodness, and is an invaluable blessing to our world. God is an inexhaustible source of all good. He is the primal fount of all mercies. He is not only the Quickener of life, but the Giver and the Sustainer of it. Divine supplies and human wants are balanced. How loving the hand that adapts the blessings to our wants. How numerous they are. Can you reckon them? Life, health, food, raiment, peace, homes, relatives, friends, money, honour, and seasons of innocent pleasure; verily, our life is an endless history of Divine bounties. God gives these blessings to all without distinction. How loudly this calls for our gratitude. But He gives infinitely more to those that love Him, delight in His statutes, and frequent His sanctuary to adore and praise Him. To them He is a sun and shield. As the sun is everything to the earth, so God is to His people—He is their All. (*J. Stevenson.*) *Children of the sun:*—We are all lovers of the sun, and give it unwitting homage in a thousand ways. We seek it as if we were new-born flowers asking for a baptism of beauty and fragrance, and, like the birds, we pipe our merriest notes when it has dismissed the chilling clouds. Nor are bees and butterflies more content than are we when it favours us with its encouraging smiles and stimulating caresses. Distant yet near, hidden yet revealed, majestic yet lowly, mighty yet merciful, terrible enough to consume worlds and yet tender enough to open a blossom, vast enough to appal us, and yet beneficent enough to attract us—there can be little wonder that men of reverent temper have found in it touching suggestions of Him who giveth grace and glory. "The Lord is a sun." I. **THEN MY LIFE MAY BE ILLUMINED.** No nook or corner of our being need go unirradiated. Open the life to God as you open the eye to the sun, and you will no longer be a child of the darkness. We need not dwell in the shadow of sin, in the cave of doubt, in the pit of melancholy, in the cavern of unbelief, in the neighbourhood of gloom: we are called to the sunshine; we can walk in the light as He is in the light, we can tread on bright-topped hills, we can hear the message, "Let there be light." II. **THEN MY LIFE MAY BE CHEERED.** He, whose shining sun brightens every earth-spot, making the flowers start up in rare brilliancy, causing the birds to sing their sweetest sonnets, putting a beauteous bloom upon the fruits of the orchard, and dressing Nature in a glorious dress, says to us, "What that sun is to the physical world, I am to the spiritual. I can work a mighty transformation in your lives, can put an end to your soul's winter, and can confer on you an endless summer. I can warm you through and through with My fires, and in the light of My face you can live perpetually, despite life's changefulness, and the hard, trying, and perplexing things which come to you—for I am God, your Exceeding Joy, the Fount of Life, the very God of Peace." III. **THEN MY LIFE MAY BE ENRICHED.** It is God who quickens me from the death of sin, who renews my life from day to day, who gives it its finest expression, who stores it with heavenly treasures, who generates within me the holiest desires, and fosters a thrice-blessed bliss-inspiring hope. Who can tell how rich I may yet become? When I see the gorgeous garniture of the universe, I know that God does not want me to be clad in less than a royal dress. When I see the opulence of Nature on all hands, I am sure He does not want me to fare meagrely. When I observe the superb dome of many-coloured glass above us, the vast panorama of earth and sea full of pictures, poems, and symphonies, I am sure that He intends me to rise to full and rich perfection. IV. **THEN MY LIFE MAY BE BEAUTIFUL.** Standing in the stream of the Divine Brightness, there is no knowing to what splendour we shall come. Drenched with the glory of His face, we shall have a sweetness far surpassing that of sun-kissed flowers, a ripeness which the fairest fruit will only faintly image, a beauty superior to anything earth has known. (*J. Pearce.*) **The Lord will give grace and glory.**—*Grace and glory the gift of God:*—I. Viewing the promise as ON THE SIDE of God, and of His condescension to us His guilty creatures, we may trace it in its source, and in the manner of its fulfilment. 1. Absolutely, grace and glory are the Lord's; being of the essence of His nature; his property and possession. 2. Relatively to us, grace and glory are the Lord's

to give; He has them so that He may give them. 3. Grace and glory are given from the Father through the Son. 4. Grace and glory are given from the Father through the Son by the Spirit. II. Consider it now ON THE SIDE OF MAN, and his need of God. 1. What are the aspects of our condition that make the assurance peculiarly suitable to our case? (1) We find no favour, no grace, in the eyes of God. On the contrary, we are the objects of His just displeasure; guilty; condemned. (2) In this condition, we have no fitness or qualification for being advanced by God to any post of honour, or distinguished by any special marks of His confidence and approval; no capacity of being glorified. (3) In this predicament of estrangement and dishonour we are helpless; without any means of extricating or raising ourselves. 2. What more suitable,—what more necessary,—than this promise—"The Lord will give grace and glory"? A right princely and royal gift! And a right princely and royal act to make it absolutely a free gift! It is a procedure worthy of God. And it is the only procedure that could really meet our case. Of His own free will begat He us by the Word. Of His own free will He called us in His Gospel. Of His own free will He puts His Holy Spirit within us, and works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. III. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GRACE AND GLORY, and the dependence of the one upon the other. 1. Grace comes before glory; and only through grace can glory be reached. Grace first, and then glory. It must be so. Vain will you seek to commend yourselves to God, and win a character and name before Him, if you are not first found willing to be debtors to His mercy and sovereign grace, His full and free mercy. 2. Glory comes after grace; and grace is in order to glory. Why would you have the Lord to give you grace? Is it that you may hopefully press on to glory? Grace is the means to glory. Do you so regard it? Are you anxious, not merely about your personal rest, and ease, and comfort, but about your being put in a position and receiving power to serve the Lord freely, and to enjoy Him fully? 3. Grace implies glory (Phil. i. 6; Rom. viii. 29, 30). What gracious soul is in heaviness through manifold affliction? Let him not faint. Let him seek grace to hold on, in the confident belief that the Lord, giving the grace he seeks, will give the glory for which he is content to wait. 4. Grace prepares for glory; and the proportion of grace determines the proportion of glory; or, to put it in a pointed form, the more grace the more glory. 5. The seals of grace are the pledges of glory. This is doubly true. It is true of the inward seal of grace, which is the Holy Ghost in the heart, and of the outward seals of grace, which are the holy sacraments in the Church. (*R. S. Candlish, D.D.*) *Grace and glory*:—The Lord gives; there is nothing freer than a gift, and there can be nothing freer than that greatest of all the gifts of God, eternal life. That expression, "eternal life," sums up these two things, grace and glory. "The Lord will give grace and glory." It is His glory to give His grace; and because of His graciousness, He gives glory. Glory never comes without grace coming first, but grace never comes without glory coming last; the two are bound together, and "what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." I. THE FIRST GIFT: "The Lord will give grace." 1. The Lord will give grace to all those who feel that they need it, and confess their need. Claim anything as of right, and God will only give you what you have a right to claim, and that will be everlasting destruction from His presence and from the glory of His power. But confess that you are guilty, and stand ready for the death-sentence to be executed, and appeal to the unmerited mercy of God, and you shall have it freely given to you. 2. He will give grace to those who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. Nay, He has given grace to them already. It has pleased the Father that in Christ should all fulness dwell, and therefore fulness of grace abides in Christ. 3. He will give more grace to those to whom He has given some grace. If you have had the first droppings of grace, keep on looking to Him who gave you those first drops, for there is a shower on the way. 4. He will give grace in the form in which it is needed. 5. He will give grace when it is needed. Grace is a thing which has to be used, and the Lord who gives it means us to use it. Whenever God sharpens my scythe, I know that there is some grass for me to cut. If ever He hands me down a sword, He seems by that very action to say to me, "Go and fight," and He does not give it to me that I may have it dangling between my legs to show what a man of war I am. When you need grace, you shall have grace. 6. He will give us grace to a much larger degree when we are prepared to receive it. 7. He will give grace till it melts into glory. II. THE LAST GIFT. When our entire manhood, spirit, soul, and body shall be in heaven, then

will this promise be fulfilled, "The Lord will give glory." 1. "Glory" means, first, recognition. When Christ shall declare that He knows us, and shall say to each one of us, "Well done, good and faithful servant"; when He shall confess us before men when He comes in the glory of His Father; O sirs, when Christ shall call out His poor persecuted followers, and amidst such a scene as never was beheld before, when angels shall lean from the battlements of heaven, and a cloud of witnesses shall gather round about assembled men, when Christ shall say, "You were with Me in My humiliation, and I own you as My chosen, My beloved, My brethren," that will be glory. 2. The next meaning of the word "glory" is vision. "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty." With Job, each believer can say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," etc. 3. The third meaning of the word "glory" is fruition. What the fruition will be I will tell you when I have been there. Long ago, we learned that "man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever." Brothers and sisters, we have enjoyed His Word; we have enjoyed His day; we have enjoyed His covenant; we have enjoyed His love; but what will it be to enjoy God Himself, and to enjoy Him for ever? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Grace inexhaustible*:—Mountains have been exhausted of their gold, mines of their diamonds, and the depths of ocean of their pearly gems. The demand has emptied the supply. Over once busy scenes silence and solitude now reign; the caverns ring no longer to the miner's hammer, nor is the song of the pearl-fisher heard upon the deep. But the riches of grace are inexhaustible. All that have gone before us have not made them less to those who follow us. When they have supplied the wants of unborn millions, the last of Adam's race, that lonely man, over whose head the sun is dying, beneath whose feet the earth is reeling, shall stand by as full a fountain as this day invites you to drink and live, to wash and be clean. (*T. Guthrie.*) *No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly*.—*God's good things for the upright*:—It all depends on what you mean by a good thing. It does not follow, for instance, that a thing is good simply because it has a good name. Mankind is governed very much by names, and some very bad and hurtful things go by a good name in the world. The old name for the Cape of Good Hope was the Cape of Storms, but everybody would prefer the later name, though it does not lessen by an inch the height of the stormy waves. The Irish speak of the fairies as "the good people"; not that they have much confidence in their goodness, but because they think it judicious to speak of them in that way. Now, God's good things are very varied in their names. Some have the best and most beautiful of names. Others again, nominally, are not so attractive. What a lovely name was that which Jesus gave His disciples when He said, "Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends!" They were raised to a higher level, and not merely got orders as servants, but confidences as friends. Who would presume, however, to call Himself by that name? But I find that Jesus speaks, in another place, of a yoke. That is not such an attractive name. There is no doubt, however, about its being a good thing, if it be Christ's yoke. It is through the taking of that yoke upon us that we shall find rest unto our souls. I suppose, if we were asked as to the characteristics of a good thing, most of us would say that a very important one must be that it lasts. Well, that is true, above all, of God's good things. They last. Time has been called "the prince of honest fellows," for he brings out the real value of things in the long run; and time has proved the value of the Gospel, and the blessings that come to us through it. "Why do I not like that story so well to-day as yesterday?" said a little girl, when her mother told her the same story a second time. It is mostly the way, however. The interest fades with repetition. But the old, old story of Jesus and His love gets more precious and fascinating the longer we live, and the more we think about it. Sometimes we wonder what will be the good things of the next world, the good things that God has in store; for, you see, they have to last such a long time there, they have to last and satisfy us to all eternity. But that is a secret that will be kept till the time comes. Let us only be sure of this, the Lord can provide, and the Lord will provide. And to whom is the promise of the text made? To "them that walk uprightly." What could be simpler than these words, and yet what could better describe our spiritual requirements? There is something noble in the erect posture. Only man can stand erect. The body does get bent as age creeps on, but the power of Christ can still make straight and keep straight the soul. No debility of age need set in there. (*J. S. Mavor, M.A.*)

**Vor. 12. O Lord of Hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee.**—*Of trust in God.*—I. **THE EXERCISE ITSELF.** 1. Man is altogether insufficient for his own happiness. 2. God alone is all-sufficient for the happiness of man. 3. God in His Word has made a revelation of His grace, mercy, and goodwill towards sinners. II. **SOME PROPERTIES WHICH OUGHT TO ATTEND OUR TRUST IN GOD.** Our trust in God ought to be—1. Universal, for all good things. 2. Fixed, close, continual. 3. Heroic and fearless. 4. Joyful. 5. Resolute and determined. 6. Reverential and humble. 7. Regular; *i. e.* corresponding to God's revealed will, and to the tenor of His promises. 8. Everlasting. III. **THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MAN THAT TRUSTETH IN THE LORD.** 1. God Himself pronounces him so. 2. His state, with regard to God and eternity, is perfectly safe. 3. In being thus exercised he gives glory to God. 4. His trust frees him from all care and fear. 5. In thus trusting, he is filled with hope and joy. 6. In so doing, he is strengthened both for doing duty and suffering affliction. 7. His trust shall not be disappointed. (*A. Swanston.*) *On a religious trust in God, and the happiness attending it.*—I. **THE NATURE AND GROUNDS OF A RELIGIOUS TRUST IN GOD.** To trust in God is to repose a steady confidence in His protection, and to have an invariable acquiescence of mind under all the dispensations of His providence. This notion of a Supreme Being, and submission to His will, cannot fail in producing proper sentiments of those Divine attributes, upon which this duty of affiance is grounded; which are His wisdom, power, goodness, and faithfulness. II. **THE EFFICACY AND ADVANTAGES THAT RESULT FROM THIS RELIGIOUS TRUST IN GOD.** 1. It teacheth us to entertain a modest and humble opinion of ourselves, and it is the best expedient to prevent those dangerous consequences that naturally flow from our supposed excellences. 2. By entertaining an humble opinion of our own endowments, our minds are more sensibly affected with juster apprehensions of God's goodness, and more disposed to patience and resignation under His dispensations. 3. To form a true notion of Divine providence will afford an additional strength to this argument: pursuant to this we must consider, that the same all-powerful, all-wise Being, who created the world, must of necessity be the Governor of it, and so order affairs and dispose circumstances as He thinks fit. III. **MOTIVES FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THIS DOCTRINE.** 1. A believing trust in God's help naturally produces the firmest persuasion and gives us the strongest security of His almighty protection. 2. We have the contemplation of a future state to cure all our discontentedness and to secure the stability of our peace. (*W. Adey.*) *Blessed trust.*—I. **THE HEART OF RELIGION ALWAYS HAS BEEN, AND IS, TRUST IN GOD.** The bond that underlies all the blessedness of human society, the thing that makes the sweetness of the sweetest ties that can knit men together, the secret of all the loves of husband and wife, friend and friend, parent and child, is simple confidence. And the more utter the confidence the more tranquilly blessed is the union and the life that flow from it. Transfer this, then—which is the bond of perfectness between man and man—to our relation to God, and you get to the very heart of the mystery. Not by externalisms of any kind, not by the clear dry light of the understanding, but by the outgoing of the heart's confidence to God, do we come within the clasp of His arms and become recipients of His grace. Trust knits to the unseen, and trust alone. And trust is blessed, because the very attitude of confident dependence takes the strain off a man. To feel that I am leaning hard upon a firm prop, to devolve responsibility, to give the helm into another steersman's grasp, whilst I may lie down and rest, that is blessedness, though there be a storm. II. **A LIFE OF FAITH IS A BLESSED LIFE, BECAUSE IT TALKS WITH GOD** (vers. 9–11). The ordinary Christian life of this day is terribly wanting in this experience of frank, free talk with God, and that is one reason why so many of us professing Christians know so little of the blessedness of the man that trusts in God. You have religion enough to keep you from doing certain gross acts of sin; you have religion enough to make you uncomfortable in neglected duty. You have religion enough to impel you to certain acts that you suppose to be obligatory upon you. But do you know anything about the elasticity and spring of spirit in getting near God, and pouring out all your hearts to Him? The life of faith is not blessed unless it is a life of frank talking with God. III. **THE LIFE OF FAITH IS BLESSED, BECAUSE IT HAS FIXED ITS DESIRES ON THE TRUE GOOD.** "A day in thy courts," etc. This psalmist, speaking with the voice of all them that trust in the Lord, here declares his clear consciousness that the true good for the human soul is fellowship with God. But the clearest knowledge of that fact is not enough to bring the blessedness. There must be the next step—"I had rather be a



doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness"—the definite resolve that I for my part will act according to my conviction, and, believing that the best thing in life is to have God in life, and that that will make life, as it were, an eternity of blessedness even while it is made up of fleeting days, will put my foot down and make my choice, and, having made it, will stick to it. It is all very well to say that "a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand": have I chosen to dwell in the courts; and do I, not only in estimate but in feeling and practice, set communion with God high above everything besides? IV. A LIFE OF FAITH IS A LIFE OF BLESSEDNESS, BECAUSE IT DRAWS FROM GOD ALL NECESSARY GOOD. "The Lord God is a Sun and Shield"—brightness and defence. "The Lord will give grace and glory"; "Grace," the loving gifts which will make a man gracious and graceful; "glory," not any future lustre of the transfigured soul and glorified body, but the glory which belongs to the life of faith here on earth; link that thought with the preceding one. "The Lord is a sun . . . the Lord will give glory"; like a little bit of broken glass lying in the furrows of a ploughed field, when the sun smites down upon it, it flashes, outshining many a diamond. If a man is walking upon a road with the sun behind him, his face is dark. He wheels himself round, and it is suffused with light, as Moses' face shone. If we walk in the sunshine we shall shine too. If we "walk in the light" we shall be "light in the Lord." "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." Trust is inward, and the outside of trust is an upright walk; and if a man has these two, which, inasmuch as one is the root and the other is the fruit, are but one in reality, nothing that is good will be withheld from him. For how can the sun but pour its rays upon everything that lives? (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *The joy of trustfulness*:—I. THE JOY OF TRUSTFULNESS. The deepest and purest joys are the outcome of trustfulness and the abandonment of oneself to another. The law holds good of our relationship to God, as of our relationship to each other, namely, that we receive according to our faith. Trustful people have a way of communicating their own simplicity and generosity to those with whom they have dealings. To trust the goodness of another is to make goodness seem to him at once more desirable and more possible of attainment. God has created us with this natural capacity for trustfulness, and the exercise of it is a source of joy. The dearest and most precious relationships are founded upon it. The joys of love and friendship are deeper and purer than those of material possessions. II. THE BELIEVER'S JOY IN THE OBJECT OF HIS TRUST. Trust is sometimes misplaced. There are those who are base enough to take advantage of trust reposed in them. Many tragedies are caused by the discovery of untrustworthiness in the man or woman in whose hands we have placed our lives. The most interesting stories in literature are those of heroes and heroines whose trustworthiness is for long under a cloud, but which is finally vindicated. That which underlies our trust in each other is our love for goodness itself. "We needs must love the highest when we see it." Our real love is for God, who is goodness itself. We love persons in whom we trust that goodness is to be found in large measure. The believer who makes God his trust is happy indeed, nor is there any danger of shock and disappointment to such a trust. If other trusts bring much joy, this brings supreme joy. III. THE SUPREME CHARACTER OF THE BELIEVER'S JOY—BLESSEDNESS. There is something heavenly about the word. The kind and degree of joy which God experiences is known by this name. He is "the ever-blessed God," "blessed for evermore." Blessedness is calm and tranquil; it brings a sense of steadiness to the mind, and enables it to do its work without distraction or anxiety. (R. C. Ford, M.A.)

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PSALM LXXXV.

VERS. 1-13. *Lord, Thou hast been favourable unto Thy land.—A psalm of deliverance; songs and sighs*:—A part of the nation had returned, but to a ruined city, a fallen temple, and a mourning land, where they were surrounded by jealous and powerful enemies. Discouragement had laid hold on the feeble company, enthusiasm had ebbed away, and heart as well as faith had been lost. This psalm

accurately reflects such a state of things, and is reasonably taken as one of the earliest post-exilic psalms. 1. The first portion presents one great fact in three aspects, and traces it to Jehovah. The restored Israel had been sent back by the conqueror as a piece of policy, but it was God who had done it, all the same. The blessed fact is joyously announced in ver. 1, and the yet more blessed fact of forgiveness, of which it is a token, in ver. 2. The word rendered "forgiven" implies that sin is regarded as a weight, which God lifts off from the pressed-down sinner; while that for "covered" regards it as a hideous stain, which He hides. Our sins weigh us down, and "are rank, and smell to heaven." Ver. 3 ventures still deeper into the sacred recesses of the Divine nature, and traces the forgiveness to a change in God's disposition. His wrath has been drawn in, as, if we may say so, some creature armed with a sting retracts it into its sheath. 2. God turns from His anger, therefore Israel returns to the land. But the singer feels the incompleteness of the restoration, and the bitter consciousness suddenly changes joyous strains to a plaintive minor in the second part (vers. 4-7). "Turn us," in ver. 4, looks back to "brought back" in ver. 1, and is the same word in the Hebrew. The restoration is but partially accomplished. Similarly the petitions of ver. 5 look back to ver. 3, and pray that God's wrath may indeed pass utterly away. The prayers are grounded on what God has done. He does not deliver by halves. He is not partially reconciled. The remembrance of the bright beginning heartens the assurance of a completion. God never leaves off till He has done. If He seems to have but half withdrawn His anger, it is because we have but half forsaken our sins. 3. The third portion brings solid hopes, based on God's promises, to bear on present discouragements. In ver. 8 the psalmist, like Habakkuk (ii. 1), encourages himself to listen to what God will speak, "I will hear," or, rather, "Let me hear." Faithful prayer will always be followed by faithful waiting for response. God will not be silent when His servant appeals to Him, but, though no voice breaks the silence, a sweet assurance, coming from Him, will rise in the depths of the soul, and tell the suppliant that He "will speak peace to His people," and warn them not to turn to other helps, which is "folly." The peace which He speaks means chiefly peace with Himself, and then well-being of all kinds, the sure results of a right relation with God. But that peace is shivered by any sin, like the reflection of the blue heaven in a still lake when a gust of wind ruffles its surface. Vers. 9-13 are the report, in the psalmist's own words, of what his listening ear had heard God say. First comes the assurance that God's salvation, the whole fulness of His delivering grace, both in regard to outward and inward evils, is "nigh them that fear Him." They, and only they, who keep far away from foolish confidence in impotent helps and helpers shall be enriched. That is the inmost meaning of God's word to the singer and to us all. The acceptance of God's salvation purifies our hearts to be temples, and is the condition of His dwelling with us. The lovely personification of vers. 10-13 have passed into Christian poetry and art, but are not rightly understood when taken, as they often are, to describe the harmonious meeting, in Christ's work, of apparently opposing attributes. Mercy and faithfulness blend together in all God's dealings with His people, and righteousness and peace are inseparable in His people's experience. These four radiant angels dwell for ever with those who are God's children. In ver. 11 we have a beautiful inversion of the two pairs of personifications, of each of which only one member appears. Truth, or faithfulness, came into view in verse 10 as a Divine attribute, but is now regarded as a human virtue, springing out of the earth; that is, produced among men. They who have received into their hearts the blessed assurance and results of God's faithfulness will imitate it in their own lives. Conversely, righteousness, which in ver 10 was a human excellence, here appears as looking from heaven like a gracious angel smiling on the faithfulness which springs from earth. Thus heaven and earth are united, and humanity becomes a reflection of the Divine. Ver. 12 presents the same idea in its most general form. God gives good of all sorts, and, thus fructified, earth "shall yield her increase." Without sunshine there are no harvests. God gives before He asks. We must receive from Him before we can tender the fruit of our lives to Him. In ver. 13 the idea of Divine attributes as the parents of human virtues is again expressed by a different metaphor. Righteousness is represented doubly, as both a herald going before God's march in the world, and as following Him. It makes His footsteps "a way" for us to walk in. Man's perfection lies in his imitating God. Jesus has left us "an example" that we should "follow His steps." (A. McLaren, D.D.)

*Genuine piety*:—This psalm present to us genuine piety in three aspects. I. ACKNOWLEDGING THE MERCIES OF THE PAST. 1. Restoration to their country. "Thou hast brought back," etc. He brought them from Egypt and from Babylon. 2. Absolution of their sins. "Thou hast forgiven," etc. When sin is forgiven it is "covered"; it does not reappear any more in producing suffering and anguish. Its guilt and power (not its memory) are crushed. 3. The cessation of penal afflictions. "Thou hast turned thyself," etc. Genuine piety can recount such blessings in the past as these, and even of a higher order. "The presence of present afflictions should not drown the remembrance of former mercies." II. DEPLORING THE EVILS OF THE PRESENT. 1. The sense of estrangement from God. "Turn us, O God of our salvation." Departure from God is our ruin, return is our salvation. The separation between man and his Maker arises, not from His turning from man, but from the turning of man from Him. 2. The sense of the displeasure of their Maker. "Wilt Thou be angry with us for ever?" This really means, Wilt Thou afflict us for ever; shall we be ever in suffering? God's anger is not passion, but antagonism to wrong. 3. The sense of deadness. "Wilt Thou not revive us again?" etc. They had been politically dead (Ezek. xxvii.), and they were religiously dead. Such are some of the evils they deprecate in this psalm; and for their removal they now implore their God. III. ANTICIPATING THE GOOD OF THE FUTURE. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." Piety here fastens its eye on several blessings in the future. 1. Divine peace. "He will speak peace unto His people." He will one day speak "peace"—national, religious, spiritual, peace to all mankind. 2. Moral unity. "Mercy and truth are met together," etc. These moral forces, ever since the introduction of sin, have been working, not only separately, but antagonistically; and this has been one of the great sources of human misery; but in the future they will coalesce, unite. 3. Spiritual prosperity. "Truth shall spring out of the earth," etc. From the hearts of men truth shall spring as from its native soil, and it shall grow in stately beauty and affluent fruitage. And "righteousness shall look down from heaven," delighted with the scene. (*Homilist*.) *The responsibility of favoured nations*:—It is true that the God of nations has His special calling and election for each of the races of mankind. To quote Bishop Westcott: "History on a large scale is the revelation of the will of God; and in the history of the greatest nations we may expect to find the will of God for them. They are themselves the record and the retribution of their past, and the prophecy of their future." We Englishmen must be blind and thankless, indeed, if we fail to recognize God's ordination in our own history, God's warnings and promises in our own fortunes. Surely He has been favourable unto this land of ours, until every acre of it is holy ground. To us also God has granted prophets, and captains, and reformers in long succession to "bring back our captivity," until freedom means more in England to-day than it means anywhere else in the world. And upon us, too, God has laid the burden of a duty and destiny which we still only half discern. He has given us a charge which we can never fulfil abroad except as we become faithful to our vocation at home. To realize the very hand of the living God laid on our nation to-day humbles us into awe and seriousness and searchings of heart. The proud vision of Empire fades into a solemn sense of the Divine Imperator who ordains our inheritance for us; because the kingdom, and the power, and the glory are His own. (*F. H. Darlow*.)

Ver. 6. *Wilt Thou not revive us again: that Thy people may rejoice in Thee!*—*A prayer for revival*:—I. WHAT IS THE TIME FOR SUCH A PRAYER AS THIS? 1. When we can remember some gracious acts of God in the past. After some mercy drops, it becomes us to cry for showers of blessing. 2. After tokens of Divine displeasure. 3. When saints feel languid. 4. When efforts seem to be useless. 5. When we have among us a number of persons who are backsliding. II. THE NEED OF SUCH A PRAYER. Who needs it? 1. The minister. If the preachers grow dull and sleepy, there is no wonder that the people do so; therefore, give us a special place in your supplications that we may be kept right for your sakes, and for Christ's sake, and the Gospel's sake. 2. All the leaders of our Church. Often, dead deacons and dead elders prevent a church prospering; therefore, let us pray earnestly for the leaders of God's Israel, "Lord, revive them again. Put more spiritual life into them." 3. The same is true of all the members of the Church without exception. How much they need reviving! 4. And all the workers, too. 5. The hesitators. 6. The careless ones. 7. The outside public.

who never go to hear the Gospel at all. III. THE ESSENCE OF SUCH A PRAYER. It means—1. Dependence upon God. 2. Confidence in God. 3. Importunity with God. IV. THE NET RESULT IF THIS PRAYER BE ANSWERED. It seems rather singular, does it not?—that the psalmist should put as the reason for a revival that God's people should rejoice in Him. You and I do not always estimate things aright. Preaching is only the stalk; conversion, prayer, praise,—these are the full corn in the golden ear. In the garden, the leaves may represent the work that is done; but the flowers are the praise that is rendered. In a revival, part of the result is the conversion of men, but the result is the praise of God; and that revival brings forth most fruit that gives to God the most glory. I reckon that we have served God when we have fed the poor, when we have taught the ignorant, when we have reclaimed the wanderer; but I am equally sure that we have rendered acceptable sacrifice when we have prayed to God, when we have delighted ourselves in Him, when the joy of our heart has in silence exhaled towards Him. So, therefore, if God will be pleased to send a revival, His people will rejoice in Him because they are revived. They will be thankful that their spirits are plucked away from their languor and lethargy; and then they will begin to rejoice with the joy of gratitude because God has done such great things for them; and then sinners will be converted, and straightway saints will rejoice over sinners saved. Now, as you come to the communion table, I want you to try to rejoice in God. "But I am mourning about myself," says one. Well, mourn about yourself, if you like; but do rejoice in God. "Oh, but I am troubled in my circumstances!" Well, but a child of God should rise above circumstances, and rejoice in God. There is more in God to cheer you than in your circumstances to depress you. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Revival experiences*.—I. THIS PRAYER WAS DICTATED BY PAST EXPERIENCES. "Wilt Thou not revive us 'again?'" II. IT IS THE PRAYER OF ONE ALIVE TO THE PRECIOUSNESS AND NEEDFULNESS OF SUCH SPECIAL EFFUSIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. "Wilt Thou not 'revive?'" III. IT IS THE PRAYER OF ONE FULLY CONSCIOUS THAT GOD ALONE IS THE SOURCE OF REVIVING POWER AND GRACE. "Wilt not 'Thou?'" etc. Never was revival more needed than now. Therefore let us make this prayer our own. IV. AT TIMES OF REVIVAL CHRISTIANS REJOICE IN GOD. (*American Homiletic Monthly*.) *Religious declension and revival*.—I. THE CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS DECLENSION. 1. I have known trials in business the occasions of religious declensions—trials which ought to have led to God in prayer, who can by His mighty arm take us over them, but which have so absorbed the mind and so worried the spirit, that instead of their leading to God the man has sat down and sighed his soul away in sorrow. 2. I have known the very opposite of trials, namely, worldly prosperity, a cause of religious declension. The sea has been all calm, the tide has set in our favour, the breeze has filled our every sail, and with full sails our vessel has entered into the haven, and we have sought to make earth, not heaven, our home; our prosperity we have put down to our own ingenuity, and not to the goodness of God. II. THE EVIDENCES OF RELIGIOUS DECLENSION. 1. Remissness in secret prayer. 2. Neglect of family prayer. 3. Neglect of the public means of grace. III. THE REMEDY FOR RELIGIOUS DECLENSION. 1. There is a remedy (2 Sam. xiv. 14; Jer. xxx. 17; Mal. iii. 7; 2 Chron. xvii. 4). 2. The means to be used for revival. (1) We must become alarmed about our state, and apply for the remedy. (2) We must humble ourselves before God. (3) We must make a full surrender of ourselves. IV. THE BLESSEDNESS OF A REVIVED RELIGIOUS STATE. It is the blessedness of—1. Restored spiritual health. 2. Rejoicing in the God who gave it. 3. Joy in common with others. (A. M. Brown, LL.D.) *The causes and cure of religious declension*.—I. THE CAUSES. 1. Remissness in secret duty. 2. Inattention to God's word. 3. Neglect of self-examination. 4. Allowed indulgence of some favourite sin. 5. Indifference to public means. 6. Self-complacency. II. THE MEANS OF SPIRITUAL REVIVAL. 1. Recollect yourselves. 2. Humble yourselves. 3. Surrender yourselves anew to the Lord. 4. Give yourselves unto extraordinary prayer. 5. Attend with constancy the public means. 6. Apply to yourselves what you hear and read of God's Word. III. THE ADVANTAGE OF A REVIVED AND CHEERFUL STATE OF MIND. 1. To ourselves. A new impulse will be given to our religious feeling and affections. 2. Others will share the advantage of our revival. Seeing how lowly, how forbearing, how kind, how cheerful, the followers of Jesus can be; they will be constrained to think favourably of that gracious Lord who "taketh pleasure in the prosperity of His servants," and to allow the excellency of that religion which can make a fallen sinful creature so holy, so contented, so happy. Saints will be

edified; timid professors encouraged; mockers silenced; and sinners convinced and won to the love and practice of piety. 3. The Lord Jesus Christ will be magnified by our liveliness and zeal in His service. (*W. Mudge.*) *A Pentecostal prayer*:—

I. A GENERAL REVIVAL OF TRUE RELIGION IS NEEDED. 1. The world needs it. (1) The world of Christendom needs it. From having so long lived in a Christian country, many are disposed to take it for granted that they are Christians. Others, from so often hearing and reading the truth, fail to feel its power. (2) The world of heathendom needs it. Much has been done to win the world to Christ, but much still remains to be done. 2. The Church at large and individual churches need it. 3. The individual members of our churches need it. II. THE GROUNDS FOR EXPECTING SUCH A REVIVAL. 1. The fact that God has promised to revive His people. 2. The fact that He has again and again revived them—on the day of Pentecost; at the Reformation; under the preaching of Wesley and Whitfield. III. THE MEANS NECESSARY FOR BRINGING ABOUT A REVIVAL. 1. Prayer for an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Such prayer must be characterized by humility, fervency, perseverance, faith. 2. As all our blessings come to us through Christ, we must pray in His name. 3. As the Word of God is "the sword of the Spirit"—i. e. its instrument—we must study it ourselves, and teach it to others. 4. As God always works by means, we must employ appropriate effort. (1) Put away all sin. (2) Seek to cultivate true, healthy piety, as opposed to austerity, narrow-mindedness, sentimentalism, or laxity. (3) Endeavour to progress in the Divine life ourselves. (4) Seek to arouse others. (*E. W. Wilson.*) *The coming revival*:—Each of the last four centuries, to go no farther back, has been distinguished by a great revival of religion. In the sixteenth century there came what we may call the Protestant revival, in the seventeenth century the Puritan revival, in the eighteenth century the Evangelical revival; and during the nineteenth century we have witnessed a revival which it is more difficult to characterize, but which has been as real and will probably prove as fruitful as any of the former. It has manifested itself in various ways, by high ritualism on the one hand and by much earnest evangelism on the other. Probably its most distinguishing characteristic is that it has inspired Christian people with a strong desire to reach the whole population of the land, to uplift socially and morally the most degraded, and so perhaps it might be called the Democratic revival. It is certain that neither this nor any other of the religious movements I have named has been unmixed good or evil. Like all things on earth, they have been imperfect in character and results. But in each case there has been a vast preponderance of good, and all of them have helped to hasten on the age of universal righteousness. And the history of these four centuries seems to render infinitely probable a great revival in the twentieth century. Another fact which makes us confident that we shall shortly witness a great revival is the manifest need of it. The coldness and deadness of many of our churches, the utter indifference of the masses, the neglect of public worship, the practical infidelity which is so common in all ranks of society, the hopeless misery of the "submerged tenth," the comparative failure of the churches to rescue the very classes in which Jesus showed the greatest interest and amongst which He gained His chief success, all these things prove that a revival is necessary. Now, we find that when the need is greatest the help is nearest. It is the way of the Lord to display His grace and power in the day of His people's extremity. The coming revival will be an intellectual movement. It will very largely consist in the awakening of the mind. Of course, every revival is in some degree an intellectual movement. Conversion implies the opening of the eyes and the turning from darkness to light. But in former revivals the intellectual element has not been the most prominent. A century ago, and even later, religion was chiefly emotional. The majority of the people in this country were uneducated, many of them were grossly ignorant. They were incapable of understanding an argument or of appreciating a spiritual idea. And so the preachers of the evangelical movement appealed to the fears of men. In the coming revival men will be brought to God, not by craven terror, not by coercion of any kind, but by persuasion, by conviction, by recognition of the truth. The religious movement of the twentieth century will be the triumphal progress of reason. But the chief glory of the coming revival will be its ethical character. It will bring about a great moral reformation. The weak point in former revivals has been in the development of character. We find Martin Luther complaining that the Protestants were no better in moral character than the Catholics. Puritanism produced many eminent saints, yet it also produced some notable hypo-

critics. The Puritan theology did not give to morality the high place to which it was entitled; and, indeed, in some respects it tended rather to depress the importance of moral character. In the coming revival high and pure morality will be accorded its sacred rights. It will be a revival of righteousness; it will fill men with an enthusiasm for goodness. It will be inspired by the practical theology of Jesus Christ; not by the theology of Luther, or Calvin, or Augustine, or even of Paul, so much as by that of the Great Master. And so it will produce in Christian men a character more true and manly, more Christlike, and more Divine. And on this account the coming revival will be more extensive and more permanent in its results than any that have preceded it. The great sign and evidence of the revival, when it comes, will be its manifesting power, its power of discrimination and discovery. Men are separated by great lines of moral demarcation, but generally these lines are visible only to Omniscience. When the revival comes they will show up clearly and with astonishing vividness. There are those who are saved and know they are saved: they will be the chief instruments of the revival. There are those who are not saved and know they are not; they will be the objects upon which the revival will exert its convincing and converting power. But there are also those who think they are saved and are not, good, easy people, self-complacent and censorious, to them the revival will bring a rude awakening. There is yet another class—those who are saved and do not know it—a much more numerous class than is generally supposed. With the great revival there will come to them a clearer vision. Receiving the Spirit of adoption, they will thenceforth serve the Lord with gladness. Doubt and weakness will give place to confidence and strength. (*S. T. Bosworth, B.A.*) *Personal revival*.—I use the term "revival" as implying, not simply the quickening and strengthening of the Divine life in the soul where it already exists, but also the production of that life where it has not before been enjoyed,—in other words, as including in it the conversion of sinners, as well as the edification of saints. I. WE NEED A REVIVAL. Is there not amongst us much spiritual insensibility—much formality—much worldliness? Is there any one of us who does not feel, when he seriously and thoughtfully reflects on his opportunities and privileges, that he is not what he ought to be—not what he might have been? II. WE MAY OBTAIN A REVIVAL. 1. That this desirable result may be gained, let me remind you that spiritual revival is a personal thing. The revival of a congregation or of the church at large can only be reached by the revival of the individuals of whom the congregation or church is composed. 2. Do you ask, how are we to get it for ourselves? I answer,—by the use of the right means in the right spirit. (1) If you are not yet converted, you must begin by receiving Christ as your personal Saviour. This is the commencement of Divine life in the soul. (2) Prayer—secret personal prayer. It is very well that you should seek the prayers of others; but if you do not pray for yourselves, you have no right to expect personal revival. (3) The devout study of the Word of God. In it God speaks to us, and speaks to us directly. If we do not listen, how can we be His children—how can we know His will or do it? (4) The cultivation of a watchful and dependent spirit. By a watchful spirit, I mean a spirit ever on its guard against sin. By a dependent spirit, I mean a spirit conscious of its own guilt and depravity, of its own weakness and infirmity. (*John Robson, D.D.*) *Spiritual revival*.—1. What is the kind of spiritual awakening that is required in the days in which we are living? "A new realization of God." Now, understand what realization is. There may be belief and no realization. Devils believe and tremble. I may believe in God and be as foul as Satan. I realize God, and He will be the Power that dominates me in all my thought and in every department of my being. You go to Switzerland and one object is in your thought, Mont Blanc, which dominates the valleys. When we realize that God will dominate our thoughts and our actions, we shall realize that He besets us behind and before, and that if we take the wings of the morning and go to the uttermost parts of the sea He is there. I would realize God; I would try to help you to realize Him. Now, the great difficulty of this subject comes from the fact that with the progress of science, as science has brought us knowledge, and knowledge is reality, we are brought to an understanding of the fact that He is great, passing all our comprehension, and we begin to understand that no man by searching can by any possibility find Him out. I can only tell you some things which will be when we realize God, when He is near to us and we appreciate that He is near to us as we are to one another. When that is true all places will be holy. All times are sacred when God is realized. And in the next place, all duties are sacred. Why do we say that one man

in a large place is doing a great work for God, while one in a small place is doing a work of insignificance? Because we do not appreciate that everything done for Him is great, and that those who are most faithful are those who are most worthy of praise. 2. And then, in the next place, when we realize God, all men are sacred. In the humblest, in the barefooted beggar boy, in the man who sweeps the streets, in the one who is outcast and forgotten, there is something of the Divine. We doff our hats when those who rule us ride by, but in the man who sweeps the walk for you there is something of the King of the Universe. Ah, do we think of these things? That is the kind of revival that is needed. How may this revival be promoted? Well, in the first place, those who bear the Christian name ought surely to be those who lead in it; and if they lead in it, certain things must be realized. They must learn to practise the presence of God; and, moreover, they must learn also to lay upon it every weight and every sin. We cannot prevent a thought knocking at the door of our mind and looking in, but we can prevent that thought coming in and staying there. And then, associate much with Jesus Christ; He is the One who brings God to us; He is the One who reveals Him in a way in which we can understand Him. Spend time with Him, think about Him, feed upon Him, live with Him. Next, this thought: What will result when we do realize God, when this revival has come to us? What will be the results? Will you pardon me if I return my question with a question, and ask you what kind of life do you think you would live if God was just as real to you as His sun in the heavens? If you were sure every day, every hour, every minute, that the holy eyes of the loving God were on you, what kind of life do you think you would lead? Now, once more, consider if there are any signs of the coming of such an awakening. 3. I find signs of it in the amazing earnestness which characterizes the young men and the young women in our institutions of learning, so far as I know, the world around. There were never so many who were pledging themselves to the missionary service in the whole history of the world as are pledging themselves to-day. I find signs of this spiritual awakening also in the spirit of expectancy. We all feel—sensitive spirits in the pews and in the pulpits everywhere feel—as if we were on the verge of some wondrous revelation of spiritual reality. (*A. H. Bradford, D.D.*) *A revival sought:—I. A REVIVAL IS GREATLY NEEDED.* Compare our lives with those of Paul, Brainerd, Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, M'Cheyne, Baxter, Whitefield. Think of their love for souls, their zealous labours, their self-denials, their communion with God. Why, beside such men our piety is scarcely discoverable even by the aid of a microscope. *II. IT CAN COME FROM GOD ONLY.* The land in India is parched and dried up for want of rain; where are the reviving showers to come from? Can a council of her wise men by consulting each other obtain it? No; from above it must come. We too, are dry and parched, and all our talk and schemes and Church organization will do nothing, unless the showers fall upon us from above. In this matter we are absolutely dependent upon God. I have heard of men and Churches trying to "get up" revivals. Got-up revivals end in spiritual dearth, or, worse still, spiritual death. They must be brought down to be of any service. *III. CAN WE OBTAIN A REVIVAL? IF SO, HOW?* 1. I believe we can, because—(1) Of the promises God has made in this respect (*Mal. iii. 10; Isa. xlv. 3; Zech. xii. 10*). (2) All who have ever earnestly and truly sought one have obtained it. Think of the times of Baxter, of Bunyan, of Burns, of Flavel, of Finney, of Wesley, of Whitefield, of M'Cheyne. In our isle, and lands beyond the seas, God has poured out His Spirit. Lord, Thou hast revived others; wilt Thou not revive us? Thou hast revived us in days past; wilt Thou not revive us again? (3) Revivals are a part of God's method of accomplishing His purposes, and without them the world cannot be converted. 2. How are we to obtain it? (1) There must be a determination on the part of each member of the Church to have a better state of things. A revival must be desired before God will give it. (2) There must be on the part of each one of us sorrow of heart for our coldness and backslidings, full confession of sin to God, the giving up of every known sin, and the earnest petition, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." (3) There must be also on behalf of sinners soul travail (*Isa. lxvi. 8*). In this there is deep philosophy: 'tis the mother who has felt the birth-pangs that loves and cares for the child as no other can. And 'tis those who have wrestled with God for the conversion of men, who know how to care for them when converted. *IV. WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF A REVIVAL WHEN OBTAINED?* 1. It generally affects the minister, first and most. His lips are touched with the live coal from off the altar; he is clad with zeal as

with a cloak. He has an unction from the Holy One resting upon him. 2. The deacons and all the members feel a kind of spell come over them. They don't neglect family prayer now. They don't forget to read their Bible now. All is changed, and things are as they should be. 3. Sinners who have listened for years, now, upon confession of their faith, wish to be baptized. 4. Then shall all the members of our Church be glad and rejoice in the Lord. (*W. W. Williams.*) *Lent, the season of revival*:—The advantage of such a season as Lent,—a season set apart for special prayer, and searching of heart, and amendment of life,—is that, where there is a feeling of slackness and failure, it meets it, and welcomes it, and sustains it, and guides it; and where there is no such wholesome feeling of inward concern and self-censure, it tends to awaken, and foster, and stimulate it. 1. Can we put a little more self-denial and effort into our religious exercises and devotions? 2. Can we see our way to embarking on a crusade,—a truly holy war,—against some besetting sin, or fault, or failing, of our own; with a determination to suppress it and stamp it out;—or to denying ourselves some little innocent indulgence, for the sake of self-discipline and the love of Christ;—or to applying the Cross practically to ourselves in any other special way whatever? 3. Can we cut out for ourselves, or anyhow aid in, any enterprise of Christian philanthropy, having for its object the bettering of the physical, social, intellectual, or religious condition of our fellow-men, around us or at a distance; some enterprise which we can help and forward by money, by prayers, or by personal labour and toil; and this, in the recollection, and under the inspiration of the Saviour's words: "inasmuch as ye have done it," etc. (*D. J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *The test of a true revival—joy and delight in God*:—Pardon and quickening are joined together in ver. 5. We beseech the Lord and Giver of Life to revive among us that life of the spirit which grows stifled, and choked, and deadened by the pressure of the world. Nothing gives thoughtful Englishmen graver concern than the decay of high ideals, alike in the politics and the literature of the nation. And in the Church itself, while we raise great sums of money, do we not grow painfully aware of a certain dearth and poverty of spiritual passion, which can only be re-inspired and rekindled from above? "Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?" Note this searching test of a real revival: it fills Christians with a new joy and delight in God Himself. As the Holy Ghost comes upon us and the power of the Highest overshadows us, the Church breaks out in a fresh "Magnificat," and sings, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." And the Church becomes the irresistible missionary when it can chant that victorious song. (*T. H. Darlow.*) *Revivals—their relation to nations*:—Historians seldom take note of so obscure an event; yet, if the secret connections of revivals with the destiny of nations could be disclosed, they would appear to be more critical evolutions of history than the Gothic invasions. A volume has been compiled narrating the decisive battles of the world. But more significant than this, and probing deeper the Divine government of the world, would be the history of revivals. (*Austin Phelps.*) *Don't predict a revival*:—There is a current idea that the best way to start a revival is to preach to the Christians in a church. I do not accept that idea. If you want to raise up a lazy crew on board ship, set them hauling in that man who has fallen overboard. Don't talk too much about "revival! revival! revival!" Don't predict a revival. I never in my life knew a predicted revival that came to pass. In my own ministerial experience the spiritual operations known as "revivals" generally began in a prayer-meeting. I learned more theology in those experiences than I ever could have learned in a theological school. A cold prayer-meeting inevitably makes a frigid church. Hang your thermometer up in the prayer-meeting. Watch the first indication of the Spirit. (*T. L. Cuyler, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. **I will hear what God the Lord will speak.**—*The return of prayers*:—**I. WHEN A MAN HATH PUT UP PRAYERS TO GOD, HE IS TO REST ASSURED THAT GOD WILL IN MERCY ANSWER HIS PRAYERS; AND TO LISTEN DILIGENTLY, AND OBSERVE HOW HIS PRAYERS ARE ANSWERED.** 1. Because otherwise you take an ordinance of God in vain in your hearts, which is to take God's name, with whom in that ordinance you deal, in vain; for it is a sign you think your prayer not an effectual means to attain that end it is ordained for, and say secretly in your hearts, as they (*Job xxi. 16*). 2. Not simply God's name, as in an ordinance made known, but also His name, that is, His attributes, are taken in vain. For it is a sign you think of that God you pray to, that either "His ear is heavy, that He cannot hear, or His



hand shortened, that He cannot save," or His heart straitened, that He will not : and thus you rob Him of one of His most royal titles, whereby He styles Himself (Ps. lxxv. 2). 3. You let God speak to you in vain, when you do not listen to what He answers. 4. You will provoke the Lord not to answer at all; He will forbear to answer, because He sees it will be in vain. 5. If you observe not His answers, how shall you bless God and return thanks to Him for hearing your prayers? 6. As God loseth, so yourselves also the experience which you might get thereby. (1) Both experience of God and His faithfulness, which will cause in you hope and confidence in God another time, when you have found Him again and again answering your prayers. And also—(2) By observing God's answers to your prayers, you will gain much insight into your own hearts, and ways, and prayers, and may thereby learn how to judge of them. 7. You will lose much of your comfort (John xvi. 24). Comfort it is many ways—(1) To hear from God, as to hear from a friend, though it be but two or three words, and that about a small matter; if there be at the bottom this subscription, "your loving father," or, "your assured friend," it satisfies abundantly; so also—(2) To know that God is mindful of us, accepts our works, fulfils His promises. (3) How doth it rejoice one to find another of his mind in a controversy; but that God and we should be of one mind, and concur in the desire of the same things,—not two in the earth only agree (Matt. xviii. 19), but God who is in heaven and we agree,—this rejoiceth the heart exceedingly. And thus it is when a man perceives his prayer answered. Therefore you lose much of your comfort in blessings when you do not observe answers to your prayers. II. Now, as for RULES AND HELPS TO FIND OUT GOD'S MEANING TOWARDS YOU IN YOUR PRAYERS, AND TO SPY OUT ANSWERS, AND HOW TO KNOW WHEN GOD DOETH ANYTHING IN ANSWER TO YOUR PRAYERS. 1. Concerning prayers put up for the Church, for the accomplishment of such things as fall out in ages to come. (1) There may be some prayers which you must be content never yourselves to see answered in this world, the accomplishment of them not falling out in your time; such as are those you haply make for the calling of the Jews, the utter downfall of God's enemies, the flourishing of the Gospel, the full purity and liberty of God's ordinances, the particular flourishing and good of the society and place you live in. All you whose hearts are right do treasure up many such prayers as these, and sow much of such precious seed, which you must be content to have the Church, it may be, in after ages to reap; all which prayers are not yet lost, but will have answers: for as God is an eternal God, and Christ's righteousness an "everlasting righteousness," and therefore of eternal efficacy (Dan. ix. 24), "being offered up by the eternal Spirit" (Heb. ix. 14), so are prayers also, which are the work of the eternal Spirit of Christ, made to that God in His name, and in Him are eternally accepted, and of eternal force, and therefore may take place in after ages. (2) Only at present in prayer it may be that thou hast revealed unto thee, by a secret impression made on thy spirit, that these things shall come to pass, and so hast thy faith confirmed. (3) And when they are accomplished, and thou in heaven, thy joy will surely be more full for thy prayers. 2. Concerning answers to our prayers for others, for particular men, as friends and kindred; and likewise for temporal blessings. (1) Such prayers God often hears (James v. 15, 16; 1 John v. 16). (2) Prayers for others may often also not obtain the particular thing prayed for them (1 Sam. xv. 35; Ps. xxxv. 13). (3) When the prayers are thus made out of conscience of our duty for such whom yet God doth not intend that mercy unto, then they are returned again into our own bosoms, to our advantage; even as St. Paul saith, that his rejoicing that others preached, though they lost their labour, should turn to his salvation (Phil. i. 19). (4) If we have prayed long for those whom God intends not mercy unto, He will in the end cast them out of our prayers and hearts, and take our hearts off from praying for them. That which He did by a revelation from heaven to some prophets of old, as to Samuel and Jeremiah, the same He doth by a more undiscerned work; that is, by withdrawing assistance to pray for such by withdrawing the spirit of supplication from a man, for some men, and in some businesses. (5) God will hear those prayers for, and answer them in, some others, in whom we shall have as much comfort as in those we prayed for; and so it often proves and falls out. 3. The third case to be considered is, when a man prays for something with others, or which others likewise pray for with him, so as he is not alone in it; how then should he know that his prayers have a hand in obtaining it, as well as theirs? For in such cases Satan is apt to object, though the thing is granted indeed, yet not for thy prayers, but for the prayers of those

others joined in it with thee. (1) If thy heart did sympathize and accord in the same holy affections with those others in praying, then it is certain thy voice hath helped to carry it: "If two agree on earth," says Christ (Matt. xviii. 19), that is, if they harmonically agree to play the same tune; for prayers are music in God's ears, and so called "melody to God" (Eph. v. 19). (2) God doth usually and often evidence to a man, that his prayers contributed and went among the rest towards the obtaining of it; as—(i.) By some circumstance: as, for example, sometimes by ordering it so that that man that prayed most for a thing of concernment, should have the first news of it when it comes to be accomplished; which God doth, as knowing it will be most welcome news to him. (ii.) By filling the heart with much joy in the accomplishment of what a man prayed for: which is an evident argument that his prayers did move the Lord to effect it, as well as the prayers of others. (iii.) If God give you a heart thankful for a blessing vouchsafed to another, prayed for by you with others, it is another sign your prayers have some hand in it. (3) And, lastly, in case the thing concerned thyself, which was prayed for by others helping thee therein, what cause hast thou but to think that it was granted for thy own prayers, and not for theirs only? seeing God stirred up their hearts to pray for thee, and gave thee a heart to pray for thyself, and besides gave thee the thing which thou desiredst. Which argues thou art beloved as well as they, and accepted as well as they. (*T. Goodwin.*) *Hearing the Lord*:—I. As to DOCTRINAL TRUTH. It would be very dangerous if we had no rule to go by. In things of importance it is—1. Plain and decided. There is no obscurity as to man's sin or the way of salvation, or the reward of the good, and the loss of the evil. 2. Always accessible. The book of the law of the testimony is in our midst. II. As to MY MOVEMENTS IN LIFE. How much depends upon one wrong step as it regards our comfort, reputation, or usefulness! Even if sin is pardoned, its consequences cannot be remedied. Marriage, business, the choice of a home, have frequently produced dire results. A Christian should, therefore, at every step try to hear what the Lord shall speak. Integrity and uprightness are the principles He requires, and these must form the groundwork of every action. III. As to THE DISPENSATIONS OF HIS PROVIDENCE. 1. Every visitation has its mission. There is a purpose in every pain and an object in every trial. Let us, then, not only hear, but learn. Many are often in such a state of ignorance, despondency, and doubt, that they cannot understand what object or purpose God may have in view; but while the natural man is concerned to escape from trouble, the Christian is only anxious to have the trouble sanctified and improved. 2. We pray to God. Do we want to hear what He has to say in reply? Most of our petitions are never thought of as soon as they are delivered. We knock at the door, but never stay to see it opened. Can we expect that God will attend to those prayers which we ourselves condemn? (*Homilist.*) *The believer's expectation*:—We have here a solitary believer introduced, reviewing the dispensations of God, meditating on the prayers and praises already offered to the Divine Majesty, humbly waiting for the result. I. HIS DISPOSITION. He had sought forgiveness, consolation, revival, from the hands of God, both for himself and his people; and now he would watch, wait, attend, expect the Divine direction, and the Divine blessing. 1. It is a patient disposition. I long now for pardon; for the assurance of pardon; for the powerful efficacy of Divine grace, that I may be converted, and sanctified, and enabled to glorify God; but I must wait in the use of the appointed means, till the Lord shall "lift up upon me the light of His countenance." 2. It is an attentive disposition, an expecting, watching frame of mind. God the Lord will speak, and I must be observant of His voice. It may not come in the great and strong wind, nor yet in the earthquake, nor yet in the fire; it may be the "still small voice," the silent intimation of Providence; the gentle moving of the pillar and of the cloud. I must therefore attend and watch, to know what my Master's will is. 3. It is an obedient disposition. It is the disposition which Abraham evinced, when, having heard the most painful precept, he arose early in the morning, and hastened to its fulfilment. It is the temper of the wounded Israelite, who no sooner heard of the brazen serpent, than instead of reasoning or disputing, or prescribing some more excellent way, turned his dying eyes, beheld and lived. II. HIS EXPECTATION. God speaks peace to His people—1. By enlightening their understanding to perceive the way of peace. God "can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus"; such gracious words as these descend like the dew or the rain upon a thirsty land. 2. By communicating to the soul the assurance of peace. Believing the declarations of His word; seeing a suitable-

ness and sufficiency in the atonement of Christ, the convinced sinner comes with humble faith pleading His sacrifice and relying on Him. 3. By communicating to them a spirit of peace. Having much forgiven, they love much. III. THE CONCLUDING CAUTION. "Let them not turn," etc. The deceitfulness and depravity of the heart of man appears in nothing more striking than in the backslidings of those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. (*T. Webster, B.D.*) *Peace: how gained, how broken.*—I. WHAT WE KNOW THE LORD WILL SPEAK. 1. He speaks peace to a certain company—"to His people and to His saints." Let us, then, ask ourselves, Has the Lord ever spoken peace to us, or will He do so? If God is everything to you, you are among His people, and He will speak peace unto you. That peace is, however, always connected with holiness, for it is added, "and to His saints." His people and His saints are the same persons. Those who have a God know Him to be a holy God, and therefore they strive to be holy themselves. 2. But now, notice here that the peace which is to be desired is peace which God speaks, and all other peace is evil. The question is sometimes put—"We see bad men enjoy peace, and we see good men who have but little peace." That is one of the mysteries of life; but it is not a very difficult one as to its first part. Sometimes their peace arises from sheer carelessness, sometimes from worldliness, and sometimes from despair. God alone can speak true peace to the soul. The blood of Jesus speaks "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding." We read that on the storm-tossed lake "there was a great calm." How great is the quiet of a soul which has seen and felt the power of the atoning sacrifice! 3. I have told you that only God can speak this peace; let me remind you that He can give you that peace by speaking it. One word from the Lord is the quietus of all trouble. No deed is needed, only a word. Peace has not now to be made: the making of peace was finished more than eighteen hundred years ago on yonder cross. 4. Sooner or later the Lord will speak peace to His own. How blessed are the shells and wills of the Lord God! "He will speak peace unto His people." Doubt it not. There may be a time of battling and of struggling, the noise of war may disturb the camp for months; but in the end "He will speak peace unto His people." II. WHAT WE FEAR MAY MAR THIS BLESSING OF PEACE. Peace may be broken with the Christian, through great trouble, if his faith is not very strong. It need not be so; for some of those who have had the greatest fight of affliction have had the sweetest peace in Christ Jesus. Peace may be broken through some forms of disease, which prey upon the mind as well as the body; and when the mind grows weak and depressed from what are rather physical causes than spiritual ones, the infirmity of the flesh is apt to crush spiritual peace. When the Lord hides His face, as He may do as the result of grave offence that we have given Him, ah! then we cannot have peace. But, after all, the chief reason why a Christian loses his peace is because he "turns again to folly." What kind of folly? 1. There is the folly of hasty judgment. Have you never judged without knowing and considering all the surroundings of the case? Have you not come to a wrong conclusion, when you have ventured to judge the dealings of God with you? You have said, "This cannot be wise, this cannot be right; at any rate, this cannot be a fruit of love"; but you have found out afterwards that you were quite mistaken, that your severest trial was sent in very faithfulness. 2. Another kind of folly is of like order: it is repining, and quarrelling with the Most High. Some are never pleased with God; how can He be pleased with them? There can be no use in contending with our Maker; for what are we as compared with Him? Let the grass contend with the scythe, or the tow fight with the flame; but let not man contend with God. 3. Another kind of folly to which men often turn is that of doubt and distrust. Be satisfied with God, and you shall be satisfied in God. 4. Some turn to the old folly of looking for life upon legal principles. You remember how Paul seemed astonished at this perversity. "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" When you try to draw your comfort from what you are, and what you do, you are foolish. Self is at best a dry well. 5. Some lost their place by turning again to the folly of intellectual speculation. Stick to the Scriptures. 6. But the worst form of folly is sin. Remember what it cost your Lord to make you free from the consequences of former folly; never return to it. Look a little way before you. Think of the street of gold, the river which never dries, the trees which bear eternal fruit, the harps of ceaseless melody. We cannot turn again to folly! O God, do not permit us to do so! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **For He will speak peace unto His people.**—*Tidings of peace to be spoken to consciences distressed:*—In the words you have a discovery

of God's proceedings in treating of peace or proclaiming war with His people and subjects. 1. You see that sometimes God doth not speak peace to His own children. This was their state for the present, when this psalm was penned: "He will speak peace"; therefore, at present He did not. 2. There must needs be some great reason for this, they being His people. They had fallen into some gross folly or other; some sinful, inordinate dispositions had been indulged unto and nourished in them; which is usually, though not always, the cause of this His dealing. And as wicked men may out of His patience have a truce; so, on the contrary, with His own, God may take up a quarrel; yet He loves them, and remembers them with everlasting kindness. The uses are these—(1) As peace with God is dear to you, so to take heed of turning unto folly. Only take this advertisement, that they are not mere follies or ignorances that do interrupt or break the peace. (2) Doth God take up quarrels against His own? Then, upon any breach made, go forth to meet Him. Let not the sun go down upon God's wrath towards thee. (3) If the peace of God's own people be thus often interrupted, what wrath is reserved for the children of disobedience? 3. When the child of God wants peace, he can have no peace till God speak it. (1) Because God is the king of all the world, the sovereign Lord of all. (2) Because God is the Judge of all the world, and the party offended. (3) Peace, especially of conscience, is a thing must be created, for our hearts of themselves are full of nothing but turmoil, as the raging sea, which cannot rest. (4) The wounds of conscience which are in God's people are of that quality that none but God can cure them; for the chief thing that wounds them is the loss of God's favour, not simply His wrath. 4. Let God's people be in never so great distress, yet it is an easy thing for God to give place to them. (1) Because His speaking is creating; if He speaks, He makes things to be, even with a word. As at first He did but say, "Let there be light, and there was light"; so still, if He but say, "Let there be peace," there is peace; He made all, and upholds all by the word of His power. (2) Because the light which God gives to a man's spirit when He speaks peace is a sure and infallible light, and therefore a satisfying light, so as when it comes it must needs give peace, and no objection, no temptation can darken or obscure it when it shines. 5. Let God be never so angry, and His people's distress never so great, yet He will speak peace in the end to His people. (1) Consider who this God is that is to speak peace, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak"; He is the Lord, and therefore able to speak what pleaseth Him; He is peculiarly "the God of peace," and therefore willing to speak peace. (2) Consider who they are to whom He is to speak it. They are His people, as the text hath it; and to them there is no question but He will speak peace, though He seems angry for a while. (3) If God did not in the end speak peace, they would indeed return to folly. As it is a rule in physic still to maintain nature, and therefore when that shall be in hazard to be destroyed, they leave giving purging physic, and give cordials; so doth God with His people: though with purging physic He often brings their spirits very weak and low, yet He will uphold and maintain their spirits, so as they shall not fail and be extinguished, but then He will give cordials to raise them up again. (*T. Goodwin.*) **But let them not turn again to folly.**—*Saints cautioned against returning to folly:*—1. Sin, in every form of it, is the greatest folly and madness. 2. The whole world, God's people and saints as well as others, are naturally under the power of this folly. 3. When men first become God's people and His saints, they are in some degree turned from the folly of sin. 4. The people of God, after their first conversion from folly, do yet frequently relapse into it. 5. Such is the great grace of God unto His people, that He often speaks peace to them, even when they have been playing the fool remarkably; and this is the way in which He makes them turn to Himself. 6. God's people are very apt to return unto folly, soon after He has spoken peace to them. 7. God's speaking peace to His people, lays them under particular obligations not to turn again to folly. There is no vice held in more general abhorrence amongst men than ingratitude; and its enormity riseth in proportion to the importance of the benefits received, and to the dignity of him who confers, and the ill desert of him who receives them. Judging by this rule, how black the ingratitude of returning again to folly, after God has spoken peace to our souls! 8. A relapse into folly, after God has spoken peace to our souls, may be attended with very dangerous consequences to ourselves. We may perhaps hear again the voice of war, which formerly gave so much disquiet. 9. Those to whom God hath spoken peace ought to be particularly watchful, lest they return again to folly. Learn—(1) How much it is our duty to read, hear, and meditate upon the Word of God; seeing in it, when

explained and applied by His Spirit, He speaks peace unto His people. (2) What it is that enables the people of God to bear up under all outward crosses and troubles in this world. It is God's speaking peace to their souls. (3) That believers are not to be discouraged from entertaining an assurance of the love of God, from an apprehension that such assurance tends to licentiousness. (4) This subject reprobates all those who enjoy a peace which God doth not speak to them in His Word. Those, for instance, who, when their consciences are disquieted with guilt, seek to suppress their clamours by vain amusements, or by a hurry of business. This peace is not founded in the faith of God's Word, and therefore it is false; and if it is rested in, it will issue in war and wrath. (A. Swanson.)

**Ver. 9. Surely His salvation is nigh them that fear Him.**—*The nearness of salvation to piety*:—The "fear" of God does not mean servile terror, but loving reverence; it means piety. The subject of these words is the nearness of salvation to piety. They are so near that they are inseparable; in truth, they are essentially one. Where there is piety there is salvation, and nowhere else; where there is salvation there is piety, and nothing else. This vital connection between salvation and piety serves two purposes. I. To CORRECT A POPULAR DELUSION. In popular religious tracts and pulpits, men are constantly exhorted to seek salvation, as if it were something outside of them, something away in another region, and to be reached by scheming. But it is in the state of the heart, and nowhere else. "Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend to heaven to bring it down?" etc. It is in supreme love to God and self-sacrificing love for man. II. To URGE THE CULTIVATION OF PERSONAL PIETY. "The grace of God hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts," etc. (Homilist.) *There is safety in godly fear*:—Holy fear is a searching the camp that there be no enemy within our bosom to betray us, and seeing that all be fast and sure. For I see many leaky vessels fair before the wind, and professors who take their conversion upon trust, and they go on securely, and see not the under water till a storm sink them. (H. G. Salter.)

**Vers. 10-13. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.**—*The bridal of the earth and sky*:—This is a lovely and highly imaginative picture of the reconciliation and reunion of God and man. The poet psalmist, who seems to have belonged to the times immediately after the return from the exile, in strong faith sees before him a vision of a perfectly harmonious co-operation and relation between God and man. He is not prophesying directly of Messianic times. 1. The heavenly twin sisters, and the earthly pair that corresponds. "Mercy and truth are met together"—that is one personification; "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other" is another. It is difficult to say whether these four great qualities are to be regarded as all belonging to God, or as all belonging to man, or as all common both to God and man. I am disposed to think of the first pair as sisters from the heavens, and the second pair as the earthly sisters that correspond with them. "Mercy and truth are met together" means this: That these two qualities are found braided and linked inseparably in all that God does with mankind. Mercy is love that stoops, love that departs from the strict lines of desert and retribution. And truth blends with mercy. That is to say, truth in a somewhat narrower than its widest sense, meaning mainly God's fidelity to every obligation under which He has come. God's faithfulness to promise, God's fidelity to His past, God's fidelity in His actions, to His own character, which is meant by that great word, "He swears by Himself." Love is thus lifted up above the suspicion of being arbitrary, or of ever changing or fluctuating. In the second two, "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other," we have the picture of what happens upon earth when mercy and truth that come down from heaven are accepted and recognized. To put away metaphor, here are two thoughts. (1) That in men's experience and life righteousness and peace cannot be rent apart. The only secret of tranquillity is to be good. (2) Righteousness and her sister, Peace, only come in the measure in which the mercy and the truth of God are received into thankful hearts. 2. God responding to man's truth. "Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven." Where a man's heart has welcomed the mercy and the truth of God, there shall spring up in that heart, not only the righteousness and peace, of which the previous verse is speaking, but specifically a faithfulness not all unlike the faithfulness which it grasps. Righteousness looks down, not in its judicial aspect merely, but

as the perfect moral purity that belongs to the Divine nature. No good, no beauty of character, no meek rapture of faith, no aspiration Godwards, is ever wasted and lost, for His eye rests upon it. 3. Man responding to God's gift. "Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good, and our land shall yield her increase." Earthly fruitfulness is only possible by the reception of heavenly gifts. The earth yields her increase by laying hold of the good which the Lord gives, and by reason of that received good quickening all the germs. 4. God teaching man to walk in His footsteps. "Righteousness shall go before Him and set us in the way of His steps." The psalmist here draws tighter than ever the bond between God and man. Man may walk in God's ways—not only in the ways that please Him, but in the ways that are like Him, and the likeness can only be a likeness in moral quality. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *A blessed coalition*:—I. Here is a coalition of the most blessed qualities. "Mercy," a modification of love, love commiserating; "truth," which means reality, eternally antagonistic to all shams and hypocrisies; "righteousness," the immutable law of the moral universe, to which all must bow sooner or later; "peace," not insensibility, inaction, or stagnation, but the moral repose of souls centred in God. These are the moral qualities here specified; and more precious are they a thousand times than all the gems of ocean, or orbs of immensity. II. Here is a coalition of blessed qualities that HAVE BEEN SEPARATED. In all human history, ever since the introduction of sin, these blessed qualities have been working separately and even antagonistically. There has been "mercy" without "truth," and "peace" of a certain kind, without "righteousness." They have not worked together either in communities or in individuals, hence the constant agitations and struggles in all human life. III. Here is a coalition of qualities BLESSED IN THEIR REUNION. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." These celestial sisters come together and embrace one another with delight. Blessed is this union! Let them be united in our hearts and conduct! (*Homilist*.) *Divine perfections united to save sinners*:—In the restoration of the Church by Jesus Christ, the glorious attributes of the great Jehovah conspire together for the redemption and salvation of sinners. And although the perfections of God, mentioned in the text, may be represented as opposed to each other, yet in the covenant of grace they all agree. Observe the uncommonness of such a meeting: two opposites in two pairs, meeting together. The unanimity of such a meeting; that contraries should shake hands and kiss each other. I. THAT THE PERFECTIONS OF JEHOVAH DO HARMONIZE IN THEIR RESPECTIVE CLAIMS CONCERNING THE SALVATION OF THE CHURCH. 1. Mercy pleads for the guilty Church (Ps. lxxvi. 15). 2. Truth stands up for God's faithfulness against sin (Gen. ii. 17). 3. Righteousness or justice comes and claims execution (1 John iii. 4; Rom. xii. 9). 4. Peace pleads for a mediator (Job xxxiii. 24; Isa. ix. 6; Gal. iv. 4). II. THE TIME AND PLACE OF THIS FRIENDLY MEETING. 1. The place of assembly was in Christ (Col. i. 19; 2 Cor. v. 19). (1) Mercy is vouchsafed to the soul deserving of eternal death, through the mediation of Christ. (2) Truth or faithfulness stands engaged for the soul through Him, being upheld by Him, through the atonement. (3) Righteousness or justice is satisfied in him, and pleads for an everlasting release. (4) Peace flows into the soul of the believer, as a proof of the unanimity of the meeting. 2. Some of the various meetings called by these parties. (1) At the eternal council-table of covenant love (Eph. i. 5). (2) In the garden of Eden after the fall (Gen. iii. 15). (3) At Bethlehem at our Saviour's advent (Luke ii. 11). (4) On Mount Calvary (Heb. xii. 2). III. THE MANNER OF THEIR MEETING IN THE SOUL'S SALVATION. 1. A wonderful meeting (1 Tim. iii. 16). 2. A joyous meeting (Isa. liii. 10). 3. A holy meeting (Jer. ii. 2, 3). 4. A happy meeting (Eph. i. 3). 5. A free meeting (2 Tim. i. 9). 6. An unexpected meeting to us (Rom. xi. 33). 7. An inseparable meeting (Heb. xiii. 8). IV. THE GLORIOUS PURPOSE FOR WHICH THEY MET. 1. To promote Jehovah's glory (Eph. i. 6). 2. To disunite some unhappy meetings (Isa. xxviii. 18). 3. To unite opposite characters (1 Cor. 17; John xvii. 21). 4. To unite opposite nations in one body (Eph. ii. 16). 5. To unite opposite covenants of works and grace (Rom. x. 4). 6. To bring the Church to glory (Heb. ii. 10). (*T. B. Baker*). *The tenderness of God's rule*:—We commonly think of God's righteousness as contrary to His mercy; we supplicate His regard for us, personally, to qualify His regard for right. How hard it is to recognize that law is the minister of love, and love the fulfilling of law! Let us now consider some of the ways in which He reveals this to us. I. PARENTAL RULE is one of these ways. The government of every pious household is, in measure, a revocation of the government of God.

"Men are but children of a larger growth." We call ourselves the children of God, and this is much more than a merely endearing name. We have all a child's hold on God's affections, all a child's need of discipline and correction, all a child's power to grieve Him; and He has all a Father's kind determination to train us in right. II. The tenderness of God's strict rule is revealed to us again in **THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE**. It is hard to say whether most injury is done by over-strictness or by over-indulgence. Regard for right is the truest personal regard. God would shield men from woes unnumbered, from confusion of an unregulated will, from the conflict of passion, from the loathing that follows self-indulgence; and, therefore, has He made His laws so severe and certain, and, therefore, does He subdue us to His laws. Truth is not opposed to mercy; where there is no righteousness love works destruction. The experience of life prepares us to turn in gladness to our God, in gladness to rest in the rule of Him in whom we see that "mercy and truth are met together," etc. III. This revelation, again, is granted in **PRAYER**. We mourn under some appointment of life, thinking God is punishing us in it for our sins; as we pray to Him, we learn that we are not being punished, but chastened. We ask that God's anger may be taken away and we forgiven; we see that we are already forgiven, and that what we thought was anger was only the fidelity of love. IV. The tenderness of God's strict law is revealed to us in the Gospel of Christ. It is personal regard for man which we see pre-eminently in Jesus; yet who so much as He makes us feel the constraining bond of righteousness? He is filled with human sympathy; in the fulness of His pity He makes their sorrows, and their shame, and their struggles His own; but the influence of His associations is to make men feel more and more that they cannot escape the rule of God. He delivers them from the penalties of law; but it is to awaken in them a reverence for it, deeper and more solemn than any experience of penalty can be. He frees them from its pains by transforming its painfulness into an entire devotion to it. He shows them that personal regard is not at variance with regard for right; for the Father, who loved the Son, did not out of regard for Him turn aside from strictest law. V. The closing verses declare **THE BLESSED EFFECTS OF THIS DISCOVERY** in a true and fruitful, in a trusting, an intelligent and obedient life; in a life hallowed by God's smile and crowned with His constant benediction. (*A. Mackennal, D.D.*) *Rigorousness and clemency in God's procedure with man.*—The words "truth," "righteousness," and "judgment" in these passages we shall take to represent the stern, the inflexible, and severe in God's dealing with men; and the words "mercy" and "peace" to represent the mild and the clement. I. In God's procedure with man these principles are found in **HARMONIOUS CO-OPERATION**. 1. We see these two principles harmoniously operating in God's dealing with us through the phenomena of nature. In the earthquake and the tornado, in the fierce lightnings and the rolling thunders, in the raging oceans and the furious winds, we feel ourselves confronted with the stern, the rigorous, and the terrible; but in the serene and the sunny we feel ourselves in the presence of the mild and the lenient. Both in nature work together, they "kiss each other," and bring about the good ordained. 2. We see these two principles harmoniously operating in God's dealing with us through the events of human history. When we read the history of our race—its wars, famines, pestilences, and innumerable calamities—we are brought before the severe and awful in God; whilst in the happiness of tribes, the prosperity of nations, and the gradual advancement of the race, we see the merciful and the kind; but both principles co-operate, the rigorous and the clement. They "meet and kiss each other." They are in a blessed partnership in their endeavours to make humanity what God would have it be. 3. We see these two principles harmoniously operating in God's dealing with us through the circumstances of individual life. In the various afflictions, physical, intellectual, and social, which every man has, God in the sterner aspects of His character appears before us; whilst in the pleasures and enjoyments of our life He faces us in an aspect tender and kind. But both principles co-operate. "Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment," etc. 4. We see these two principles harmoniously operating in God's dealing with us through the means of redemptive Providence. In the life of Christ, God seems in one aspect terribly righteous, on the other side infinitely merciful, but the two are one; they meet, kiss, and co-operate in making a perfect Saviour. It is so in the redemptive training of men for everlasting blessedness. First, law comes to the man with its flashing light and terrible thunder, rousing conscience, and kindling the terrible flames of remorse, and the Divine One seems rigorous and awful. Then comes the assurance of

forgiveness, the contralizing the affections in infinite love, and all in God seems tender and merciful. But the two principles meet together and co-operate in bringing about the same blessed result, viz., the training of the soul for a higher life. II. Though these principles harmoniously co-operate in God's procedure with man, **ONE IS EVER IN THE ASCENDANT.** "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment." 1. In the phenomena of nature you see more of the clement than the stern. The mild, and not the rigorous, is the queen of nature; storms and earthquakes, thunderings and lightnings are but the exceptions; sunny days, serene earth, and calm atmospheres are the rule. 2. In the events of human history you see more of the clement than the stern. History, it is true, records bloody wars, blasting pestilences, and writhing famines, but these after all are only exceptions in God's dispensations with mankind; peace, health, and plenty, have been the rule. 3. In the circumstances of individual life you see more of the clement than the stern. It is true we have our afflictions and our sorrows, but these are exceptions. As a rule, the existence of most men is that of health and judgment; goodness and mercy follow us. "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment," in our experience. 4. In the means of redemptive Providence you see more of the clement than the stern. In the Christian life there have been the pains connected with conviction, repentance, and conversion; but these are in the initial stages of the Christian life; succeeding stages are generally calm, and often jubilant, and the end everlasting life. (*Homilist.*) *Mercy and truth meeting together*:—There is always truth enough in the world, but it is merciless truth. Men are quick enough to see the faults and sins of their neighbours. If truth is merely fault-finding, then there is plenty of it everywhere. No man ever commits a sin but some one sees it and points it out. But cold, hard truth never convinces; it only provokes. It hardens instead of converting. It seems like injustice, cruelty, wrong. Truth without love has, therefore, virtually the effect of falsehood. It is often said that men are seldom converted by argument or controversy. This is because controversy is so apt to be carried on in a spirit of coldness and hatred, rather than love. There is also enough love in the world, if love means only kind feelings, weak good-will, which is too full of sympathy to see the faults of others and point them out, which will concede or suppress truth for the sake of peace. No. Love which has no truth in it is not love, but real enmity. To treat a bad man as if he were not bad, is a cruel kindness. It puts darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. It confounds moral distinctions. It encourages the man who might be cured by vigorous remedies to go on from bad to worse till he is incurable. It is not easy to unite these great forces, for they are polar forces and antagonist. A truthful man tends always to be too hard; a loving man tends to be too soft and yielding. This conflict between truth and love is sometimes presented to us as a problem in ethics. If a robber asks me which way his victim has gone, shall I tell a lie and deceive him or not? Shall I tell a lie to an insane person or a sick person for his good? Is it right ever to deceive? These questions, when put in abstract form, cannot always be answered. But the practical answer comes to us if we have learned to live in truth and love. When these are united in our character, they will not be divided in our speech or our action. We shall not tell any lies from good nature, but we shall be taught in the hour of exigency what to do and say. The promise of Jesus will be fulfilled: "Take no thought what ye shall say, for it will be given you in that hour what ye ought to say." If we live in the whole a united life, we shall not act partially or in a one-sided way. The Lord will help us in each exigency to say and do the right thing, not sacrificing truth to love or love to truth. Life often teaches us that way which logic fails to find. The only live work, too, is that which has both truth and love in it. We must love our work, to do it well; we must also believe in it, to do it well. The lowest drudgery becomes a fine art when we put our mind and heart into it: a fine art becomes mere drudgery when we practise it only to make money or get reputation out of it. Work is very hard when we do it only because we must; it is very easy when we have faith in it and love it. (*J. F. Clarke.*) *True peace is inseparable from righteousness*:—Peace may be sought two ways. One way is as Gideon sought it when he built his altar in Ophrah, naming it, "God send peace," yet sought this peace that he loved as he was ordered to seek it, and the peace was sent in God's way. "The country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon." And the other way of making peace is as Menahem sought it when he gave the King of Assyria a thousand talents of silver, that "his hand might be with him." That is, you may either win your peace or buy it—win it



by resistance to evil; buy it by compromise with evil. . . . No peace is ever in store for any of us, but that which we shall win by victory over shame or sin—victory over the sin that oppresses, as well as over that which corrupts. (*John Ruskin.*)

Ver. 11. **Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven.**—*The moral prosperity of earth the joy of heaven:*—I. The history of earth will one day be CHARACTERIZED BY MORAL PROSPERITY. Truth—what a seed is this! The deadly foe of all falsehoods and wrongs, the root of virtue, the river of joy. Two things are implied in this growth of truth—1. The preparation of the soil. 2. The implantation of the seed. II. The moral prosperity of earth will be a SOURCE OF DELIGHT TO HEAVEN. "More joy . . . over one sinner," etc. What is the joy? 1. It is the joy of benevolence. A delight springing from the discovery of an increase of happiness in the universe. 2. It is the joy of piety. It is a delight to discover that, instead of a world of rebels, it is a world of loyal subjects. (*Homilist.*) *God's purpose concerning the world:*—Heaven is the abode, the treasure-house of righteousness: it is filled with its riches, and no room is left for iniquity to enter. Truth is akin to righteousness—it is her daughter and her image; and when truth has covered the earth, even as righteousness clothes the heavens, this world and that, so long alienated in sympathy, and character, shall be one. Man shall bear the image of God, and earth shall be the reflection of heaven. I. **THE DIVINE PURPOSE.** It is to reverse the moral state of things long prevalent among mankind. 1. Falsehood, and not truth, has had the ascendancy in our world. Falsehood has reigned in the regions of philosophy; and a thousand wild chimeras, the offspring of vigorous but wayward genius, have bewildered human minds. Portions of truth, gleams of light, playing amidst widespread darkness, have remained—the results of early impressions, the relics of primitive tradition, and the utterance of those instinctive tendencies and laws of mind, which nothing can completely crush; but error, various, manifold, portentous, gigantic error, has predominated and reigned. 2. The reversing of this scene forms the purpose unfolded in our text. What we have now been looking at reminds one of Vesuvius after an eruption, when the burning lava has transformed the surrounding region into a sulphureous lake, destroying the field and the garden, the village and the city. But, through the tender mercy of our God, the scene is to be changed; these fires are to be extinguished; a new moral soil, if I may so speak, is to be spread over the desolation of past ages; and then, quickened by the seeds of truth, and watered by the rains of righteousness, the earth is to yield her increase, truth is to spring up and flourish, and so to clothe this lower world as to make it the counterpart of that upper one. II. **THE PARTIAL REALIZATION OF THIS PURPOSE.** The Gospel has not been 1800 years in the world for nothing. Its early triumphs were wonderful. Like an electric shock it passed through the Roman Empire. Superstition felt it; the heathen mythology lost its remaining hold on the public mind. Idolatry felt it, and the images of the gods were forsaken; philosophy felt it, and its vain and delusive speculations were dispelled. A revolution took place unparalleled in the history of the world. The religion of a few poor fishermen overturned the religion of priests, philosophers, and emperors. It altered the destiny of man; it gave a new impulse to the progress of civilization; it infused a fresh and healing element into society; it entered the family, and reformed domestic habits; it entered the region of literature, and shed upon it new light; it entered the halls of legislature, and improved the codes of nations; it entered the royal palace, and taught princes lessons of justice and mercy. Christianity thus strove to embody in man and society the beautiful picture sketched in my text; and to a very considerable extent, through the grace accompanying its proclamation, it realized its object. There were individuals, families, and churches, sanctified by truth, and rich in the fruits of righteousness. In all ages there have been such specimens! Blessed be God, they are numerous in the present day; perhaps more numerous than ever. They are to be found at home and abroad. III. **THE FUTURE COMPLETE FULFILMENT.** While man is eager, precipitate, longing to see the end of everything, God is saying, "Wait!" "The end is not yet; but it shall come." A glorious age of truth and righteousness shall come; the kingdom of Christ, in its power and glory, shall come. "My counsel shall stand; and I will do all my pleasure." Nor is there, after all, any actual deferring or postponement of what God intends to do. God is not putting off what He once purposed to do earlier: He is fulfilling His first intentions; He is following out the original plan. There the intermediate steps

were all marked, as well as the final issue. Indeed, the slowness of God's work is only apparent. To us, who dwell upon the surface of the globe, its movements appear extremely slow—nay, it seems entirely stationary. Standing on the deck of our great world vessel, we feel not the motion of the mighty ship as it cuts its way through the infinite ocean of space; and it is only by the careful observation of the stars that we can realize and measure our progress; but in the eyes of God the earth is moving in its orbit with vast celerity, with a speediness of flight which mocks the arrow, and would startle us mortals, who are borne along by it, could we become fully sensible of its rushing pace. So the work of God in this world, for the consummation of the triumphs of truth and righteousness, seems slow to us; nay, sometimes may seem as though it had stopped; but, in the eye of Him who "seeth the end from the beginning," it is swift, though tranquil; rapid like the planets, and like them tending to the accomplishment of its appointed round. (*John Stoughton.*)

**Ver. 13. Righteousness shall go before Him; and shall set us in the way of His steps.**—*Right steps*.—I. THE ESSENTIAL STEPS OF THE LORD'S DEALINGS WITH US. The first thing in God's dealing towards us is that He gives His well-beloved Son; and the first thing in His manifestation of Himself to us is to open our eyes to see our need of this, and thus to bring us into the same way, the way of His steps. The next step in a way of detail as given in this psalm is that of forgiveness. The steps now described in a way of detail naturally follow. "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of Thy people." That is one of the sweetest features of the Gospel. "Thou hast covered all their sin." Here is Satan's universal and entire defeat, seeing He has covered all their sins; and "who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Is not this a step in loving-kindness, is not this a step of grace, is not this an infinitely and an eternally advantageous step,—thus to receive Christ Jesus as to receive the forgiveness of sins? II. THE REASONS WHY THE LORD SETTETH US IN THE WAY OF HIS STEPS. 1. That we may be supported when we fall into tribulations, adversities, and trials. If some of you are so placed at present that you may not exactly feel in your minds the force of this reason, you will before you die, because trouble is the lot of us all, affliction is the lot of us all, and the Lord brings us into His steps that we may be with Him, and be supported. 2. That He might foreshow us what we should do under difficult and trying circumstances. See Daniel in the lions' den; see Mordecai. The Lord doth in ten thousand ways stir up His children, give them the spirit of prayer, make them look to Him to deliver them from their troubles; thus they shall escape ten thousand evils that they must have been entangled fatally by but for the reigning grace, power, and interposition of the blessed God. 3. The Lord keeps His people with Himself that they may be like Him. (*James Wells.*)

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PSALM LXXXVI.

**VERS. 1-17. Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, hear me: for I am poor and needy.**—*Man and the great God*.—I. MAN in a variety of aspects. 1. What every man is. "Poor and needy." Morally this is the case with every man. He is "poor" (Rev. iii. 17). And "needy." What does he need? Knowledge, pardon, purity, power. 2. What every man requires. "Be merciful unto me, O Lord." "The wages of sin is death." He must throw himself on mercy; mercy is his only ground of hope. 3. What every man should be. (1) Pious. "For I am holy." (2) Trustful. "That trusteth in Thee." He is infinitely trustworthy. (3) Incessantly prayerful. "I cry unto Thee daily," or all the day. We should "pray without ceasing." True prayer is not a service but a spirit. 4. What every man should believe. "For Thou, Lord, art good," etc. (1) God is essentially good—the primal font of all goodness. (2) Forgivingly good. "Ready to forgive." Many men esteemed good have not sufficient goodness in them to forgive. Forgiving goodness is goodness in its highest manifestation. (3) Abundantly good. "Plenteous in mercy," etc. No sinner need despair. 5. What every man should do. (1) He should seek a knowledge of the Divine will, in order to obey it.

"Teach me Thy way," etc. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" This should be the great question in every man's life. (2) He should strive for unity of heart, in order to praise God for evermore. "Unite my heart," etc. II. God in a variety of aspects. 1. He is infinitely incomparable. (1) Incomparable in being. "Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord." Angels that excel in strength, etc. But what are they to God? (2) Incomparable in works. "Neither are there any works like unto Thy works." 2. He is universally attractive. "All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship," etc. Glorious prediction this. 3. He is transcendently great. "For Thou art great," etc. (Isa. xlv. 6). "All nations before Him are as nothing." 4. He is unspeakably kind (ver. 15). (*Homilist*.) *A pattern of prayer*:—Earnest reiteration is not vain repetition. Christ used many repetitions, as does the psalmist. This is a pattern of prayer in its invocations, petitions and pleas. I. THE INVOCATIONS. The appeals to the Divine Name. 1. The significance of invocation, not a mere formality, but the basis of all prayer. (1) Names expressing certain aspects of Divine character. (2) The use we make of these names. (a) Thought. We think of God under this aspect. (b) Confidence. We avow our faith in Him. (c) Appeal. We remind God of what He has declared Himself to be. 2. The invocations in this prayer. Note the frequent and varied use of the Divine names. These are made the ground of confidence. (1) Jehovah—a name with two-fold meaning. (a) The word itself. Eternal, underived existence. (b) Its history. The seal of the covenant, i. e. the eternal God entering into covenant relations with man. (2) My God. (a) God implies fullness of power. (b) My God. The Godhead appropriated, i. e. Almighty strength, claimed by human need. (3) Lord, not here meaning Jehovah, but the God of authority and dominion. II. THE PETITIONS—a progress in thought and desire. 1. The introductory petition. (1) Loving regard. "Bow down Thine ear." (2) A mighty answer. Hearing means answering. 2. Deliverance under a three-fold aspect. (1) Protection—"preserve my soul." (2) Safety. (3) Mercy. The source of both. The first two emphasize the psalmist's peril. The last his unworthiness. No word as to the manner of deliverance. He leaves all that to God. 3. The crowning blessing. Gladness as the result of all these. "Rejoice the soul of Thy servant." III. THE PLEAS. The arguments of prayer. The reasons why God should bless. 1. Man's necessities. "I am poor and needy." (1) Circumstances borne down by outward calamity. (2) Character, destitute of inward resources. These constitute a prevailing plea with God. 2. Man's relations and desires towards God. (1) Divine favour. "I am holy." I am favoured by God. (2) Possession. "Thy servant." The Lord cares for the slave. (3) Confidence. "That trusteth in Thee." (4) Supplication. "I cry unto Thee daily." (5) Aspiration. "Unto Thee do I lift up my soul." 3. God's own character. "For Thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive." This the mightiest plea of all. We can add to these pleas the name of Christ. (*A. MacLaren, D.D.*) *Assurances that God will hear prayer*:—The most of these supplications may be found in other parts of Scripture as promises from God. Only so far as an articulate Divine word carries my faith has my faith right to go. In the crooked alleys of Venice, there is a thin thread of red stone, inlaid in the pavement or wall, which guides through all the devious turnings to the Piazza in the centre where the great church stands. As long as we have the red line of promise on the path, faith may follow it, and it will come to the Temple. Where the line stops it is presumption and not faith that takes up the running. God's promises are sunbeams flung down upon us. True prayer catches them on its mirror, and signals them back to God. We are emboldened to say, "Bow down Thine ear," because He hath said, "I will hear." We are encouraged to cry, "Be merciful," because we have our foot upon the promise that He will be. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 4. *Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.*—*Soul elevation*:—The soul's true elevation is a progress—I. GODWARD. "Unto Thee." It does not really rise as it moves towards worldly wealth, position, influence, or knowledge; but only as it moves towards God. II. BY SELF-EFFORT. "Do I lift up my soul." It must rise, not as a stone rises into the air, by the application of a foreign force, and as soon as the force is expended comes down again; but as the lark rises, by its own energy, and the use of its own pinions. Self-lifting is the true lifting; and it requires an effort, resolute, energetic, and persevering. (*Homilist*.)

Vers. 6, 7. *Give ear, O Lord, unto my prayer.*—*Concerning prayer*:—In such a

prayer-psalm as this, there is no studying of language: it is the pouring out of the heart as the heart boils over, the utterance of the desires as they bubble up from the soul's depths, with an entire carelessness as to the fashion of the expression. This ought to be a hint to you when you pray. Do not study how to arrange your words when you come before the Lord. When your heart is like a boiling geyser, let it steam aloft in pillars of prayer. The overflowing of the soul is the best praying in the world. I. David in his prayer sought, beyond all things, to have PERSONAL INTERCOURSE WITH GOD. To my mind that is just the distinction between prayer before conversion and prayer after it. Note well that David, while he thus sought to have dealings with God, to come to close grips with the Lord in the act of prayer, was not presumptuously bold. He perceives the condescension of such fellowship on God's part. This may be seen in the first line: "Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, hear me." As if he said, "Thou art so high that, unless Thou shalt stoop very low, Thou canst not commune with me. But, Lord, do thus stoop. Bow down Thine ear. From Thy lofty throne, higher than an angel's wing can reach, stoop Thou down and listen to me—poor, feeble me." As you further read in this psalm, you will notice that David, in order to obtain this high privilege, pleads his need of it. He cries, "I am poor and needy"; as much as to say, "Lord, do come to me, do let me have personal intercourse with Thee, for nothing else will serve my turn. I am so poor that Thou alone canst enrich me; I am so feeble that Thou alone canst sustain me. Thou hast made me: Lord, forsake not the work of Thine own hands; I, Thy child, am full of wants, which Thou only canst supply. Oh, deal with me in great compassion!" He next pleads his personal consecration: "Preserve my soul, for I am holy"—consecrated and dedicated to the Divine service. Moreover, David, anxious to use every argument, pleads his trust: "Save Thy servant that trusteth in Thee." This is a conquering plea: "Lord, my sole reliance is on Thee; come to me, then, and justify the confidence which Thou Thyself hast inspired." Then, notice that David pleads for God's presence because He is God's servant. "Save Thy servant." He urges yet another reason why just now he should see God, namely, that he is always in prayer: "I cry unto Thee daily." Blessed are we when prayer surrounds us like an atmosphere. Then we are living in the presence of God; we are continually conversing with Him. May we climb to the top of the mount of communion, and may we never come down from it! David also tells the Lord that, when he could not attain to the nearness he desired, yet he struggled after it, and strained after it. Now, when a man's daily cries and inward strivings are after God, he may certainly expect that God in prayer will have intercourse with him. There are occasions with all His people when the Lord brings them very near, and speaks with them, and they with Him, when His presence is to them as real as the all-pervading air, and they are as much rejoiced in it as in the presence of father, or wife, or child, or friend. Still David, conscious of the great privilege which he sought, was not content without pleading the master argument of all: he pleads the great goodness of the Lord. "For Thou, Lord, art good." As much as to say, "If Thou wert not good Thou wouldst never listen to me. I am, as it were, a noxious insect which a man might far sooner crush than speak with; and yet Thou art so good, my God, that instead of setting Thy foot on me, Thou dost lift me up and talk with me." II. DAVID DESIRED PERSONAL ANSWERS FROM GOD. We hear our fellow-Christians say, when we tell them of instances in which God has heard our prayers, "How very extraordinary!" And we look at them, and say, "Extraordinary?" Has it become an extraordinary thing for God to be true to His own promise? I like better the remark of the good old lady, who, when her prayer was answered, was asked, "Does it not surprise you?" She said, "No, it does not surprise me; it is just like Him." A promise is like a cheque. If I have a cheque, what do I do with it? Suppose I carried it about in my pocket, and said, "I do not see the use of this bit of paper, I cannot buy anything with it," a person would say, "Have you been to the bank with it?" "No, I did not think of that." "But it is payable to your order. Have you written your name on the back of it?" "No, I have not done that." "And yet you are blaming the person who gave you the cheque! The whole blame lies with yourself. Put your name at the back of the cheque, go with it to the bank, and you will get what is promised to you." A prayer should be the presentation of God's promise endorsed by your personal faith. We expect our God to answer our prayer all the more surely when we are in trouble. David so expected: "In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee: for Thou wilt answer me." Trouble is sent

to make us pray. When we pray, the prayer becomes the solace of our trouble; and when the prayer is heard, it becomes the salvation out of our trouble. Many of you would be out of trouble quickly if you prayed. "Sir, I have been doing my best." And what is your best? A better thing than your best is to wait upon the Lord. Now, if we expect God to answer us, we do so on very good grounds. There are certain natural reasons. I was turning over in my mind the question, "Why do I pray? Why have I any reason to believe that God hears me?" And I thought to myself, "Well, on natural grounds I have a right to believe that God will hear prayer, or otherwise why is prayer commanded?" The Scripture is full of prayer. It is an institution of the old covenant, as well as of the new, and yet it is a piece of folly if God does not hear it. Observe, again, that prayer has been universal among all the saints. There have been saints of different moulds and temperaments, but they have all prayed. Some of them have been, like Heman and Asaph, masters of song, and they have prayed; others could not sing, but they have all prayed. But, if you turn to scriptural reasons, why was there a mercy-seat if there is nothing in prayer? Why does the throne of grace still remain as a permanent institution, of which Paul says, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace," unless there is a reality in it? Tell me, why is Christ the way to the mercy-seat? Why is He Himself the great Intercessor and Mediator, if there is nothing in prayer? The Holy Ghost helpeth our infirmities in prayer; surely there must be something effectual where He lends His aid. What! is He, after all, helping us to do a thing which produces no result? For, once more, we know that God hears prayer, because we have met with multitudes of His people who can tell of answers to prayer. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

**Ver. 7. In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee: for Thou wilt answer me.**—*The day of trouble*.—I. HERE IS A DAY THAT MAY BE EXPECTED BY US ALL. Though all men do not "walk in the midst of trouble," all must meet with trouble sooner or later. There is no human experience that has not had, or will not have, such a day—personal and relative troubles, bodily and spiritual troubles. II. HERE IS A DETERMINATION THAT SHOULD BE FORMED BY US ALL. "I will call upon Thee." This resolution—1. Agrees with our instinct. In trouble, men involuntarily call on God. This resolution—2. Agrees with our reason. Who else can really help us? Money profiteth nothing in the day of trouble; and the tenderest, truest friendships are helpless. III. HERE IS A HOPE THAT MAY BE ENTERTAINED BY US ALL. "For Thou wilt answer me." 1. Thou hast answered others who called on Thee in trouble. 2. Thou hast promised to answer all who call on Thee in trouble. (Homilist.)

**Ver. 8. Among the gods there is none like unto Thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto Thy works.**—*God's works unique*.—I. God's works in the MATERIAL domain have no equal. 1. How exquisite in perfection. How delicate in structure, symmetrical in form and hue. Compare the finest fabric that the human hand has ever produced with the commonest flower of the field, and what a difference. 2. How infinite in variety! From the microscopic atom to that central orb that holds the material universe together, from the animalcule to the archangel, no two alike. How limited the range of man's inventions, what a sameness in all his productions! 3. How immeasurable in extent! "The works of the Lord are great," etc. II. God's works in the MORAL domain have no equal. For example, how different the way in which God deals with enemies with the way men do! 1. God offers forgiveness to the rebel; man crushes him. 2. God offers forgiveness to the rebel after he has frequently refused it. 3. God offers forgiveness to the rebel, and makes the greatest sacrifice, "He gave His Son," etc. Verily, "His ways are not our ways." (Homilist.) *The wonder-working God*.—I. THE GLORIES OF ISRAEL'S COVENANT GOD UNEQUALLED. "There is none like unto Thee." II. THE OPERATIONS OF HIS HANDS. "Neither are there any works like unto Thy works." 1. In nature, who can make a tree such as God makes? You may make an imitation of it. Who can make a blade of grass such as God makes? 2. In providence there are no works like unto God's. If He send forth His servants, as He did Jeremiah, to throw down, root up, and overturn nations and empires. It is He that giveth power to get wealth, He it is that fixes the bounds of our habitations; nay, more, it is His constant employ to order the very steps of every good man. 3. Now, look at what might be accounted religious works, or what may be termed the work of grace. Can any god work like Him? III. THE DESIGNS OF HIS

LOVE. 1. The salvation and redemption of His Church. 2. The new creation of every member of the Church, to qualify them to enjoy redemption. What a subject for personal self-examination! 3. The tribute of praise He designs shall be paid to Himself. "My glory," says He, "will I not give to another," nor my praise to graven images; therefore is there no god like our God, and no other god shall have any of His tribute. (*J. Irons.*) *God's work:*—The text is the expression of the unsophisticated man in the presence of earth and sky; and, mind, Jesus Christ is on the side of the unsophisticated man. "Consider the lilies, how they grow," etc. He did not say that Solomon was not a match for a landscape, but he was not arrayed like "one" of these. That is, in the estimation of Jesus Christ, there was more splendour in a single wild flower than there is in all our manufactured magnificence. It is something like what Mr. Ruskin said: "There is more beauty in a bluebell than would be necessary to decorate a dozen cathedrals." The unsophisticated man feels that there is no rivalry between our creations and the magnificence of the Creation. Everybody knows that when Aladdin's palace was built the magicians were disturbed, and left a window incomplete, and all the genius of the East failed to complete that window. But, I say, if a bit of the sky had been left incomplete, or a section of the rainbow unpainted, or the petal of a flower organically defective, who would have finished that? Oh, no, "amongst the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord." A great many art critics fancy that God Almighty is not much of an artist, and that you require a great deal of correction and idealization before you can get a picture. The botanist feels that flowers must have a great deal of care and training before they are fit for the show; and most people who have to deal with nature have a consciousness that it does not satisfy their artistic sense. So to-day, you perpetually hear of the limitation, the irregularity, the defectiveness, and failures of nature. Now, what are you to say to these? Are you to deny them? Not for a moment. But remember this, that whenever you mark the defects of nature, those alleged defects are only part of a larger ultimate perfection. Let me say this—two great canons—everything in nature is good in its place, and everything in nature is good for its purpose; not ideally perfect, but good in its place, good for its purpose. But I wish to speak to you on the perfection of God's works as revealed in His government of the race. Now, the unsophisticated man, looking at the structure of society, the independence of the nations, the unfoldings of evolution, would say at once that God was wonderful in counsel and excellent in working; amongst the gods there is no ruler like Thee, O Lord, neither is there any government like unto Thy government. But the critic steps in again. What! Look at the planet; think of human history; mark all the confusions and catastrophes of the ages; and could any government be worse than the government of God—that is, if there be such government? Now, what are we to say? Let us begin again. Everything good in its place. What is that? Get the right distance, look at the thing with a true perspective, and you will give a favourable verdict. Let me illustrate it. There has appeared, almost in our own day, a new historian—the philosophical historian. The old historians gave anecdotes of kings and of camps, stories of the people, the movement of the times. It was a series of sketches, a series of anecdotes; and there they finished. But in modern times we have another historian—the philosophical historian. What is his particular vocation? He shows how the different nations have contributed to the development of civilization; what part the Egyptian civilization played, what part the Greek, what part the Judaic, what part the Roman. Why did not the philosophical historian come earlier? Because the right point of view had not been reached; the Egyptian did not know what he was doing—the Greek did not, the Jew did not, the Roman did not. They were up in the dome, they were far too near. But the philosophical historian is the man who has got the proper distance; he has got the floor, and he begins to see that the past has not been a gigantic muddle, but there has been system in it, order, purpose. The chaos is revealing itself as a picture. The philosophical historian says, "Under everything there is a plan; running through all things there is a purpose; and what for ages looked to men but a confused and purposeless history begins to show to-day the great, universal, and splendid purpose of Him who sits upon the throne and governs all things to His own great ends." Don't you judge too quickly; you wait ten thousand years; you have plenty of time. What is ten thousand years to you? The great purpose of God that is hidden begins to make itself known through the mist, and what you once thought to be a chaos you see to be a cartoon. Yes, you say, but ten thousand years is rather trying to us, with our impatience. It is; you need

not always wait so long. Three centuries ago an ugly tyranny in this nation drove out from us some of the noblest women and noblest men that belonged to the commonwealth. Now, if you had been on the Atlantic coast, and had seen the *Mayflower* driving across that wild sea to an unknown world, you would have said, with your little view of things, "Where is the wisdom and purpose of this? Talk of the government of God—could there be a worse government than the government that permits the expatriation of these noble men and women?" The American Republic of to-day is God's explanation of the mystery of three centuries ago, and the voyage of the *Mayflower*. Yes, you say, but one gets a bit tired in three centuries. It is tedious. Well now, let me tell you this. God does not always keep you waiting three centuries. You know, young people think they know every thing, and they do pretty nearly, but there are a few things that God keeps for the aged, there are a few odd truths that He whispers in our ear; and I tell you one is this. As a man gets older he begins to see that his life has not been made up of unrelated patches, but it has been an intelligent working and programme throughout. When a man is young, life seems made up of events unrelated, contradictory, grotesque; life seems made up of ups and downs, ins and outs, births, deaths, and marriages, without rhyme and without reason. But when a man gets old, at the right distance from the dome, he begins to see that God girded him when he knew it not, and that God has been shaping things from infancy to age. I don't think for a moment that I deceive myself when I think to-day of my life; I can see to-day what I did not see before, that God has been standing at the back, and He has ordered things, and what I once thought a mistake I see now to have been right, and before I have done, very likely, I shall see the picture more clearly than I see it to-day. I am a philosophical historian on a small scale, and I begin to feel that God has worked out my life with a distinct purpose and plan, and I have a deep conviction that He has done all things well. Everything good in its place—what did I say?—everything good for its purpose. Try that again. What is the object of the government of God? To make us perfect, to make us into noble men and women. The failures of society are only imperfections that aim at a larger perfection—the perfection of the man. When you judge things, you judge they are blunders, because they have spoiled your money, or they have spoiled your health, or they have spoiled your happiness. Not at all. Think how they stand related to your discipline, your higher education, your perfecting in knowledge and righteousness; think of that. Judge the purpose, and then you will see that it was not a blunder. "Thy judgments are a great deep," says the psalmist. Yes, a great deep, that is now, and we are sceptics, we are complaining, the air is filled with criticism and cynicisms and blasphemies. "Thy judgments are a great deep," and we say all sorts of wicked things. But on the last page of the book I read, "For Thy judgments are made manifest." (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *The ways and works of God:*—The psalmist is here speaking of the incomparableness of the workmanship of God. The perfection of the Divine action as we witness it in creation: "Amongst the gods there is none like unto Thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto Thy works." That is the utterance of the unsophisticated man as he stands in the presence of the grandeur of the world. You know that in the old story of the building of Aladdin's palace by the spirits, that they were disturbed in their work and they left one of the windows incomplete, and all the artistry of the East failed to finish that window and make it harmonize with the work already done. But I say if a bit of the sky had been left uncoloured, who would have dared to dye it? If the fragrance had been left out of the rose, who would have supplied it? But we are not left to instinctive admiration, for the critic comes along. There is not a man in this place but who knows that there is more said to-day about the imperfection of nature than about its perfection. Our artistic friends are sure they could have improved the world vastly if they had been consulted. The result is that many people speak much about the imperfections of nature, the imperfections of society, and the imperfections of life. Now, what are we to say about these? How are we to deal with these questions? Are we to deny them? No, not for one moment. Admit them, and then declare that the apparent imperfections of the world are only the proofs of a more glorious and more wonderful perfection. There are two principles which I want you to keep in mind while we follow this thought—that everything in nature is good in its place. It does not seem good if you take it out of its place. Now, when you went to Rome and had climbed to the dome of St. Peter's, the thing which struck you was the imperfection of the fabric, the material was coarse, the inlaying was carelessly

done, and the colours were crude. But when you came down to the floor 250 feet beneath and looked up, it was a triumphant success; its very imperfection was its perfection. The artist knew that his work was to be looked at from the floor, and he made his plans accordingly. If he had finished it in fullest detail he would have defeated his own purpose. But instead he made it rough, and so created a picture of great beauty. It is just like that in nature. The sacred writer, with a fine discrimination, says: "Everything is beautiful in its time, in its season." Everything is beautiful in its order, everything is beautiful in its place, so that when a man sees only the imperfect or the unscientific, all I can say to such an one is that he has taken it out of its context, he has looked at it out of its perspective. There is a further principle, everything is good for its purpose. The ideally perfect is not always the ideally practical. One of the greatest scientists of this age has told us that if any optician was to send him an instrument as imperfect as the eye, he would return it at once with a severe reprimand for his carelessness. We are told that the eye has serious technical defects. The optician could make us a better, but he does not. I do not doubt that he could make us once more theoretically and ideally perfect. But if we got an eye like that, its very refinements would be an impediment to us. It would not be of service for its purpose. With all its defects the human eye is good for its purpose. I want to say a word about the Divine action in the ways of God's government. The unsophisticated man looks on the world all down the ages, and he says, How wonderful, how marvellous in counsel! What providential leadings we have seen. Don't you be in too great a hurry, for you will have the critic down on you. He will ask you if you can shut your eyes to the suffering of the world, to the bankruptcies of civilization, to the tragedies of nations, and to the miseries of individuals. Let us go back to our first principle. Everything is good in its place. If you are going to judge wisely, you must have a true standpoint, and before we can judge history we must have such a true standpoint and wait long enough. In our day you have a new school of historians—the philosophical historian. The old historian used to give us pictures of things; he would tell us anecdotes about the kings, parliaments, and contemporaries, and the events of great personages. The philosophical historian is of another type. His method is to find out the succession and harmony of events. He says to you that "through the ages one increasing purpose runs." He tells you how the great nations have worked for one purpose. The Jew contributed ethics, the Greek beauty, the Roman jurisprudence, and he points out to you how the different nations were all working unconsciously for the bringing in of a wider purpose. Now, what I want to know is, why did not the philosophic historian come sooner? To see the providence of God sometimes you have to wait six, eight, or even ten thousand years, but what is that to you and me? We have plenty of time, for we are alive for evermore. God's plan runs on, and it is not for us to say that we can interpret His workmanship. If you had stood on the shore that day when the *Mayflower* steered her course from our land! The occupants were fleeing from tyranny in this country. Surely it was cruelty and a spectacle for pity. It seemed as if the great men and noble women were driven out to find a home in another part of the world. But we were too near to the pinnacle to see rightly. You wait until you get to the floor. Wait three hundred years, and the American Republic is God's interpretation of the *Mayflower*. The young people will not understand this, but it has its appeal to the patriarchs. They will agree with me that the difference in the past and the present vision of life is all a matter of a new perspective. Thus what was once a shapeless, purposeless confusion is revealed as the perfect plan of God. So I say to you, when you are tempted to judge God's ways hard, always be sure that you have waited long enough. "He maketh the wrath of men to praise Him." What is the purpose of the government of God? Is it to make us rich, or strong, or to make us famous and happy? If His government aimed at such results, it has broken down most pathetically. But it does not aim at such results. It aims at the moral development of the individual and the cleansing of the community, the making of a holy nation. These are the aims of His government, not material but moral aims. A German writer, in pointing out the defects of nature, shows that many animals are woefully defective. The organs of motion are often mechanically defective. We cannot argue with these men, they say it is so, and no doubt it is true. But I was most struck with the last line of the paragraph. He finished by saying, "Considerations of a higher order have determined these imperfections." I tell you that as I walk along the streets of the city and look on the suffering world, on the



sickness and the loss, the poverty and the tears, I often whisper to myself, "considerations of a higher order have determined these imperfections." Ah! God sometimes smites us on lower grounds for higher purposes. He afflicts me to-day that He may give me to-morrow higher and better things, "considerations of a higher order have determined these imperfections." Let us consider this in relation to the Divine action in revelation. How you could emphasize this! How wonderful those pages have been to you, promises full of stars for dark times. Sweet pastures where the Shepherd leads His flock. But suddenly the critic comes down upon us, and he says with a mighty scorn, "That Book perfect! It is full of crudities, full of inconsistencies, and full of imperfections." Don't deny these charges, but reveal the greater perfection. The sun has spots, but you don't break it up and cart it away for scrap iron. Go back to your principles. Everything good in its place. Now, there are those who find fault with the Old Testament, and especially with the Pentateuch. I say to you that the Pentateuch has been effective not in spite of its imperfections, but because of them. It was the only way in which God could educate a sensual age. Just think of a rose looking down at its roots, and saying, "There is a nasty thing. It has got no colour, no shape, and no fragrance." But the root is perfect as a root, and the perfection of the root is the rose which graces its top. And I say to you to-day that you must not despise that Old Testament out of which you sprung. Boast not thyself against the root, for thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. It is also good for its purpose. What is the purpose of this revelation? It is to teach redemption, not geology or astronomy. It was to reveal God, and make you like Him. I was very interested during my visit to America in a correspondence on what would have been the effect if the sun had been another colour, say, if it had been green, or scarlet, or blue. It was a very amusing controversy, but I was most interested in the conclusion they arrived at, viz., that, on the whole, it was better as it was. The sun may be defective, but it ripens your corn, and colours your flowers. And so with the revelation of God: it fulfils its purpose. This book has illumined men, inspired men, and comforted men. His weakness is stronger than our strength. His weakness is greater than our wisdom. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 9. All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; and shall glorify Thy name.**—*The golden age that is coming:*—When all the nations fall down in practical worship before the One all-holy, all-wise, and all-strong, then the golden age will have come, the millennium of the world. Three remarks about this event. I. To all HUMAN EXPERIENCE IT IS MOST UNLIKELY. See what the nations have been through all the ages that are past, and see what they are now. How far away from, and how hostile to, the great God. Judging from our own experience it seems an impossibility. II. To all TRUE REASON IT IS MOST PROPER. 1. Because all nations are His, and they are morally bound to serve Him. 2. Because all nations must worship Him if they would be virtuous and happy. III. To all SCRIPTURE IT IS MOST CERTAIN. 1. Scripture teems with Divine promises of such an event. 2. It is the nature of Divine promises that they must be fulfilled. (*Homilist.*) *The hope of David:*—I. THE ORIGIN OF THIS HOPE. It grows directly out of his reverence for God. He feels his God has charms that must win the hearts of men; that He has activities which lead Him to seek and to save the lost; that His Spirit is breathing everywhere upon the face of the great world; that God is not content to be without His children or to leave them in the far country, and accordingly, believing in God he believes in man; and his eye, filled with Divine light when it looks on man, catches some Divine features in man, traces a family likeness; and he speaks of "man whom God has made." If you despair of the success of the Gospel in heathen lands, it is not because you know man, it is because you do not know God. If you knew Him—that His heart is as large as all His attributes, that in His vast family there is no one beneath His care, or thought, or love, that His love touches all, and His kingdom rules over all—that knowledge of God would dispel doubt and loose your neck from the bands of poorer fears: and, revering God, you would hope for man. I have not yet done with the question of the origin of the hope, because there is a little more shown us by the psalm itself. For both this reverence for God and this hope for man have again their root in the psalmist's penitence; and we do not get at the bottom of the matter till we get to the broken spirit and the contrite heart; that gives him reverence for his Maker and faith in his brother man. Looking up he sees a Father, and looking round he sees the golden age coming on apace, mankind waking to truth,

ready to accept it, erring only because they do not know it. He sees no gulf fixed between man and God here, and no despair necessary or inevitable. He lives in adoration and in hope. II. *THE HOPE ITSELF.* It is a hope that there will be one universal religion; that however diverse in constitution, temperament, training, experience, sooner or later truth will dominate over all error, and grace rule all hearts, and mankind belong to Christ. It is a great hope. Even the philosopher, the historian, the man of science might rejoice in that; much more we who know the value of each individual spirit in the sight of its Maker. Let us look at it. 1. All the holiest men in all ages have cherished this hope. The devout has never been a narrow heart—never. It enlarges all thoughts when we get into the realm of communion with our God. Moses had breadth of view when he said, "There shall be one law to you and to the sojourner that dwelleth with you," and taught that God was the God of the stranger. David had no narrowness. Again and again in all his psalms you see precisely the same feeling as is exhibited here. You know how Isaiah dwelt in expectation of the distant isles coming to Jehovah, the rams of Nebaioth coming up on His altar, people coming from the north and the south, and the land of Sinim pressing into the house of His glory. You know how Ezekiel had the missionary spirit in him, how he describes the river of the water of life deepening as it flowed, and carrying to every land the life of healing with which it was charged. You know how Paul argued. Through all his epistles there is but one great argument advanced, that the Gospel is to be a world-wide message, that Christ is not second Abraham, but second Adam—head of mankind, and that as death has come upon all men, so the grace of God through Jesus Christ will come upon all men unto salvation. You know John's vision: "I beheld, and lo, a great multitude out of every nation," etc. 2. This hope has been justified largely by past experience. That creed of Israel was once the creed of a single man. It lay in the heart of Abraham, who found it. Although trained as a heathen, as an idolater, as a worshipper of other gods, following the inward voice he found the great God. He gave the creed to Isaac, Isaac to Jacob, and these to a few others. In two or three centuries it had received sufficient acceptance to become the living thing about which a nation crystallizes, and which can be embodied in a marvellous law infinitely ahead of anything then existing. It finds more adherence still, better acceptance in the days of David, still more in the times of the prophets, and still larger acceptance amidst the discipline and the furnace of the Babylonish captivity, till in the time of Christ it was the creed of a great people scattered throughout the world, and leavening all nations where they were scattered. That is an instance only; from one man, this creed spread till it animated a people. And the same thing has been going on ever since. The creed of the Church of Christ—that God is love and man should be—is brief and clear. There seemed but little hope of its being accepted. All nations resisted, as you and I did when it first came to us. It was too good news to be true. The Jew despised it, the Roman tried to crush it, and the warlike tribes of the nations turned away from it as something that would enfeeble their manhood. But it passed from heart to heart, from city to city, till it became the creed of the great Roman Empire, and has gone on and on until to-day it is the creed of three hundred millions of people, and these three hundred millions the strongest part of the earth's inhabitants. 3. The welfare of mankind is bound up in its realization. Raise the man and you raise his whole condition. Reform from the heart outward, and you secure an effective reform which you cannot secure if you begin at the other end. All good work is God's work, and will win His reward. But still the great work is that which gives the man his manhood, which sets him free, which gives him an immortal hope. Give him that, and you give him thrift and self-respect, and civil liberty, and the power of mastering everything that is adverse in his condition. The welfare of mankind is bound up in this hope. 4. The realization of this great hope tarries because of our indifference. We decline to be our brother's keeper. We eat our morsel of the bread of life alone. (*R. Glover.*)

Ver. 10. *Thou . . . doest wondrous things.*—*Curiosities:*—In this age a great amount of wealth is lavished on "curiosities." I. ONE OF THE GREATEST CURIOSITIES WHICH HAS BEEN MADE FOR YOU IS THE CREATED WORLD. When you see anything which is wonderful, the first questions are, Who made it? How did it get here? Some people say that this earth made itself; and that the machinery of its creation is a thing of chance. What a grand old curiosity is this world which God has made! It may also be likened to a glorious picture which speaks to us

of Him. II. ANOTHER CURIOSITY WHICH IS INTENDED FOR US IS THE BIBLE. Thank God, the Bible is now so cheap that every man may possess a copy. It was once so scarce and dear that it was chained in the churches. The Bible is the grandest curiosity in the world. III. ANOTHER GREAT CURIOSITY IS YOURSELF. What are you? What is your destiny? What is your pathway? Is it for happiness or misery? (*W. Birch.*)

Ver. 11. **Teach me Thy way, O Lord; I will walk in Thy truth.**—*Moral light*.—I. Moral light sought FROM THE TRUE SOURCE. 1. God has a "way" for man. He has a course, a mission for every man. 2. Of this "way" man is ignorant. He is in darkness. Errors as to the chief good have abounded in all times. 3. God alone can teach that "way." "Teach me Thy way, O Lord." Philosophers, poets, and priests have failed to throw light on this way. II. Moral light sought for a RIGHT REASON. 1. It is sought, not for mental speculation, but for life regulation. 2. Walking in this path is a walk of—(1) Safety; (2) Invigoration; and (3) True progress. (*Homilist.*) *Three phases of religion*.—In the expressions "teach," "fear," "walk," we have religion presented to us in the three aspects of knowledge, feeling, and conduct. In other words, religion in the head, in the heart, and in the feet. The several forms of human activity may be described by three phrases—I think, I feel, I do. I. RELIGION AS A MATTER OF KNOWLEDGE, A PROCESS OF INSTRUCTION. "Teach me Thy way, O Lord." 1. The teacher is the Lord. Men are both blind and in darkness in relation to spiritual matters; there is an objective and a subjective disability in regard to these things. The Bible is calculated to meet both these conditions; it not only dispels the darkness—that is, removes the historical ignorance of men regarding God's plans and methods for saving them—but it goes further; it removes their blindness by conferring the faculty of spiritual vision. "The entrance of Thy word giveth light." There is not only the word, but the word secures an entrance into the mind, illuminating it with the light of God. Divine truth not only reveals objectively, but is by its very nature, as the mind of the spirit, instinct with a convincing force, enabling it often to overcome the most ingrained prejudices, to arouse the most callous indifference, conquer even the fiercest hostility, and secure for it the most cordial reception by the mind. 2. The learner. He displays the first essential of a true learner, a keen desire for his lesson. He craves it even on his knees, for he prays that he might be taught. How essential an attitude is this in all who would truly learn of God. It is the teachable disposition—the true receptive mood. The Divine Teacher will not withhold the waters of knowledge from a soul thus panting for them. How emphatically is Divine instruction promised to such as manifest this docile disposition (Ps. xxv. 9, 14). Meekness and fear, that is, docility and reverence, are qualities in the pupil which unlock the secrets of the Divine heart. II. RELIGION IN THE HEART, OR RELIGION AS A MATTER OF FEELING. "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." 1. The "fear" is not that of terror or dismay, but love. It is the childlike disposition, sweet, trustful, and penetrated with holy, subduing reverence. 2. The essential condition of this beautiful disposition is a heart at peace with all its passions, in thorough harmony with God. This consecrates all its aims. God becomes henceforth the great end of every act, thought, ambition, etc. III. RELIGION IN THE LIFE, OR AS A MATTER OF CONDUCT. "I will walk in Thy truth." The process has now reached its final stage, from the head to the heart, from the heart to the conduct—in other words, from knowledge into motive, from motive into action; from an understanding illuminated by Divine instruction to a heart dominated by Divine love (heart-fear), from a heart dominated by Divine love to a life regulated by Divine truth. (*A. J. Parry.*) *A dutiful prayer and a wise resolution*.—I. A TWOFOLD PETITION. 1. "Teach me Thy way." (1) Man's need of Divine instruction. (a) This is obvious from the darkness of his understanding. In consequence of this, he does not see things as they really are, and, as a result of this, the estimate he forms of them is false and deceptive. Hence the most pernicious results must necessarily accrue. These are manifest in the wrong objects which he naturally pursues, the sinful pleasures he seeks after, and the forbidden things in which he delights. No change for the better need ever be expected on the part of man's darkened understanding, for it possesses no power of self-rectification. He must receive light from above, just as the sun-dial must receive the sun's rays if it is to be of any practical utility. (b) This is obvious from the hardness of his heart. This state of hardness is one which does not remain stationary, for, just as in the continuance of frost, the ice thickens and

the ground hardens, so in like manner, under the operation of his depraved tastes and habits, the heart of the natural man waxes harder and harder. (2) The psalmist doubtless desired instruction, at least, in two important points—viz., in God's way of pardon, and in the way of purity and spiritual progress. (a) Pardon is a blessing of universal need and measureless value. It is God's prerogative to forgive sins, for "who can forgive sins but God only?" The way of pardon being provided, it is indispensable that we know it before the blessing can be enjoyed. (b) A renewal of heart is as essential as a reversal of condition: for how can two walk together except they be agreed? Without holiness, no man can see the Lord. 2. "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." (1) This petition obviously implies the conviction that reverence is due to Jehovah. This reverence for God requires the concentration of the heart's affections. (2) It is plainly implied that God alone can beget in us this reverential spirit. O let us be persuaded that from God alone all holy thoughts and pure desires proceed. II. **THE WISE RESOLUTION.** "I will walk in Thy truth." His resolution intimates progress. Whether conscious of it or not, progress is a law of our being—progress in that which is good, or growth in that which is evil. The resolution of the psalmist implies progress in the right direction. "I will walk in Thy truth." The objects to be sought are to possess the sanction of the God of Truth, the life that is to be lived is to be that which is enjoined by the God of Truth, and in prosecuting life's journey he is to take God's truth as a light to his feet, and as a lamp to his path. Religious profession and Christian practice must, therefore, correspond. (*A Brunt.*) *Prayer for light and guidance:*—A man in David's position needed special light, almost more than we do. He trod a somewhat solitary path in morals and religion. He had no spiritual masters at whose feet he could sit. Our world is made brilliant by guiding lights and example. We have Christ, and Christian influences, and Christian finger-posts everywhere about us. Yet we need to offer this prayer only less, if at all less, than those men of old. We often find ourselves in moral perplexities, riddles are set before us for which we can find no solution. It is very evident, then, that we need this prayer, and cannot offer it too frequently and too earnestly. In truth there is such a strong pull in the wrong direction that we are not likely to take the right way in any doubtful moment unless the light is made clear, unless we feel the drawings of a mightier Power, unless we ask each day, and often more than once a day, in all humility and in all sincerity, that God will make us feel that drawing power, and show us that light, and cause us to know the way wherein we should go. But now, to offer this prayer two things are indispensable. We must first believe that prayer is a real thing, offered to a real Being, offered to One who hears and takes the trouble to answer, and who can answer in ways unknown to us. Further, if this prayer is to be of any value, we must be prepared to go in God's way when He shows it. "Teach me Thy way; I will walk in Thy truth; unite my heart to fear Thy name." Because if the heart is not united, if one part is looking towards God's light and the other pulling away from it strongly to what one likes a great deal better, there is nothing but confusion, indecision, cross purposes, and the guidance is given in vain, even if in that case it is given at all. For we never get light unless we ask for it with the whole heart and are resolved to walk in it if it can be shown us. (*J. G. Greenhough, M.A.*) **Unite my heart to fear Thy name.** *Unity of heart:*—Unity of heart is essential—I. **TO FORCE OF CHARACTER.** Mind, like light, air, water, diffused, is comparatively worthless; compressed, it is mighty. Condense the rays of the sun, and they shall burn up the world; compress the air, and it shall rive the mountains. There are three states in which we find mind in this world. 1. Unconcentrated. Millions of men have no definite object in the world, they are distracted and unstable. 2. Wrongly concentrated. There are minds set upon inferior objects, such as business, politics, literature, science, etc. 3. Rightly concentrated. It is united to "fear Thy name." United in God, centred in Omnipotence. II. **TO PEACE OF SOUL.** The mind divided is distracted and disharmonious. Peace requires that all the faculties and affections of the soul flow in one direction towards one object, and that object agreeing with our dictates of right and our highest aspirations. God alone is such an object. Our constant prayer should be, "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." (*Homilist.*) *Prayer of saints for constant holiness:*—I. **A GOOD MAN HAS NOT TWO HEARTS.** David does not pray that God would unite his old and new heart, or his old and new principle, or his old and new disposition, or his old and new taste; but his one, only heart. The new heart destroys the old heart.

11. WHAT HIS ONE HEART IS. A sinner's heart consists in a train of mere selfish affections; but a saint's heart consists in a train of both benevolent and selfish exercises. The best of saints are imperfectly holy in this life; and their imperfection in holiness consists in their sometimes having holy, and sometimes unholy affections. Their holy and unholy affections are always distinct, and never blended together. Their holy exercises are never partly holy and partly unholy, but perfectly holy; and their unholy exercises are never partly holy, but perfectly unholy. A train of holy and unholy affections forms the heart of a saint; but a train of constant, uninterrupted sinful affections forms the heart of a sinner.

III. THE HEART OF THE SAINT NEEDS TO BE UNITED. The perfect holiness of Adam, in his primitive state, wholly consisted in the constant and uninterrupted succession of his holy affections. The perfect holiness of just men in heaven consists in the constant and uninterrupted succession of their holy affections. Nor could there be the least moral imperfection in the hearts of good men in this world, if their affections were constantly holy, without any interruption by affections of an opposite and sinful nature. The reason why the heart of a good man needs to be united is, because it is disunited by a contrariety of affections; and not because his affections are too weak, or low, or languid. The only way to raise the ardour of a holy heart is, to make the succession of holy affections more constant and less interrupted, or, in other words, to unite one holy affection so intimately with another, that there should be no time, nor room, for any sinful affection to intervene, interrupt, or cool the ardour of Divine love.

IV. THERE IS A PROPRIETY IN HIS PRAYING THAT GOD WOULD UNITE HIS HEART. 1. Every Christian finds that his heart is more or less disunited; that not only his love, his fear, his faith, and other gracious affections are sometimes what he calls low and languid, but actually interrupted by directly opposite exercises. He finds opposition instead of submission; unbelief instead of faith; the love of the world instead of love to God; and aversion to duty, instead of delight in it. These are positive exercises of sinful affections, which are diametrically opposed to positive exercises of grace.

2. It is proper for Christians to pray that God would unite their disunited hearts, because no external means or motives will produce this effect without His special influence. Improvement:—1. If every Christian has but one heart, and that heart consists in moral exercises, then no person is passive in regeneration. 2. If a good heart consists in good affections, which are continually liable to be interrupted by affections of an opposite nature, then it is easy to see wherein the deceitfulness of the heart consists, viz., in its mutability. 3. If the hearts of good men consist in free, voluntary exercises, then they ought to be perfectly holy in this life. For if they ought to have one holy exercise, then they ought to have another and another, in a constant, uninterrupted succession. They have no right to exercise one selfish, sinful affection. 4. If a good heart consists in holy exercises, then the Gospel as really requires perfect holiness as the law. The difference between the law and the Gospel does not lie in their precepts, but in their promises. The law promises eternal life to nothing short of the constant, uninterrupted exercise of holy affections, and condemns the man who indulges one selfish, sinful affection; but the Gospel promises eternal life to every one who perseveres in holy exercises, though they are interrupted in a thousand instances. 5. If the hearts of saints consist altogether in moral and voluntary exercises, then they never have any more holiness than they have holy exercises. 6. If the hearts of saints consist altogether in free, voluntary exercises, then there is a foundation in their hearts for a spiritual warfare. 7. In the view of this subject Christians may see their great moral imperfection. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Man's need of a united heart*:—Who will not recognize the immense importance in every pursuit and employment of having the heart at one, the character consistent? "Methinks," says Plato, "it would be better for my lyre to be out of tune and discordant, and even the chorus of singers whom I lead,—yea, better for the whole world to be at variance with me and contradict me,—than that I in my own person should be out of concord with myself and self-contradicting." Yes, anything is better for a man than a distracted, unharmonized, inconsistent character. Yet with how many is this the case! I speak not now of that progress of gradually ripening opinion and judgment which is the necessary condition of all thoughtful minds: I require not that a man's mature age should be brought to be measured by the unripe words and hasty inferences of his youth: it were better, indeed, and happier for him, if the whole life unfolded itself gradually and consistently; but of this progress, or of the lack of it, I am not speaking now. Few of us, I

suppose, can look back many years without being sensible of more than a mere expanding change; few who are not conscious that while they have purchased some experience it has been at the reluctantly paid price of much of their former self-confidence. But what I do reprobate is this,—that the same man, at the same time, should be uncertain, self-counteracting, divided against himself,—in words, in acts, in the influence of his character over others. Anxious to appear like others in society, the young often profess strong opinions, and take decided courses, with regard to matters on which, from their very limited experience, they can know but little; they become strong upholders of this or that side in difficult questions, imitating, and going beyond, the partizanship of their elders. And hence, from this very pertinacity, comes fickleness and self-contradiction. As, by widening experience, the light of truth breaks in here and there, the young heart, if brought up under purifying and hallowing influences, is ever susceptible of just and generous impressions; and these very often clash with the artificial or traditional views before so strongly upheld, and bring about inconsistency and confusion. And these thoughts lead us to one remark; that with the young especially, one of the first conditions of this unity of heart is a humble and conscientious adoption of opinions. And here I say that it is lamentable to see men punctiliously upholding an accredited opinion which we have reason to know they do not themselves hold. O it is by such men and such lives that mighty systems of wrong have grown up under the semblance of right; by such, that vast fabrics of conventional belief have been upheld for power's sake and for gain's sake, long after their spirit has departed; it is in spite of such men that the God of truth has broken these systems to pieces one after another, and has strewn the history of His world with the wrecks of these fair-seeming fabrics. Let us not be consistent thus. Our prayer does not run after this sort, "unite my acts, that I may make me a name and become great;" but far otherwise—"Unite my heart that I may fear Thy name." Now, it is plain to all that these last words, "to fear Thy name," must have a meaning very far removed from that of mere dread or terror of God. This he may have, and has, whose heart is not united; the inconsistent and the unprincipled, even in his worst moments, has the bitter drop of the terror of God and His judgments abiding at the bottom of his soul. Besides, such a terror is as unreasonable as it is undesirable. A heart at unity with itself cannot be in disunion with the chief object of its being; and that object is to serve and glorify Him who is its Creator and Redeemer. Manifestly then we must seek here for another definition of fear than mere dread; and to that definition our last consideration will guide us. Take that consideration in this form. If our hearts are to be brought into real and wholesome unity, it must be by the objects of their affections being in their right relative places. A united heart, for instance, cannot place Him in a low or secondary position of affection and regard whom nature and reason themselves combine to place first. If it be so, conscience will ever and anon be bearing testimony against the disproportion,—and infinite disunion will be the result. No; if we would be consistent men, God must be first in everything. If this is so, the first consequence will be that our motives will be consistent. We shall not be acting from a selfish desire now, and a generous impulse then; openly and frankly to one man, and covertly and craftily to another; but this fear of God will abide as a purifying influence in the very centre of our springs of action; His eye ever looking on us, His benefits ever constraining us. And union of the heart in God's fear will save you also from grievous or fatal inconsistency in opinion. (*Dean Alford.*)

**Ver. 13. Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.—Saved from the depths:**—A plan has lately been proposed and successfully employed for raising the cargoes of sunken vessels. A huge electro-magnet, operated from the deck of a vessel, is lowered to the submerged cargo; and if it be of a character subject to the influence of magnetism, it is attracted and lifted by this power, and thus easily saved. There is a power from on high which came to seek and save that which was lost. Down in the murky depths of the waters of sin, this magnet of love draws to itself sinful souls, and lifts them by its power to the bright sunlight and pure air above. Not by any virtue or power of their own—simply by the love that passeth understanding and the saving power of the Divine Redeemer—they are uplifted from the depths and made to stand among the rescued ones of the Lord. (*Cora S. Day.*)

Ver. 17. **Show me a token for good, that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed; because Thou, Lord, hast holpen me, and comforted me.**—*Tokens for good*:—At the outset note—1. How this man in the hour of conflict looks to his Divine protector. Not to men but to God does he cry. And observe—2. That his troubles drove him to God. Too often they drive men away from God. 3. We look to God alone. We may not set up a rival with God in the temple of our trust. What is it that thou wouldst yoke with God? Oh to be cut clear of all visible supports, and props, and holdfasts! You have seen a balloon well filled struggling to rise: what kept it down? What hindered it? The ropes which bound it to earth. Cut clear the ropes, and then see how it mounts! With a spring it leaps upward while we are gazing into the open sky. Oh for such a clearance and such a mounting for our spirits! Alas, we are hindered and hampered, and those bonds which detain us are our visible supports and reliances. "My soul, wait thou only upon God." The Lord bring us into this high state of spiritual emancipation. Now, let us notice the request David puts up. If we are in his state of mind when we put up a like prayer, this asking for a token will do us no harm: otherwise such desire may be very hurtful to us. I. **THIS REQUEST FOR A TOKEN.** It was to be from God and according to God's will, and asked in faith, not in unbelief. For we have no right to say we will not believe unless God give us a token. We are bound to believe Him whether He gives us a token or not. And tokens that men have had, or thought they had, they have come to question about after a while. Peter, though he had seen our Lord's transfiguration, declares that he had the "more sure word of prophecy." Yet may we ask for tokens in a subordinate sense, when we are willing to believe God without them: we may ask for them as confirmatory signs and seals. Several such are named in this psalm. 1. We may long for answer to prayer (Cf. v. 1, 6). If we have received such answers (and have we not?), we may take them as tokens for good. 2. Then, preservation of character is another token (ver. 2). If amid much trial and temptation we have been able to maintain an unblemished reputation, then you need not envy any among the sons of men. 3. Deliverance in trouble is another such (ver. 2). And there is another form of token which must never be overlooked, and that is—4. A sense of pardoned sin (vers. 3, 5). Before this all ills disappear. And—5. Support under trial. If God gives you this, if you are able to say to all God sends you, "Thy will be done," take comfort from that. 6. Cheering visits from Christ, and fresh anointings of the Holy Spirit are also most sure tokens for good. They are implied in vers. 4, 11, 16; and in our text. II. **THE RESULT OF SUCH TOKENS.** Our enemies are abashed before them. The most malicious adversaries of God's people have stood in awe of them. III. **CONCLUSION.** What an unhappy state must those be in who have troubles, but have no God to go to: enemies, but no defender; darkness, but no star of hope. Your friends, and, still less, yourself, are to be trusted in such times. What can they do? Oh, seek the Saviour's face. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Tokens for good*:—Webster defines a token thus: "Something intended to represent or indicate another thing or event." The rainbow was the "token" to Noah that a second flood would not destroy the world (Gen. ix. 1-17). The blood on the doorposts of the Israelites was a "token" that their firstborn would be spared when the destroying angel passed over the land (Ex. xii. 13). The going down of the shadow on the sun-dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward, was a "token" or sign that fifteen additional years would be added to Hezekiah's life (Isa. xxxviii. 7, 8). God grants to His people tokens for good. 1. A deep sense of sin is a token for good—the precursor of salvation. Sinners must be made sorrowful for their sins, or they cannot be saved. 2. Prayerfulness. Do you feel a strong impulse to pray for the prosperity of the Church, or for one of its individual members; for your family, or for your personal growth in the Divine life? It is "a token for good," the work of the Spirit within you, a sure precursor of some blessing which God has in store for you. 3. A spirit of inquiry into the meaning of God's Word. Luther received "a token for good" when reading an ancient manuscript in his cell. He saw what a treasure of light and life there was in the Bible compared with the traditions of the Papacy. He discovered the doctrine of justification by faith, which he calls "the test of a standing or falling Church." He also found that millions of people were ready to receive its blessed light. 4. In the prosecution of our work God gives "tokens for good." A preacher saw no good done, and resolved to quit the scene of his labours, but he was encouraged by the dream of a man with a small hammer striking a large head, which after

a long time flow into a thousand pieces. 5. Dark and distressing dispensations of Providence are often a "token for good." Health decays: business fails. Temporal loss often leads to spiritual gain. If God takes away one blessing He confers another more fitted to promote our well-being than that of which He deprived us. The drying up of the streams of earthly comfort lead men to seek the water of life. (*H. Woodcock.*) *God our helper*:—I like this Saxon word "holpen." There is something substantial in the appearance of it and hearty in the sound of it. When associated with certain adverbs and prepositions its meaning comes out in full force. Help forward, onward, out, over, off, to, up. "Thou, Lord, hast holpen me." We have cause to say this every birthday, and when completing each stage of life. Have we not reason to say it at the end of decades of years, as we pass from childhood to youth and from youth to manhood? In truth this is a suitable utterance at the end of every day. (*Samuel Martin.*) *Comfort*:—To what shall we liken comfort? It is like copious and heavy dew to withering flowers. It is like rain to the parched and thirsty earth. It is like an anodyne to sharp pain. It is like the sight of coast and harbour to the mariner, when the sea is rough and the sky is stormy. It is like the appearance of the moon after hours of thick, black, dark cloudiness. It is like the mother's voice to a terrified child, and like the mother's arms to a fretful babe. "Comfort" is a word which we interpret by our feelings. A mother's lap and bosom, and a bird's nest, are embodiments of God's idea of comfort. (*Ibid.*)

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PSALM LXXXVII.

VERS. 1-7. *His foundation is in the holy mountains.*—A material portrait of the spiritual Church:—I. It is GLORIOUS IN ITS ELEVATION (ver. 1). The spiritual Church is a city set upon a hill. Though elevated it is safe; its foundation is in the everlasting mountains. "Upon this rock," etc. II. It is SPECIALLY REGARDED BY GOD (ver. 2). The infinitely loving One must be interested in all the works of His hand; even the sparrow that falls not to the ground without notice. But for those Christian men who constitute the true spiritual Church He has a special regard. III. It is ILLUSTRIOUS IN ITS HISTORY (ver. 3). Many glorious things had been said of Zion. It was said that they should call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and they should call all the nations to it; it was said they should come to see the city of Zion, and flow together to the goodness of the Lord. It was said by God (1 Kings ix. 3; 2 Chron. vii. 16). But what far more glorious things have been said of the true Church. Read what victories she has won, not only in the time of the apostles, but in every subsequent age. It has been said of the true Church, that it is "a royal priesthood." IV. It is SUPERIOR TO ALL OTHER COMMUNITIES (ver. 4). Compare commercial, scientific, political, and other religious communities with it, and in all that is morally great and glorious, the brightest of their fires pales into dimness. V. It is THE BIRTH-SCENE OF THE GOOD (ver. 5). In the true spiritual Church, souls are born again. VI. It is DIVINELY REGISTERED (vers. 6, 7). Jehovah kept a register of all that were born in Jerusalem, and so He does of all who are spiritually born in the true Church. "When He writeth up the people." Ah! the time will come when He will write up a register of all true men. No others, however lofty in rank and illustrious in genius, will find a place in that book. No one shall enter heaven who is not found written in "The Lamb's Book of Life." VII. It is INFINITE IN ITS RESOURCES. "All my springs are in Thee." This is what the poet says, as the representative of all that were born in Zion; and this is what all the members of the true spiritual Church can also say and most deeply feel. All my fountains are in Thee, in Thee, that is, in Zion or in God. If in Zion, it is from God. (*Homilist.*) *The city of God*:—I. ITS FOUNDATION (ver. 1). Christ's character, teachings, miracles, and merit. II. ITS FAVOUR (ver. 2). God canopies the city with His wing of covenant promise, and belts it with the attributes of His Being. III. ITS FAME (ver. 3), (2 Chron. vii. 16; Ps. cxxxii. 13-17; Zech. i. 14: ii. 4-12). IV. ITS FRATERNITY (vers. 4-6). Here are the true aristocracy of souls, the real nobility of earth. V. ITS FUTURE (ver. 5). VI. ITS FOUNTAINS (ver. 7). (*J. O. Keen, D.D.*)



Ver. 2. **The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.**—*The gates of Zion*.—I. GOD HAS ALWAYS SHOWN A PARTICULAR RESPECT TO HOUSES SET APART FOR HIS WORSHIP. Nor is He less present with us than He was with His ancient worshippers. Now God, dwelling in a tent and a temple, prefigured the incarnation of our Saviour, who having taken upon Him our nature, dwelt, or tabernacled among us. II. WORSHIPPING GOD IN SUCH PLACES IS MORE CONDUCTIVE TO THE SPIRITUAL IMPROVEMENT OF THE WORSHIPPERS THAN ELSEWHERE. 1. The character and perfections of God never appear with such bright lustre as in the sanctuary, where numbers of His faithful subjects are assembled before Him, to present the sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving. 2. The worship performed in the house of God is the most direct testimony of our homage and obedience. 3. Worshipping God in such places animates and strengthens us in our devotional exercises. 4. Worshipping God in the sanctuary contributes to promote peace and happiness among all orders and degrees of men. III. THE IMPORTANCE OF A REGULAR ATTENDANCE UPON THE SERVICES THAT ARE THERE PERFORMED. Like the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, we must continue our attendance till it please God to give a blessing to the means of His own appointment. (*John Ramsay, M.A.*) *God's peculiar regard to places set apart for Divine worship*.—I. THAT GOD BEARS A DIFFERENT RESPECT TO PLACES SET APART AND CONSECRATED TO HIS WORSHIP, FROM WHAT HE BEARS TO ALL OTHER PLACES DESIGNED TO THE USES OF COMMON LIFE. 1. Those eminent interposals of the Divine providence for the erecting and preserving such places, will be one pregnant and strong argument to prove the difference of God's respect to them, and to others of common use. 2. The second argument for the proof of the same assertion shall be taken from those remarkable judgments shown by God upon the violators of things consecrated and set apart to holy uses. A coal, we know, snatched from the altar, once fired the nest of the eagle, the royal and commanding bird; and so has sacrilege consumed the families of princes, broken sceptres, and destroyed kingdoms. 3. The ground and reason why God shows such a concern for these things is that He has the sole property of them. It is a known maxim, that "in Deo sunt jura omnia"; and consequently, that He is the proprietor of all things, by that grand and transcendent right founded upon creation. Yet, notwithstanding, He may be said to have a greater, because a sole property in some things, for that He permits not the use of them to men, to whom yet He has granted the free use of all other things. Now, this property may be founded upon a double ground. (1) God's own fixing upon and institution of a place or thing to do His peculiar use. When He shall say to the sons of men, as He spoke to Adam concerning the forbidden fruit, Of all things and places that I have enriched the universe with, you may freely make use for your own occasions; but as for this spot of ground, this person, this thing, I have selected and appropriated, I have enclosed it to Myself and My own use; and I will endure no sharer, no rival or companion in it: he that invades them, usurps, and shall bear the guilt of his usurpation. Now upon this account, the gates of Zion, and the tribe of Levi, became God's property. He laid His hand upon them, and said, "These are Mine." (2) The other ground of God's sole property in any thing or place is the gift, or rather the return of it made by man to God; by which act he relinquishes and delivers back to God all his right to the use of that thing, which before had been freely granted him by God. II. THAT GOD PREFERS THE WORSHIP PAID HIM IN SUCH PLACES ABOVE THAT WHICH IS OFFERED HIM IN ANY OTHER PLACES WHATSOEVER. 1. Because such places are naturally apt to excite a greater reverence and devotion in the discharge of Divine service than places of common use. The place properly reminds a man of the business of the place, and strikes a kind of awe into the thoughts, when they reflect upon that great and sacred Majesty they use to treat and converse with there: they find the same holy consternation upon themselves that Jacob did at his consecrated Bethel, which he called "the gate of heaven": and if such places are so, then surely a daily expectation at the gate is the readiest way to gain admittance into the house. 2. Because in such places it is a more direct service and testification of our homage to Him. For surely, if I should have something to ask of a great person, it were greater respect to wait upon him with my petition at his own house, than to desire him to come and receive it at mine. (*R. South, D.D.*) *God's love for the gates of Zion*.—I. THE LORD LOVES THE DWELLINGS OF JACOB—He loves those that are true Israelites. These are succeeded by the name Christian, for the Christian Church is now become the true Israel of God. He loves His saints on account of

that image of Himself which they bear: He loves them on account of those graces which are infused into them when they are renewed by the Spirit; He loves them on account of the relation they stand in to Him as His people, and as His Church, who are qualified for the duties of the relation by that love of their Father, that reliance upon His care, that delight in His person, that enjoyment in His service which belongs to dutiful and affectionate children. II. **HE LOVES THE GATES OF ZION MORE THAN ALL THE DWELLINGS OF JACOB**—nothing in the dwellings of Jacob so much attracts His attention as the people of God connected together in a social capacity. He regards with peculiar complacency the worship of His saints—1. On its own account, as a yielding to Him that which is His prerogative. 2. On account of that union of mind and consent of heart evinced in the assembling of His people together and constituting themselves into a Church. 3. On account of that deference to His authority which is evinced by maintaining and keeping up the practice of those institutes which rest entirely on that authority. III. **CONSIDER HOW IT IS THAT GOD MANIFESTS THIS COMPLACENCY IN THE GATES OF ZION ABOVE THE DWELLINGS OF JACOB.** 1. By making the assembly of the saints the grand means of conversion. 2. By continually maintaining in operation those gifts which are for the edification of the saints, and without which the union of the saints would be with difficulty maintained. 3. By that marvellous protection which is afforded to the interests of the Church of God; whereby, though weak, and frequently reduced to a handful of disciples yet they have been protected, and their society on earth continued. (*R. Hall, M.A.*) *God's regard for His Church*:—I. **THE IMPORTANT FACT IMPLIED.** "The Lord loveth the dwellings of Jacob," i. e. the righteous in their personal and domestic capacities. 1. He loves them in their individual character as His people. 2. He loves them in their domestic capacity (Ps. cxxviii.; Prov. xx. 7; Jer. xxxi.). 3. He loves them in all their religious services. II. **THE GLORIOUS DECLARATION GIVEN.** "He loveth the gates of Zion better," etc. That is, He greatly prefers the public assemblies of His people over all the dwellings of Jacob. 1. The evidences of this preference. (1) The special promises given. One of the most ancient promises is, "Wherever My name is recorded," etc. Then the one given to Solomon, "My eyes, and Mine heart shall be there continually." "Wherever two or three," etc. (2) The Divine manifestations afforded. In His house He reveals His truth, and faithfulness, and goodness, and grace, etc. (3) The invaluable blessings communicated. Here He says to the benighted chaotic minds, "Let there be light," etc. Here He speaks to heavy-laden, sin-sick souls, "Go in peace thy sins are forgiven thee." (4) By perpetuating the public assemblies of His saints despite of all opposition. 2. What reasons can be assigned for this affectionate preference. It is in Zion, or the public assemblies of His saints, (1) That the graces and holy feelings of God's people are most fully displayed. (2) On account of the holy and happy harmony which is exhibited. Here men are brought together, to hear, and love, and pray. (3) Because it is the pillar and ground of truth. (4) Because of its resemblance to heaven. Application.—1. Do we love the gates of Zion? What evidences do we give? Speak for it; think of it; pray for it; labour for it. 2. What advantages have we derived from it? Justification, comfort, holiness, longing for heaven. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *Zion the spiritual centre*:—The glory of a nation is in the quality of its manhood and womanhood. It is not determined by the number of square miles that it may possess, not by its geographical position, nor by its commerce, but by its men. There is a little village in the west of Scotland that has to-day no commercial value, but it is great because David Livingstone was born there. We come to this truth, then, that—1. Personality gives value to place. Bethlehem was but an insignificant Eastern village; it was not the centre of any trade, it was off the main highway of commerce. It is the personality of Jesus that gives value to Bethlehem. 2. Zion is great also because God "records His name there. He loves the gates of Zion." A peculiar blessing ever attaches to the house of God. This is the place where the feet of our God rest, and is thereby made glorious. It is here where this man and that man was born into the new life of God. 3. We come then to this further truth that Zion is the place where souls are born. This is where men are detached from the world and attached to Christ, where they are polished and perfected. In all these souls born in Zion, God sees wonderful possibilities. 4. Let me say further that in Zion God is always wanting to work on the men born there, and to bring the best out of them. Aaron's rod was to him only a piece of ordinary timber, a dead stick, with no

possibility of life in it; but when he laid it up in the sanctuary, and God began to work His silent wonders on it, Aaron gazed with astonishment on the transformed stick as he saw it bearing buds and blossoms and ripe almonds. We often wonder what God can ever make of the men and women that are born in Zion. They come in late, some of them, and come in sighing and moaning, "Give me back my lost years." There is a sense in which God cannot do this, but there is another sense in which He can. "I will restore unto you the years that the caterpillar and the locust and the palmerworm have eaten." "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound." It is a significant fact known to botanists that the late flowering plants have often the most magnificent blossoms. Of late florists have been treating plants to what is known as the "cold process." The plants are kept in an ice-house so that the blooms are repressed. This repression really does the plant no harm. They blossom all the more freely and rapidly when brought into a warm atmosphere. Many a man has for years been kept in a kind of spiritual ice-house, but some day, in the warmth of a gracious revival, he breaks out into unexpected splendour and glowing wonder. A recent writer states that an "Apollo" has been discovered in Rome amid a heap of rubbish. It was headless, and had only one arm. A sad sight. The artist's beautiful work marred by the rough handling of time and the weather. How many of Christ's works of art—saved men—get mutilated, debased, crushed, ruined. Some want a spiritual limb, an eye, a hand, a foot. They are full of defects and incompleteness; but it is the glory of God to work on them till not a coarse fibre is left, and His redemptive power produces in them spiritual completeness.

5. What lots of different material there is in Zion for God to work on. There are so many different characters, many of them unpromising and unlikely that God has much to do. Yet He never despairs. Out of Peter, that handful of sand blown away by a maiden's breath, God brings the man of rock-like solidity. He cares for the stars, will He not care for the man and woman for whom His own Son died upon the cross? The God who works with completeness in the starry realms will bring out perfectness in you, His own child.

6. And believe me, our God does not work haphazardly. He has a plan. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." No, God has not finished with us yet.

7. But all this must begin down here. "When God counts up the people, He shall say this man and that was born there." The only important question about any Church is, "Are souls born there?" This was the glory of the ancient Church. "Multitudes turned to the Lord." What value the Bible places on the individual! Christ thought very little of the tyranny of numbers. This old Jew saw them coming from the most unlikely places. From Rahab and Babylon, Philistia and Tyre and Ethiopia; "all sorts and conditions of men" were to find a resting-place, a home within the walls of God's Zion. God's house is not a select club for the rich. It is a home for all. What an honour to open the gates of Zion to the night-wanderer and the outcast. (*A. J. Campbell.*) *A Divine preference and its reasons*.—When the Roman soldier went out to fight, his battle-cry was "Pro aris et focis"—that is, for altars and hearths. It was not of his fields that he thought, it was not of his beeves—or at any rate it was not of these in the first place, but of treasures he held dearer still, the inmates of his dwelling, the honour of his gods. Now, it is these two thoughts, of home and of sanctuary, that are brought together in the text. What are the "dwellings of Jacob"? Are they not just the peaceful homesteads scattered up and down the land, in which families dwelt together in unity with themselves, and in covenant with their God? And what are the "gates of Zion"? Are they not a symbol of the common convocations when they gathered for religious worship—to pray, to praise, and to sacrifice?

I. GOD'S REGARD FOR THE FAMILY. We may prove it by various facts, and in especial by three.

1. Consider the place God has given to the family in the economy of nature. For what is home—home, I mean, where it attains its destined ideal and fulfils its appropriate ends? It is a means of protection for the young, hiding them in their defenceless years from the sight of evil and the strife of tongues. It is a ministry of refreshment for the old, calming and recruiting them in their hours of weariness after the bustle and fret of toil. And it is a school of charity for all.
2. Consider the place God has given the family in the kingdom of grace. Let us never forget that there is a law of heredity in grace. There exists a principle of transmission, on which Scripture lays abundant stress, by which the generations are made one, linked together in a chain of blessing.
3. Consider, too, the place that God has given the family in the discipline of Christ. Can

there possibly be a stronger proof of the honour which God sets on the household than the fact that to the household's keeping and to the household's care He entrusted the most precious treasure of heaven, the noblest life on earth? II. GOD'S GREATER REGARD FOR THE CHURCH. The text says that, good and beautiful as home is, the assembly of the saints is better. And why? Why is it that, while God delighted in these peaceable habitations, each beneath its vine and fig-tree, the nurseries of brave young men and pure and gentle maidens, sons as plants grown up in their youth, daughters as corner-stones polished after the similitude of a palace, He took still greater delight in the temple services at Jerusalem? 1. The Church's fellowship is more catholic. However close, however sacred, and however enriching the fellowship of the family is, it is the fellowship of those that are one in blood. As such it is circumscribed. And there is an element of selfishness in it, innocent selfishness if you will, permissible selfishness, but selfishness notwithstanding, a certain home-centredness which may easily turn to exclusiveness, coldness towards the wants, and indifference towards the interests, of those beyond. But in the fellowship of the Church the range is extended, the horizon is enlarged. We are out on the open platform of grace. 2. The Church's testimony is more public. Home means privacy, home means seclusion; there is the erection of a certain barrier, the intervention of a certain screen. And therefore the witness of home, however consistent and faithful, may be said to begin and to end with the inmates of home; it is seldom far-reaching, because little observed. It is otherwise with the Church; publicity is of its very essence. The character of the Church is maintained, the ends of the Church are fulfilled, not when it edifies itself merely, but when it makes confession to the world. 3. The Church's character is more spiritual. The Church is the special abode of the Holy Ghost, whose living and personal presence gives meaning to every privilege and might to every agency, purifying the Church's life, prospering the Church's work. And, in comparing the Church with the family, may we not say that the Church has ampler provisions, finer adaptations, more sacred and select appliances, more ample and effective energies, for the maintenance of God's worship, the proclamation of His message, and, as a consequence of both, the saving and the sanctifying of souls? 4. The Church's experiences are more permanent. There are duties and joys of the domestic life which it would be wrong to say, "I am acting and feeling now as I shall act and feel in heaven," for we shall be changed in more ways than we think, if by grace we get there. But we can say so of worship. For the exercises of worship are spiritual, they are therefore abiding and unalterable; the future can make no real change in them. Both home and Church have their close connection with the heavenly life. But while home life prepares for it, Church life anticipates it. The one is a training, the other is an earnest. III. THE PRINCIPLE OF THE TEXT, with its elevation of Church over home, in the aspects, and for the purposes we have spoken of, is suggestive of various practical lessons. 1. It means comfort for the homeless. Though God has denied you the lesser good, He offers you the greater. If He has shut the door of home, He has thrown wide the door of the Church. 2. The text suggests a caution to those who have homes. For though the Church may be a substitute for home, home can in no wise be a substitute for the Church. Beware of imagining that it may. See to it that the home points upwards to the Church. Teach your children to take their place at the Church's services. Accustom them to bear a share in the Church's work. Always keep before them the duty of communicating at the Church's table, and making avowal of the Church's Lord. (IV. A. Gray.) *Public worship to be preferred before private*:—Public worship is to be preferred before private. So it is by the Lord, so it should be by His people. So it was under the law, so it must be under the Gospel. 1. The Lord is more glorified by public worship than private. God is then glorified by us when we acknowledge that He is glorious. And He is most glorified when this acknowledgent is most public. 2. There is more of the Lord's presence in public worship than in private. He is present with His people in the use of public ordinances in a more especial manner, more effectually, constantly, intimately. 3. Here are the clearest manifestations of God. Here He manifests Himself more than in private. Why was Judah called a valley of vision, but because the Lord manifested Himself to that people in public ordinances? 4. There is more spiritual advantage to be got in the use of public ordinances than in private. Whatever spiritual benefit is to be found in private duties, that, and much more, may be expected from public ordinances

when duly improved. There is more spiritual light and life, more strength and growth, more comfort and soul refreshment. 5. Public worship is more edifying than private. In private you provide for your own good, but in public you do good both to yourselves and others. And that is a received rule, that good is best which is most diffusive, most communicative. Example has the force of a motive; we may stir up others by our example (Zech. viii. 20, 21). 6. Public ordinances are a better security against apostasy than private, and therefore to be preferred: an argument worthy our observation in these backsliding times. 7. Here the Lord works His greatest works; greater works than ordinarily He works by private means. 8. Public worship is the nearest resemblance of heaven. In heaven, so far as the Scripture describes it to us, there is nothing done in private, nothing in secret, all the worship of that glorious company is public (Heb. xii. 22, 23). They make one glorious congregation, and so jointly together sing the praises of Him that sits on the throne, and the praises of the Lamb, and continue employed in this public worship to eternity. 9. The examples of the most renowned servants of God, who have preferred public worship before private, is a sufficient argument. 10. Public worship is the most available for the procuring of the greatest mercies, and preventing and removing the greatest judgments. 11. The precious blood of Christ is most interested in public worship, and that must needs be most valuable which has most interest in that which is of infinite value. The blood of Christ has most influence upon public worship, more than on private: for the private duties of God's worship, private prayers, meditation, and such like, had been required of, and performed by, Adam and his posterity, if he had continued in the state of innocency; they had been due by the light of nature, if Christ had never died, if life and immortality had never been brought to light by the Gospel. But the public preaching of the Gospel, and the administration of the federal seals, have a necessary dependence upon the death of Christ. As they are the representations, so they are the purchase of that precious blood; as Christ is hereby set forth as crucified before our eyes, so are they the purchase of Christ crucified, so are they the gifts of Christ triumphant. 12. The promises of God are more to public worship than to private (Ex. xx. 24; Isa. iv. 5; lv. 2, 3; Ps. xxxvi. 8, 9). (D. Clarkson.) *The gates of Zion*:—The gates of our Zion ought to be—I. GREETING GATES. Think how the welcoming heart of Jesus opened itself to all sorts and conditions of men during His earthly life—to the leper, the Samaritan woman, the thief on the cross, etc. Surely, if the Church is to represent her Lord, her gates ought to be gates of greeting. II. ESTABLISHED AND GUARDING GATES. Our churches stand for great facts and doctrines—like God, the humanity and Deity of Jesus, the authority of Scripture, the atonement, the sacredness of the Sabbath, righteousness, beneficence, etc. III. LOVED GATES. What our Lord loves we should love. And especially your own Church should you thus love. IV. SUPPORTED GATES. Every Church-member should be willing and glad to do his share toward the support of worship. V. ATTRACTIVE GATES. So winning, so wrapped in genial and cheerful atmosphere should our Church services be, so evident in their holding forth the attractive Christ, that the Churchless throng should be constrained to enter and to share. (*Homiletic Monthly*.)

**Ver. 8. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God.**—*The glorious city*:—The inspired singer had the ransomed Church in view, and his soul was stirred by a vision of the new Jerusalem, its regenerated myriads gathered from every nation, and its crucified King, when he broke forth into this eulogy. I. There are glorious things with respect to **THE ERECTION OF THE CITY**. 1. The plan of its erection. Faultless, complete, wonderful for beauty and grandeur, worthy of its Divine Architect and of the end in view, viz. to rear a city for Him to dwell in. 2. The site. The sure decree, the Divine perfections, the promise of Him that cannot lie, and the incarnate Son Himself, are the holy mountains, whose summits are gloriously crowned by the city of the great King. There the city sits securely, beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth. 3. The date of its erection. It is older than any of the cities of the ancient world—Rome—Nineveh—Babylon; it reaches a higher antiquity than any of them all. It was standing before the flood; Noah, Enoch, Abel, dwelt in it. It is almost as old as the creation. II. There are glorious things to tell of **THE DEFENCES OF THE CITY**. It is well fortified—encircled by the sleepless providence of Jehovah, girt about with the power of the Almighty. When its bulwarks were reared, He that made them "saw that they were good"; and He said, "No weapon that is formed against

these shall prosper." III. There are glorious things in connection with **THE STORES AND SUPPLIES ON WHICH THE CITY DEPENDS**. 1. The excellence of the city's supplies. It is little to say that there is the best of everything—the finest of wheat, honey from the rock, water clear as crystal. The bread, the water, the wine, the milk, and the pleasant fruits, are without a parallel. 2. The abundance of the city's supplies. There is enough for all the citizens. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," etc. 3. The source whence the supplies are derived. (1) They do not come from without. Its well-springs are not in the world. The corn, and the wine, and the oil, are grown where the foe is without any power. (2) There is a river that maketh glad the city of God. Yes, the city has a river—a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal. But cannot Satan do to the river of our city as Cyrus did to the river of Babylon? The river is beyond his reach. The fountain whence it issues is within the city walls. The river-head, the perennial spring of the stream of life, is in the heart of the fortress, and in the very throne of the King. (3) The windows of heaven are right above the city; and the windows of heaven are frequently opened, and manna and other celestial products showered down, till there is not room enough in the magazines of the city to receive them. IV. There are glorious things respecting **THE KING OF THE CITY**. 1. He is glorious in Himself. (1) His name—Wonderful. He is Adam, Jacob, David, Israel; Jesus, Immanuel, Shiloh, Christ; the Second Man, the Mighty God; the Lamb, the Shepherd, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah; the Branch, the Plant of Renown, the Rose of Sharon; the Morning Star, the Sun of Righteousness, the Word of God, the Alpha and the Omega, the Amen. And these are not the whole. There are many titles and appellations behind. (2) His person—full of grace and dignity. (3) His character. 2. There are glorious things respecting the King, when we consider Him in connection with the city. (1) His choice of the city is one of these. He made choice of the city before the foundation of the world; yea, the city itself was not built when it became the object of His choice. He foreknew the city; raising the curtain of futurity in the past beginning, He saw the city, He fixed upon it His love, and resolved to be its King. (2) The circumstance that He dwells in the city is glorious. (3) His sufferings for the city are glorious. (4) His victories for the city are glorious. V. There are glorious things in connection with **THE CITIZENS OF THE CITY**. 1. The number of the citizens. It was foretold long since that they of the city should flourish like grass of the earth, and that they should be like the stars of heaven for multitude. The population of the city is increasing accordingly. Sometimes its progress is greater, and sometimes it is less, but it is always advancing. 2. The rank of the citizens. All of them are princes—the King's own kinsmen. They are born of God, and the glorious King is their elder brother! 3. The circumstances of the citizens. In other places some are rich and some are poor. But here all the citizens are poor. "To this man will I look," says the King. "to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit," etc. 4. The character of the citizens. All of them are on the way to perfection. They are being fashioned to the pattern of the character of the King. The climate in which they live, the atmosphere which they breathe, the diet on which they are fed, and the exercises they engage in, have a powerful tendency to produce a resemblance between them and Him, and to conform them to His image. The beauty of the Lord descends upon them more and more. 5. The employment of the citizens. 6. The privileges of the citizens. (1) They are served and protected by the King's attendants and guards. (2) They are permitted to eat fruit in the King's garden. (3) They may enter the King's palace, and approach His throne. (*Andrew Gray.*) *The glory of the Church*:—Glorious things are spoken of our New Testament Zion—

I. **AS A MAGNIFICENT CITY**. 1. It is populous. The polished European is there, and the rude islander from the great Pacific; the dark Ethiopian on whom the sun has looked down; and the wild dweller under the North Star from his dreary regions of perpetual snow. The philosopher is in Zion with his extensive learning and habits of independent thought, in humble submission to the Cross. The cottager is there, who has read and known little but his Bible; and the child, who, receiving the Gospel in its simplicity to his infant heart, has been set forth as a pattern to the older by Him who said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." 2. It is increasing; but its past triumphs are not to be compared with its future glory. A time is coming when the Gospel shall be preached to all, when the true light shall shine in the dark places of the earth, and "the isles shall wait for His law." 3. Zion is a magnificent, because a well planned city. Glorious

things are spoken of its situation. It has not an unhealthy site by the slough of despond, or a disagreeable position beside the habitations of horrid cruelty: "His foundation is in the holy mountains." Many cities are overcrowded, and while their best streets are beautiful and spacious, their alleys are the abodes of misery and the nurseries of disease: but this city has abundant convenience and blessings for all. II. **AS THE SEAT OF THE GREAT KING.** Many cities are beautiful in themselves, but want the honour of the metropolis. This is the capital of the dominions of a Monarch who is "higher than the kings of the earth,"—God in the person of Jesus Christ. He is great—1. In His character. 2. In His dominions. 3. In His actions. 4. In His speech. His decrees and revelations are not only superior to any statements to be found elsewhere in their cheering and instructive nature, but in the length of their duration. The edicts of other kings soon pass out of date; those of the King of Zion are eternal. III. **AS THE ABODE OF A HAPPY PEOPLE.** 1. Zion is the abode of a people who are happy, because they are well governed. The first element in a good government is a strong mutual affection between the prince and the people. 2. The inhabitants of Zion are happy, because well conducted. A realm whose inhabitants are idle can never be a happy one: and Christians, besides being taught not to be slothful in the common business of life, are told likewise to be active in their Master's work. 3. Zion is the abode of a people who are happy because all their wants are abundantly supplied. There is never a famine of spiritual food in that glorious and happy place. (*W. Dickson.*) *The city of God*:—I. **THE DESIGNATION.** 1. A city, well-built and fortified. 2. It is the city of God. (1) He is its Architect and Builder. (2) He dwells in it. (3) He reigns over it. II. **THE EXCELLENCES ASCRIBED TO THIS CITY.** 1. Its purity. There is no guilt there; for "the people that dwell therein are forgiven their iniquities." There is no defilement there; for "they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." There are no remains of transgression there; for "they are without fault before the throne of God." The place itself is holy, and all who dwell in it are holy, in every possible respect. Their actions, conversation, desires, and thoughts, are all holy. Nor is it merely by the absence of sin the city is distinguished. There all the fruits of righteousness abound, and in every member of its glorified community the Spirit takes up His abode, filling him with light, and life, and love. 2. Its magnificence. There is the throne of God and of the Lamb. If He were not there, it would be like a city wrapped in night; but because He is there, it shines with the brightness of perpetual day. Hence He is the object on which all eyes gaze. 3. Its opulence. Universal plenty. No toil, no anxious cares, nor disappointed hopes. Its inhabitants have for their portion God Himself, who is all in all. They are His people, and He is their God, and from the boundless resources of His nature they are ever supplied with the richest blessings. 4. Its permanence. It is an "abiding city"; "a city that hath foundations"; "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"; "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." III. **PRACTICAL LESSONS.** 1. The necessity of personal holiness. 2. Learn, while dwelling in the vale below, to live as citizens of heaven. 3. Learn what estimate to put upon the things of time and sense. They are evanescent as the vapour which appeareth for a little time and then passeth away. There is nothing certain but death; there is nothing true but God; there is nothing permanent but heaven. (*Thornley Smith.*) *The city of God*:—Glorious things are spoken of—1. Its Founder. 2. Its privileges. Pardon, instruction, comfort. 3. Its eminent characters. 4. Its perpetual security. 5. Its future extent and magnificence. (*J. Jowett, M.A.*) *Mother Church*:—By universal consent Zion is regarded as type of the Christian Church. I. This mother is **GLORIOUS IN HER REPUTATION** (ver. 3). She has the reputation—1. For the highest intelligence. To her are committed the oracles of God. She is the receptacle and the revealer of heavenly intelligence. 2. For self-sacrificing love. The love which she possesses is of the same kind as that which the Son of God exemplifies—an unconquerable love for souls. 3. For the most beneficent achievements. She has created Christendom. All the arts that bless and adorn the civilized world must be ascribed to her. Her great work is to save souls. II. This mother is **DIVINE IN HER RESOURCES** (ver. 5). She has had her enemies. Her continuance can only be ascribed to Divine support. 1. In what does God establish the Church? In truth and love. She is like a tree which He roots and grounds in love; like a vessel which He fastens in the firmest anchorage; like a house which He builds upon a rock. 2. How does God establish the Church?

He thus gives her "power, love, and a sound mind." III. This mother is ILLUSTRIOUS IN HER FAMILY. 1. Her children are men. "This and that man was born there." Many call her mother whom she disowns. 2. Her children have their birth divinely registered. "When He writeth up." 3. Her children are distinguished by every variety of mind (ver. 7). There is the impulsive Peter, the heroic Paul, and the scientific Luke, and the lamb-like John. There is no monotony in her domestic circle. (*Homilist.*) *The city of God*:—I. IN THEIR LITERAL REFERENCE TO THE JEWISH METROPOLIS. Jerusalem was truly the "city of God"; the city which He particularly chose—to which He paid especial regard. Hence "glorious things" were spoken of her. 1. There was the seat of the civil government. 2. There the Divine ordinances were celebrated. 3. There was the general rendezvous of all the Israelitish tribes. 4. This city received a glorious name, "vision of peace"; and was at length honoured with the presence of our Lord, "the Prince of Peace." II. IN THEIR SPIRITUAL APPLICATION TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST. St. Paul styles this "Jerusalem which is from above, which is the mother of us all"—of all believers (Gal. iv. 26). Hence Christians are represented as "fellow-citizens" (Eph. ii. 19). Now of this spiritual city, the antitype of Zion, glorious things are spoken:—1. That she is gloriously founded by the living God. 2. That she possesses glorious privileges. 3. That she contains glorious inhabitants. 4. That glorious promises shall be accomplished in her (Isa. lx.). III. IN THEIR GRANDEST TYPICAL REFERENCE TO HEAVEN ITSELF. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *The city of God*:—Glorious things are spoken of—1. Its security. 2. Its beauty. 3. The privileges enjoyed by its inhabitants. There are the present and palpable advantages connected with a life of piety; evil things are sent them in mercy, and of the good things of life they have the real benefit and enjoyment, and possess them with God's blessing. There is the inheritance of grace; theirs the heirship of glory. 4. Its enlargement, and the increase of its inhabitants. 5. Its durability. (*James Kirkwood.*) *The Church and the city of God*:—I. A RANSOMED CITY. II. A HOLY CITY. III. A UNITED CITY. IV. AN ENLARGING CITY. V. AN EVERLASTING CITY. (*J. Smyth, D.D.*) *Zion's glories*:—I. First on the catalogue is the fact of God's INTIMATE CONNECTION WITH THE CHURCH. "His foundation in the holy mountains." God and His people cannot be separated. The Spirit dwells within the Church, aye, and tabernacles within the very body of each believer. II. The second glory is found in the fact that GOD HIMSELF HAS ESTABLISHED THE CHURCH. The Divine attributes and perfections are as the foundations of the city. III. An equally glorious fact is to be found in THE SPECIAL FAVOUR GOD HAS TOWARDS HIS CHURCH. IV. The most glorious thing of all is THE PROMISE OF INCREASE, AND THE FULFILLMENT OF THAT PROMISE. Certain nations are spoken of here. "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there." Whole nations, you see! Yes, for a nation shall be born in a day, and men shall come to Christ as doves fly to their windows. The character of the people is here indicated. These are heathen nations, Rahab, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre and Ethiopia. Thank God for the missionary work at home and abroad, for home missionaries and city missionaries, as well as for foreign missionaries, since the heathen are at our very doors. But though nations are made mention of, it is very evident that individuals are dealt with. "This man was born there," "This and that man was born there." Yes, salvation is an individual matter after all. You cannot be saved with the crowd, though you can be saved in a crowd. It must be God's own Spirit working on heart and causing it to be new-born. Praise the Lord for this individual work among the people. (*T. Spurgeon.*) *Glorious things of the city of God*:—1. Her redemption and salvation through Christ. 2. Her spiritual life and beauty. 3. Her increase and enlargement. 4. Her relation to the kingdom of this world. 5. Her millennial happiness. 6. Her duration on earth. 7. Her future eternal glory. (*E. Ritchie.*)

Ver. 5. *And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her.—The Church of to-day*:—I. THE CHIEF WORK AND TRUEST DIGNITY OF THE CHURCH LIES IN HER REGENERATION AND SAVING ENERGY. In imitation of the example of her Lord, she has reached, and is reaching now, those whom philosophers and poets, statesmen and even philanthropists, had designated "the lapsed and incorrigible classes." Where schools of philosophy and codes of law have utterly and ignominiously failed to kill the virus of some moral epidemic, the religion of



Christ has succeeded, the Gospel of Christ has proved an unfailing remedy. II. THE CONVERSION OF MEN SHOULD BE THE FIRST AIM OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY. III. THIS SHOULD BE THE GREAT AIM OF ALL RELIGIOUS EFFORT. We need more of the spirit of the sainted Alleine, who said "he was insatiably greedy for the salvation of souls"; or of Matthew Henry, who said "he would deem it a greater happiness to gain one soul to Christ than thousands of gold and silver." IV. THE DIGNITY AND WORK OF THE CHURCH LIES WITH ITS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS—"THIS AND THAT MAN." The Church of every age can boast of names whose loss would be a loss to mankind. Time would fail to tell of Paul, the eloquent apostle of the Gentiles; Polycarp, the faithful disciple of John; Justin Martyr, the great defender of the faith; Augustine, Luther, Wycliffe, Knox, Wesley and Whitefield, and a host of others, of whom we say with pride, "this and that man," etc. V. THE TRUE INSPIRATION IN THE CHURCH IS SPIRITUAL AND SUPERNATURAL. I have seen an unfilled balloon lying limp and useless on the ground. I have seen the same material expanded and floating gracefully far away above the toil and sin of earth. So have I seen the Church lying limp and lifeless, an object of loathing to some and pity to others. I have seen the same Church filled by the breath of God warm and full, no longer pitied, but admired as the centre of life and hope for a weary world. (*Z. T. Downen, D.D.*) *Zion a type of the Church*:—Contemplate Zion in regard to—I. HER CONVERTS. They are born, as it were, into a new world. The subjects of this change have new attachments and aversions; new joys and sorrows; new fears and hopes. They are actuated by new motives; and having experienced such a change in the inward man, they will manifest it in the whole of their deportment. II. HER PERPETUITY. III. HER FINAL TRIUMPH. We may infer this from—1. The faithfulness of God to His promises. 2. The firm basis on which religious liberty rests in our day, and the growing intelligence of the age respecting the spiritual nature and the Scriptural means of supporting the Church of Christ. 3. The more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit with which we believe God will bless His Church. 4. The prayers offered and the efforts made for the religious interests of the neighbourhood. (*Essex Remembrancer.*) *The Church's fruitfulness*:—1. In regard of the eminency of her births, she is not wholly barren; she hath her births of men, and worthy men. The carnal world hath not exceeded the Church in men of raised intellectuals; Zion hath not been a city of fools. 2. In regard to the multitude of them; "this and that man," of all sorts and conditions, and multitudes of them, so that "more are the children of the desolate than of the married wife." The tents were prophesied to be enlarged, the curtains of the habitations of Zion to be stretched out, and her cords to be lengthened, to receive and entertain that multitude of children that should be brought forth by her after the sacrifice of the Son of God (*Isa. liv, 1, 2*); for that exhortation follows upon the description of the death and exaltation of Christ (*Isa. liii.*). (*S. Charnock.*) *Fragrant memories of spiritual birth-places*:—There is nothing strange in the halo of dearness which, to every Christian, hangs around the scenes with which the beginning of his new life is associated. The place where two friends first met is sacred to them all through their friendship, all the more sacred as their friendship deepens and grows old. Only the last day shall tell how much of earth is hallowed ground. This is what makes the old churches holy with an accumulated sacredness which surpasses their first consecration. Who can tell how many this church of ours will find among the blessed to honour and treasure her for ever, that she may not be forgotten when the birthplaces of souls are remembered? (*Bishop Phillips Brooks.*) *And the Highest Himself shall establish her.*—*The Church's stability*:—I. THE EXPLICATION. 1. This stability must not be meant of any particular Church in the world. Particular Churches have their beginnings, progresses, and periods. Particular Churches have been corrupted by superstition and idolatry, rent by heresies, and scattered by persecutions. Zion hath stood, though some synagogues of it have been pulled down; it hath, like the sun, kept its station in the firmament, though not without eclipses and clouds to muffle it. The Church is but one, though it be in divers countries, and named according to the places where it resides, as the Church of Ephesus, the Church of Sardis, etc. If you obstruct the light of one beam, or lop off one branch, or dam up the stream, yet the sun, root, fountain remains the same. 2. Though God unstakes the Church in one place, yet He will not only have a Church, but a professing Church in another. It is a standing law of Christianity that a belief in the heart should be attended by confession with the mouth (*Rom. x. 9*). And the Church is a congregation of people sounding

the voice of Christ, as He was preached and confessed by the apostles. While there are believers, there will be professors in society together; some ordinances settled in being during the continuance of the world, as the supper (1 Cor. xi. 6). 8. This Church or Zion shall have a numerous progeny. The spiritual Israel shall be "as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered" (Hos. i. 10), which was the promise made to Abraham (Gen. xxii. 17), and renewed in the same terms to Jacob (Gen. xxxii. 12). The Church is a little flock in comparison of the carnal world, yet it is numerous in itself, though not in every place.

**II. GOD HAS HITHERTO ESTABLISHED ZION.** 1. This is testified by its present standing, when other empires have sunk by age or violence. She hath borne up her head in the midst of earthly revolutions, and met with her preservation or resurrection where carnal interests have found their funeral. 2. No society but the Church ever subsisted in the midst of a multitude of enemies. 3. The violences against her, which have been fatal to other societies, have been useful to her. This bush hath burned without consuming, and preserved its verdure in the midst of fire; not from the nature of the bush, but the presence of Him that dwelt in it. 4. When she has seemed to be forlorn and dead, God has restored her. When Israel was at the lowest, a decree issued out in Egypt to destroy her males and root out her seed, deliverance began to dawn; and when a knife was at her throat at the Red Sea, and scarce a valiant believer found among a multitude of despairers, God turned the back of the knife to His Israel, and the edge to the throat of the enemies. 5. God never wanted instruments for His Church in the due season. If Nebuchadnezzar be the axe to hew down Jerusalem, Cyrus shall be the instrument to build her up; when His time is come, He will not want an Ezra and Nehemiah to rear her walls, nor be wanting to them to inspire them with courage and assist their labour, in spite of the adversaries that would give checkmate to the work. If Stephen be stoned by the Jews, He will call out Paul, an abettor of that murder, to be a preacher of the Gospel, and he that was all fire against it shall become as great a flame for the propagation of it: one phoenix shall arise out of the ashes of another.

**III. WHY IT MUST NEEDS BE SO.** 1. It is necessary for the honour of God. Those societies may moulder away, and those religions grow feeble, which have drawn their birth from the wisdom of man and been settled from the force of man, but a Divine work must needs have a Divine establishment. It is so—(1) If you regard it as His main design in the creation of the world. (2) As He hath been the author and builder of Zion. (3) As He hath been the preserver and enlarger of her to this day. (4) In regard of the cost and pains He hath been at about Zion. (5) In regard of faithfulness, His veracity is engaged. (6) In regard it is the seat of His glory. (7) In regard that it is the object of His peculiar affection. (8) In regard of the natural weakness of the Church. 2. It is for the exercise of the offices of Christ that Zion should be established. He is prophet, priest, and king, which are all titles of relation. Prophet implies some to be instructed, a priest some to offer for, and a king some to be ruled; put one relation, and you must necessarily put the other. If there were no Church preserved in the world, He would be a nominal prophet without any disciples, a king without subjects, and a priest without suppliants to be atoned by Him upon earth. 3. The foundation of Zion is sure. It is founded upon Christ, the corner stone.

**IV. THE USE.** 1. Information. (1) If the Church hath a duration and stability, then ordinances and ministry are perpetual. Ministers may be thrust into corners, clapped up in prison, hurried to their graves, but the sepulchres of ministers are not the graves of the ministry. (2) The doctrine of the establishment of every member of Zion is clearly established. The same blood that is the cement of Zion, the same hand that built her, the same head that influenceth her, secures every one of her true-born children. They are all in the same posture and upon the same foundation with Zion herself. (3) How great is the folly of Zion's enemies! They judge of her by the weakness of her worldly interest, and not by the almightiness of her guardian. (4) What a ground is here for prayer! No petition can more comfortably, no petition can more confidently, be put up, than for Zion's establishment. Prayers for particular persons, or for ourselves, may want success; but supplications for Zion never miscarry. (5) What a strong ground is here for trust! Look not so much upon the condition of Zion's walls as upon her foundation; not upon her present posture, as upon her promise-charter; not upon her as a weak vine, but under the hand of the Highest as the vine-dresser. Look not upon the feebleness of the flock, but upon the care of the shepherd; nor upon the fierceness of the lions, but upon the strength and affection

of her guardian. 2. Comfort. (1) In the confusions and troubles of the world. (2) In persecutions. (3) In the deepest designs of her enemies. If He be the Highest, and employs Himself as the Highest, there is none so high as to overtop Him, none so high as to outwit Him. Though their union be never so close, and their projects never so deep, yet God's being with the Church is curb enough for them and comforting enough for Zion (Isa. viii. 9). 3. Exhortation. (1) Take heed of apostatizing from Zion. (2) Let us love Zion. (3) Let us desire the establishment of Zion more than our own private establishment. (4) Let us endeavour the establishment of Zion. (S. Charnock.)

Ver. 6. **The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there.**—*The last census*.—I. When this dispensation shall come to its close, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come in the clouds of heaven, then we believe the Lord shall write up His people. **WHAT WILL THIS WRITING BE?** 1. There will be written in this census nothing but personal matters. "This man was born there." They are not taken in the plural—"these men." They are not taken as a corporate body—this nation, this Church, this family—but one by one each man's name shall be found either written there or else left out. There is no truth which we need more frequently to hold up before the eyes of our people than the truth that nothing but personal godliness will ever avail. 2. Again, you will perceive that this great census deals not merely with personal matters, but with vital matters which concern a man's birth. Here you have it that this man was born there. 'Tis true the things we have thought and those we have done shall be mentioned at the last, but not for their own sakes. They shall be mentioned only as means of proving that we were born again, or else as evidence that regeneration had never taken place in us. 3. This census will be decisive—the last polling of the people, the last counting of the jewels and casting away of the counterfeits, the last bringing in of the sheep and banishment of the goats. Oh that we were wise to look into futurities! II. **WHOSE NAMES WILL NOT BE FOUND WRITTEN WHEN THE LORD COUNTETH UP HIS PEOPLE.** 1. The name of the hypocritical Church member will not be found there. 2. The man who is a mere hearer. 3. Those who are living in vice and open sin, and die as they live. 4. Moralists. III. **WHOSE NAME WILL BE FOUND THERE?** We reply, there shall be the name of every soul that ever believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. IV. **WHO IS TO MAKE OUT THE CENSUS PAPER?** "The Lord shall count when He writeth up the people." But why shall the Lord make out the census? Who else should do it? God is only wise. We will not question this man or that, this denomination or that. It is not for us to use our fingers to count the brands plucked from the burning, but to use our hands to pluck them from the fire, and we will pass the roll to the only wise God, and He shall at the last decide whether they be His or no. V. **WHY WILL THE CENSUS BE TAKEN AT ALL?** The Lord counts up His people—1. To show His value of them. 2. To show to Satan his entire defeat. 3. To let all men see that the great riddle which has distracted human intellect was no riddle but a fact. God is glorified, and man free. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The correct census*.—I. **THE COUNTING.** A census is no new thing. Refer to the history of Jacob, the time of Pharaoh, etc. Churches have their census. This describes the final census—1. It will be an individual counting. "This man was born there." The question not one of reformation, but of regeneration. 2. It will be unalterable. It will be final (Rev. xxii. 11). It is of supreme importance to have our name written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Seek to have it registered now. II. **THE COUNTER.** "The Lord shall count." What a mercy. Man might accidentally omit, or through partiality insert some name, but it is well that the Lord should be the Presiding Officer because of—1. His intimate acquaintance with every one. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." He cannot therefore be deceived. To Him all hearts are open. We may "profess and call ourselves Christians," but our profession will be worthless unless our name be inserted in the heavenly register. 2. His unfailing accuracy. No name omitted or inserted in error. The totals will agree. Man may err, but His accuracy none can call in question. III. **THE COUNTED.** Whose name will be found in the register? Only his who has been "born again," i. e. "born from above." I may be "the weakest of them that love Him," but if I have been "born there," I shall not be disowned. If we share in the bond of the covenant, we shall also share in the blessedness of the covenant. Will He count me? "Except a man be born again," etc. (Samuel Oliver.) *God takes the census*.—Why should the Lord make out

the census? The reason is—who else could do it? Imagine for a moment that the pen could be given to the Pope of Rome. I am sure he would omit yours and mine, because we are not obedient to the Pontifical See; and even if he were under authority and command, I am sure he would make a great splutter in trying to write the name "Martin Luther," and he would throw down his pen and utterly refuse to obey if he had to write the glorious name of John Calvin. Suppose, now, we put the pen into the hand of Bigotry—Bigotry who lives not quite so far off as Italy, but takes up her residence in our own land, and hard by our abode. I think I see her, with her face bitter as wormwood, and with her eyes full of darkness, and she, having written all the names down, reads, "There be few that shall be saved; they be so few that a child can count them." . . . God, and God only—God the only wise—shall have the writing up of the people, for there is no one to be found but God who could do it. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 7. **As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there.**—*Music an epitome of life*:—Music does a great many things for us. It pleases the senses, it affords æsthetic delight, it calms perplexed feelings, it nerves the soldier's heart to battle, it soothes the babe upon its mother's breast, it thrills the maiden's heart with love, it consoles the mourner's grief and hallows it, it spurs the rapture of the dance, and moderates and sanctifies the march to the tomb. What man would but cannot, music seems to do for him. When his deed lags, she strengthens him; when his spirit falters, she inspires; when his voice is dumb, she speaks for him. In a word, music is capable of supplementing man's finitude, and opening for him the realm of his ideals and his aspirations. And this is the explanation of its power to do so much for us, and be so much to us, because in its own terms it has a capacity of expressing life. This is at once an explanation of its power and a statement of its inscrutable mystery, that it is fitted to be the common language of the universal sentiment of humanity. As good old Father Haydn said of it, "My language is understood all over the world." So, in recognition of this capacity to portray human experience and to reflect human sentiment, I have chosen to consider music as an epitome of life. One essential of music is based on time, and consists in the relation of notes to each other measured by duration. The savage beating his tom-tom is the rudimentary musician. The human ear is earliest susceptible to the impression of rhythm. Yet so radically and perpetually essential is this feature that the most elaborate symphony is dependent on it equally with the primitive drum-beat. Lacking it, either one would be incoherent, would cease to be music, and would become simply noise. This is manifest, but now where shall we find in life the equivalent of this essential term? What is the pulse of the moral life, the heart-beat of conduct as rhythm is the heart-beat of song? What imparts measure and meaning and impulse to the otherwise unrelated activities, and sets them in order in intelligible succession? What, if not the exercise of will, the putting forth of purpose? Yes, purpose is to life what rhythm is to song. Beside time, the other evident essential of music is tune, in which also we may discern some suggestive parallel to life. The possibility of tune depends on that mysterious feature of music we call the scale or the octave. These eight tones of relative pitch that compose the octave, with their semitones of the chromatic scale, furnish the material out of which all music is composed. Melody, which is a sort of harmony, and harmony, which is in turn a sort of condensed melody, both equally flow from this mysterious relation that sounds bear to each other, and depend on it. Not a single note in music stands alone in its significance. We are not far, then, from recognizing what is signified concerning human life, in the fact that music rests on the relation of note to note, of part to part. The parallel truth is that no man liveth to himself. Selfishness excludes one from the harmony of being. As the notes in the scale are fitted by their mutual relations to portray ideal beauty, so are we constituted for each other, attaining the roundness, the completeness, the satisfaction of life, never in ourselves alone, but only as we stand related to each other in the significance of that scale of character that imparts the meaning to life, and in this large relation we all inevitably stand for discord or for harmony. A closing parallel may be drawn from the motive of music. Its material it takes from time and tune, its method is obedience, and its motive is love. Each individual musical entity gives itself to the use and being of the whole. How the symphony exemplifies this truth! Each note is woven as a mesh in the network of tone; each part contrasts and amplifies every other part; each instrument sets

in other colour the utterance of its neighbour—the violins in clear intensity of utterance give forth the theme, and then they part, some to maintain it, others to adorn it; the flutes and clarionets and oboes touch it with a sylvan tone; the lower strings grant it the fervour of their passionate thought; the horns breathe calm and clear; the trumpets sound the voice of resolute affirmation, while the basses solidly support them all: so many voices, yet with one harmonious theme, it is the picture of a community of inspired souls with a common purpose. Therein the finite escapes from its bondage and restriction, and goes out into the Infinite. Hear the words of the Christ, having identical import: "He that loseth his life shall find it. Let a man deny himself, and he shall have a part in My eternal kingdom. Let the finite humble itself, and it shall be exalted to share in the Infinite." A definition has been given of music, at once most philosophical and most poetical—a single line by Sidney Lanier:—

"Music is love in search of a word."

Yea, this is its one abiding theme; not the mere feeling of affection and selfish preference, not of mawkish sensibility, the expression of which is music's bane and curse and disgrace, but love that comes from a humble consciousness of the worth of personal being, and that in the spirit of consecration and of self-bestowment devotes itself to that fulness of being of which its character enables it to supply a part. "Music is love in search of a word." True life is love striving for perfect utterance in word and deed. (C. F. Carter.) **All my springs are in Thee.—Christ Jesus the fountain of grace:—**I. IN JESUS CHRIST ARE THE SPRINGS OF PARDONING MERCY. This is the root of every other mercy. II. A Christian acknowledges **ALL HIS SPRINGS OF SANCTIFYING GRACE TO BE IN JESUS CHRIST.** As the streams of a fountain are directed into various channels to water every part of the garden in which it springs, so doth the grace of God, in Jesus Christ, gush forth from its unfathomable depth of mercy, into every sentiment of the heart and mind of a sincere believer. It rectifies the erring judgment—it corrects the perverted will—it sanctifies the affections, weaning them from the vanities of earth and the defilement of sin, and turning them to dwell with complacency and with delight upon the supreme realities of eternal things. It quickens every languishing grace, and unites all the parts of Christian character in one supreme desire to glorify God. III. **THE SPRINGS OF THAT PEACE AND JOY WITH WHICH A CHRISTIAN IS FILLED IN BELIEVING, ARE ALSO FOUND IN THE SON OF GOD, AS HE IS PRESENT WITH HIS CHURCH.** O if the sight of Joseph at Pharaoh's right hand, in favour and honour with the King of Egypt, could send the patriarchs home to Canaan with such joyful news to their aged father, what a message of delight must faith carry to the soul when it comes after a visitation of mercy in those services in which it hath contemplated the glory of Christ, and its own interest in that glory! With joy, even with joy unspeakable and full of glory, may such a soul draw water out of the wells of salvation. IV. **THE SPRINGS OF HOPE THAT CHEER AND BLESS THE PILGRIMAGE OF A CHRISTIAN, ARE DERIVED FROM THE GREAT HEAD OF THE CHURCH.** To Him are given exceeding great and precious promises; and a view of the unchangeable fidelity of his Father, in the covenant of love by Jesus Christ, fills him with a hope that maketh not ashamed. V. **THE SPRINGS OF ETERNAL GLORY PROCEED FROM THE SON OF GOD.** The righteousness, the holiness, which constitutes the character of true Christians, and the blessedness with which it will be recompensed, are all given by Christ to the Church. They who possess them are the seed which should prolong their days, or be happy for ever. In them He sees of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied. Here the gracious purpose of Jehovah prospers in His hands, perfectly and for ever. (R. P. Buddicom, M.A.) **A song of triumph:—**I. **THE CHRISTIAN REQUIRES DIVERS KINDS OF BLESSINGS, AND THESE ARE ALL FURNISHED FOR HIM.** Not one rill of supply merely, but many springs. 1. We will speak first of that spring which may be called sanctification, which washes us from daily accumulating evil, and checks our own depravity—which makes us more holy, and more fit to become partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. 2. Sustaining grace. 3. Wisdom to direct. 4. Strength and assistance in every time of need. 5. Joy and comfort. II. **WHERE ARE THESE SPRINGS TO BE FOUND?** In Jesus our Lord and our God. It is of the Father's grace that the Spirit gives us from Jesus' fulness, so that we can never faint or fail. The wisdom of this arrangement will be evident if we consider—1. Our own folly. 2. Our weakness. 3. Our great ingratitude and forgetfulness of God. 4. Our tendency to pride. 5. We admire this plan because it exalts

God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It makes us to come often into their presence to acknowledge our need and to extol God as alone able to supply it. (*J. A. Spurgeon.*)

## PSALM LXXXVIII

**VERS. 1-18. O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before Thee.**—*A portrait of a suffering man:*—I. **DEPICTING HIS WRETCHED STATE.** He speaks of himself as "full of troubles," satiated with sufferings. 1. He represents himself as tottering on the grave and without power (vers. 2-5). 2. Crushed by agonies and conscious of the Divine displeasure (vers. 6, 7). 3. Bereft of friends, and the subject of social contempt (ver. 8). 4. Deprived of liberty and exhausted with grief. "I am shut up," etc. (ver. 8). II. **SUPPLICATING HIS AFFLICTING GOD.** This he did—1. With unremitting earnestness (ver. 1). To whom can human sufferers look for help, but to the God of "salvation"? And to look to Him with earnest constancy is at once our duty and our interest. 2. With profound inquiries (vers. 10-12). The living have a profound interest in the dead. 3. With pious determination (ver. 13). 4. With painful apprehension (vers. 14-18). (*Homilist.*) *Heman's sorrowful psalm:*—From this psalm—I. **LEARN HOW TO PRAY.** 1. Tell the Lord your case. 2. Pray naturally. 3. Pray with this belief fixed in your mind, that your help must come from God, and pray expecting salvation from the Lord. 4. Pray often. 5. With weeping and mourning. 6. Pleadingly. II. **RESOLVE TO PRAY IN YOUR VERY WORST CASE.** When you are full of troubles, go to God with them, that is the very time when you most need to pray. "But," say you, "Mr. Spurgeon, you do not know all that I have to think of." No, but I do know that, the more you have to think of, the more reason you have to go to God in prayer about it. The more loads you have to drag, the more horses you need; and the more work there is to be done, the more reason is there for crying to God to help you to do it. Do not, I pray you, stay away from the outward means of grace when you are in trouble; but especially do not stay away from God Himself when you are tried and perplexed. When you are as full of trouble as ever you can be, then is the time to pray most. "But I have nobody to speak to," says another. Never mind if you have not; that is all the more reason why you should pray to God, and plead with God, who will not leave you. "But I am distracted," says another. Yes, and you will be distracted, unless you will go to God as you are, and implore Him to look at your distractions, and to lay His gentle hand upon you, and to restore you to yourself, and then to restore you to Himself. III. **REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD KEEP ON PRAYING.** 1. You cannot lose anything by prayer. 2. It is not so great a thing, after all, to have to continue to ask. As a sinner I kept God waiting for me long enough, aye, far too long. 3. Cease not to pray, for He to whom thou prayest is a gracious God. Take good heart; thou wilt not plead in vain, for He loves to hear thy prayers. He must, He will, answer thee, for He is a God of grace. 4. He has heard others. 5. He has promised to hear thee. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *No trouble too great for God to lift:*—The tide was out. A great ocean steamer lay at the wharf, loaded to the line; by its side was a little boat that danced on top of the waves. The big iron ship grew worried, and said to the dancing, happy boat: "I fear, when the tide comes in, I'm so heavy it can't lift me, and I'll go to the bottom." "Never fear," said the smaller one, "it can lift thee as well as me." "Oh but you are so light, while I'm so heavy. It's easy enough to lift you, but me—oh, dear!" "Worry not, worry not, old ironsides. It's lifted the likes o' you many a time, and will soon lift thee as well as me." And the tide came in; up and up they both rose on the bosom of the sea; one lifted as high and as easy as the other. Great heart, loaded to the line with thine own sorrows and others' burdens, filled with fears and worried with doubt, thou wilt not go down. (*The Advertiser.*)

**Vor. 3. For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.**—*Heman: a child of light walking in darkness* (with 1 Chron. xxv. 5):—A

seer is just a man who sees. Other men also have eyes indeed, but, then, they do not see with their eyes as a seer sees. Now, Heman was a seer. Heman saw constantly a sight that to most men even in Israel was absolutely invisible. Heman saw, and saw nothing else, but his own soul. 1. "My soul is full of troubles," says this great seer, speaking about himself. What led Heman to speak and to publish abroad this most melancholy of all the psalms we are not told. It was not Heman's actual sin, like David's. Neither was this terrible trouble, like David's, among his large family of sons and daughters. Heman had brought up his sons and daughters more successfully than David had done. For all Heman's children assisted their father in sacred song in the house of the Lord. At the same time Heman cannot take a happy father's full joy out of his talented and dutiful children because of the overwhelming trouble of his own soul. It is a terrible baptism into the matters of God to have a soul from his youth up so full of inconsolable troubles as that. 2. "My soul is full of troubles," says Heman, "till I am driven distracted." Every day we hear of men and women being driven distracted through love, and through fear, and through poverty, and through pain, and sometimes through over-joy, and sometimes, it is said, through religion. It was thought by some that the Apostle Paul was quite distracted in his day through his too much thought and occupation about Divine things. But be not too much cast down. Comfort My people. Say to them, and assure them, that this is the beginning in them of the wisdom, and the truth, and the love, and the salvation of their God and Saviour Jesus Christ. 3. Now, with all that, this is not to be wondered at that Heman says next (ver. 18). Anything else but this is not to be expected from Heman. Heman makes it an additional complaint, but it is a simple and a necessary consequence of his troubled and distracted soul. Friends and lovers, the oldest, and the warmest, and the best—they all have their several limits. Most men are made with little heart themselves, and they are not at home where there is much heart, and much exercise of heart. They flee in a fright from the heights and the depths of the high and deep heart. It needs a friend that sticketh closer than a brother to keep true to a man who has much heart, and who sees and feels with all his heart. Heman, besides being the King's seer, was also an eminent type of Christ, both in the distracting troubles of his soul, and in the fewness and in the infidelity of his friends. 4. Now, all that, bad as it is, would have been easily borne had it been a sudden stroke and then for ever over. Had it been a great temptation, a great fall, a great repentance, a great forgiveness, and then the light of God's countenance brighter than ever all Heman's after days. But Heman's yoke from his youth up has been of that terrible kind that it has eaten into his soul deeper and deeper with every advancing year. Had Heman lived after Paul's day he would have described himself in Paul's way. He would have said that the two-edged sword had become every year more and more spiritual, till it entered more and more deep every year into his soul. 5. There are these four uses out of all that. (1) The first is to justify such a proceeding as to take a text like this for a Communion evening. What could be more comely in a worthy communicant, who has been stayed with flagons and comforted with apples all day than to say to the outcasts of Israel ere this day closes (Isa. xliii. 1, 25). (2) And then for the use of all Heman-like, all distracted communicants—do not despair. Do not give way to distraction. (3) Are you quite sure that this deep darkness of yours is quite unaccountable to you short of God's sovereignty—short of His deep, hidden, Divine will? I doubt it, and I would have you doubt it. I would have you make sure that there is no other possible explanation of this darkness of His face. All the chances are that it is not God's ways that are so distractingly dark, but your own. (4) There is a singular use in Heman for ministers. When God is to make a very sinful man into a very able, and skilful, and experimental minister, He sends that man to the same school to which He sent Heman. Now, who can tell what God has laid up for you to do for Him and for men's souls when you are out of your probationership of trouble and distraction, and are promoted to be a comforter of God's troubled and distracted saints? He may have a second David, and far more, to comfort and to sanctify in the generation to come; and you may be ordained to be the King's seer in the matters of God. Who can tell? Only, be you ready, for the stone that is fit for the wall is not left to lie in the ditch. (*A. Whyte, D.D.*) *Heman's elegy*:—Two Hemans attained eminence in Israel. One was a singer, the other was a sage (1 Chron. xv. 16–22; xxv. 5; 1 Kings iv. 31). The two facts which filled Heman's soul with trouble were by no means unusual facts.

They were—1. The growing infirmities, the frailties and sicknesses, of age (ver 7); and—2. The loss of friends, or the supposed alienation of friends, which often accompanies age, especially when it is sick and weary of the world (vers. 8-18). These are common facts, but they are none the more welcome for being common when they come home to us personally. Our sage broods over them, resents them, as we all do at times, and laments his feebleness and isolation. Nay, as he traces all the facts and events of human life to the hand of God, he charges God with all the responsibility, all the pains and bitterness of them, and concludes that even this great Friend has forgotten him; or has turned against him. With all his wisdom he has been, as he confesses (ver. 5). Of a sceptical and misgiving temperament from his youth up. Two ways in which we may view the contents of the psalm—either making the best of them, or making the worst of them, in so far at least as they bear on the character and aim of the author of the psalm. We are not bound to adopt Heman's views, or even to sympathize with them. Much in the Bible was written for our warning and admonition. If we bring a generous spirit to the interpretation of this song, or elegy, we may recall the familiar maxim: "In much wisdom is much sorrow." A thoughtful mind is a pensive mind. The more a man sees of human life, the more he feels how much there is in it which is wrong, foolish, base, disappointing, if not hopelessly corrupt and bad. So we shall begin to make excuse for Heman. Let us remember also that in much sorrow there is much discipline, and discipline by which a wise man should profit. Do you, do all men, resent the wrongs of time? Remember that resentment, then, as well as the wrongs which provoke it; and consider what a happy omen lies in the fact that men do hate and resent that which is wrong, and both love and demand that which is just and right. Those who decry "mere human wisdom" are very likely to conclude that Heman the sage was punished for his largeness and freedom of thought, that he was abandoned to the guidance of his own wisdom in order that he might learn how little it could do for him in the greatest emergencies of life, how little, therefore, it was worth. I see no reason to judge him thus harshly. I find much in this psalm to lead us to a more kindly judgment. But, doubtless, there are many among us to whom such a description would apply. (*Samuel Cox, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. **Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave.**—A true and a false idea of the grave:—I. A TRUE idea of the grave: "Free"—1. From all physical sufferings. 2. From all secular anxieties. 3. From all social tumults. 4. From all human tyrannies. II. A FALSE idea of the grave. That the dead are—1. Forgotten by God. 2. Separated from God. They are not "cut off" from Him in any sense. (*Homilist.*) "Free among the dead":—This remarkable expression is to be interpreted in the light of Job iii. 19, which counts it as one blessing of the grave, that "there the servant is free from his master." But the psalmist thinks that that "freedom" is loathsome, not desirable, for it means removal from the stir of a life, the heaviest duties and cares of which are better than the torpid immunity from these, which makes the state of the dead a dreary monotony. In some strange fashion they are and yet are not. Their death has a simulacrum of life. Their shadowy life is death. The psalmist speaks in riddles; and the contradictions in his speech reflect his dim knowledge of that place of darkness. He looks into its gloomy depths, and he sees little but gloom. It needed the resurrection of Jesus to flood these depths with light, and to show that the life beyond may be fuller of bright activity than life here—a state in which vital strength is increased beyond all earthly experience, and wherein God's all-quickenings hand grasps more closely, and communicates richer gifts than are attainable in that death which sense calls life. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. **Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and Thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves.**—For the troubled:—As men, the people of God share the common lot of men, and what is that but trouble? Yea, there are some sorrows which are peculiar to Christians, some extra griefs of which they partake because they are believers, though these are something more than balanced by those peculiar and bitter troubles which belong to the ungodly, and are engendered by their transgressions, from which the Christian is delivered. I. EXPOUND THE TEXT. 1. Tried saints are very prone to overrate their afflictions. 2. Saints do well to trace all their trials to their God. 3. Afflicted children of God do well to have a keen eye to the wrath that mingles with their troubles. God will visit His children's



transgressions. He will frequently let common sinners go on throughout life unrebuked; but not so His children. If you were going home to-day, and saw a number of boys throwing stones and breaking windows, you might not interfere with them, but if you saw your own lad among them, I will be bound you would fetch him out, and make him repent of it. Perhaps the reason of your trouble may not be a sin committed, but a duty neglected. Search and look, and see wherein you have been guilty of omission. When you have so done let me give one word of caution. Do not expect when in the trouble to perceive any immediate benefit resulting from it. Remember that word, "Nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness." The gardener takes his knife and prunes the fruit trees to make them bring forth more fruit; his little child comes trudging at his heels and cries, "Father, I do not see that the fruit comes on the trees after you have cut them." No, dear child, it is not likely you would, but come round in a few months when the season of fruit has come, and then shall you see the golden apples which thank the knife. Graces which are meant to endure require time for their production, and are not thrust forth and ripened in a night. Were they so soon ripe they might be as speedily rotten. II. **THE BENEFITS OF TROUBLE.** 1. Severe trouble in a true believer has the effect of loosening the roots of his soul earthward and tightening the anchor-hold of his heart heavenward. How can he love the world which has become so dear to him? Why should he seek after grapes so bitter to his taste? 2. Affliction frequently opens truths to us, and opens us to the truth. Blessed is that man who receives the truth of God into his inmost self; he shall never lose it, but it shall be the life of his spirit. 3. Affliction, when sanctified by the Holy Spirit, brings much glory to God out of Christians, through their experience of the Lord's faithfulness to them. 4. Affliction gives us through grace the inestimable privilege of conformity to the Lord Jesus. We pray to be like Christ, but how can we be if we are not men of sorrows at all, and never become the acquaintance of grief? 5. Our sufferings are of great service to us when God blesses them, for they help us to be useful to others. Luther was right, when he said affliction was the best book in the minister's library. How can the man of God sympathize with the afflicted ones, if he knows nothing at all about their troubles? (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 8. **I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.**—*The imprisoning power of suffering.*—I. **SUFFERING ALWAYS SHUTS US UP TO OURSELVES.** It does this in two ways, it destroys both the disposition and the capacity to go out into society. Suffering isolates, it throws us back upon ourselves, and makes us feel our absolute loneliness. This is often—1. Spiritually necessary. 2. Spiritually beneficial. II. **SUFFERING SOMETIMES SHUTS US UP TO GOD.** When "shut up" to ourselves, we are often urged into the conscious presence of God. God is better seen and heard in solitude than in society. I am not alone, "the Father is with me." "Enter into your closet, and shut your door," etc. III. **SUFFERING MUST SHUT US UP TO THE GRAVE.** Elsewhere the writer says, "My life draweth nigh unto the grave." (Homilist.)

Ver. 9. **Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction.**—*The godly man in trouble.*—1. Godliness doth not make men senseless of grief, nor doth it hinder tears or mourning, or any other effects of sorrow to be seen in their body. 2. Sorrow should neither hinder the godly to seek God, nor move them to seek their consolation elsewhere. 3. It is possible that a godly man may be instant daily with God, praying with tears for comfort, and yet not obtain for a long time, as this example doth teach. 4. As in serious prayer, specially in secret, the affections of the heart do utter themselves in the answerable gestures of the body, as well as in the voice and words of the mouth; so those gestures have their own speech unto God, no less than the words of the mouth have; as here, "I have stretched out my hands unto Thee," is brought forth to express his submissive rendering up of himself unto God, and his dependence upon Him. (D. Dickson.) **I have called daily upon Thee.**—*The necessity for daily prayer* appears when we consider the consequences of neglecting it. Experience proves that a regular habit, at some fixed hour or hours, becomes a safeguard against forgetfulness, as well as an invaluable help to the constant "practice of the presence of God," whereas those who say that they can pray at any time, end in praying very seldom, or never. And Mrs. Besant has testified that "God fades out of the life of the man who forgets to pray." On the other hand, you may lose hold of many a Christian

doctrine, but you have not lost your faith so long as the angels can say of you, "Behold, he still prayeth." Distress teaches us to pray, and prayer dispels distress. One wodge displaces the other.

Vers. 10-12. *Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise Thee?*—*The great problem*.—I. Here is a problem common to HUMANITY. Lived there ever a man who has not asked this question in some form or other? II. Here is a problem that UNAIDED REASON CANNOT ANSWER. 1. Ancient philosophy tried and failed. Witness Socrates. 2. Modern philosophy has nothing but speculations. III. Here is a problem on which THE GOSPEL THROWS LIGHT. What saith the Gospel? (1 Cor. xv. 51). (*Homilist*.) *Wonders shown to the dead*.—In these verses we find mention made of four things on the part of God: "wonders," "lovingkindness," "faithfulness," and "righteousness"—four attributes of the blessed Jehovah, which the eyes of Heman had been opened to see, and which the heart of Heman had been wrought upon to feel. But he comes, by Divine teaching, into a spot where these attributes seem to be completely lost to him; and yet (so mysterious are the ways of God!) the very place where those attributes were to be more powerfully displayed, and made more deeply and experimentally known to his soul. 1. "Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead?" He is speaking here of his own experience; he is that "dead" person, to whom those "wonders" are to be shown. And being in that state of experience, he considered that every act of mercy shown to him where he then was must be a "wonder." All God's people are brought by the Spirit's operations upon their souls, sooner or later, to be in that spot where Heman was. Paul was there, when he said (Rom. vii. 9). Then, surely, he was "dead"; that is, he had been killed in his feelings by the spirituality of God's law made known in his conscience—killed, as to all hopes of creature-righteousness, and killed as to any way of salvation which the creature could devise. But the word "dead" carries with it a still further meaning than this. It expresses a feeling of utter helplessness; not merely a feeling of guilt and condemnation, so as to be slain to all hopes of salvation in self, but also to feel perfectly helpless to deliver himself from the lowest hell. But if we look at the expression as it simply stands, it seems to be uttered by one who is passing under the sentence of death before the wonder is displayed. It does not run in the past tense, "Hast Thou shown wonders to the dead?" It is not couched in the present tense, "Art Thou showing wonders to the dead?" The language is not the language of praise for the past; nor of admiration for the present; but that of anxious inquiry for the future: "Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead?" Is it possible? Am I not too great a sinner? Is not my case too desperate? 2. "Shall Thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave?" We have come a step lower now. We had been communing with "the dead"; but now we must go a step lower. We must go to the sepulchre; we must accompany the corpse to the grave. Now, what is "the grave" but the place where corruption riots, where putrefaction reigns? Here, then, is a striking figure of what a living soul feels under the manifestations of the deep corruptions of his heart. All his good words, once so esteemed, and all his good works, once so prized, and all his prayers; and all his faith, and hope, and love, and all the imaginations of his heart, not merely paralyzed and dead, not merely reduced to a state of utter helplessness, but also in soul feeling turned into rottenness and corruption. Now, were you ever there? Did your prayers ever stink in your nostrils? And are all your good words, and all your good works, and all your good thoughts, once so esteemed, now nothing in your sight but filthy, polluted and unclean? 3. "Or Thy faithfulness in destruction?" What is this "faithfulness" of which Heman speaks? It is, I believe, in two different branches; faithfulness to the promises that God has made in His word of truth—and faithfulness to His own witness and His own work upon the souls of His children. The Lord has destroyed your false religion, your natural hopes, your imaginary piety, your mock holiness, and those things in you which were not of Himself, but which were of the earth earthly, and were drawing you aside from Him; and has made you poor, naked, empty before His eyes. But it is in these very acts of destruction that He has shown His faithfulness—His faithfulness to His covenant. His faithfulness to His written word, His faithfulness to those promises which He has dropped with power into your heart. 4. "Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark? and Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" Here is another attribute of God about which Heman was exercised. His "righteousness." God's righteousness, I believe, here

and elsewhere does not mean only Christ's righteousness, but also the righteous acts of God in dealing with the soul in a way consistent with His own equitable character. This land of forgetfulness seems to imply two things—our forgetfulness of God, and God's apparent forgetfulness of us. (1) We often get into this sleepy land of forgetfulness toward God; we forget His universal presence, forget His heart-searching eyes, forget His former benefits, forget His past testimonies, forget the reverence which belongs to His holy name; which, above all things, we have desired most earnestly to remember. It is, then, in this land of forgetfulness, in this dull and heavy country, when, like the disciples in the garden, we sleep instead of watching, that God is still pleased to show forth His righteousness. God's righteousness runs parallel with Christ's atonement, for therein is His intrinsic righteousness manifested, that is, His strict compliance with equity and justice, because equity and justice have been strictly fulfilled by the propitiation of the Son of God. (2) But the land of forgetfulness often means forgetfulness on God's part—God seems to forget His people (Isa. xlix. 13). "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" Does it not seem, at times, as though the Lord had utterly forgotten us, would take no more notice of us, slights us, rejects us, and would not cast one look, or bestow one word upon us? (*J. C. Philpot.*) *Marvels amidst the tombs*:—What a sad day in the history of a great country was that when over the gateway of the chief cemetery of Paris was inscribed the sentence, "Death is an eternal sleep"! This hopeless statement was the product of a highly civilized age, that chose to live without God; but the primitive races of men had not sunk so low in religious matters. When the chieftain of prehistoric days was placed in his tomb, before they raised his tumulus they placed with his bones his weapons of stone, or bronze, that he might in "the spirit world" pursue his avocations which he had followed on earth. But when men became philosophers, and studied the grounds of evidence, a cold withering frost of doubt seemed to freeze up their cheering convictions. Even the great Socrates, with his last breath, speaks with a kind of faltering utterance to his judges, "And now we part, and whether it will be best for you, or for me, is known to God only." Then came the dawn of a nobler day. Christ Jesus walked on earth. In the death-chamber of the little Jewish maiden He recalled the vanished spirit. Thus the Christian answers to the despairing, wailing cry of Scepticism—"Does God show signs amongst the dead?" by pointing to the empty sepulchre; to the white-robed angels, that announce—"He is not dead, He is risen"; to the testimony of the pious women, who found the spices might be reserved for incense to burn in the worship of their Ascended Lord; and to the multitude of sober and sufficient witnesses, who both on the first Easter Day, and afterwards in Galilee, by many infallible proofs, perceived that He was alive, and alive for evermore! And now He holds the keys of death and of Hades—that is, the unseen world—and adoring Christendom bows before His name, who has "shown wonders amongst the dead." In this faith our dear ones close their eyes, in His peace they rest; "in sure and certain hope" of His resurrection-power we lay their earthly tabernacles beneath the green sod. (*J. W. Hardman, LL.D.*) **The land of forgetfulness.**—*The land of forgetfulness*:—There is a fabled river in ancient mythology called Lethe,—simply meaning forgetfulness. The idea of the fabulist was that whoever drank water out of that river instantly forgot everything that had happened; all the past was a forgotten dream. Nay, more than this, consciousness itself was not left after the Lethal water was taken. The man who drank one draught of the water of Lethe, oblivion, was not aware of his own existence; that draught had utterly extinguished him. Men have often longed for a draught of that water; men have sighed for the land of forgetfulness; souls, harps on which music was meant to be played, have desired with unspeakable earnestness to be allowed to die, to forget, to be forgotten. I. In some aspects the land of forgetfulness is a **DESIRABLE LAND**. There are moments when we want to enter it and be enfranchised in it for ever. There are things that other people have done to us that we long to forget; if we could wholly forget them life would be sweeter, friendship would be dearer, the outlook would be altogether more inviting. What is it that makes the land of forgetfulness a land in poetry, a land inaccessible? Is there no potion that the soul may take? there are potions that the body may drink, but we do not want to drink our bodies into some lower level and some baser consciousness; we are inquiring now about soul-potions, drinks that affect the mind, draughts that lull the soul. II. There are other aspects in which the land of forgetfulness is an **ATTAINABLE LAND**. We can

so live as to be forgotten. Men can live backwards. Men can be dead whilst they are alive, and forgotten while they are present to the very eyes. What is there to remember about them? Beginning as ciphers they have continued as ciphers; they have never done anything for the world, or for any individual in the world. Where are the parts of character on which we can lay hold and say, By these we shall remember you evermore? III. But the land of forgetfulness is in fact AN IMPOSSIBLE LAND. Effects follow causes: deeds grow consequences. The Lord forgets nothing: but after a process known to us by the sweet name "forgiveness" there comes the state in the Divine mind which is known by the human word "forgotten." Sometimes we say we can forgive but never forget. Then we cannot forgive; and if we cannot forgive we cannot pray; if we cannot forgive we cannot believe. Forgiveness is the true orthodoxy. Largeness, sensitiveness, responsiveness of heart, slavery to love, that is orthodoxy. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Things that should be forgotten*.—Let us forget all unkindness, incivility, discourtesy. Let us forget our good deeds. That will be one great step towards the land of heaven. There are some who remember every good deed they ever did, and therefore they never did anything worth doing. No man has ever done anything for God if he has kept account of it. It may be difficult to teach this lesson, and to drive it home; but so long as a man can tell you when he gave pounds and shillings, and when he rendered service, and to what inconvenience he put himself, all that he did is blotted out. The value of our greatest deeds is in their unconsciousness. The rose does not say, I emitted so much fragrance yesterday and so much the day before. The rose knows nothing about it; it lives to make the air around it fragrant. Thus ought souls to live, not knowing how long they have preached, how much they have done, what the extent of their good deeds has been. They know nothing about it; they are absorbed in love; they are borne away by the Divine inspiration, and whilst anything remains they suppose that nothing has been given. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 13. In the morning shall my prayer prevent Thee.**—*Morning devotion*.—As the Oriental traveller sets out for the sultry journey over burning sands by loading up his camel under the palm-trees' shade, and fills his water flagons from the crystal fountain which sparkles at its roots, so does Christ's pilgrim draw his morning supplies from the exhaustless spring. Morning is the golden hour for prayer and praise. The mind is fresh; the mercies of the night and the new resurrection of the dawn both prompt a devout soul to thankfulness. The buoyant heart takes its earliest flight, like the lark, towards the gates of heaven. One of the finest touches in Bunyan's immortal allegory is his description of Christian in the chamber of Peace, "who awoke and sang while his window looked out to the sun rising." "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee." (*T. L. Cuyler, D.D.*)

**Ver. 14. Why hidest Thou Thy face from me?**—*Divine hiding*.—God sometimes hides Himself in nature that He may reveal Himself in providence; He sometimes hides Himself in providence that He may reveal Himself in grace; and He sometimes hides Himself in grace that He may reveal Himself in glory.

**Ver. 15. I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer Thy terrors, I am distracted.**—*Religious terrors*.—As the comforts which true religion affords are the only sure support against the evils and calamities to which every condition of life is more or less exposed, so the terrors of religion, being very grievous in themselves, exclusive of these comforts, add weight to all our miseries, and are a burden too heavy for the spirit of a man to sustain. These terrors arise from—I. UNCERTAINTY IN RELIGION. The religious man fears God because he knows Him; and therefore he fears Him, as a wise, just, good, and merciful Father and Judge ought to be feared: his fear is full of love and reverence, and has nothing dreadful in it, unless guilt and a wounded conscience arm it with unnatural terrors; but the superstitious man fears God, just as children and weak men fear spirits and apparitions; he trembles at the thought of Him, he flies from he knows not what, seeks refuge he knows not where; and this hurry and confusion of mind he calls religion; but the psalmist has given it a better name, it is distraction. II. FALSE NOTIONS OF GOD, AND OF THE HONOUR AND WORSHIP DUE TO HIM. We ought never to expect more from God than He has expressly promised, or than He may grant consistently with the measures by which His providence rules and governs the world. If we exceed these bounds, religion, instead of being

our comfort, will soon become our torment; but we, and not religion, will be to blame. If we consider that this world is a state of trial, and that afflictions are trials, we can never lay it down to ourselves, that God will relieve us at our request from all afflictions; for this would be owning ourselves in a state of trial, and, at the same time, expecting that no trial should come near us: It is supposing that God has shown us a way to defeat the great end of His providence in sending us into this world; He sent us here to be proved, and yet we think to prevail on Him not to prove us. III. A CONSCIENCE WOUNDED UNDER THE SENSE OF GUILT. Natural religion has no cure for this; because the title by obedience being forfeited, there are no certain principles of reason from which we can conclude how far, and to what instances, the mercy of God will extend; because we can have no assurance of ourselves that our sorrow is such, and our resolutions of amendment such as may deserve mercy; and lastly, because this whole matter is founded upon reasons and speculations too exact, and too refined, to be of common use to mankind. This last reason alone will sufficiently justify the wisdom and goodness of God, in proposing to the world a safe and general method for the salvation of sinners; for what if you have penetration enough to see a way for sinners to escape under natural religion; must your great parts be a measure for God's dealing with the world? Shall thousands and thousands live and die without comfort because they cannot reason as you do? This consideration should make those who have the highest opinion of themselves, and therefore of natural religion, adore the goodness of God in condescending to the infirmities of men, and showing them the way to mercy, which they were unable to find out. This He has done by the revelation of the Gospel of Christ, which is the sinner's great charter of pardon, a certain remedy against all the terrors and fears of guilt. IV. ACCIDENTAL DISORDERS OF MIND OR BODY. Whatever the union of soul and body is, so united they are, that the disorders of one often derive themselves to the other. A melancholy mind will waste the strength and bring paleness and leanness upon the body; disorders in the body do often affect the mind; a stroke of the palsy will rob a man of the use of his understanding, and leave him disabled in mind as well as body. For this reason it is that I ascribe some religious fears to the disorders of the body, though they properly belong to the mind. These terrors cannot be imputed as a blemish to religion; not by him, at least, who acknowledges the providence of God, and whose principle of religion is reason; for all madness is destructive of reason, as much as these terrors are of religion: they are both destructive: they are evils to which we must submit; and if we cannot account for the reason of them, it becomes us to be dumb, and not open our mouths in His presence whose ways are past finding out. (Bp. Sherlock.)

Ver. 18. *Lover and friend hast Thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.—On sorrow for the death of friends:—*I. THE SORROW WHICH WE NATURALLY FEEL WHEN WE ARE BEREAVED OF DEAR AND WORTHY FRIENDS, AND THE BOUNDS WITHIN WHICH IT OUGHT TO BE RESTRAINED. If Christianity pronounces it the height of profligacy to be without natural affections, the tears which flow from such affections, Christianity cannot forbid. What nature hath implanted the religion of Jesus means not to extirpate, but to moderate and direct. Shall it not calm the soul tossed with tempests, and if not dry up, at least diminish, the flowing tears, that a voice from heaven, the voice of the spirit of truth, declares: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord"? They see God as He is. They are satisfied with His likeness. II. THE PRACTICAL LESSONS WHICH WE OUGHT TO RECEIVE FROM THE DEATH OF OUR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS. 1. It should impress on our minds a deep and lasting sense of our own mortality. 2. It should teach us the vanity and nothingness of this world. 3. It demonstrates the worth and excellency of religion. 4. It teaches us how important it is to discharge our duty to friends who yet survive. 5. It should kindle within us a longing desire for a blessed eternity. We naturally wish to be with those whom we love. When Jacob hears that his son Joseph is yet alive, and advanced to great honour in Egypt, he cannot rest till he goes down there to see him. And when our friends have left that land in which we are yet strangers and pilgrims, our affections should be more weaned from it, and our desires inflamed to get to that better land, whither they have gone before us. (John Erskine, D.D.) *The hand of God in removing our friends and acquaintances far from us:—*I. THE HEAVY AFFLICTION WITH WHICH THE PSALMIST WAS VISITED. In the removal of his friends and relatives he had lost—1. Their company. 2. Their counsel and advice. 3. The

sight of their good works and examples. 4. Their prayers. II. THE PSALMIST'S DEVOUT ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE HAND OF GOD IN THIS AFFLICTION. 1. He removeth our friends, who hath a right to do it. (1) They were our friends, but they are His creatures; and may He not do what He will with His own? (2) They were our friends; but do we not hope and believe that, by repentance, faith in Christ, and sanctifying grace, they were become His friends too? dear to Him by many indissoluble ties? Hath He not then a superior claim to them, and a greater interest in them? Is it not fit that He should be served first? His knowledge is perfect and unerring: His goodness boundless and never-failing. Application—1. The cause here described is a very pitiable one. Let us weep with them that weep, and pray for them. 2. Let us bless God for the friends we have had, and all the comfort we enjoyed in them. 3. Let us humbly submit to the will of God when He putteth our friends far from us. 4. Let us be careful and diligent to make a due improvement of such afflictions. (1) Let our departed friends still live in our memory, honour and affection. (2) Let us carefully recollect and consider what was excellent and praiseworthy in them, as every good man hath some peculiar, distinguishing excellencies, and let us imitate them. (3) Let us follow them in the path of Christian duty, obedience and zeal; endeavour to supply their lack of service, and be quickened to do so much the more good, because their time and opportunity are ended. (4) Let us particularly learn from their removal to be dead to this world. 5. Let us be thankful for our friends yet living, and faithfully perform our duty to them. 6. Let us make sure of a friend who will never leave us: even the almighty and everlasting God. (*Job Orton, D.D.*) *The loss of connections deplored and improved.*—I. THE CONNECTIONS WHICH GIVE A CHARM TO LIFE. 1. "Lover." As this is distinguished from friend and acquaintance, it stands for the tender relative. The husband, the wife, the father, the mother, the child, the brother, the sister, and other dear ties of flesh and blood. 2. "Friend." This is a sacred name, which many usurp, and few deserve. It cannot be applied to the confederate in sin; or to the mercenary, selfish wretch, that loves you because he wants to make use of you, as a builder values a ladder, or a passenger a boat. Friendship is founded in a community of heart. It supposes some strong congeniality, yet admits of great diversity. 3. "Acquaintances" are distinguished from friends. The former may be numerous; the latter must be limited. The one is for the parlour, the other is for the closet. We give the hand to the one, we reserve the bosom for the other. II. TWO WAYS BY WHICH WE MAY BE DEPRIVED OF OUR CONNECTIONS. 1. By desertion. The highest degree of this crime is the want of natural affection. Perfidy is a vile thing, but not a very rare one. How many kiss in order to betray; and gain your confidence, to sting when you are lulled to sleep. 2. By bereavement. This is principally, if not exclusively here intended. Several things add poignancy to the loss. (1) In some cases the bereaved are deprived of worldly support. (2) We are deprived of their company. (3) We can have no intercourse or correspondence with them. (4) They cannot promote our welfare where they now are. III. THE AGENCY OF GOD IN THEIR REMOVAL. He has done it—1. Who is almighty and irresistible (*Job ix. 12*). 2. Who had a right to do it. If they were your friends, they were His creatures and servants; and was He obliged to ask your permission to do what He would with His own? 3. Who was too wise to err, and too kind to injure in doing it. IV. APPLICATION. Improve such dispensations in a way of—1. Sympathy. 2. Gratitude. 3. Precaution. 4. Resignation. (*W. Jay.*) *A loss bewailed.*—It is an extreme distress that is portrayed in this psalm. I. THE THREEFOLD LOSS. 1. There are, or ought to be, three circles round every man like the belts or rings round a planet—love, friendship, and acquaintanceship. (1) Love is the nearest, while, at the same time, it lends its value to the other two. Friendship and acquaintanceship have no real pith, or substance, or value in them, except as they are permeated by the spirit of the nearest circle. It is love that receives and nurtures us; it is love that knits the closest and tenderest bonds; it is love that is the sunshine and the strength of life; it is love by which we do good, by which we get good. Men learn to love by loving intensely a few. The heart is not a vessel of quantity which has only a certain amount to give. The more it gives, the more it has to give. It is filled by the effort to empty itself. (2) Friendship comes next, and implies certain sympathies. Happy is the man who has right true-hearted friends to sustain him in good principles, to reflect and stimulate noble feelings, and to cheer him in sorrow. Many are the blessings of friendship, but the chief is a genial brother-

liness, a certain unexplained understanding, an undefined sympathy, an easy, unconstrained, general harmony. (3) Outside the circle of friendship is the larger but vague circle of acquaintance shading and thinning gradually off into the general world of humanity. Acquaintanceship broadens a man. It is some sort of bond between those who can have no close relation. It tends to cement and sweeten human society. 2. There is a period in life when ties are formed, but there comes a time when the breaking of ties is more frequent. That is a great part of the sadness of life, that, as one wears on in his journey, the friends of his early days drop off. Oh, strange life! It is a contradiction to our nature and to right, an enigma insoluble but for the light of another world, that we should be encouraged and impelled to throw our affections round men only to have the ties rudely snapt. Oh, strange; if there is nothing beyond this, that it should be our duty, our elevation, and our noblest impulse, to love strongly, to love as if we were never to part, all the while that parting lies but a little way before us.

II. REFLECTIONS. 1. Thinking of departed friends will help us to realize our own death. We need to realize death in order to be sober, in order to intensify all that is good, and to drive off vain thoughts. Yea, we need to realize death in order to conquer death, and live while we live. 2. Thinking of our departed will help to take away the bitterness of death. Death gets identified with the thought of father, or mother, or sister, or brother, or husband, or wife, or child, or friend, and we feel that we dare not, and cannot, shrink from going to them. 3. Thinking of the departed will enable us to realize immortality. Can you think of that friend, knowing all that was in him; and entertain the thought, even for a moment, that he has ceased to be? Is it not treachery and insult to his memory? 4. Thinking of the departed cannot but fill us with regret and penitence. To remember angry words or selfishness towards the departed is a bitter thing. It is good to be ashamed and blush before God for hardness, meanness, or selfishness. It is good to be brought to this lowly, contrite mood, though it be over the grave of the departed. That place of death may be the birthplace of eternal life.

(J. Leckie, D.D.) *Our threefold relationship to Christ*:—1. Acquaintance—knowing about Him only;—His birth, His life, His words familiar, but Himself unknown. Familiar with His circumstances, but ignorant of His true life—that heart of love. 2. Friend—how much nearer is this! Here is trust; here is fellowship; here is love. His claim is admitted and is responded to, and His company is welcomed with delight. 3. But there is another relationship, infinitely more tender and more complete, which we may venture to claim as ours—lover: to love Him with a love that possesses us, that masters us, that subdues and compels all that we are and all that we have for His service and pleasure: a love which finds its highest heaven in His joy, its deepest hell in His grief: a love which has and holds Him for its own, for ever and for ever. This He seeks as His solace; this He offers to us as our high privilege and joy. (M. G. Pearse.)

END OF VOL. III.