

THE
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE
VERY REV. H. D. M. SPENCE, D.D.,
DEAN OF GLOUCESTER;

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

WITH
INTRODUCTIONS

BY THE
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P S A L M S.

Exposition
BY REV. G. RAWLINSON, M.A.,
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Homiletics
BY REV. W. CLARKSON, B.A.

Homilies by Various Authors.
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VOL. III.

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THE BOOK OF PSALMS.

BOOK V.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM OVII.

A SONG of thanksgiving, first for deliverance from the Babylonish captivity (vers. 1—3), and then for other deliverances (vers. 4—32), passing into a general account of God's providential dealings with mankind, both in the way of chastisement and of loving-kindness, but especially the latter (vers. 33—42). The composition closes with a single gnomic reflection on the wisdom of pondering such matters as those brought forward by the writer.

Formally, the psalm falls into seven divisions: (1) a thanksgiving for the return from Babylon (vers. 1—3); (2) one for deliverance from the perils of travel (vers. 4—9); (3) one for deliverance from prison (vers. 10—16); (4) one for recovery from sickness (vers. 17—22); (5) one for escape from the perils of the sea (vers. 23—32); (6) a general account of God's dealings with men (vers. 33—42); and (7) a commendation of the entire subject to the consideration of God's people. Parts 2, 3, 4, and 5 are terminated by a refrain.

Ver. 1.—O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good (comp. Ps. cvi. 1; cxviii. 1; cxxxvi. 1). For his mercy endureth for ever (see the comment on Ps. cvi. 1).

Ver. 2.—Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. "The redeemed of the Lord" in this place are those whom the Lord has just delivered out of exile and captivity (comp. Isa. xlv. 22—24; li. 11; Jer. xxxi. 11; Zech. x. 8, etc.). The writer calls on them to give voice to the thanksgiving of

ver. 1. Whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; i.e. of Babylon.

Ver. 3.—And gathered them out of the lands (compare the prayer of Ps. cvi. 47; and for the expression, "the lands"—i.e. the foreign countries—see Ps. cvi. 27; Ezra ix. 1). From the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south. The present Hebrew text has יָם, "from the sea"—and so the LXX., ἀπὸ θαλάσσης—but it is thought that probably יָם is a corruption of יָבֵן (Cheyne), which would mean "from the south."

Vers. 4—9.—The form is historical, but the intention is to describe a recurrent event. Men from time to time wander—lose their way—either literally, or in the wilderness of life, grow faint and weary, and are ready to perish. But if they cry to God, God gives them aid, succours them, saves them. Then let them praise and thank him.

Ver. 4.—They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. It is, perhaps, best to divide this verse as was done by the LXX., who attached דרך, "way," to the latter clause. So Cheyne, who translates, "They wandered in the wilderness, yea, in the desert; they found no road to a city of habitation." So also Rosenmüller.

Ver. 5.—Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Either actual hunger and thirst, or dissatisfaction with life, may be intended.

Ver. 6.—Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble (comp. Ps. cvi. 44, and the comment *ad loc.*). And he delivered them

out of their distresses. "Distresses" may be a plural of amplification, or it may point to the triple suffering—hunger, thirst, faintness.

Ver. 7.—And he led them forth by the right way; or, "by a straight way"—a way in which there was no crookedness. That they might go to a city of habitation. The same phrase as in ver. 4. A city suitable for habitation is meant.

Ver. 8.—Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness! Here the refrain occurs for the first time. Note its repetition in vers. 15, 21, and 31. It is an earnest call on those who have experienced God's mercies to be thankful. And for his wonderful works to the children of men! or, "his wonderful *doings*."

Ver. 9.—For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness. The "satisfaction" intended seems to be spiritual rather than material (comp. Ps. xxxiv. 10; Luke i. 53). God alone can satisfy the cravings of man's spiritual nature.

Vers. 10—16.—There are others afflicted differently—struck down by some grievous calamity, imprisonment, earthly ruin, downfall of their hopes, a sense of their bondage to sin—who suffer perhaps even more than the dissatisfied wanderers. They too may cry to God in their trouble; and when they do, they experience his mercy. Let them join in the chorus of praise.

Ver. 10.—Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death (comp. Job xvi. 16; xxxvi. 8). The expressions used are purposely vague, being intended to cover various sorts of misery. Being bound in affliction and iron; i.e. "in an affliction which holds them like bands of iron" (comp. ver. 17).

Ver. 11.—Because they rebelled against the words of God. Such deep affliction as is here spoken of scarcely ever comes upon any but those who have offended God by resisting his will. And condemned the counsel of the most High (comp. Prov. i. 25). The "counsel of God" is the course of conduct which he has prescribed to man, whether through the reason and conscience that he has implanted in him, or through his revealed Word.

Ver. 12.—Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; rather, *with misery, or with sorrow*. They fell down; i.e. collapsed—sank to the earth. And there was none to help. They were like Job; no one gave them any help in their affliction.

Ver. 13.—Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses (comp. ver. 6, and see also vers. 19 and 28).

Ver. 14.—He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death. Wherein they sat (ver. 10). And brake their bands in sunder. Freed them from their fetters (ver. 10), whatever they were.

Ver. 15.—Oh that men, etc. A repetition of ver. 8.

Ver. 16.—For he hath broken the gates of brass. God completely liberates the unhappy ones who turn to him; removes every restraint that confines and galls them; breaks on their behalf, as it were, "gates of brass." And cut the bars of iron in sunder. Snaps fetters and prison bars.

Vers. 17—22.—A third class of persons under God's displeasure are punished by grievous sickness, and brought to the very verge of the grave. They, too, in many cases, turn to God, and, "crying to him," are delivered from their peril. It is for them, under such circumstances, to make a return by means of praise and thanksgiving.

Ver. 17.—Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Some read סוּחִים, "sick men," for סוּחִים, "fools," here. But the change is not necessary. Folly and sin are regarded as two aspects of the same moral condition by the sacred writers, and sickness is spoken of as an ordinary punishment for them (Job xxxiii. 17—22; 2 Kings v. 27; 2 Chron. xxi. 15; xxvi. 16—19; Acts xii. 23).

Ver. 18.—Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat (comp. Job xxxiii. 20; Ps. cii. 4). And they draw near unto the gates of death. See Ps. ix. 13; and compare Ἦκω νεκρῶν κενθμῶνα καὶ σκότου πύλας λιπῶν (Eurip., 'Hec.', 1).

Ver. 19.—Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses (see above, vers. 6 and 13).

Ver. 20.—He sent his word, and healed them; rather, *he sends his word, and heals them* (see the Revised Version). The "word" intended may be a message sent by a human messenger, like the "word" sent to Hezekiah in his sickness (2 Kings xx. 4; Isa. xxxviii. 4); or it may be a thought suggested to the mind either directly by God, or by an angel, like that spoken of in Job xxxiii. 23, 24; or, lastly, it may be the actual Word of God (John i. 1), the Son, sent by the Father. But this last sense can scarcely have been in the writer's mind. And delivered them from their destructions; or, "from their grave-pits" (Kay, Cheyne). The word used occurs only here and in Lam. iv. 20, where it is translated "pits."

Ver. 21.—Oh that men, etc.! A repetition of vers. 8 and 15.

Ver. 22.—And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving; compare the expression, “the calves of our lips” (Hos. xiv. 2), and see also Heb. xiii. 15. And declare his works with rejoicing; *i.e.* joyfully proclaim the great things that God has done for them.

Vers. 23—32.—Finally, there are cases among those whose business requires them to traverse the sea, where the danger is great, and death seems imminent. Let such persons cast themselves upon God, and “cry to him in their trouble,” and they too will be heard and delivered. Must it not be their duty also to give thanks?

Ver. 23.—They that go down to the sea in ships. That many of the Israelites engaged in maritime pursuits appears from 1 Kings ix. 26—28; x. 22; xxii. 48; 2 Chron. xx. 36; as also from Judg. v. 17; Ps. xlviii. 7; Prov. xxiii. 34; xxx. 19; and from many passages of the Apocrypha. Joppa was at all times an Israelite port, from which trade was carried on by the residents (2 Chron. ii. 16; Ezra iii. 7; Jonah i. 3). That do business in great waters; *i.e.* trade in fish. The “great waters” of the Mediterranean are spoken of in contrast with those of the small inland seas of Palestine, the sea of Galilee and Lake Merom.

Ver. 24.—These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. Storms, tempests, and sudden deliverances are the “wonders” especially meant (comp. Acts xvii. 14—44; 2 Cor. xi. 25).

Ver. 25.—For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind (comp. Ps. cxlvii. 15, 18; Jonah i. 4). The operations of nature are constantly spoken of in Scripture as God’s direct doing. Which lifteth up the waves thereof; or, “the waves that are his” (compare, in Ps. cxlvii. 17, 18, “his ice, his cold, his wind”).

Ver. 26.—They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths. Tossed on the foaming billows, now carried up until they seem almost to touch the sky (see Gen. xi. 4), anon sinking into the trough of the sea, and as it were swallowed up in its depths. Their soul is melted because of trouble; or, “their soul melteth away in the trouble” (Cheyne).

Ver. 27.—They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man. The oldest sailor “loses his sea-legs,” and staggers about the deck like a landsman, or like one drunk. And are at their wit’s end; literally, as in the margin, *and all their wisdom is swallowed*. But the English

idiom of the Authorized Version is a very happy one, and exactly expresses the writer’s meaning. All the seaman’s intelligence is at fault, and can suggest nothing.

Ver. 28.—Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. Practically identical with vers. 6, 13, and 19.

Ver. 29.—He maketh the storm a calm; *i.e.* he causes the wind to drop, and to be succeeded by a “great calm” (comp. Matt. viii. 26). Such sudden changes do sometimes occur, not only in inland seas, but on the Mediterranean (see Jonah i. 15). So that the waves thereof are still; literally, *the waves of them*; *i.e.* of the great waters (see ver. 23).

Ver. 30.—Then are they glad because they be quiet; or, “because they be at rest,” *i.e.* no longer tempest-tossed. So he bringeth them unto their desired haven; literally, *the haven of their desire*; *i.e.* the haven where they desire to be.

Ver. 31.—Oh that men, etc.! Repeated from vers. 8, 15, and 21.

Ver. 32.—Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people. The psalmist holds it to be not enough for men who have received deliverances to thank God in their hearts, or secretly in their chambers. He requires them to make public profession of their thankfulness “in the congregation of the people.” The Christian Church maintains the same attitude. And praise him in the assembly of the elders. The elders led the congregation and presided in it (Ezra iii. 9—11; vi. 16—22; Neh. viii. 4—9; ix. 4, 5; xii. 27—43, etc.).

Vers. 33—42.—Professor Cheyne finds in this passage—which he views as an “appendix” to the psalm—a falling off from the earlier portion of the psalm, and a set of “sentences strung together without much reflection.” But to others the transition from special deliverances to God’s general dealings with mankind seems an enlargement and an advance in the thought, although the language may be less graphic and more commonplace than in the former portion of the composition.

Ver. 33.—He turneth rivers into a wilderness. God can, and does, by the operation of his providence, turn lands naturally fertile—lands abounding with streams—into arid wastes, either by such a physical catastrophe as that which blasted the cities of the plain (Gen. xix. 24, 25), or by such moral changes as have turned Babylonia from a garden into a desert, a miserable howling wilderness (comp. Isa. xiii. 15—

22; l. 2; Jer. l. 18—15, 38—40; li. 13, 37—43, etc.). And the watersprings into dry ground. The phrase is varied, but the meaning is the same. God has full control over nature, and can either take back his blessings, or render them of no avail.

Ver. 34.—*A fruitful land into barrenness; literally, into saltness.* The judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah is probably in the writer's mind. For the wickedness of them that dwell therein. God does not capriciously withdraw his blessings from a land. If he turns a fruitful land into a barren one, we may be sure that the inhabitants have provoked him by their sins.

Ver. 35.—*He turneth the wilderness into a standing water; rather, a wilderness (comp. Isa. xxxv. 7; xli. 18). And dry ground into watersprings.* The entire verse is antithetical to ver. 33.

Ver. 36.—*And there he maketh the hungry to dwell.* God gives the land, which he has thus blessed, to some previously famishing people; as he did Canaan to Israel after they had had but scant fare in the wilderness. That they may prepare a city for habitation; literally, and they prepare. It is naturally their first thought to prepare themselves a settled dwelling-place (comp. Gen. iv. 17; xi. 4; xxv. 16, etc.).

Ver. 37.—*And sow the fields; literally, and sow fields—the first act of a settled population. And plant vineyards.* The second act in a wine-producing country. Bread and wine were recognized in the East as the prime necessities of life (see Gen. xiv. 18; Judg. ix. 13; xix. 19; 2 Sam. vi. 19; Neh. v. 15; Ps. civ. 15; Dan. i. 5, etc.). Which may yield fruits of increase; rather, and get them; literally, make them. The expression, "fruits of increase," points to the abundance of the harvest and vintage.

Ver. 38.—*He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly.* With increasing prosperity comes increase of population, naturally—i.e. by God's ordinary providence. This increase is, however, only a blessing within certain limits. And suffereth not their cattle to decrease. This modest under-statement suggests an enormous increase (comp. Job xlii. 12).

Ver. 39.—*Again.* There is no "again" in the original, but merely the usual *vav* conjunctive. Still, in the *thought*, there is no doubt an abrupt transition. The writer turns to the darker side of the picture. They are diminished and brought low. God shows his providence, not merely in blessing, but also in chastising. Even the very nation which has been the most highly favoured may, by misconduct, fall under

his displeasure and suffer at his hands. Their population is diminished; they are "bowed down" (Revised Version), or "brought low." Calamities of various kinds befall them. Sometimes their decline is brought about through oppression, which may be either the cruel rule of a native monarch, such as Saul, or the still heavier yoke of a foreign power, like Egypt or Babylon. Sometimes it comes from such an affliction as bad harvests, plagues of locusts, or pestilence. Sometimes it is brought about by sorrow—the death of a good ruler in the flower of his age, the extinction of a royal stock, the destruction of a nation's best and bravest on battle-fields, and the like. But in all calamities alike it is God's hand that deals the blow.

Ver. 40.—*He poureth contempt upon princes.* A direct quotation from Job xii. 21, but not therefore to be regarded as spurious, since the sacred writers often quote one another, and the psalmists especially are very much in the habit of citing, or referring to Job (see, in this very psalm, besides the present passage, vers. 10, 18 (*bis*), 20, 34, 41, and 42). And causeth them to wander in the wilderness; rather, a wilderness (comp. Job xii. 24). Where there is no way. "Wandering in a wilderness without a way denotes helpless embarrassment" (Hengstenberg).

Ver. 41.—*Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction.* Even in such dread calamities, when a whole nation is punished, God's providence protects the poor and needy—not of course in all, but still in very many cases. The mower's scythe passes over the humblest flowers. And maketh him families like a flock (comp. Job xxi. 11). Those whom God thus preserves he collects into "families," and looks after as carefully as a shepherd looks after his sheep.

Ver. 42.—*The righteous shall see it, and rejoice.* Experience will justify God's ways to man. "The righteous"—his people—will see that the general course of God's providence is such as described (vers. 33—41), and will "rejoice" that it is so. And all iniquity shall stop her mouth. The gainsayers, unable to impugn the righteousness of the Divine proceedings, shall have no resource but to sit still and hold their tongues.

Ver. 43.—*Whoso is wise, and will observe these things; rather, let him observe these things.* It is assumed that they are open to be observed by all; they are the patent facts of human life. Even they; rather, and they. Shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord; literally, loving-kindnesses; i.e. many acts of loving-kindness.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—32.—*Deliverance and indebtedness.* We can never measure what we owe to God for his daily loving-kindness. Indeed, it is only the wise who observe and take account of the Divine source of all human blessings, that at all understand how great is our debt of gratitude (ver. 43). But we are too apt to overlook God's goodness to us even in the more striking events of life. How often in the course of our life are we cast upon the kindness of the Divine Redeemer!

I. THE MANIFESTNESS OF OUR NEED. 1. Our necessity takes various *temporal or bodily forms*. It may be: (1) Distance from home; sometimes in the land of the alien and the enemy (vers. 3, 4); sometimes in oppressive and depressing solitude (ver. 4); sometimes in pecuniary straits. (2) Cruel and almost intolerable restraint—in the home, in the school, in the institution, in the prison (vers. 10—12). (3) Bodily evil—sickness, pain, prostration, dependence on the ministry of others (vers. 17, 18). (4) Perils of travel by sea or by land—*e.g.* the journeys of Paul and all missionaries (vers. 23—27). 2. Our necessity often takes the much more serious aspect of *spiritual evils*. These may correspond to those of the flesh. They may be: (1) Distance from God. (2) Spiritual bondage, in which we sigh and struggle for a freedom which seems beyond our reach. (3) Unsoundness of soul, loss of all appetite for the heavenly and the Divine. (4) Inward commotion, profound unrest.

II. THE TRUE ACCOUNT OF OUR DISTRESS. Its origin is to be found in ourselves—in our own folly, in our own iniquity, in our wilful departure from God; and in the consequent penalty which God's righteousness exacts (see vers. 11, 12, 17).

III. THE ONE REFUGE OF THE HEART. Men that forget God at every other time remember him in the hour of trouble and of danger. When they are brought very low, when there is "none to help" (ver. 12), when the gates of death are seen (ver. 18), "then they cry unto the Lord." The refrain of the psalm is the habit of the heart of man when his case is desperate, and his soul is "faint within him." Nothing but the dark night will bring out the heavenly star.

IV. DIVINE INTERVENTION. (Vers. 7, 13, 16, 20, 29, 30.) Sometimes very markedly, sometimes indirectly and through various agencies or instrumentalities, God makes his delivering power to be felt. But in whatever way, directly or indirectly, it is in the exercise of his power and by forces which he has ordained, originated, and maintained, that the wanderer finds his way home, that the fever abates and the patient is healed, that the door of escape is opened and the prisoner comes forth. It is of him and through his grace that the prodigal returns, that the tyrannous habit is broken, that the soul is made pure and sound, that peace and rest come back to the troubled heart, that the light of heaven shines clear on the pilgrim's path.

V. THE PLACE OF GRATITUDE IN THE HEART AND LIFE OF MAN. (Vers. 1, 2, 8, 15, 21, 22, 31, 32.) This should be a *very large* place. The redeemed of the Lord should "say so." They should sing his praise with joyful lips; they should daily offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving; they should carry with them everywhere a sense of deep indebtedness; they should feel that for the *special temporal* mercies of God, and also for his restoring and reconciling grace in Christ Jesus, they owe a continual, an unbroken, an abounding gratitude—a gratitude that should find vent in sacred song, in blameless conduct, in cheerful submission, in earnest and persevering labours.

Vers. 33—43.—*Divine revolution.* The wheel of providence "goes full circle," lifting up the lowly and abasing the proud. God turns the rivers into a wilderness, and the wilderness into standing water, etc. (vers. 33, 35).

I. THE DIVINE OVERTHROW. He cast out the guilty inhabitants of Canaan, and planted in their place the children of Israel; but when these rebelled against him, he rejected them, and sent them forth into a strange land. Thus has God humbled nations age after age; thus has he humiliated Churches—both great ecclesiastical organizations, and such Churches as those we read of in the Apocalypse (Rev. ii., iii.). And thus may we expect that he will bring down all communities that forget their Creator, that are false to their Redeemer, that are unfaithful to their mission.

II. THE DIVINE UPBUILDING. (Vers. 35—38, 41.) A people, a Church, a society,

may be very low, there may be but a spark of life in it; yet it need not despair. There is a hand which can kindle the faintest spark into a noble flame; there is One who can turn the sterile desert into the fruitful field. Far above all means and measures is the consideration—*Is God's favour gained?* Our expectation is from him. "Let Israel hope in the Lord." There are three things which avail to secure his good pleasure and his restoring power. 1. Penitence for past misdeeds and present unworthiness. 2. The faith which leads to earnest prayer for his blessing. 3. The appropriate, devoted action to which he calls us. Under these conditions we may look for a Divine revolution—evil and sorrow overturned, righteousness and prosperity restored.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—43.—*Wherefore men should praise the Lord.* Such is the theme of this glorious psalm. "It contains the thanksgiving of exiles (ver. 3) apparently not yet returned to Jerusalem, but already escaped from the thralldom of Babylon." Note—

I. ITS GENERAL LESSONS. 1. *It tells of present earthly troubles.* They were such as the returning exiles had met with, for Babylon was not the alone place of exile. There had been weary wanderings in the barren, waterless, and burning deserts; cruel and hopeless imprisonment; sickness nigh unto death; perils by sea (cf. Jer. xvi. 15; xl. 12; Dan. ix. 7). And it repeatedly declares the real cause of human troubles—the wickedness of men. 2. *It warrants our praying for deliverance from such troubles.* It tells how all the troubled ones did this. And, indeed, it is an instinct in man to thus pray. 3. *It promises that God will answer such prayers.* "He delivered them" is four times affirmed (vers. 6, 13, 19, 28). 4. It demands that therefore men should praise the Lord. It expresses a longing desire that men should do this, but also a tacit confession that many of them would not. These are the lessons that lie on the surface of the psalm. But are they true? Consider, therefore—

II. THE QUESTION OF THEIR TRUTHFULNESS. 1. *The psalmist had no doubt about it.* But in our day many doubt it much. They say all these troubles come to men now, and instead of deliverance such as is here affirmed as ever taking place in answer to prayer, there is in the majority of such cases no deliverance at all. 2. *Calvin* argues (see *Pewee*, in *loc.*) that no doubt the most do perish, but, then, all deserved to; therefore if any are saved it is by the great mercy of God: God was not bound to save any of them. But how can any thoughtful soul be satisfied with such reply? It is like Calvin, but all unlike the teaching of Christ. 3. *The true reply* is, that God answers prayer in different ways. He will ever give the best thing—of which he only can be the Judge—but that may not be the thing we cry for. And when he does literally deliver, it is rarely by interfering with natural laws, but rather is it by suggesting to men's minds how they may work out their own deliverance. He teaches them here to use the laws of nature so as to win what they desire; but he does not miraculously set those laws aside. It is true God ever answers sincere prayer, but not that he does so in the literal, direct way which the psalmist believed. But if we allow ourselves, as we surely may, to regard these distresses as patterns and images of spiritual distresses, then the declarations of the psalm are absolutely true. Therefore consider—

III. ITS SPIRITUAL SUGGESTIONS. 1. *That in these earthly troubles we have such as are spiritual faithfully represented.* 2. *That we may and should pray for deliverance from them.* 3. *That such prayer shall be surely answered.* 4. *That then it is our bounden duty to praise the Lord.* "Whoso is wise will consider these things, and," etc. (ver. 43).—S. C.

Ver. 8.—*Praise, its desirableness, absence, and source.* This psalm one of those many Scriptures which show God's mindfulness of the needs, not alone of one land and age, but of all. For see what variety of condition, character, occupation, experience, are portrayed in this one psalm—the desert, the city, the sea, the prison, the traveller, the exile, the sailor, the disease-stricken, the captive, the storm-tossed, the rescued. And thus it is that all men, of all ages and all lands, may find, whatever their condition, in this blessed book that which meets their case, which seems written for just such as

they. But the psalm mainly contemplates God's great deliverances, and is a summons to all men to praise the Lord for his goodness. This is the burden of the text, and it plainly teaches that for men thus to praise the Lord is—

I. INFINITELY DESIRABLE. The psalmist longs that they should do this; he seems eagerly waiting for that outburst of praise which he feels ought to be forthcoming. And it is thus to be desired: 1. *Because it is so right.* If this could not be said of it, nothing else that might be urged could justify such longing after it. But this can be said. For God's goodness deserves men's praise. Think how great, how varied, how constant, how all undeserved, how costly, is the goodness of God to men, and how it follows them continually all the days of their life here, and then goes with them into the eternal life. If a fellow-man have shown to us, when in distress, great kindness, we are not slow to acknowledge it; or if we were, the verdict of our fellow-men would at once condemn us. 2. *It so brightens our life.* That which darkens life is the dwelling on its unhappy events, or on those which we think unhappy. But if we would brighten life, we have to reverse this process. Collect the happy facts of life, and let memory recollect and ponder them. It will be found that however great the sum of our sorrows may be, the sum of our joys is greater. 3. *It gives us courage in the conflict with the social evils of the day.* There are many such. They are demanding men's attention more and more. The bitter cry of multitudes of our fellow-men can be no longer stifled or ignored. And good men are setting themselves to see what can be done to remedy these wrongs. But every one knows that it is much easier to point out a wrong than to find a remedy. For there are so many who profit by the wrong, that they will never, if they can help, let go their hold of it. All man's selfishness rises up to guard it, and its defences are strong indeed. But what can so encourage us to assail these strongholds of wrong as the conviction, wrought by the habit of praising the Lord for his goodness, that he whom we know to be good cannot but be against such wrong, and *with* those who seek to remedy it? There will be heard in their souls the ancient stirring cry, "*Deus vult!*" and like as that emboldened men in the days of the Crusades, so for this far more important and difficult crusade it will serve the same blessed office of emboldening the hearts of those who undertake it. But such custom is—

II. LAMENTABLY ABSENT. The text is both a confession and a bitter complaint of this fact. *But why is this?* Wherefore is it that men act towards God in a way which would cover them with shame were they to act so in regard to their fellow-men? The very words of the text suggest not a little of the answer. 1. *Many do not believe in the Lord.* They will not absolutely deny his existence, but they are not at all certain of it. And such uncertainty paralyzes praise. They, of course, believe in some "force," some efficient power, which produces what they see. They cannot help believing in that. But what it is they do not pretend to say. They are materialists, evolutionists, agnostics, but no more. 2. *Others question the "goodness"* for which men should praise the Lord. They are bewildered at many aspects of the natural world and of the social world, that seem to throw grave doubt on that goodness. And when they look within and see what they themselves are, how evil and wrong; and when they listen to what not a few theologians tell them of God, and the doom he destines for the mass of men, a very sea of doubt and misgiving surges over them, not to say swallows them up. 3. *And others deny any "wonderful works."* They do not believe in the supernatural, and all miracle is but myth. They believe only in the reign of law, and that things happen not in any "wonderful" way, but according to fixed, orderly, and ascertained law. They have a natural explanation for everything, and need no Divine intervention to account for aught that has occurred. They believe in "wonderful works" done by "the children of men," by their genius, skill, daring, but not in any done for them. Such are some of the silencers of men's praise and gratitude. But, whatever the cause, *the effect is most sad.* Man's own self becomes, to him who believes not in God, the greatest and most important being he knows, and what but hideous selfishness can follow? And he who doubts—as, alas! so many do—

"That he and we and all men move
Under a canopy of love
As broad as the blue sky above,"

—what is there for him but to sink down into a wretched pessimism, a despair of good, such as may be met with in wide regions of the thought, speech, and writing of this unbelieving age? Pride, miserable atheistic pride, is another of the Dead-Sea fruits which grow on the tree of unbelief in the supernatural. Believing that man is self-made, he has a wonderful respect for his maker, but no gratitude to God. What, then, is to be done? for surely the spirit of praise—

III. IS EARNESTLY TO BE SOUGHT AFTER. But how may men be made to praise the Lord for his goodness—how? This is, indeed, an important question, and almost as difficult as important. Not, we think, by their simply going over the mercies they have received, because, unless they believe them to be God's mercies, the mere enumeration will do no good—will probably only foster pride. But we believe that St. John supplies the true answer. He says, "We love him, because he first loved us." This is the genesis of the spirit of praise, its true point and spring—our seeing and believing God's love to us in Christ our Lord. So, then, would we quicken this spirit of praise in ourselves, let us get back whence it first began; and would we awaken it in others, the best, we believe the only way, is to

"Tell them the old, old story
Of Jesus and his love."

S. C.

Vers. 4—32.—*Four portraits of one soul.* I. INQUIRE AS TO THIS SOUL. 1. *The psalm tells of ransomed exiles, of redeemed Israelites, and recounts the sad but varied experiences through which they had passed. Some had been wanderers, some captives, some stricken with mortal sickness, some all but lost at sea.* 2. But in all ages of the Church this psalm has been taken as telling not merely of the literal facts which it records, but as setting forth in vivid and varied way *the history of every soul as yet unsaved.* It is, then, of the soul not yet saved that this fourfold portraiture is given.

II. LOOK AT THE PORTRAITS. 1. *That of the wanderer.* Out of the right way, in the wilderness, and going astray there; very miserable since he can find no home or rest; famine stares him in the face, and his soul faints within him. Is not this a true description of such as are unsaved? Every detail answers to his experience and condition. "All we like sheep have gone astray." Wanderers from God, and weary because of it,—such is the unsaved soul. 2. *That of the captive.* He is shut up in some dark dungeon, fettered hand and foot, doomed to die; he has brought it all on himself by his rebellion; the weight of his trouble has utterly cast him down; he lies prostrate on the ground, without help or hope. Here, again, the real resemblance between this portrait and the unsaved soul can be readily seen. Many such can bear testimony that they have been through it all. Christ speaks of such as captives, held fast behind prison doors and bound (Luke iv. 18). Then: 3. *That of the man stricken with mortal disease.* Fools are they, and not simply unhappy, for these also have brought their misery on themselves; they are sinners as well as foolish. But now, so stricken with sickness are they, that they turn from all food, and are at the point of death. Sin is such a disease, and they are fools who bring it on themselves; and the effects of it are just what is said, and there is but a step betwixt them and death. 4. *The storm-driven mariner ready to perish.* Again we have a portrait of the soul, so driven and tossed by the tempests, trials, and storms of life, that he has almost made shipwreck. We may be going on in our ordinary pursuits when these dreadful tempests rise; and then, at our wit's end, not knowing what to do, our soul is melted because of trouble. Out of Christ, we are ever exposed to such storms; for his word alone can still the tempest, and bring us to the haven where we would be.

III. OBSERVE THE POINTS OF DIFFERENCE AND RESEMBLANCE. 1. *Of difference.* The first tells of the unrest and failure of the soul to find satisfaction apart from God. The second, of the awful power, oppression, and cruelty of sin. "O wretched man that I am! who," etc.? (Rom. vii. 24). The third, of the paralysis of all spiritual energies, and the drawing ever nearer death of all the faculties of the soul, which sin causes. The fourth, of the liability to sudden and overwhelming destruction of the soul unpiloted by Christ. 2. *Of resemblance.* All such souls have to suffer. That suffering reaches extremity ere succour comes. Nor does it come then until prayed for; but then it does come, and according to the need of each. The Lord alone sends it. The

effect of it is ever to wake up praise; to make the soul long that others may praise, and to grieve that they do not.—S. C.

Ver. 30.—*The Pilot, the passage, and the port.* “So he bringeth them to their desired haven.” These three themes are suggested by the words. Therefore consider—

I. **THE PILOT.** He is the Lord Jesus Christ. We need his aid. Some think they can manage well enough without him, and hence refuse his aid; but no ship ever yet came safe to port without that aid. Receive him, therefore. His knowledge is perfect. His wisdom never errs. His power is omnipotent. His terms are such as all can comply with—trust and obey. His authority is from God. There are many pretended pilots; he alone is sent of God. He never fails.

II. **THE PASSAGE.** “So he bringeth them,” etc. How? 1. *By his Holy Spirit* he guides the soul. 2. *By his Word.* “Thy Word is a lamp unto,” etc. (Ps. cxix. 105). 3. *By his gracious providence,* sending now one influence and now another to further our course. 4. *By the ministries of his Church*—the means of grace, prayer, sacraments, etc.

III. **THE PORT.** It is our desired haven. Desired because there is: 1. *Rest.* 2. *Safety.* 3. *Joy and happiness.* 4. *Reward.*—S. C.

Ver. 43.—*The loving-kindness of the Lord.* I. **WHAT IS IT?** 1. “*These things*” here spoken of are not merely the gracious deliverances which were granted in answer to the people’s cry, but the terrible troubles which led to that cry unto the Lord. The deliverances are but parts of these things. 2. *And often there is no deliverance.* The weary wanderer sinks down on the sands and dies; the captive perishes in his dungeon; the man stricken with mortal sickness enters those gates of death to which he had drawn near, and does not come back; the storm-beaten ship goes down with all on board. 3. *Deliverances are the exception, not the rule.* In these cases is there no loving-kindness of the Lord? Some say there is not, and they further say God is not either. 4. *But these things are part of what we are to observe.* No doubt they do make the loving-kindness of the Lord difficult to understand. It seems as if the observing of them were just the thing which would hinder, not help, that understanding. But we are to look at the psalm as a whole; not at the deliverances only, nor the troubles only, but at all together. 5. So looking, we shall see that the *loving-kindness of the Lord* is his bringing our heart, our will, to be at one with himself. This is his great, his blessed, and most loving gift. When it is wanting, there comes rebellion and sin of all kinds, and following close after that, trouble and sorrow; but when it is present, then these things depart. When it is absent, no amount of earthly good satisfies or can make really blessed; when it is present, no amount of earthly sorrow can rob the soul of its peace and trust. This, then, is the loving-kindness of the Lord—the heart that always says to God, “Thy will be done.”

II. **WHAT THIS LOVING-KINDNESS DEMANDS.** 1. *That the rebellious heart should be brought down and humbled.* (Cf. ver. 12.) In each of the scenes so vividly portrayed this is what is seen: the stout, self-trusting and self-satisfied heart has disappeared, and a meek and lowly one has come instead. 2. *God must insist on this;* for until it is brought about, there is no way open for peace with God. Will we not see this at once, and take on us the Saviour’s yoke, and learn of him who was meek and lowly in heart, and so find rest in our souls?

III. **WHAT IT WILL SURELY DO.** It will take measures for the accomplishment of that which is so essential. There are two methods by which God’s loving-kindness brings down the proud heart. 1. *By his Holy Spirit.* He convinces of sin, withers up the pride and self-sufficiency which lurk within us, and leads us in all humility to the feet of the Lord. He is ever striving to do this. Happy are they who yield to him. But this may fail. Therefore: 2. *His providence* is set to work. The consuming fire of God’s terrible punishments burns up the rebelliousness which nothing else will purge away. The stout heart is made to yield, and the obstinate will to give way. 3. *But the ordeal is fearful.* Nothing but the loving-kindness of the Lord will hold men down to it. Let us not compel him thus to deal with us. Let us accept the yoke of wood, lest he put upon us the yoke of iron.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Love orders our lives.* That is the meaning not only of the gentle,

but also of the awful, ways of God. 2. *Love must have the obedient heart.* 3. *The wise only will see all this,* and they must "observe these things" in order to understand. It was the secret of Christ's peace, for he understood the loving-kindness of the Lord.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*The Lord's people are a redeemed people.* "The ransomed of Jehovah" (Perowne). This has been well called "the psalm of life." While its figures are partly suggested by the history of Israel, it is a meditative rather than historical psalm. "It presents to us, first, a magnificent series of pictures of various crises of human life—of the distress which throws men at such times on God in prayer, and of his gracious answer of deliverance; and next, a more thoughtful contemplation of God's government of the world by blessing and chastisement, by exaltation of the meek and humiliation of the proud." It is evidently composed by one of the returned exiles, and represents the pious feeling of a man who is rejoicing in some new and wonderful redemption of God. In the light of the new experience he reads his own life, and the story of his race, and he can see that God has always been, in every sphere, the Redeemer, Deliverer, and Ransomer. God has a fourfold claim to be called the "Redeemer" of his people.

I. GOD'S CLAIM ON THE GROUND OF THE GREAT REDEMPTION. That was the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian bondage. Of it Israel was ever kept in mind by the Passover rite; by Divine revelations; by appeals of psalmist and prophet. It was a *great* redemption in view of (1) the distress from which it delivered; (2) the wisdom and power displayed in it; (3) the issues to which it led. Israel was bound to regard itself as a redeemed people, bound in allegiance to its Redeemer, who is to be served by thankful, loving obedience.

II. GOD'S CLAIM ON THE GROUND OF THE MANY REDEMPTIONS. 1. These appear to view in the wilderness-journey, when again and again God delivered the people from their circumstances, their enemies, and themselves. 2. They appear to view in the period of the Judges, when God graciously responded to penitence and prayer, and raised up national deliverers. 3. They appear to view in the period of the prophets, when God held back again and again his threatened judgments. The true reading of each individual life shows the same ever-delivering, rescuing, redeeming God.

III. GOD'S CLAIM ON THE GROUND OF HIS LATEST REDEMPTION. That, to the psalmist, was the rescue from the Babylonish captivity. A wonderful restoration considered as to (1) its time, (2) unexpected manner, (3) important issues, (4) fulfilment of promises. The feature of it that most pleased the psalmist was the gathering of the scattered Israelites, and the uniting of representatives from all the tribes to form the new nation.

IV. GOD'S CLAIM ON THE GROUND OF HIS SPIRITUAL REDEMPTION. That which was wrought by the agency of the Lord Jesus Christ. The soul-redemption, of which all other redemptions could be only the foreshadowing and illustration. Jesus reveals God the Redeemer.—R. T.

Vers. 8, 9.—*A fourfold view of God's relations.* This point is illustrated from the first thirty-two verses of the psalm, the verses taken as text being the refrain closing the first section. Summing up God's relations with his people, Delitzsch suggestively says: 1. God gave them the lands of the heathen (see Ps. cv. 44). 2. God scattered them in the lands (see Ps. cvi. 27). 3. God gathers them from the lands (see Ps. cvii. 3). The thirty-two verses, or rather those from ver. 4 to ver. 32, contain four mental pictures: (1) of pilgrims in a barren land of thirst and distress; (2) of captives languishing in a captivity, which is the punishment of sin; (3) of foolish men smitten by God's hand with sickness, even unto death; (4) of sailors in extremity of danger on the sea. God is seen in his general relations to all, and in his special relations to each.

I. GOD THE REFRESHER; or, the pilgrim's Provider and Guide. Two sources for his figures are before the mind of the psalmist. 1. The old wilderness-journey of the Israelites. 2. The recent desert-journey of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. Both presented peculiarities of difficulty, trial, and need. In both God had most graciously overcome difficulties, and secured all needed supplies. In neither had his people wanted any good thing. This will readily be illustrated by details of these journeys.

II. GOD THE LIBERATOR; or, the captive's Deliverer. Here the same two sources provide the figures. Once Israel was captive in Egypt, and then God brought his people out "with a high hand and outstretched arm." Recently they had been captive in Babylon, and the interweavings of Divine providence, which led to their return to their own land, were no less wonderful and no less gracious. There is a higher sense in which God, through his Son Jesus Christ, now gives "liberty to the captives."

III. GOD THE HEALER; or, the wilful man's Saviour. The association of this figure is not so easy to trace. There is very probable allusion to those times of pestilence in the wilderness-journey which followed on the people's sin; and the people were led into sin by foolish, wilful individuals, such as Korah or Dathan. But even when suffering was direct judgment on sin, God magnified his mercy in healing and restoring.

IV. GOD THE CONTROLLER; or, the sailor's Preserver. Israel seems to have had no mercantile associations with the sea before the time of Solomon; but in the time of captivity the Israelites were scattered abroad, and engaged in commerce in all lands, so sea-figures had become familiar. But the reference here may be typical; the perils of the sea picturing all kinds of human peril that are beyond man's control, but within God's control. For what he is to his people, we are bidden to thank and praise the Lord.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*Prayer for temporal good.* The trouble was trouble in their outward circumstances. The cry was a prayer. The answer was a gracious Divine dealing with these troublous circumstances. Whatever may be urged against its reasonableness, the fact cannot be gainsaid that Bible men and women did pray to God about their material needs, and did find those needs supplied after prayer. The philosophy may be beyond us; the fact is plain. "This psalm teaches us not only that God's providence watches over men, but that his ear is open to their prayers. It teaches us that prayer may be put up for temporal deliverance, and that such prayer is answered. It teaches us that it is right to acknowledge with thanksgiving such answers to our petitions. This was the simple faith of the Hebrew poet."

I. PRAYER FOR TEMPORAL GOOD IS NATURAL. It is a natural impulse which every one feels; even the atheist feels it in the time of shipwreck. It is natural to man (1) as a creature, having creature-wants for which it cannot itself secure the supply; (2) as a child, who has a stronger impression of material than of spiritual need. All natural impulses have a sound basis. There is that in God which responds to them.

II. PRAYER FOR TEMPORAL GOOD IS REASONABLE. Because we can see that forces are continually acting upon and modifying forces (as when I raise my arm, and make vital force counteract the natural force of gravitation); and no man has any right to say that prayer is not a higher force, which can modify, or lead to the modifying, of both vital and physical forces. Prayer may set moving the Divine forces which control and readjust the working of the material forces. It is often said that natural law never changes; but it needs to be seen that natural laws are always cross-working, and even preventing each other's working. It cannot be unreasonable to conceive of the Divine will as a controlling law, working in material spheres.

III. PRAYER FOR TEMPORAL GOOD IS ACCEPTABLE. This may be shown by several considerations. 1. God, in every age, has asked it of man. Referable to outward needs, he says, "For all this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." 2. Man, in every age, has prayed about such things. Illustrate by instances taken from each period of Bible history. There are supreme cases in which men have even given up working, prayed and waited for God to act. It is unfair to give such cases no consideration. 3. God has, in every age, interfered in men's lives, in order to answer their prayers. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard, and saved him out of all his troubles."—R. T.

Ver. 17.—*Bringing affliction on ourselves.* "Foolish men," so called "because of the moral infatuation which marks their conduct. Men of earthly, sensual, selfish minds, who turn a deaf ear to warning, and despise counsel." The "fool" of the Bible is usually the strongly self-willed man, who accepts no guidance or control, but persists in following the "devices and desires of his own heart." Such a man is sure to bring trouble upon himself. It is true that all men are tempted into self-will at times; but

the case introduced here is that of men who are persistent in their self-will, and let it fashion their course of conduct, their habit of life.

I. AFFLICTIONS ARE THE NATURAL CONSEQUENCE OF WILFULNESS. Because the wilful spirit is sure to lead to acts which involve trouble. The world is ordered according to the will of God; and it keeps the order when man's will is in harmony with God's will. Illustrate by the peace of a country, and welfare of all its inhabitants, when the will of the people and the will of the governing body are in harmony. Every self-willed citizen spoils the harmony for the whole, and brings trouble on himself. So in God's kingdom. The self-willed (foolish) man is a disturbing element; and the king, all law-abiders, and all the arrangements of the kingdom, must be against him. He cannot get his own way; he must "bring affliction on himself," and not on himself alone. It is a searching and humbling inquiry—How many of our earthly afflictions are the direct result—the natural consequence—of our wilful persistence in wrong-doings? The humiliation of the review of life is the discovery of how many troubles were our own fault, and might have been avoided by mastering our self-will. "Many sicknesses are the direct result of foolish acts. Thoughtless and lustful men, by drunkenness, gluttony, and the indulgence of their passions, fill their bodies with diseases. Men, by a course of transgression, afflict themselves, and are fools for their pains."

II. AFFLICTIONS ARE THE DIVINE AGENCY FOR BRINGING WILFUL ONES TO REASON. Perhaps it is true that God's afflictions are never "judgments," in the sense of mere vindictory punishments. But they are not always "judgments" in the sense of "chastisements." They are—certainly they are for the persistently wilful—"judgments" in the sense of "humiliations." Their design is to break men away from their self-confidence. And therefore the affliction is so directly connected with the sin, and men are compelled, humiliatingly, to admit that they have brought their troubles on themselves.—R. T.

Ver. 22.—*Thanksgiving when prayer is answered.* Men are much more ready to pray than to give thanks; to express their desires than to recognize the response made to their desires. Men fail in gratitude rather than in petition. Therefore do the apostles specially urge this grace, and require its cultivation by the Christian disciples (see Phil. iv. 6; Col. iv. 2; Heb. xiii. 15). The call to thanksgiving is the refrain of the psalm. Man is seen to gain no blessing save through the ministry of him who is the "Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift." And man's sin is seen to be restraining his lips, and failing to make due recognition of "grace abounding." A life full of God's benedictions should be a life full of God's praise. In this text the general duty is presented under two figures.

I. THANKSGIVING AS A SACRIFICE. The peculiarity of a sacrifice is that it is a *silent act*. It is something a man does which has its own voice, and need not be accompanied with any words. When the old Jew brought his animal to the priest, according to the rules of the Mosaic ritual, he did not need to say anything by way of explanation. The priest perfectly understood what he meant. Some act of Divine mercy was filling him with thankfulness, and his offering found for it expression. Philip Henry puts this sharply: "Thanksgiving is a good thing, thanksgiving is a better." The self offered in sacrifice speaks our gratitude to the listening ear of God. A man can show himself grateful by his manner of life. Bonar prays—

"Fill thou my life, O Lord my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy Being and thy ways.

"Not for the lip of praise alone,
Nor e'en the praising heart,
I ask, but for a life made up
Of praise in every part."

"I beseech you therefore that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice;" so says St. Paul. And it is to be a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

II. THANKSGIVING AS A TESTIMONY. "Tell out his works with gladness." Here thanksgiving is a *voiceful act*. "I will not refrain my lips, O Lord, thou knowest."

"Praise is the only employment in which self finds no part. In praise we go out of ourselves, and think only of him to whom we offer it. It is the most purely disinterested of all services."—R. T.

Ver. 30.—*The desired haven.* "So he bringeth them unto the haven where they would be" (Prayer-book Version). The picture of the sea connected with this text is "painted as a landsman would paint it, but yet only as one who had himself been exposed to the danger could paint the storm—the waves running mountains high, on which the tiny craft seemed a plaything; the helplessness of human skill, the gladness of the calm, the safe refuge in the haven." It is difficult for those who love the sea to enter into the feelings with which Eastern people in olden times, and especially the Israelites, regarded it. That feeling of mystery and dread must have been intense before Solomon's time, when a commercial navy was employed in both the Mediterranean and Red Seas. For the severity of a storm in the Mediterranean, the story of Jonah, and of St. Paul's shipwreck, may be studied. What seems more especially to have influenced ancient minds was the constant *unrest* of the sea. This is reflected in many of the Bible references to it; and this has always struck both poetic and pious minds.

I. THE FASCINATION OF REST. To man it is the supreme idea of heaven; it is the perfection of bliss on earth. That not so much because of toil, as because of change and trouble. The rest man seeks is not rest from *work*, but rest from *worry*. The activity of work is, for healthy minds and bodies, the truest rest. But uncertainty, change, anxiety, make us long for the moral rest, which can only come when God's will is no longer checked by man's. It is not the rest of the grave man wants; it is the rest of the "desired haven"—the rest of the moral issue of life. Every man is, according to his own idea, moving towards and into rest. Alas! that so many make shipwreck.

II. THE SYMBOL OF REST. A "desired haven." Harbour after a long and stormy voyage. "In the fierce gales of November or March, when the shrieking blasts drive furiously up the channel, and the huge mountain-billows, green and white, open threatening graves on every side, how welcome would be a safe harbour, easy of access, and placed at a part of the coast which else would be unsheltered for many leagues on either side!" (Gosse). "The stately ships go on, to the harbour under the hill" (Tennyson). The point suggestive of practical teachings is thrown out by the Prayer-book Version. Our "desired haven" is, "the haven where *we would be*." It is the realization of our life-objects, of our hopes; and so we are led to discuss men's life-aims. Their rest, when they gain it, too often proves to be no rest. He only reaches rest that is rest indeed, who has voyaged life's seas in hope of entering at last the harbour of God.—R. T.

Vers. 33—39.—*God's commonplace mercies.* The difference in the style and contents of the latter part of this psalm has been noticed by almost every writer. The pictures, with their closing refrain, cease; and in a hurried way instances of God's providential government are given. It has been thought that the psalm was completed by another poet; but in that case the structure of the psalm would have been closely imitated. The peculiarity of this portion may be explained by showing that the psalmist had spoken of God's gracious relation to special forms of trouble; and he might leave the impression that God was only in them. And men might be feeling very deeply how *commonplace* their life was. Without such special experiences they might take up the notion that they were out of the spheres of special Divine mercies; and so the didactic psalmist puts in a word for these: in a few skilful sentences he sketches ordinary, commonplace life, and shows God's relation to it. The things briefly mentioned suggest—

I. THE COMMONPLACE ADVERSITIES OF LIFE. Such are the difficulties of the seasons, the rains, the floods, the drought, in their relation to agricultural life.

II. THE COMMONPLACE ENTERPRISES OF LIFE. Working for a living, tillage, building, planting, tending cattle, etc.

III. THE COMMONPLACE DISASTERS OF LIFE. Accidents, diseases, plagues, etc.

IV. THE COMMONPLACE ENMITIES OF LIFE. For few men pass through many years without suffering from the mischief-making schemes of those who, by reason of envy or masterfulness, make themselves their enemies. The psalmist urges that God is quite

as truly in the commonplace as in the unusual. He is working through our everyday life-experience some high and gracious moral end. And therefore every man should be quick to observe the "loving-kindness of the Lord," and ever ready to "praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men."—R. T.

Ver. 43.—*The wise observance of God's loving-kindness.* The Prayer-book Version reads, "Whoso is wise will ponder these things;" will think about them; will brood over them. The signs of God's active and gracious working, in men's lives, is clear enough, but only to the "wise," who "thoughtfully ponder what the thoughtless pass by."

I. THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF GOD IS NOT APPARENT TO EVERYBODY. Many are stumbling over the severities of God's dealings, and, indeed, over the presence of evil, in the senses of wrong and calamity, in his world. How can the God of love stand aloof, and permit the misery of the earth? How can the doom of vast masses of humanity be consistent with Divine love and Fatherhood? We venture to say that these difficulties are felt because men are carried away by surface appearances, and do not *ponder*. They look upon the events of a limited time and space, and do not try to estimate God's dealings in view of *all* time and all space. Mistake follows studying *parts*; it is relieved by studying *wholes*. It is not easy to appraise aright passing things; we cannot see how they *fit*. A bird's-eye view sets things in places and relations, and so explains a great deal.

II. THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF GOD IS REVEALED TO THE UNBIASED. And they only are the "wise." Every bias, prejudice, preconceived opinion, is a limitation of faculty, a misdirection of judgment. And if man would understand God's ways, it is of supreme importance that he should clear his mind, and come with the simplicity of true wisdom, to such studies.

III. THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF GOD IS REVEALED TO THE THOUGHTFUL. Here the idea is that mistake is made by coming to a too hasty decision or judgment. The thoughtful man is the man who is content to *keep on thinking*; who wants to see things all round and all through before he makes up his mind. Quietly wait to see the loving-kindness. It is often only revealed when the ends of God's dealings are reached.

IV. THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF GOD IS REVEALED TO THE EXPERIENCED. It is the man who only *observes* it who is so often misled. The man who *feels* it will be sure to realize the loving-kindness at last, if not at first.—R. T.

Vers. 1—43.—*God's watchful care.* "Whatever the circumstances under which the psalm was written, there can be no doubt as to the great lesson which it inculcates"—that God watches over men, and his ear is open to their prayers. Look at some illustrations.

I. GOD HAD ANSWERED THE CRY OF THE JEWS IN EXILE, AND RESTORED THEM TO THEIR OWN COUNTRY. (Vers. 2, 8, 9.) They were called on to give thanks for those wonders, and to remember that "he filleth the hungry soul with good." God is working toward the deliverance of all enslaved nations. This thought is amplified in vers. 10—16, with special reference to the sins that had plunged them into such helpless affliction, and therefore how much they should praise God for loving-kindness!

II. THE EMPHATIC THOUGHT IN VERS. 17—22 IS THAT GOD DELIVERS WICKED MEN, WHEN THEY CALL UPON HIM, OUT OF THE VERY SHADOWS OF DEATH. God pities transgressors, and loves them with an infinite compassion in their terrors and sufferings. He sendeth his word—the message of his mercy—and healeth them; delivers them "from their graves."

III. Another example: HE DELIVERS THE SAILOR FROM THE STORMS OF THE SEA. (Vers. 23—32.) Wonderful description of a storm and its subsidence. "Then are they glad because they be quiet, and he leadeth them to their desired haven." The psalmist is writing *poetry* under the inspiration of a devout faith; and not *science*, discussing the unchangeable laws of material nature. The preacher must do his utmost to reconcile poetry and science in the theology he teaches.

IV. Now the current of thought changes its direction, but only for a moment. God SOMETIMES MAKES THE WICKED AN EXAMPLE OF HIS TEMPORAL JUDGMENTS. (Vers.

33, 34.) But this thought is uncongenial, and is soon changed again for the thought of God's mercy. The wilderness is crowned with cities; and the poor and humble are raised to the condition of princes, and the rich and the proud overthrown. The question at the close most suggestive—that it is only the observant and the wise that can understand the loving-kindnesses of God; only they that can approach to the solution of the great problems of God's providence.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CVIII.

THIS is a composite psalm, made up of portions of two Davidical psalms, viz. lvii. 7—11, and lx. 5—12, but not (probably) put into its present shape by David. It is difficult to imagine what was the occasion which was thought to call for the union of two such distinct and unconnected passages. The text, moreover, has suffered in the transfer.

Ver. 1.—*My heart is fixed.* In the original form (Ps. lvii. 7) this emphatic phrase was reiterated, which much increased the force of the declaration. *I will sing and give praise, even with my glory.* It is difficult to assign any distinct meaning to the last clause, which has nothing parallel to it in Ps. lvii. 7.

Ver. 2.—*Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early.* Ps. lvii. has, "Awake, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp," which is intelligible and forcible.

Ver. 3.—*I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people; and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations.* Identical with Ps. lvii. 9, except that "O Lord" is expressed by "Jehovah" instead of "Adonai."

Ver. 4.—*For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds.* Identical with Ps. lvii. 10, with the exception of one preposition, which occurs only in some manuscripts.

Ver. 5.—*Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth.* Absolutely identical with Ps. lvii. 11.

Ver. 6.—*That thy beloved (or, thy beloved ones) may be delivered: save with thy right hand, and answer me.* Absolutely identical with Ps. lx. 5; but with a change in the connection which give the words a somewhat different bearing.

Vers. 7, 8.—*God hath spoken, etc.* Completely identical with Ps. lx. 6, 7.

Ver. 9.—*Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe.* Identical with the first two clauses of Ps. lx. 8. *Over Philistia will I triumph.* In Ps. lx. 8 the expression used is different. There we have, "Philistia, triumph thou over me," or, "because of me." Apparently the compiler has not understood David's irony, and has therefore changed the form of the verb.

Ver. 10.—*Who will bring me into the strong city?* A slight change occurs here, *כִּי־אֶבְרָר* taking the place of *כִּי־אֶבְרָר*, but there is no difference in the sense. *Who will lead me into Edom?* Identical with the last clause of Ps. lx. 9.

Ver. 11.—*Wilt not thou, O God, who hast cast us off: and wilt not thou, O God, go forth with our hosts?* Identical with Ps. lx. 10, with the exception that there, in the first clause, "thou" is expressed by *אַתָּה*. The meaning is probably that assigned in the Revised Version, "Hast not thou cast us off, O God? and thou goest not forth, O God, with our hosts" (see the comment on Ps. lx. 10).

Ver. 12.—*Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.* Completely identical with Ps. lx. 11.

Ver. 13.—*Through God we shall do valiantly, etc.* Also completely identical with Ps. lx. 12.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—13.—*Triumph in trouble.* The words of which this psalm is composed were written after a reverse, or in the midst of strife, but also after a Divine promise (ver. 7) which was the assurance of success; they breathe a spirit not merely of serenity, but even of triumph; and they bear with them the lesson, that in the time of trouble we may be so sustained by the Word of God that we may even exult in the prospect before us.

I. THE PRESENCE OF ADVERSITY. Behind us is defeat (ver. 11); before us is difficulty, apparent impossibility (ver. 10); the ordinary, visible resources have failed us (ver. 12): "vain is the help of man." This adversity may be either outward or

inward, in circumstance or in the soul. 1. We may be beaten in the battle of life, or at any rate temporarily overcome. We may sustain a serious reverse; we may be reduced in our holding and our position; we may suffer in our reputation; we may be sadly disappointed in some venture; we may fail to secure some coveted post or honour. 2. We may fall far short of our endeavour and our expectation in the spiritual struggle. This may be either on the arena of our own spiritual nature, or on the broad field of conflict with error and evil. We may find ourselves much further from the goal than we expected by this time to be, or we may be surprised and grieved at the comparative fruitlessness of our Christian labour. It is the hour of defeat.

II. THE REFUGE OF THE HUMAN HEART. There always remains one thing that can be done when all others fail: we can go in prayer to God, we can "pour out our heart" unto him (ver. 6). If we are God's children, we can urge this plea as the psalmist does here; we can call on our heavenly Father to hear and to save his own. We are warranted to look for Divine attention, sympathy, succour. And, apart from the desired intervention, the very act of filial approach and appeal to God brings with it refreshment and relief. But there is—

III. THE DIVINE PROMISE. "God hath spoken," etc. (ver. 7). However God spoke to the psalmist, we know how he has spoken to us. He has spoken "in his holiness," in his faithfulness, the word upon which we can build. By holy men of old whom he inspired, and by that Holy One himself who was "the Truth," whose words cannot pass away without being fulfilled, God has given us strong assurances both for our present earthly life, and also for our own spiritual course, as well as for the coming of his kingdom. We know that to the upright there will arise light in the darkness; that all needful things will be added to those who seek and serve Christ; that the Spirit of God will be granted to those that ask earnestly for his presence; that our labour will not prove to be in vain in the Lord; that we shall dwell with our Lord in his glory. Our hope, our confident expectation, rests on the immovable rock of the faithfulness, the holiness, of the eternal and immutable One.

IV. OUR HOLY CONFIDENCE IN GOD. "I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem," etc. (vers. 7—9); "Through God we shall do valiantly," etc. (ver. 13). David, when he wrote these words, felt as strong an assurance that he would carry out his purpose and subdue his enemies, as if he had seen them flying from before his army; he realized the unseen. It is for us, by a strong and living faith, to foresee the issue of our efforts; to be thoroughly convinced that provision will be made for us; that our name will be cleared; that we shall gain the victory over our spiritual adversaries, and be conquerors through Christ; that our work shall be rewarded, and result in real spiritual success; that we shall reach home and heaven at last; that we shall one day understand that which sorely perplexes us now.

V. OUR SPIRIT OF THANKFULNESS. It is not only that the psalmist is calm and peaceful; he is more than that. His lips are full of praise, though the "strong city" is not yet entered, and Edom is still unsubdued. His heart is fixed; he is unwaveringly confident of victory; his mouth shall be full of praise. He does not wait for the moment of success; he pours out his joy in God; he ascribes to him, at once, the attributes of truth and mercy; he exults in him, and "extols him with his tongue" (vers. 1—5). It is the triumph of faith. Thus it may be true that God's "praise is continually in our mouth;" not only when the sun is shining, and the corn is ripening, but when the rain is falling, and the corn is rotting in the field; not only when the church is crowded, and the converts are passing into the fold, but when the message of truth is rejected, and there are but few results to chronicle. Let us praise God "with our glory;" with the glorious *agent*—this thinking, trusting, loving, rejoicing human soul; with the glorious *instrument*—this tongue, which sings the grace and speaks the truth of Jesus Christ.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—13.—"This psalm is a compilation formed by combining the last five verses of Ps. lvii. with the last eight verses of Ps. lx., the latter being itself a compilation." It is ascribed to David because the original passages both occur in psalms ascribed to

him. But Bishop Perowne thinks that some later poet probably adapted them to circumstances of his own time; possibly wishing thus to commemorate some victory over Edom or Philistia. For homiletic treatment, see the above-named psalms.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—God honoured by fixed resolves. “My heart is fixed;” “My heart is ready” (Prayer-book Version); “My heart is steadfast” (Perowne). This psalm is clearly a compilation from two earlier psalms, and was probably arranged for liturgical worship. It represents the kind of experience which we properly associate with David. The references are such as suit his endeavour to extend and consolidate his kingdom; but the expression in ver. 11 suggests that the psalm was rewritten by a returned exile, to whom the Captivity was a “casting off” of the nation by God. What we now see is, that the mood of mind in which David first composed it is one eminently characteristic of him; and it is a mood eminently suitable for a restored exile, who was under the persuasion of the restoring mercies of God. What is the most striking thing in David’s career is his *fixity for God*, the steadfastness of his purpose to live for God. He may have stumbled, made mistakes, acted unworthily, and openly sinned. And who, of woman born, has yet lived such a perfect life that he can venture to throw a stone at David? But from the beginning to the ending of his life David never heart-swered from God. “His heart was fixed.” Fixed to trust; fixed to serve; fixed to praise.

I. FIXITY IN PRINCIPLE IS THE SECRET OF FREEDOM. Illustrate by the tree, which is only free to spread and wave its branches, and put itself forth in flower and fruit, when the roots go well into the ground and hold firm. A man is not free who has no established principles, no fixed laws of conduct. He seems free, but really is a slave to his senses, and to all who have skill to offer sense-gratifications. True freedom is liberty to do right, and to do wrong, when a man is fixed that he will *not* do wrong. Sin enslaves those who are not fixed for God.

II. FIXITY IN PURPOSE IS THE SECRET OF STRENGTH. Illust.: Joshua. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” That resolve inspired a strong, unflagging life of service. Or take St. Paul. His resolve is, “To me to live is Christ;” so he exclaims, in conscious strength, “I can do all things through him that strengtheneth me.” The man who knows what he means can gather up and unify his forces; hold them in restraint, and use them wisely.

III. FIXITY IN HABIT IS THE SECRET OF DEFENCE. Here reference is to the habit of praise. This is the Christian’s guard against *depression* and against *temptation*. What can the tempter do with a man whom he finds rejoicing in God?—E. T.

Ver. 1.—The best work of a man’s best. “I will sing and give praise with the best member that I have” (Prayer-book Version). A man’s “glory” is his soul—the powers and faculties which belong to him as a rational and spiritual being. A man may join in singing praise, and only do it mechanically. A man may give praise himself as the mere performance of a duty. A man only praises God aright, or acceptably, when he praises with his *glory*; as a real and sincere expression of his feeling. True praise is the utterance of a man’s individuality.

I. THE GLORY OF A MAN IS THAT WHICH DISTINGUISHES HIM FROM THE ANIMALS. The beasts of the field have no uplooking eyes or yearning hearts. No mere animal can sing. It is only in a figurative sense that birds are said to *sing*. They express nothing intelligent to men in the sounds they make. Man can think; can receive impressions; can discern qualities in things done for him and to him; can feel emotions of love and admiration and gratitude. So with his glory *as a man*, he can sing and give praise. Man can lead the choir of creation; but man’s song differs from all other songs. The tone and meaning in it is put by man’s *glory*.

II. THE GLORY OF A MAN IS THAT WHICH DISTINGUISHES HIM FROM OTHER MEN. It may be true that all men are alike. The bodily limbs, organs, faculties, etc., are the same. But it is even more true that men differ from one another. Each one is strictly an individual. A man may have much in common with his fellows; he has something which is peculiar to himself—some faculty, or taste, or preference, or influence, or experience, which is strictly personal. And that, whatever it may be, is his *glory*. And it is the placing of *that* on the altar of service to God which is the real “presenting

of a man's self as a living sacrifice." The Prayer-book Version seals this in its rendering, "with the best member that I have."—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Morning religion.* "I myself will awake right early" (Revised Version). The idea seems to be, that the anxiety to be praising God is so strong in the psalmist that it actually wakes. A man wakes early when he has a mind burdened with business or family cares; the psalmist wakes early because his mind is burdened with its sense of indebtedness to God. Perhaps but few of us can say that we shorten our self-indulgent sleep for the sake of praise and prayer. Our Lord lived a crowded, bustling life; but as he must have, for soul-refreshing, daily communion with his Father, he was wont to "rise a great while before day." According to the Eastern use of the figure, waking early to do a thing was the sign of being thoroughly in earnest in the doing. A man has his heart in the thing which he gets up early to accomplish.

I. MORNING RELIGION IS REFRESHING TO THE SOUL. Because then thought is free and emotion lively, and there is a bright and cheerful tone on all that is said and done. When wearied with the day and its toils and care, religious meditation easily becomes gloomy, the fatigued body flinging its shadows over all the expressions of the spirit. Give the freshness of morning thoughts to God, and that service will surely come back on you as refreshing.

II. MORNING RELIGION IS ACCEPTABLE TO GOD. Because it shows him that we are in earnest in his service, and hold our very best as the fitting gift to offer to him. "The flower that's offered in the bud is the best sacrifice." That is as true of the day as of the life. And God may be expected to estimate our gifts in the light of what they cost us to present to him. That is our way of appraising the gifts which we receive, and we may be sure that it is God's way. What, then, is God's estimate of our daily praise and thanksgiving? Does it really cost us much? It does if, for it, we *awake early*; preventing the day lest we should lose our holy opportunity, or be beneath our best and freshest in our communions.

III. MORNING RELIGION IS INFLUENTIAL ON OTHERS. It is one of the most effective and impressive examples; and it has a special influence on the young, helping them to form good life-habits. Many of us can gratefully remember the influence of the early morning devotions of our parents. Let us gain the power on others which they have gained on us.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Hope and prayer inspired by praise.* In this verse we trace the influence which the spirit and utterance of praise has upon the psalmist. It leads to prayer, and gives him confidence in prayer.

I. PRAISING GOD BRINGS HOME TO US GOD'S RELATIONS TO US, AND OUR RELATIONS TO GOD. Praising God for what he has done convinces us of his kindly feeling toward us and interest in us, so that we may even think and speak of ourselves as God's *beloved*. This may be regarded as David's way of thinking of himself; but a similar appropriation of the Divine love we may make. It is the realization of our Father's personal love to us that fills us with hope, and gives us confidence to pray. We never think of putting God under any *constraint* of prayer. We pray as children make their requests of parents who love them.

II. PRAISING GOD BECOMES AN INSPIRATION TO PRAYER FOR FURTHER BLESSINGS. 1. It gives us argument. For we only praise because we know that God has answered our prayers. It is really for those answers that we offer prayer. Once let it be established in our hearts that God is the prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God, and we have the all-sufficing ground on which to seek him in every form of now distress and need. Praise is only possible when we fully recognize reasons for praise. 2. It gives us the feeling that makes us long to pray, and so gain yet more reason to praise. Praise and prayer are indissolubly linked together. No man will pray long who gives up praising, and no man will keep up his praise who neglects his praying. If we find ourselves hesitating about praying for what we newly need, the best thing to do is to set about praising for the blessings we have received. Just as it was with the psalmist, so it will be with us. Let *praise* do its work, and it will be sure to lead in *prayer*.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Conscious strength through God's pledge.* The construction of this and the three following verses is somewhat difficult to trace. It may be that the verses are

the things that God "spoke in his holiness." But it is simpler to treat the verses as expressions of what the psalmist feels he can do, and means to endeavour to do, basing his confidence on the fact that "God has spoken in his holiness"—has made promise and pledge to him; and God's pledges, he is sure, are holy, inviolate, certain of fulfilment. In relation to David, the promise to secure for him the full sovereignty of the nation is probably referred to (2 Sam. vii.). "In his holiness" means, "in the immutable integrity of his heart," which was an infallible guarantee for the fulfilment of his promise. The key-note of this portion of the psalm is the fact that the promises of God sent by Nathan to David ensured the establishment of the Davidic dynasty over the kingdom of Israel. But when the original of the psalm was composed, David had all the work before him. The northern portion of Canaan had to be won; neighbouring nations had to be subdued, or put under tribute. But the promise gave him conscious strength, made him feel superior to his responsibilities; able even to speak lightly, almost scornfully, of those whose conquest would involve hard toil and fighting (see figures of ver. 9).

I. FIRM HOLD OF GOD'S PROMISE GIVES US CONSCIOUS SUPERIORITY TO LIFE'S DIFFICULTIES. This is true, whether our difficulties come from our circumstances or our sins. We have Divine promises that we shall finally master both our surroundings and ourselves, winning the whole kingdom of our being for righteousness. What keeps us full of good cheer? Not our evident successes, but our grip of the Divine promises. In God's word and pledge, we rise above our circumstances and above our sins. We feel no sort of fear; we shall "come off more than conquerors."

II. FIRM HOLD OF GOD'S PROMISE GIVES US CONSCIOUS STRENGTH TO CARRY OUT OUR RESOLVES. David meant to win Moab, Edom, Philistia, etc.; and he knew he *could* because God had spoken. There is no sense of strength to accomplish life-purposes ever comes to a man like that he knows when he feels God is at his back.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*God with us assures confidence and victory.* What "casting off" is here referred to by the psalmist no one seems to have satisfactorily explained. The best suggestion, perhaps, is that the sentiments of a returned exile are here interwoven with the sentiments of David. The idea of God, as one who had cast off his people for awhile, is quite suitable to a returned exile, but quite unsuitable to David. The thought is, however, found in the original of this psalm (Ps. lx. 1); and if we must connect it with David, it is necessary to assume that he suffered some temporary repulse in the beginning of his national wars, and that, in a gloomy, poetic way, he regarded this as "God casting off his people." A good writer on Ps. lx. says, "From the first five verses we should gather that the country had been crushed by some great national disaster." One is forcibly reminded of two scenes in the national history.

I. THE ANXIETY OF MOSES ABOUT GOD GOING WITH ISRAEL. Recall the expressions of Divine indignation in the matter of the golden calf. The purpose was, as it were, half formed, to cast off a people who were showing themselves so unfaithful to the trust reposed in them. Moses interceded. The evident burden on his heart was the possibility that God might not himself go with them; and he passionately pleaded, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." Well he knew that "God with us assures confidence and victory."

II. THE ANXIETY OF JOSHUA ABOUT GOD GOING WITH ISRAEL. When the covenant was broken, through the covetousness of Achan, God for a time withdrew his defence and help, cast off his people, with the result that the army was defeated, and the whole expedition placed in jeopardy. Joshua was terribly distressed. It seemed to him (not knowing the real cause of the disaster) that the very Name of God was being dishonoured, and he passionately pleaded for that restoration of God's presence and power which alone could give confidence and victory. The history of God's people furnishes abundant illustrations of the same truth; and it was sealed for ever, as the truth of truths for helpless man, when the ascending Jesus gave his assurance, "Lo, I am with you all the days."—R. T.

Vers. 1—13.—This psalm consists of portions of two others, the first half of it being taken from the fifty-seventh psalm (vers. 7—11), and the latter half from the sixtieth (vers. 5—12). The notes on these two other psalms may be consulted.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CIX.

THE title of this psalm—"To the chief musician, a psalm of David"—is thought to be not inappropriate. We may have here David's own appeal to God against his persecutors, and especially against a chief persecutor, who may be Saul, or Doeg, or Ahithophel, or Shimei. The psalm opens with mingled complaint and prayer. The adversaries are spoken of in the plural (vers. 2—5). They have abused and maligned the writer, have returned evil for the good that he has sought to do them, and given him hatred for his love (ver. 5). The psalmist, in return, utters against them, or rather against his chief persecutor, a series of maledictions (vers. 6—15) which constitute a standing difficulty to all biblical apologists. They are certainly entirely alien to the Christian, though not perhaps to the Jewish spirit (comp. 2 Kings i. 10—12; Luke ix. 54—56). It is impossible to read or rehearse them without pain. The attempt made to explain them as the utterances of David's adversaries (Kennicott, Mendelssohn, Westcott) is unsatisfactory. We must admit that they are the psalmist's own anathemas, and judge them from this standpoint (see the comment on vers. 6—15). They are followed by an analysis of the evil temper in the adversaries which has led them into their evil courses (vers. 15—20). The psalmist then turns to God in prayer, entreating his help, and setting forth his own necessities (vers. 21—29). Finally, he winds up with a short burst of praise, since he is confident that his prayer is heard, and that he will be delivered from his persecutors (vers. 30, 31).

Vers. 1—5.—The initial prayer and complaint. The prayer occupies one verse only (ver. 1); the complaint four verses (vers. 2—5).

Ver. 1.—Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise (comp. Ps. xxviii. 1; xxxv. 22; xxxix. 12). If God makes no sign when men are grievously persecuted, he seems to be indifferent to their sufferings. Surely he will not thus treat one who praises him continually (Ps. xxii. 26; lxxi. 6).

Ver. 2.—For the mouth of the wicked and

the mouth of the deceitful; literally, of *deceit*—the abstract for the concrete. *Are opened against me*; literally, *have they opened upon me* (Kay, Cheyne, Revised Version). They have spoken against me with a lying tongue (comp. Ps. xxvii. 12; xxxv. 11). Calumny and misrepresentation are ever the portion of the children of God. David was calumniated by Saul (1 Sam. xxii. 7—13), by Absalom (2 Sam. xv. 3, 4), by Shimei (2 Sam. xvi. 8), and others. One more perfect than David was even more calumniated (Matt. xi. 19; xii. 24; xxvi. 61; Luke xxiii. 2, etc.).

Ver. 3.—They compassed me about also with words of hatred. The hatred of the wicked for the good is a plain fact of history, and quite indisputable. "*Words of hatred*" are less patent, since they are often restrained from prudential considerations. But sometimes free vent is given to them (see 2 Sam. xvi. 5—8). *And fought against me without a cause* (comp. Ps. xxxv. 7, 19; lxix. 4; cxix. 161). Saul's hatred towards David was markedly of this character—unprovoked by either act or word from its object.

Ver. 4.—For my love they are my adversaries. The tenderness and kindness of the good towards wicked men does not soften them. Rather it provokes them to greater hostility. This was seen clearly in the instance of Saul. But I give myself unto prayer; literally, *but I pray*; i.e. "but I am wholly prayer," "I do nothing during their attacks on me but pray for them."

Ver. 5.—And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love; or, "*thus they rewarded me*." The verse is a corollary from what has gone before, not anything additional.

Vers. 6—15.—The imprecatory portion of the psalm now begins. It is no doubt true to say, with Tholuck, that "no passion is discernible in the imprecations, dreadful as they are." Clearly the writer is not moved by personal feelings of hostility, but by a spirit of justice, and an intense abhorrence of sin. He delivers a calm judicial sentence. Still, the spirit of Christian love must ever shrink from such utterances, which belong to an earlier and less perfect dispensation (comp. Luke ix. 51—56).

Ver. 6.—Set thou a wicked man over him; i.e. to judge him (see ver. 7). A persecutor deserves to be himself persecuted, an oppressor to be himself oppressed. "*Nec lex justior ulla est, Quam necis artifices*

arte perire sua." And let Satan stand at his right hand; rather, *an adversary*, or *an accuser*. In courts of justice the accuser stood at the accused person's right hand.

Ver. 7.—When he shall be judged, let him be condemned; literally, *let him go forth condemned*; i.e. let him quit the court under sentence. And let his prayer become sin. The most terrible of all the imprecations. "Let him even be unable to pray to God acceptably," and so let any prayer that he offers when he is brought low be an additional sin (comp. Prov. xv. 8; xxviii. 9; Isa. i. 12—15).

Ver. 8.—Let his days be few. There were Divine promises that "bloodthirsty and deceitful men" should not "live out half their days," which might naturally be regarded as justifying this wish (see Ps. lv. 23; Prov. x. 27; Eccles. vii. 17). And let another take his office. *Τῇ ἐπισκοπῇ αὐτοῦ*, LXX. Applied by St. Peter to Judas (Acts i. 20).

Ver. 9.—Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Necessary consequences of his own condemnation to death.

Ver. 10.—Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg. If it be just that the sins of the fathers be visited upon the children, the psalmist may be regarded as justified in this wish. Still, it is not one that a Christian will readily echo. Let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Professor Cheyne corrects *וְיִי* into *וְיָד*, and translates, "Let them be driven from their desolate houses."

Ver. 11.—Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; rather, *the creditor*, or *the usurer*; i.e. the man from whom he has borrowed money. And let the strangers (rather, *let foreigners*) spoil his labour; i.e. plunder his lands, carry off his crops, and leave him destitute.

Ver. 12.—Let there be none to extend (literally, *continue*) mercy unto him. In his need, let none of his neighbours continue to show him mercy and loving-kindness. Let them stand aloof, and remain passive, while punishment overtakes him. Neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children. Let them too be suffered to endure the woes which come naturally upon them (see ver. 10) through their father's fault, without any one thinking it necessary, because they are fatherless, to show them favour.

Ver. 13.—Let his posterity be cut off. If he have children; let them die without offspring; literally, *let them be for extinction*. And in the generation following let their name be blotted out. This would be the natural result if the preceding wish were accomplished. The family having come to an end, their very name would be soon forgotten (comp. Job xviii. 18; Ps. xxxvii. 28; Prov. x. 7).

Ver. 14.—Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord. Let the threatening of Exod. xx. 5 take effect in his case, and the sins of his forefathers be remembered by God, and visited upon him. And let not the sin of his mother be blotted out; i.e. erased from God's remembrance. Let it also be visited on him, as Jezebel's was on her children.

Ver. 15.—Let them be before the Lord continually; i.e. let these sins be present to the mind of God constantly, that he may visit for them constantly, even to the bitter end; and so may cut off the memory of them (i.e. of the original sinners) from the earth (comp. ver. 13).

Vers. 16—20.—A portraiture of the wicked man, who was David's chief adversary at the time, is now given, in explanation, and perhaps in justification, of the numerous and severe anathemas. He was merciless (ver. 16), a persecutor of the poor (ver. 16), given to cursing (vers. 17, 18), and one who spoke evil against the innocent (ver. 20).

Ver. 16.—Because that he remembered not to show mercy. Saul certainly was a persecutor of this kind—implacable; one whom compassion never touched; who, after he had once become David's enemy, never under any circumstances showed him mercy. But otherwise the description scarcely seems to point to Saul. But persecuted the poor and needy man (see 1 Sam. xviii. 10; xix. 1, 10, 11; xx. 31; xxiii. 8, 14, 25; xxiv. 2; xxvi. 2—20; xxvii. 1, etc.). That he might even slay the broken in heart; literally, *and the broken in heart* (or, *yea, the broken in heart*) to slay him. It was certainly Saul's object to slay David (1 Sam. xviii. 11; xix. 1, 10; xx. 1, etc.). It was probably also Ahithophel's (2 Sam. xvii. 2).

Ver. 17.—As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him; rather, *so it came upon him* (Revised Version), or *so it shall come upon him* (LXX., Cheyne). The one of David's enemies who "loved cursing" most was Shimei (2 Sam. xvi. 5—12). As he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him; rather, *so it was*, or *so it will be*, far from him.

Ver. 18.—As he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment (comp. Ps. x. 7; lix. 12; lxii. 4). Extreme malevolence vents itself in curses, which tend to become frequent, and, so to speak, habitual. So let it come; rather, *so it came*, or *so it will come*. Into his bowels like water. Dr. Kay sees here an allusion to the "water of cursing" which was drunk by the woman whose husband taxed her with unfaithfulness (Numb. v. 22); and so also Hengstenberg. But this is doubtful. Perhaps the mere penetrative power of water is alluded to,

See the next clause. And like oil into his bones. The oil, wherewith it was usual to anoint the frame, was believed to penetrate, not only into the tissues, but into the very bones and marrow.

Ver. 19.—Let it be unto him as the garment which covereth him. Let it cling to him both outwardly and inwardly—inwardly, as the penetrating oil; outwardly, as the everyday dress. And for a girdle wherewith he is girded continually. The “girdle” or “waistcloth” was even more inseparable from the wearer than his *beged*, his “cloak” or “wrap.”

Ver. 20.—Let this be the reward of mine adversaries from the Lord; rather, *this is the reward, or the wages*. This is what their conduct has earned, and what they have received, or assuredly will receive. And of them that speak evil against my soul (see above, ver. 2).

Vers. 21—29.—The psalmist now turns to God in prolonged prayer, setting forth his needs (vers. 22—25), and entreating for help (ver. 26), deliverance (ver. 21), blessing (ver. 28), and triumph over his enemies (ver. 29).

Ver. 21.—But do thou for me; or, “deal thou with me” (see the Revised Version). O God the Lord; literally, *Jehovah the Lord*, as in Ps. lxviii. 20; cxl. 7; cxli. 8; Hab. iii. 19. For thy Name’s sake; i.e. suitably to thy Name—according to thy historically manifested attributes. Because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me. A variant echo of the preceding clause (comp. Ps. lxix. 16).

Ver. 22.—For I am poor and needy (comp. ver. 16). David was “poor and needy” both when hunted upon the mountains by Saul, and when forced to flee from Absalom. And my heart is wounded within me. The wound to David’s heart was, on the former occasion, from the malignity of Saul; on the latter, especially from the desertion of his “own familiar friend whom he trusted.”

Ver. 23.—I am gone like the shadow when it declineth; rather, *like a shadow* (comp. Ps. cii. 11). When shadows “decline,” they are just about to cease and disappear. I am tossed up and down as the locust; or, “I am carried away”—swept off, i.e., or just ready to be swept off, from the face of the earth (see Exod. x. 19; Joel ii. 20; Nah. iii. 17).

Ver. 24.—My knees are weak through fasting. I have brought myself down to extreme weakness by penitential fasting for my sins (comp. Ps. xxxv. 13; lxix. 10). And my flesh filleth of fatness; literally, *of oil*. In my state of mourning and penitence I have abstained from anointing myself (2 Sam. xiv. 2), which has still further weakened me.

Ver. 25.—I became (rather, *am become*) also a reproach unto them; i.e. to my enemies. I am an object of their reproach and scorn. When they looked upon me they shook their heads. In derision (comp. Ps. xxii. 7; xlv. 14; Matt. xxvii. 39).

Ver. 26.—Help me, O Lord my God. Connect with ver. 21. O save me according to thy mercy; i.e. “as thou art wont to show mercy, show mercy now to me.”

Ver. 27.—That they may know that this is thy hand (comp. Ps. lix. 13). “Deliver me,” prays the psalmist, “in some signal way, so that my enemies may be forced to recognize thy hand in my deliverance, and to confess that thou, Lord, hast done it.”

Ver. 28.—Let them curse, but bless thou; i.e. “Let them curse, if they will. What matters it? Provided only that thou blessest.” When they arise. When they attempt to put their malevolent designs in act. Let them be ashamed; or, “they shall be ashamed” (Revised Version); i.e. they shall fail so utterly, that they shall be covered with shame. But let thy servant rejoice; rather, *but thy servant shall rejoice*. “Thy servant” is the psalmist himself (comp. Ps. lxix. 17). He will rejoice at their failure, which secures his safety.

Ver. 29.—Let mine adversaries be clothed with shame; rather, *my adversaries shall be clothed with shame*. “The prayer is now, in conclusion, changed into a confident expectation” (Dean Johnson). And let them (rather, *and shall*) cover themselves with their own confusion, as with a mantle (comp. ver. 18). Instead of the “cursing” with which the wicked delighted to clothe themselves, they shall be forced to wear a covering of shame and confusion of face.

Vers. 30, 31.—The psalm terminates with a short burst of praise, the writer feeling assured that his prayer is granted, and that he will shortly triumph over his enemies.

Ver. 30.—I will greatly praise the Lord with my mouth. The expression “greatly praise” does not occur elsewhere in the Psalms. It is indicative of an unusually strong feeling of thankfulness. Yes, I will praise him among the multitude; i.e. in the congregation.

Ver. 31.—For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor. God will always come to the assistance of the poor and needy, when unrighteous men oppress them, and will give them help and deliverance. To save him from those that condemn his soul. The salvation is not always from the death of the body, or there could have been no martyrs; but in all cases it is a deliverance of the soul.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—31.—*Explanation, warning, encouragement.* This psalm of David contains—

I. AN EXPLANATION TO BE SOUGHT. How came these strong imprecations to be used by the servant of the Lord? Are they worthy to find a place in the pages of Holy Scripture? Two things, at least, have to be considered in defence of them. 1. David identifies his own cause with that of God, and therefore his own enemies with God's. He is animated by the spirit which breathes in the words, "Do not I hate them that hate thee? . . . I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies" (Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22). So that his bitterness is not so much personal as public; it is moral indignation rather than individual and personal resentment. He speaks as one who feels that what is said and done against himself is aimed at the cause of Jehovah; there is more of righteousness than rancour in his soul. But if, as may be fairly urged, this does not provide a full explanation, it must be further considered: 2. That David could indulge wishes and take action against his enemies which are impossible to us, without injury to his conscience. He had not sat at the feet of Jesus Christ. He had not read, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt . . . hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies," etc. (Matt. v. 43). He felt that he was well within the limits of the Law, if indeed he was not eagerly and dutifully championing the cause of God and of righteousness, by uttering these maledictions.

II. A WARNING TO BE HEEDED. It did not need that David should imprecate thus in order that his adversaries should be humbled. 1. Evil would certainly overtake them. They were guilty of unprovoked assault (see vers. 4, 5); they were utterly heartless in their course of cruelty (see ver. 16); they would inevitably meet with the condemnation of a righteous God, and with the visible and tangible tokens of his displeasure. All sin has to pay its penalty sooner or later; and it is certain that they who wantonly injure the people of God, and mercilessly afflict the poor and the unfortunated, will have to meet their doom (Ps. xxxiii. 16). 2. The penalty which the wicked have to pay answers closely to the character of their crimes (vers. 17—19). He that curses others will himself be cursed of man, as well as condemned of God. "With what measure ye mete," etc. The hard-hearted and close-fisted will have no pity shown them in their hour of need. He that taketh the sword may expect to perish by the sword. To none are we so apt to be uncharitable as to those who have no charity in their hearts towards others. Every one is inclined to excuse cruelty when it is shown to the cruel. Whatsoever we sow, that shall we reap.

III. AN EXAMPLE TO BE FOLLOWED. Not, indeed, in these imprecations; we have not so learned Christ; we have been taught the much more excellent way of pitying those who are wrong (even when they have wronged us), and of seeking to turn their hearts, that they may be saved from the consequences of their own sins. But: 1. In maintaining innocency in the midst of transgression. The psalmist had the peace-bringing consciousness that the wrongs inflicted on him had not been provoked by him; his hands were clean. In the darkest hour of our distress it is a priceless consolation that we have preserved our own integrity, that nothing has left a stain upon our soul. "Poor and needy, and wounded in heart," we may be (ver. 22), but we are true and pure, and our heart is right with God. 2. In looking to God for Divine succour (vers. 1, 4, 26—28). We, too, must "give ourselves to prayer," and look to the Strong for strength. Let who will curse us, if God bless us we shall be blessed indeed. 3. In a joyful assurance that all will be well at last (vers. 30, 31). Whatever the situation now, the future will show a Divine Redeemer at our right hand, rescuing and exalting us.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—31.—*The dreadful psalm.* It is by no means easy to imagine the whole nation of Israel singing such dreadful imprecations as those contained in vers. 6—19. "Thousands of God's people," says Mr. Spurgeon, "are perplexed by it." Not a few would like to be rid of it altogether. And the explanation given by many of the

old commentators, that these fearful curses are those of the Lord Jesus Christ on Judas, who betrayed him, has only made the difficulties connected with this psalm ever so much worse. What is to be said? The solution we have to offer is that given by a learned theological writer, Mr. J. Hammond; and it is this—that these frightful cursings are not David's at all, but Shimei's (see 2 Sam. xvi.). They are what he heaped upon David, not David upon him. For—

I. SUCH CURSING IS UNLIKE DAVID. No doubt David was capable of saying and doing terrible things. Still, such brutal malignity, such diabolic depths of cruelty, as are reached in these cursings, are not what David's life, even where the worst has been said of it, would lead us to expect. He was not himself, though passionate, a vindictive man. And if David's dying injunctions concerning Joab and Shimei be cited, we venture to say that, deplorable as they were, they are mildness and meekness itself compared with what we find here. They do not take in the parents and innocent children, nor stretch into the far future, as these delight to do; they are limited to the individual criminal and to the present life. But this cannot be said of the curses of this psalm. No, they are not like David; we do not believe they could have come from him.

II. AND THEY ARE INCONSISTENT WITH THE PSALM ITSELF WHEN TAKEN IN ITS ENTIRETY. There are three plainly marked divisions in the psalm. The first, vers. 1—5; the second, containing these imprecations, vers. 6—19; and the third, ver. 20 to the end. Now, nothing could be in greater contrast than the central, the cursing portion, and that which both precedes and follows. The first and last sections tell of "adversaries," many of them; but the central one points to one solitary individual: "Let him be condemned;" "*He* loved cursing," etc. And not in form only, but how *utterly different in spirit!* See the frequent references to God in the first and last sections; but they are scarcely to be found in the central one. In ver. 4, in the first section, David meekly says, "I give myself unto prayer;" which assuredly he did not, but to something very different, if vers. 6—19 are the utterances of *his* mind. Is it likely that all at once, as by a leap, he would pass from the spirit of meek devoutness and lowly trust in God, to the very spirit of hell, which breathes and burns in vers. 6—19? And if such were his spirit, would he at ver. 20 suddenly return to the bitter spirit of the beginning of this psalm? We think not.

III. THEIR AUTHORSHIP CAN BE SETTLED ONLY BY THE CONTEXT, and that is in favour of the view we have maintained. Note: 1. *That in Hebrew there are no quotation marks.* Such contrivances as inverted commas and the like, to make clear when the words of another are given, were unknown to Hebrew writers. You can tell only by the context and the general sense when such quotations occur. Hence: 2. *Our translators continually add some word or words to mark them.* (Of Pss. ii. 2; xxii. 7; xxvii. 8; xli. 8; lix. 7; cv. 15; cxxxvii. 3, and many more.) 3. *And there are numbers of passages where such signs should be given but are not:* e.g. Pss. ii. 6; xiv. 4; xx. and xxi. (liturgical psalms); xxii. 22; xxxix. 4; and the writer I am indebted to for these references says, "I have counted a score of passages in Perowne's translation of the Psalms where he employs either the one or the other." And then: 4. *The reproaches of enemies are cited frequently:* e.g. Pss. x. 6; xxii. 8; xxxv. 21, etc. Now, may we not ask, that seeing the Hebrew has no quotation marks, and that the context only can decide when they should be inserted, could any context more plainly indicate that these vers. 6—19 form an instance in which our translators should, as they have done elsewhere, have given such signs?

IV. IN DAVID'S OWN HISTORY WE HAVE AMPLE EXPLANATION OF THIS PSALM, and confirmation of the view we have maintained. The correspondencies between the history and the psalm are clear, constant, and minute, as well as obvious. The history is in 2 Sam. xvi. Take the vers. 1—5, and what could more faithfully depict the condition, the spirit, and the enemy of David at the time of Absalom's revolt, and when he was cursed by Shimei? And if, as we believe we should, we introduce the word "saying" after ver. 5, then do we not get a vivid representation of the curses that Shimei heaped upon him? And the imprecations themselves are just those that would have been spoken. They indicate the fact that he against whom they were directed held some great office; ver. 8 shows this. Ver. 14 points to facts told of in the Book of Ruth. David's ancestors were Israelites, but they had committed the great sin of

marrying Moabitish women. This was "the iniquity of his fathers." Then ver. 16, which at first sight seems not to correspond with David's character, finds its warrant in that dark page of his history when he slew Uriah, having first taken from him his wife. Nathan distinctly charged him with having "no pity." What wonder that the foul-mouthed Shimei should exaggerate and enlarge this with the charge which ver. 16 contains? But in the closing section of the psalm how exact the correspondences are with the moral history! The earnest pleading of ver. 21 seems but the echo of the words in the history, "It may be that the Lord will look upon mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day" (2 Sam. xvi. 12). Thus, then, from first to last the psalm "fits into the folds of the narrative of David's flight; the key turns without the slightest strain in the wards of the lock," and the whole of these correspondences go to show that the impious speeches in vers. 6—19 are not those of David against Shimei, but his and others against David.

V. BUT, IT WILL BE SAID, ST. PETER DISPROVES ALL THAT HAS BEEN MAINTAINED. And doubtless the common interpretation has been upheld by his words in Acts i. 16. But "the Scripture" (not "this" Scripture, see Revised Version) which "it was needful should be fulfilled" is not that in Pss. lxi. 25 and cix. 8, but that in Ps. xli. 9 (see reference), which is plainly concerning Judas; and the quotations further down in ver. 20 are not concerning Judas, but are simply applied as apposite to him—just as we constantly quote texts and sentences when they suit any particular case, without any idea that they were designed specially for such case. And even if this be questioned, and it be said, "the quotations do refer to Judas," it does not follow that David actually spoke the words. The psalm was his, and as a whole it is assigned to him—the part which belonged to his enemy, as well as those bitter portions which undoubtedly belonged to him. But we do not believe that they do refer to Judas in any other way than that which we have said; for if so, then the dreadful denunciations upon him must be attributed to our Lord Jesus Christ! But that he who when on the cross prayed for his murderers, "Father, forgive them," etc., should utter such cursings as these, is altogether and horribly unbelievable.

VI. AND THE INTERPRETATION IS WELL SUPPORTED. It is that of many Jewish rabbis, of Mendelssohn, of Kennicott, Lowth, etc. (see Mr. Hammond's article); and, above all, it must commend itself to the heart and conscience of those who love God's Word, and desire that others should love it too. The view we have combated lays a burden grievous to be borne on those who believe that in the Scriptures "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And this burden we have thus tried somewhat to relieve.—S. C.

Ver. 31.—*The Helper of the poor.* I. THE POOR. Who are these? Not alone those that are poor in this world's good, for such may often be rich in heavenly wealth. But the poor are those of whom Christ says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. v.). Nor is it those only who are spiritually poor, for many such, like the people of Laodicea, do not think themselves poor, but the reverse. But those of whom we speak know and feel and confess themselves to be poor. They disclaim all merit, goodness, righteousness, of their own. Their only hope is in Christ.

II. THOSE WHO CONDEMN THEM. 1. There is the Law, the strength of sin. 2. *Their own indwelling sin* and its deeds. 3. Their miserable unbelief. 4. *Those whom, ere they were saved, they led astray.* 5. *Those whom, since then, they have failed to pray for and warn as they should.* All these have just accusations to bring; but there are others which are unjust.

III. THE LORD WHO HELPS THEM. "He shall stand at his right hand to save him." As a friend, close at hand, full of love and power through his sacrifice and his Spirit.—S. C.

Ver. 4.—*Complaining to God.* "I am for prayer." "I find refuge in prayer, committing myself and my cause unto thee." The point of the psalm which seems to be missed is this—the psalmist, deeply moved in his feeling by the treacherous wrong done to him, nevertheless does not express his feeling to his fellow-men, nor act revengefully toward his enemies, but lets out his heart to God, speaking quite freely to him all that he thought and felt. It may, indeed, be said that the psalmist should not have felt

so bitterly under any provocation. But we can clearly see that, if he did feel thus, he did what was altogether the wisest and most hopeful thing, when he spoke his bad feelings to God rather than to men. It is generally agreed that David was the author of the psalm, and that the treachery and wickedness of some individual is the cause of David's extreme anger and distress. Doeg, Cush, Shimei, and Ahithophel have been suggested. The treachery of his trusted friend Ahithophel perhaps affected David more than any other wrong done to him. But Shimei was brutal in his enmity. The expressions David uses must be judged in the light of his age.

I. ACTING IN VINDICATION OF SELF MAY BE WRONG. And acting includes speech and deed. In David's case—if the association is the rebellion of Absalom—he could not act; he was helpless to defend himself. But if he had been able, it was clearly wiser not to attempt such defence. There are many forms of trouble to which men are subject which they must leave alone. Attempted vindications only make matters worse. Men often make grave mistakes through over-anxiety about self-vindication; and their own heat of feeling, and the public prejudice excited, make the methods of vindication imprudent, and the results ineffective. "Avenge not yourselves." On David's side it should be urged that he did not attempt to avenge himself.

II. APPEALING TO GOD FOR VINDICATION IS ALWAYS RIGHT. And he who goes to God may be, and should be, genuine with God; and if he does feel strongly, he should say what he feels. Illustrate by the way in which a mother encourages her boy to tell everything to her when he is in a passion. The boy tells how he hates, and wishes evil done to, the person who has injured him. The mother does not misunderstand, and her work is to get the boy soothed and calmed. We may freely speak out our bad feelings to our Father-God. That very unreserve he uses to bring us to our right minds. We may show how wrongly we feel by what we say to God, as David did; but the saying it to God is certainly right. Take your very anger to God in prayer.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Committing our enemies to the judgment of God.* It should be borne in mind that David was not a merely private person, and that he does not write this psalm as a private person. He was a king, placed in an official position, responsible to his people for the due punishment of all wrong-doers. And the treachery and wickedness of which he complains was committed against him as *king*. (This is clearly seen if the association of the psalm be with either Shimei or Ahithophel.) And there is another thing. David was not an independent king. He was the anointed of Jehovah—the true king. When David had a case of unusual difficulty, one in which personal feeling was likely unduly to influence him, every way the wisest thing for him to do was to refer the matter to the supreme Sovereign, and let him decide. The psalm is to be regarded as the appeal of a viceroy to his superior. This view relieves the psalm of its burden, because we can see that the superior will only take the representations of his subordinate into due consideration. He will be sure not to be unduly influenced by them. He will act on the eternal principles of righteousness.

I. EVERY MAN HAS A POWER TO PUNISH. Presently David would have been able to punish these men of whom he complains. When a man wrongs us we can punish (1) by slighting him; (2) by speaking of him so as to take away his character; (3) by injuring him in his circumstances. It is a fatal power—one of the most dangerous trusts a man has. Man seldom uses it well. See the uncertainty, and frequent injustice, of magistrates' decisions. Feeling guides rather than judgment. Custom tends to exaggerate sins, and so exaggerate judgments. As in the case of poaching. The Christian spirit puts strict limitation on the desire to punish.

II. EVERY MAN SHOULD LEAVE GOD TO PUNISH. That is what David does. And that is the good side of the psalm. True, he seems to prescribe what God ought to do, but that we may put down to the intensity of his feeling. He leaves God to punish both his own enemies and the enemies of the kingdom. That is precisely what we ought to do always. And we may be quite sure (1) that God will punish; (2) will punish justly; (3) will punish efficiently; (4) will punish mercifully; (5) will vindicate us by the punishment.—R. T.

Vers. 9, 10.—*The vicarious feature in judgments.* "Let his children be orphans,

and his wife a widow." There are few Bible difficulties more perplexing than that which is created by the fact, that a man's punishments are recognized as righteously affecting, not himself only, but also his children, and those dependent on him. We naturally resist this, and say, "Every man ought to bear his own burden," and a man's punishment should be limited to himself. It is not so; it never has been so; it never can be so, because men are so closely bound together, and related, that if "one member suffers, all the members suffer with it." While this has a trying side, involving a sad extension of suffering, we should never forget that it has also a bright side, involving a most glorious extension of our privileges and pleasures. The vicarious feature in life is the sweet secret of three parts of its blessedness.

I. VICARIOUS SUFFERING IS THE UNIVERSAL FACT OF LIFE. Diseased parents involve their children in disease. Sinful parents convey evil tendencies to their children. Unthrifty parents bring their children into misery. Unfortunate parents lead all belonging to them into misfortune. So unworthy kings bring woe on all their people. The consequences of wrong-doing never can be circumscribed. Every man that lives is the victim of some vicarious disability. However we may explain it, we must take the principle into account.

II. VICARIOUS SUFFERING IS TAKEN UP, AND USED, BY RELIGION. It is recognized in the Divine punishment of the first act of self-will; and in the first act of murder. Cain's posterity suffer for Cain's sin. It is declared as a principle in connection with the Decalogue (Exod. xx. 5). It is illustrated in the judgments on Korah and Dathan and Achan; and also in the family of King Saul. It is seen on its brighter side in the Christian baptism of a man and his household; as see Acts xvi. 31—33.

III. VICARIOUS SUFFERING IS PLACED UNDER STRICT CHRISTIAN LIMITATIONS. It is seen to concern only physical and temporal disabilities. And the Christian rule of life ever tends to limit the conveyance of bodily evils.—R. T.

Ver. 17.—*Suffering that which we make others suffer.* "As he loved cursing, so let it come to him." We have a popular sentence which illustrates. When a man suffers what he planned to make others suffer, he is said to be "hoist with his own petard;" and human nature, in every age, is specially pleased with cases of retributive justice, such as that of Haman, who was hanged on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai. "The psalmist felt that he was praying in accordance with the Divine will, when he prayed that the ungodly might fall into their own nets together, while he ever escaped them. So again with his prayer that the mischief of their own lips might fall upon the heads of them that compassed him about. For it was a matter at once of faith and of experience with the psalmist, that the evil-deviser and evil-doer, travelling with mischief, conceiving sorrow, and bringing forth ungodliness, who had graven and digged up a pit, was apt to fall himself into the destruction he made for other. 'For his travail shall come upon his own head, and his wickedness shall fall on his own pate.'"

I. A MAN'S PUNISHMENT DOES OFTEN COME IN THIS WAY. See the punishment of those who arranged the den of lions for Daniel. "Owen Feltham delights to recall, from the stores of ancient and mediæval story, how Bagas, a Persian nobleman, having poisoned Artaxerxes and Artamenes, was detected by Darius, and forced to drink poison himself; how Diomedes, for the beasts he had fed on human flesh, was by Hercules made food; and how Pope Alexander VI., having designed the poisoning of his friend Cardinal Adrian, by his cup-bearer's mistake of the bottle, took the draught himself, and so died by the same engine which he himself had appointed to kill another." Many other illustrations may be found.

II. STRONG IMPRESSIONS OF A MAN'S SIN ARE MADE BY THIS FORM OF PUNISHMENT. There is something striking and arresting in it; it takes public attention. There is often the element of humour in such judgments. But a sin which would otherwise have been passed over, is shown up in all its baseness when the wrong-doer suffers his own designed wrong. He feels the wrong; and others see it.—R. T.

Vers. 30, 31.—*The power of prayer to change our moods.* There is clearly a different tone in the closing portion of this psalm. It may not be so evident as we should like it to have been, but it is there. The storm of angry feeling dies down, and we only

hear mutterings after the loud thunder-peals. There is gradually more earnest prayer for himself, less concern about his enemy, and a fuller confidence that God will answer his prayer, and, in his own wise way, bless the good and shame the evil. It is his praying on that has wrought this change of mood. He has prayed himself into a better mind, by the very saying out so freely all the bitter things he had thought and felt.

I. PRAYER CHANGES OUR MOODS BY EXHAUSTING THE BAD MOODS. Here is a most singular thing. Saying out all our bad feelings to a fellow-man would only intensify the badness. We should excite ourselves even to plan revengeful things. But if we say out all our bad feelings to God, we find they get exhausted. Somehow, in his presence, we cannot keep them up. We soon come to the end, and the very Divine silence seems to be waiting until we have said it all; and presently we feel as if there was nothing more we could say. Another mood must come, as tears come when passion has expended itself. So prayer helps by finding us the opportunity for safely saying out all that is in our hearts.

II. PRAYER HELPS US BY ENCOURAGING NEW AND BETTER MOODS. Gradually, as we pray on, the sense of God's presence makes us feel kinder. We cease to want our enemy punished, we want ourselves vindicated; and then presently we feel as if we could just leave our enemy in the hands of God. The Judge of all the earth will surely do the right. At last we find ourselves filled with pity for them; it comes to us, as we pray, that it is far sadder to be a wrong-doer than to be a wronged one; the injurer is much more to be pitied than the injured. So mood after mood changing for the better, we come at last to the Christian mood, and do as the Lord Jesus did, and as St. Stephen did—pray for our enemies. In all the strain-times of life we may prove the soothing, correcting, and comforting power of prayer.—R. T.

Vers. 1—31.—This is a psalm of the most *awful imprecations*, in which the writer unrestrainedly pours forth the fiercest hatred of his enemy, and pleads with God to load him with the most dreadful curses. He justifies his vindictive spirit by pleading that his enemy had fought against him without a cause; had rewarded his good with evil, and his love with hatred. He says he will give himself unto prayer; but the words which follow breathe a spirit such as we wonder that a man dare utter before God—the God of mercy. The best commentary on the whole psalm would be a sermon on Matt. v. 43—46, and another on Rom. xii. 17—21.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CX.

ACCORDING to the recent criticism, which calls itself "advanced," this psalm is the composition of an unknown prophet, addressed to his earthly sovereign, communicating to him certain Divine utterances, or oracles (vers. 1, 5), of great weight and strangeness, and promising him complete victory over all his enemies. The king is supposed by some to be David; by others, a Davidic monarch; by others, again, a Maccabee prince or king. According to its "title," it is "a Psalm of David;" according to our Lord's comment upon it (Matt. xxii. 43—45; Mark xii. 35—37; Luke xx. 41—44), it is an address of David to the Messiah; according to every Christian commentator for fifteen centuries, it is Messianic and Davidic. Even Professor Cheyne, who in-

clines so strongly to the sceptical school, grants that "it may perhaps refer to the ideal or Messianic King himself," though he thinks it "equally possible to explain it of some historical ruler." The style and language are generally allowed to be Davidic, and many, even of the "advanced" critics, refer the composition to his time. Ewald suggested that Gad or Nathan might have been the author. Recently, Canon Gore has embraced the sceptical view, and has suggested that our Lord either did not know who was the author, or did not mean to touch the question of the authorship ('Bampton Lectures,' pp. 196—200). But the expressions, "David calleth him Lord," "David himself saith in the Book of Psalms, The Lord said unto my Lord," are difficult to explain away.

There seem to be no sufficient grounds

for rejecting the traditional views of the authorship and the interpretation. The psalm belongs to the same class as Ps. ii. It is wholly Messianic. David has had revelations made to him concerning the kingdom, the priesthood, and the ultimate victory of the Messiah over the entire power of evil. In a grand burst of song, rough and rugged, no doubt, but full of energy and genius, he addresses Messiah, and sets forth his praise and glory, the mighty offices which he holds, and the wonderful triumph which awaits him.

Metrically, the psalm consists of two stanzas—one of three, and the other of four verses (vers. 1-3, 4-7).

Ver. 1.—The Lord said unto my Lord, Jehovah said unto him who is my Lord and Master, *i.e.* to Messiah, who is my liege Lord, although about to be, in some mysterious way, my descendant. Sit thou at my right hand. An exaltation too high for any merely human personage (comp. Acts ii. 33; vii. 56; Heb. i. 3). Until I make thine enemies thy footstool. To place the foot upon the neck or body of defeated enemies was a common practice of Oriental conquerors.

Ver. 2.—The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion. "The rod of thy strength," or "thy strong sceptre," is the same thing as "thy ruling power" (see Jer. xlviii. 17; Ezek. xix. 11). The ruling power of Messiah was to go forth from Jerusalem (Acts i. 4-8; ii. 1-4). Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. According to Professor Cheyne, these are the words of Jehovah—a continuation of the address in ver. 1; but they are more generally regarded as the words of the writer of the psalm, *i.e.*, according to our exegesis, of David. He calls on the Messiah to take his power and reign.

Ver. 3.—Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power. In the full sense of the word, Messiah can only rule over "willing" hearts. In the day of his power, his people will offer themselves gladly to be his soldiers and servants, and flock to his banner, as the Israelites to that of Deborah and Barak, when "the people willingly offered themselves" (Judg. v. 2, 9; comp. Isa. xlix. 18-23; lx. 1-5; lxvi. 19-23). In the beauties of holiness. At once warriors and saints, meet for the service of One who was at once Priest (ver. 4) and King. From the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth. This is the division of the clauses now generally adopted; but the intention of this last clause is very doubtful. Some understand it of Messiah himself, and

explain, "As the dew of the morning, abundant, refreshing, spreading far and wide, miraculous, so is the might of thy perpetual youth" ('Speaker's Commentary,' vol. iv. p. 428); others, and the larger number, interpret it of Messiah's army, "As dew out of the early morning dawn, descending by a silent, mysterious birth from the star-lit heaven, so comes to Messiah his mighty host of followers" (comp. Isa. xxvi. 19).

Ver. 4.—The Lord hath sworn, and he will not repent. "A fresh revelation" (Cheyne). David, admitted into the councils of the Most High, has been made aware that the Messiah is, by God's decree, to be both King and Priest. God has "sworn" this, and will certainly not draw back from his oath. Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. Not, like ordinary priests, a priest for a few years, or for a lifetime, but a priest for ever and ever (עלמלך)—seeing "he ever liveth to make intercession for us" (Heb. vii. 25). And a priest "after the order of Melchizedek." Not, that is, after the order of Aaron, who was a priest and nothing more, but after that of Melchizedek, the older priesthood, which combined the offices of priest and king (see Heb. v. 6-10; vii. 1-10, 20-28).

Ver. 5.—The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. "Adonai" here is certainly Jehovah (Cheyne). He stands at Messiah's right hand (comp. Pss. xvi. 8; cxxi. 5) to protect and defend him, and give him victory in the battle. Ver. 5 carries on the description of Messiah's triumph begun in ver. 3. The kings to be "struck through" are those that resist the progress of the gospel—Herod Agrippa, Galerius, Julian, and the like.

Ver. 6.—He shall judge among the heathen; *i.e.* execute the royal office not only over Israel, but over the nations of the earth generally (comp. Ps. vii. 9; ix. 9; xvi. 10, etc.). He shall fill the places with the dead bodies; rather, *he shall fill the earth with dead bodies*; *i.e.* with the corpses of those whom he has slain while executing judgment. He shall wound the heads over many countries. Thus translated, the clause more fully repeats ver. 5. Perhaps a better rendering is that of Dr. Kay, "He shall smite him that is head over the wide earth"—either Satan or "the central power of the whole confederacy of evil."

Ver. 7.—He shall drink of the brook in the way. Primarily, the action described is that of pausing in the pursuit of enemies to refresh one's self with a draught of water from a brook by the wayside; but, if we interpret the passage of the Messiah, we must understand the refreshing draughts

which he ever draws from the well-spring of truth and righteousness as he advances on his career of victory. Therefore (*i.e.* because of these draughts) he shall lift up the head. He shall never faint nor be weary (Isa. xl. 28), but shall continue the

pursuit of his enemies unremittingly, as Bishop Perowne says, "with renewed ardour, with head erect and kindling eye," never resting until at length all things shall have been put in subjection under his feet (Hob. ii. 8).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*The victorious King.* New Testament references leave no doubt as to the Messianic character of this psalm. "The image of a warrior destroying his foes may seem a strange representation of the establishment upon earth of Christ's spiritual dominion. But David described Messiah's victory over his enemies by images familiar to him as a warrior; so Ezekiel drew his images out of the forms of the Assyrian world." Here, in prophetic vision, we see Christ our Lord—

I. HOLDING THE MOST EXALTED STATION. He is at the right hand of God (ver. 1). This is he who is "highly exalted;" who has "sat down at the right hand of God;" who receives the adoration of the heavenly host along with "him that sitteth on the throne" (Rev. v. 13).

II. WIELDING THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY. (Ver. 2.) He is to sway the sceptre, to receive the commission, "Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies."

III. EXERTING IRRESISTIBLE POWER. (Ver. 2.) His is "the rod of strength," and "the Lord at his right hand shall strike through kings," etc. (ver. 5). Who shall measure the power of Christ to-day? What forces are there in the world that are not Christian in their origin and in their character? The name of Christ, the truth and principles of Christ, the spirit of Christ,—this is leavening the literature, the laws, the institutions, the habits, and customs of the world. Other great forces have disappeared or are waning, but the power of Jesus Christ not only survives the changes of eighteen centuries, but it is spreading and deepening from year to year.

IV. WORKING THROUGH A BEAUTIFUL AND HOLY WILLINGHOOD. (Ver. 3.) The people (the subjects) of Messiah are to be "willing," or to be free offerings; they will offer themselves to him; they will serve under him with cheerful self-surrender. No forced, reluctant levies will win his victories, but they who hasten to his side, who long to strike bravely and earnestly in his cause, who rejoice in his watchwords, who are prepared to lay down their lives in his cause. When "the day of his power" comes, the day of battle, they will be found eager to obey the summons. And these subjects of his will be clothed with the beautiful garment of holiness. With no tawdry finery, in no massive and burdensome armour, will they be clad; they will be invested with purity, piety, love, patience, unselfishness, all-consuming zeal; fairer in the sight of truth will they be than the most splendid pageantry—the army of goodness, the hosts of Christ, separated in space but united in aim and spirit.

V. POSSESSED OF AN INEXHAUSTIBLE ENERGY. "Thou hast the dew of thy youth" may refer to Christ's soldiery or to himself. In either case, it is an ascription of unfailing vigour to his cause.

"Ever new and ever young,
And firm endures tho' endless years
Their everlasting circles run,"

may be affirmed of the cause of Christianity. It is always morning; there is no sign of sunset. It knows nothing of decline. It absorbs the new forms of activity and association, and employs them. It uses the latest knowledge, the latest arts. Instead of crumbling with age, it gathers strength and energy with time.

VI. MEETING THE DEEPER NECESSITIES OF MANKIND. (Ver. 4.) The warrior and the priest do not ordinarily meet in one person. Our Lord, however, is a Conqueror who subdues, and also a Saviour who cleanses and redeems. He is more to our race than can be indicated by an image drawn from one vocation; so much more that the unity of the sacred poem must be disregarded. His Priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, cannot be omitted. On that heavenly throne is he who once gave

himself as a sacrifice for us, and redeemed us from sin and death; an unchanging and eternal Priest, in whom to trust so long as time endures.

VII. CROWNED WITH GLORIOUS VICTORY. This once crucified One, exalted to the right hand of God, who completed his redeeming work when amongst us, and who has such followers to fight beneath his banner, will one day have his enemies beneath his feet (ver. 1). Great conquests have been won already. Immeasurably greater these would have been if his people had adhered to his truth and done his bidding. But now they hear the call of their Leader and the cry of their brethren, and are hastening to the field. To-day the triumphs of the cross are vastly greater than they were a century ago; and at the present rate of advance, with such signs of progress as have never been known before, there is every reason to expect that, a hundred years hence, the gospel will have covered and conquered a very large part of heathendom. Nor will the glorious struggle end until the whole world is won, and the crown of victory is placed on the Divine Sovereign's head.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 3.—*The day of Christ's power.* Luther calls this psalm "the true high main psalm of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ." Our Lord himself attests that it is inspired of the Holy Ghost, and there is no other Scripture in the Old Testament that is so frequently quoted in the New. The occasion of the psalm seems to have been the great festival of the bringing up of the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to Jerusalem. On that day David assumed the double function of priest and king, for he was vested in priestly raiment, and fulfilling the priestly office, whilst at the same time he was the victorious king. But this double character which in this day David bore became the prefigurement and type of the twofold character of him who was to be in all respects a King infinitely more glorious than David, and a Priest whose office should never fail. It is of the vision of him that this psalm tells. The sacred poet pictures our Saviour as a mighty monarch surrounded by his youthful warriors, bright and numberless as the dew-drops on a summer's morn, willing to shed their heart's blood in his service, each one rated as a priest, each one a soldier of God. That is what is foretold of Christ. Let us speak of—

I. THE DAY OF CHRIST'S POWER. His resurrection-day; Pentecost; all days when Christ is vividly realized by the soul;—such are days of his power. And there is yet a future day which will emphatically deserve to be thus called. Then the vision of this psalm finds fulfilment; there is the glad rush of the young to his standard, and their willing surrender to his service. And in the history of the Church there have been from time to time such blessed days. Eternal things became real to his people, the old words and truths shone out with a new lustre. Christ drew near to his people's souls, and they welcomed him as their Lord. Such days have come to scattered congregations and to individual believing souls. The secret of all real revivals of religion with which the Church has once and again been blessed has been this—that Christ came to them, as at Pentecost, in power. And if his presence were more hungered after, there would be more of such days.

II. ITS CHARACTERISTICS. 1. *The spontaneity and willingness with which the people offer themselves.* They have not to be dragged to his service, forced to do his will. 2. *Their sanctity.* They are vested "in the beauties of holiness." They are to be priests of God as well as his soldiers. When this is the case with the Church, then indeed it will be a day of Christ's power. It is what the world waits to see, and insists upon it that it as yet cannot see. 3. *Their numbers;* as the drops of dew on a summer morning, innumerable; and heaven-born, and for the earth's refreshment and fertility. Not a solitary convert here and there as now, but they shall come in multitudes. 4. *Their youthfulness.* Not worn-out lives and faded energies are offered, but "the dew of thy youth." Do we not long to see such a day? Fervent, believing, persevering, and obedient prayer shall surely bring such days.—S. C.

Ver. 4.—*Melchizedek.* This name meets us first in Gen. xiv. 18; then in the text; then it is referred to in Zech. vi. 13, where it is said Messiah shall be a priest upon his

throne, and then in Heb. vii. The record in Genesis is but brief, but the recurrence of the name leads to the inquiry as to the meaning and significance of that early record. The Epistle to the Hebrews supplies the answer. Note—

I. THE FACTS CONNECTED WITH MELCHIZEDEK. He is mentioned in the account of Abraham's intervention on behalf of the inhabitants of the district in which Abraham's nephew Lot lived. He was probably a Canaanitish chief, lived at Salem—that is, Jerusalem; was evidently a man of much distinction. He was "great" because of the combined high office he held; he was both priest and king. But yet more from his character—peaceful, righteous.

II. HIS RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST. From this psalm and from Heb. vii. we learn that he did bear such relationship. He was a type of Christ: 1. *In the mystery of his person.* We read of no predecessor or progenitor, nor of any successor. Human records are silent on all these points. And so with our Lord—"great is the mystery of godliness." 2. *In his priesthood.* It is to this that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews mainly refers, and argues from Christ being a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, that therefore his Priesthood was far superior to that of Aaron; for Melchizedek was like Christ, and greater than Aaron in antiquity, catholicity, independence, perpetuity, and spirituality of his priesthood. 3. *In his kingly character.* No king could be a priest, no priest a king, in the Jewish dispensation; but Melchizedek and Christ were both. 4. *In the effects of his administration.* Righteousness and peace. 5. *In his ministry of blessing.*

CONCLUSION. Abraham shows us our duty to Christ, in self-dedication; this the meaning of the tithe offering.—S. C.

Ver. 7.—"*The brook by the way.*" This psalm tells of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, but all that it tells of has not yet been fulfilled. But the Church is still confidently assisting the glory of the Lord. Our text is difficult of completely satisfactory explanation. Three chief interpretations have been given.

I. THAT IT TELLS OF OUR LORD'S BEING MADE A COURSE FOR US. The wrath of God running in the channel of the curse of the Law was "the brook by the way" of which our Saviour drank, and concerning which he said, "The cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it?" Calvin, Hengstenberg, and Matthew Henry thus explain this verse. And then the glorious triumphs of the cross of Christ, past, present, and yet to come, are the lifting up of the head which is said to result.

II. THAT IT DENOTES HIS INTENTNESS AND EAGERNESS IN THE PURSUIT OF HIS GREAT END, which was the destruction of the works of the devil. He would not turn aside for refreshment or rest, but like Gideon (Judg. vii.), though faint, he kept pursuing. Like as the chosen soldiers of Gideon were known by their eager lapping of the water as distinguished from the mere leisurely lying down to drink of the rest, so our Lord was intent on his work, and nothing could stay his pursuit (cf. Luke xii. 50). He would drink of the brook by the way, and then on again.

III. THAT IT SETS FORTH THE HUMILIATION OF CHRIST, in that he placed himself on a level with us by stooping to need and to partake of those spiritual refreshments which in this life God provides for us. He humbled himself to need and share these with men. This is the interpretation which we prefer. What, then, for our Lord, were these brooks? They were such as these—prayer; fellowship with kindred minds; affection and sympathy from those who loved him; the "joy set before him;" the Holy Scriptures.

IV. THUS UNDERSTOOD, THE TEXT APPLIES TO CHRISTIANS NOW. For brooks by the way are provided for us by means of which we shall be, as was our Lord, strengthened and refreshed. And ours are as his, even as his were as ours.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*War-figures applied to Messiah.* It is remarkable that the prevailing political and national associations always colour both the literature and the religious sentiments of an age. Our associations provide our figures and illustrations, and these vary and change according to the altering of associations. This may be shown by comparing the age of Cromwell with this latter half of the nineteenth century. War associations prevailed then; peace associations prevail now. The sterner views of God prevailed then; the milder views of God prevail now. Redemption was then mainly

regarded as a vindication; redemption is now regarded mainly as a moral force. It is quite natural that the conceptions of the promised and coming Messiah should vary at different times, according to the varying conditions of the Jewish people. In Moses' days he was thought of as a "Prophet" like Moses, an inspired Teacher, Revealer, and Leader. In David's days we find both the earlier warlike associations, and the later suffering associations, colouring the anticipations of Messiah. In the prophets the suffering idea is prominent, and Messiah is thought of, largely, as a "Servant of the Lord," who succeeds no better than the prophets did. The Book of Daniel, and more especially the careers of the patriotic Maccabees, bring back strongly the war associations and king-figures.

I. THE WAR-FIGURES ARE SUGGESTIVE AND HELPFUL. We should be weak in our conceptions of Messiah if we had not these war-figures. Loving peace as we do, it is astonishing how interesting to everybody the associations of war are. Everybody is excited when a regiment comes into a town. The "Salvation Army" appeal to a sentiment which seems universal in human nature. To young and old the literature of war is fascinating. And war-figures may be used in connection with Messiah, because sin is properly conceived of as an active hostile force, which man has to oppose, but is helpless to overcome. Messiah is well thought of as the Champion that undertakes man's cause, and leads man in the fight. Those two ideas, of *Champion* and *Captain*, suggest the two important sides of Messiah's work. He acts *for* us. He acts *with* us.

II. THE WAR-FIGURES BLEND WITH OTHER FIGURES. So much mistake has been made by taking them exclusively: then a one-sided theological system is constructed. They must always be treated as giving only a *portion* of the Messianic representation, and illustrating only certain sides and aspects of the Redeemer's work. He is the King, and he is the Lamb, and he is the Teacher. Blended figures alone bring apprehensions of the full truth.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*God in world-success.* Messiah does but illustrate universal human experience. He is successful, but it is God who gives him his success. "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion." This inmost truth of things is too often disregarded. The pious soul fully recognizes it and rejoices in it. His refrain in all life's toils and successes is this, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our Refuge."

I. WORLD-SUCCESS IS LARGELY DUE TO GOOD FORTUNE. Some men seem born to succeed. We can find no reason, in either their ability or their character, why they should succeed when others fail. We speak of their "good luck." Take any department of life, business, or profession, and we plainly see that some are the children of fortune. They seem born favourites, and they are the world's favourites as long as they live. This may, indeed, be an incorrect view to take; we only note that it is the common and usual view. There may be reasons, in character and in entrusted mission, which are simply beyond our discernment and appraisal. Now men may look on the success of Messiah, and say of it, "It is only a piece of good fortune. He just happened to fit to the needs of his age."

II. WORLD-SUCCESS IS LARGELY DUE TO ENERGY. Many a man, by the force of his own vitality, and by the concentration of his powers, has mastered disabilities and difficulties, and gained for himself a place. The energy that is quick-witted to seize opportunities, skilful to use opportunities, and persistent in carrying out resolves, seldom fails to win world-success. And it may be said of the success of Messiah—It is sufficiently explained by the vital force that was in him, by his energy and enterprise. The boast of Nebuchadnezzar has many and many a time been repeated since his day, "Is not this great Babylon which I have builded?"

III. WORLD-SUCCESS IS REALLY DUE TO DIVINE PERMISSION, ARRANGEMENT, AND AID. But the discernment of this comes only to those whose eyes have been spiritually opened. The success of Messiah really has this explanation, "The Lord sends the rod of his strength out of Zion." 1. There is no such thing as good fortune. Everything stands in Divine adjustment. A man's "destiny" is the arrangement of infinite wisdom. 2. Back of a man's energy is the Divine vitalizing. A man's bodily health and mental power are absolutely in God's hands, and are God's providings. Man plans, but he must lean on God for power to execute his plans. God may say, "This night shall thy soul be required of thee,"—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The power of recognizing power.* “The people shall be willing in the day of thy power.” Power to submit, power to accept, power to respond, power to offer allegiance, come to the people when they recognize Messiah’s power. Illustrated on the Day of Pentecost, when Messiah’s power was so convincingly displayed. “They then that received Peter’s words were baptized; and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls.” In common history and common life, the principle is seen working. As soon as a man is successful, as soon as his power is manifest, the crowd will flock to him. This is put into the motto, “Nothing succeeds like success.” An illustration may be found in the time of the Judges. When the people were convinced of the power of Deborah and Barak, “they willingly offered themselves for the avenging of Israel” (Judg. v. 2).

I. RECOGNIZING POWER. There is much power that is unrecognized; and there are many persons unable to recognize power. 1. Power may be undeveloped, and so not efficiently showing itself. The most we can see is the promise of what is yet to be. We do not feel the impulse of power that is only in its unfolding. 2. Power may take forms that surprise. As it does when we expect *material* power, and that presented to our view is *spiritual* power. This was the case with Messiah’s power. 3. Power may cross our power, and then our pride may prevent recognition, as in the case of the Pharisees of our Lord’s time. Certain moral conditions must be attained before moral power can be rightly valued. There is a spiritual vision which alone enables us to discern moral power.

II. THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF HAVING RECOGNIZED POWER. “The people offer themselves willingly.” This point may be illustrated by the effects of our Lord’s word on certain sufferers. A man was before him who had a withered hand. Jesus said, “Stretch forth thy hand.” The man recognized his power; that gave him power, and he did stretch it forth, and it was made whole. So in Bethesda Jesus saw a helpless cripple, and said, “Take up thy bed, and walk.” The man felt our Lord’s power; it exerted a mighty influence on him; he took up his bed and walked. In the higher regions of the spiritual life this truth finds further illustration. It is a matter of experience that it was the discernment of Christ’s power to save which brought us conscious power over sin, which persuaded us to yield ourselves to him. It is every fresh apprehension of his power to sanctify that brings us power to wrestle with evil.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The priesthoods of David and Messiah.* It cannot be safely asserted that this psalm belongs *exclusively* to Messiah. Every Messianic reference in the Old Testament probably has a first and local application. This psalm refers, then, to David, and through him to Messiah. If this be so, the application of the Melchizedek type of priest to David may help us in tracing the application of the same type to Messiah. The points dwelt on by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (vii. 1—22) are not prominent in this psalm. The point here is, that the Aaronic priesthood was *only a priesthood*; but the priesthood of Melchizedek was a *royal priesthood*.

I. DAVID’S PRIESTHOOD WAS OF MELCHIZEDEK’S KIND. Priesthood is but ministry; only it is ministry in sacred and Divine things. The essential idea of a priest is one who represents God on earth in some particular sphere. So a king who is loyal to Jehovah, and represents him in the political and national spheres, is properly a priest; just as the man who represents Jehovah in the moral and religious spheres is called a priest. Evidently Melchizedek was the Divine representative for his day and his country, just as Abraham was for his tribe; and so he is called a king-priest. It is noticed that David, and perhaps all the kings of Israel, assumed certain priestly functions. “David himself, as at the bringing up of the ark, and Solomon, as at the consecration of the temple, had some shadow of the priestly office.”

II. MESSIAH’S PRIESTHOOD WAS OF MELCHIZEDEK’S KIND. It was united with kingship, as it was in the case of Melchizedek; and we only regard Messiah aright when we fully recognize his authority to atone, and his authority to rule; his relation to the whole sphere of our worship, and his relation to our entire commonplace life and relations. 1. See the likenesses between Melchizedek and Messiah as *priests*, or as Divine peacemakers, ministrants of Divine reconciliation (2 Cor. v. 18—21). Of Jesus it is said, “He is our Peace.” 2. See the likenesses between Melchizedek and Messiah

as *kings*, or as Divine rulers, ministrants of Divine order, in the common family, social, political, and national relations of life. Perhaps it may be said with truth that, in regard to Messiah, as in regard to David, the governmental priesthood is more prominent than the sacrificial priesthood. The royalty of Melchizedek is certainly the chief point of reference to the psalmist. The Lord Jesus is our King-Priest for ever.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Spiritual refreshment for spiritual work.* “He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.” The literal meaning of the figure is easy to trace. “The victorious leader, who has made so terrible a slaughter that the field of battle is covered with corpses, is now seen pursuing his enemies. Wearied with the battle and the pursuits, he stops for a moment on his way to refresh himself by drinking of the torrent rushing by, and then ‘lifts up his head,’ derives new vigour to continue the pursuit” (Perowne). But the war-figures only paint for us the spiritual work and the spiritual triumphs of Messiah; and this particular figure only suggests two things: (1) that Messiah, in doing his spiritual work, needs refreshment; and (2) that Messiah, in his anxiety about completing his spiritual work, scarcely stops to attend to his refreshment. To this a third thought may be added—that God provided refreshment for him who was so earnestly doing his work. It may be noticed that Eastern people have a very skilful way of drinking from a flowing stream without stopping in their running. They throw the water up into the mouth. An Eastern traveller writes, “In an excursion across an Arabian desert, some of the Arabs, on coming to water, rushed to it, and stooping sufficiently to allow the right hand to reach the water, they threw it up into their mouths so dexterously, that I never observed any of the water to fall upon the breast. I often tried to do it, but never succeeded.” Applying the verse in a general way to all who, with Christ, are engaged in spiritual work, we may say—

I. SPIRITUAL WORK IS EXHAUSTING TO THE BODILY FRAME AS WELL AS TO THE SPIRITUAL NATURE. It is enough to recall the fatigue of Jesus on some memorable occasions, such as at Jacob's well, in the boat, or at Gethsemane.

II. GOD PROVIDES REFRESHMENTS FOR EXHAUSTED SPIRITUAL WORKERS. Represented by the “brook in the way.” Illustrate by God's gracious treatment of exhausted Elijah. He refreshed him, bodily, with food; he refreshed him, spiritually, with visions. Water is the type of soul-refreshings.

III. THE EARNEST SPIRITUAL WORKER WILL NOT LET EVEN NECESSARY spiritual refreshings unduly detain him from his work. He will take only a passing drink. He will be “faint, yet pursuing.”—R. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*Christ the Divine King and Priest.* Many difficulties in the interpretation of this psalm. Let us accept it as, in the main, a prophecy of the Jewish Messiah. Then we find the two main features of it fulfilled in the Christ of history.

I. HE HAS BEEN RAISED TO THE DIVINE THRONE OF KINGLY POWER. (Vers. 1—3.)
1. *The power by which he subdues the world is spiritual and Divine.* His cross “the rod of his strength.” 2. *His servants are willing soldiers in the holy war.* (Ver. 3.) Numberless as the drops of the morning dew. 3. *He will reign till he has obtained a universal victory.*

II. THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST. 1. *Priest by direct Divine ordination.* “The Lord hath sworn.” 2. *A universal Priesthood.* Not of the Jew only, but of the Gentile also, like Melchizedek. 3. *A Priest not for a time, but for ever.* 4. *The sacrifice he offers is—himself.*—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXI.

ANOTHER “Hallelujah psalm,” and at the same time an “alphabetic psalm.” It has been called a “twin psalm” with the one which follows (Ps. cxii.), and beyond all

doubt closely resembles it. Both begin with “Hallelujah;” both are alphabetic; both consist of twenty lines, arranged into ten verses. The one is the complement of the other; while Ps. cxl. “sets forth the greatness, mercy, and righteousness of God.”

Ps. cxii. is concerned with "the reflection of these in the happiness, beneficence, and righteousness of God's servants" (Kay). The two together seem to have been intended to form an introduction to the "Hallel," or chant sung at the Passover, at Pentecost, and at the Feast of Tabernacles, which consisted of Pss. cxiii.—cxviii.

Ver. 1.—Praise ye the Lord. Scarcely a part of the psalm—rather a heading or introduction. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart (comp. Pss. ix. 1; cxix. 34, 58, 69). "With my whole heart" replaces the "greatly" of Ps. cix. 30. In the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation. Professor Cheyne translates, "in the council and assembly of the upright;" and it seems to be generally allowed that two distinct assemblies are not spoken of, but that the one congregation of the faithful is designated by two names. Thus the Prayer-book translation is wrong.

Ver. 2.—The works of the Lord are great. Not his material works, but the doings of his providence (see vers. 3—9). Sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. Searched into and carefully studied by all who take an interest in such things. *Derushim*, "objects of study," is etymologically connected with *madrasa*, a college, a "place of study and research."

Ver. 3.—His work is honourable and glorious; literally, *honour and glory*; but our translators have rightly paraphrased. And his righteousness endureth for ever; i.e. his just and righteous dealing with all his creatures.

Ver. 4.—He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered; literally, *a memorial hath he made for his wonders*; i.e. he has so done them that they cannot cease to be had in remembrance. Memorial institutions, like the Passover, are scarcely glanced at. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; or, "compassionate" (comp. Ps. ciii. 13).

Ver. 5.—He hath given meat unto them that fear him. The manna may be primarily in the writer's mind, but he is also thinking of the "food given to all flesh" (Ps. cxxxvi. 25) continually. He will ever be mindful of his covenant. The covenant with Abraham, made "to a thousand generations" (Ps. cv. 8).

Ver. 6.—He hath showed his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen; rather, *in giving them*. God manifested his power to Israel very specially by causing them to overcome the many strong Canaanitish nations, and to take their lands and labours in possession (Ps. cv. 44). This was one of the greatest of his "works," or "doings."

Ver. 7.—The works of his hands are verity and judgment. All that God does is right and just—"done in truth and uprightness" (ver. 8). All his commandments are sure; i.e. firm, unchangeable—being based on truth and right.

Ver. 8.—They stand fast for ever and ever. This is exegetical of the "sure" in ver. 7. In the sense in which they were given—the spiritual sense underlying them—not one jot or tittle of God's commandments ever passes away (Matt. v. 18). And are done in truth and uprightness; rather, *being done*. It is the intrinsic truth and equity of the commandments that render them everlasting and unchangeable (see Cudworth on 'Immutable Morality').

Ver. 9.—He sent redemption unto his people. The "redemption" from Egypt (Exod. vi. 6) is perhaps especially in the writer's mind, but he may be thinking also of other deliverances. He hath commanded his covenant for ever (comp. Gen. ix. 12; xvii. 13; Exod. xxxi. 16, etc.). Holy and reverend is his Name. Intrinsically "holy," and therefore "reverend," or to be revered.

Ver. 10.—The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (comp. Prov. i. 7; ix. 10; Ecclus. i. 16; and also Job xxviii. 28). The meaning seems to be that "the beginning of wisdom is not found in keen insight, nor wide experience, nor the learning of the schools, but in the temper of reverence and awe. The fear of the finite in the presence of the Infinite, of the sinful in the presence of the Holy, self-abhorring, adoring, as in Job's confession—this for the Israelite was the starting-point of all true wisdom" (Dean Plumptre). A good understanding have all they that do his commandments; literally, *that do them*; but the "commandments" of ver. 7 are, no doubt, intended. His praise endureth for ever. The praise "of him," not "of it," as in the Prayer-book Version. As he had begun (ver. 1), so the psalmist ends, with Jehovah's praise.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*The work of God and the wisdom of man.* The uniting thought in the psalm is the work of God. It is evident (see vers. 5, 6, 9) that the writer has in view those special manifestations of Divine power by which the people of God were

delivered and preserved. But we may well give a much wider application to the thought; we therefore think of—

I. **THE FOURFOLD WORK OF GOD.** 1. In the broad field of nature; in the creation and formation of the earth and the heavens; in the agency of the sun and moon, of light and heat, of rain and dew, etc. 2. In the spiritual nature of men; in the instincts, aspirations, affections, capacities of man. 3. In the guidance of our individual life, and in human history. 4. In the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. Everywhere, in the heights and the depths, around us and within us, all along the course of our human history, we see the handiwork of God: most, and best of all, in the redeeming death of his Son, our Saviour, and in the life-giving energies of the renewing Spirit.

II. **FOUR DIVINE ATTRIBUTES OF WHICH IT SPEAKS.** "His work is honourable and glorious" (ver. 3). It speaks of: 1. *Divine power* (see ver. 6). In this sense God's works are "great" (ver. 2); immeasurably surpassing our puny efforts. 2. *Divine wisdom.* They are "wonderful" (ver. 4). The keeping of the planets in their orbits, the covering of the earth with fertile soil, the life and growth of tree and flower and fruit, the organization of the animal, the expansion of the human mind, the fitness of the gospel for the large and deep necessities of the human soul,—what depths of Divine wisdom are here! 3. *Divine faithfulness* (vers. 5, 7, 8). All that God promises he does; he gave food to eat and water to drink in the wilderness; he has not allowed "seed-time or harvest to fail." He adds all needful things to those who seek first his kingdom. He is with us in the deep waters of affliction, and does not allow them to overflow us. It is the unvarying testimony of the good in every age that "God is faithful;" that he is "mindful of his covenant." 4. *Divine goodness* (ver. 4). God has so ordered our human life that fatherly kindness, motherly tenderness, friendly affection, filial attachment, philanthropic pity and beneficence, Christian compassion, enwrap our souls, and shed their radiance on our life; and surely these are not the least of his "works."

III. **THE FOURFOLD RESPONSE IT EVOKES.** 1. *Inquiry.* The works of the Lord are "sought out" (ver. 2). There is no worthier, no happier, no more elevating pursuit than the study of the works of God. In whatever field we are engaged we reap valuable fruits for our toil; more especially do we gather good to ourselves when we search those Scriptures which record his government of the world and the redemption of our race. 2. *Reverence.* We cannot study God's work in any sphere that is open to us without concluding that "holy and reverend is his Name;" that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (ver. 10). If "the undevout astronomer is mad," it may be truly said that the irreverent geologist, physiologist, historian, philosopher, is mad also. A hasty or a one-sided inquiry may lead to atheism, but a prolonged and unbiassed search conducts to reverence and awe. As "knowledge grows from more to more," there will "more of reverence in us dwell." 3. *Obedience.* "A good understanding," etc. (ver. 10). Men who make no response to God for all his goodness and love to them may be very "smart" and clever, but they outwit themselves; they are continually declining the one thing—devotion, obedience to God—which hallows, enlarges, and enriches human life. On the other hand, men may be very simple, unlikely to rise to eminent positions, and ill adapted to conduct great affairs of the city or the state, but they may have that reverence for God and that readiness to do and bear his will which make any and every human life both beautiful and blessed. The fear of God is the very foundation of wisdom, and they who do his will have a soundness of understanding which the most learned and the most astute may envy. 4. *Praise.* (Ver. 1.) Thanksgiving (1) filling the heart; (2) uttered in the more domestic gathering, the assembly; (3) sounded forth in the congregation.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—10.—"*The works of the Lord.*" This is the theme of the psalm. These works are named six times in this short psalm. They are the occasion and cause of the fervent praise, and exhortation to praise, with which the psalm begins. It is one of the nine alphabetical psalms; that is, psalms so arranged for aiding the memory.

Ps. cxix. is the most conspicuous instance of this. In the psalm before us the alphabet is not complete. An interesting and instructive study is to reproduce in English this same structure, being careful not to alter the sense. It has often been done. The psalm opens with a summons to all to praise the Lord, and declares the psalmist's purpose to do so himself, both amongst those who sympathized with him—"the assembly of the upright"—and amongst those, many of whom did not—"the congregation." It is easy to praise the Lord amongst people who are all of the same mind as ourselves, but not so easy where there is indifference or hostility. But the psalmist declares that amid both he will praise the Lord. And the inspiration of his praise is the works of the Lord. He makes six affirmations concerning them.

I. **THEY ARE GREAT.** (Ver. 2.) There can be no question as to this, whatever true test of greatness we adopt—motives, methods, spirit, results. Especially is this true of God's chief work in the redemption of man by our Lord Jesus Christ. But it is true everywhere, in nature, providence, grace. The question for us to consider is—Are they great to us? Too many men despise them, "make light of it."

II. **"SOUGHT OUT OF ALL THEM THAT HAVE PLEASURE THEREIN."** Those who have pleasure in any study are the first to welcome any fresh light on their particular department of inquiry. And so in regard to the work of God in our own souls; if we know that work truly, then the study of like work of God will ever be pleasing to us. If we do not care for such study, it is an argument to prove not only that we have no pleasure, but also no part therein. Thus may we test ourselves.

III. **"HONOURABLE AND GLORIOUS."** (Ver. 3.) This is how God's works may ever be recognized. What is otherwise is not his work. It is as the psalmist here affirms, both in regard to God and man, in regard to righteousness and mercy alike. The motive from which it sprang, the manner in which it was accomplished, and the result that follows, all deserve the praise here given.

IV. **THEY ARE TREASURED UP IN MEMORY.** (Ver. 4.) 1. *This is so in regard to his work of mercy.* Probably some great manifestation of God's grace led to this psalm. But especially God's great work of mercy in Christ—that is remembered and told of everywhere. 2. *And so in regard to his judgment-work.* Such as the Flood, the overthrow of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, the fall of Jerusalem, and other such awful displays of God's judgment. Because the Lord is gracious and full of compassion, he makes them to be remembered, that so we may not bring like judgment on ourselves. 3. *His work of grace.* If that has been done in our soul, we can never forget it.

V. **THE POWER OF THEM HE HATH SHOWED TO HIS PEOPLE.** (Ver. 6.) The Divine power, that they may have strong confidence in God, and go courageously forward to possess the heritage of the heathen.

VI. **THEY ARE WORKS OF VERITY AND JUDGMENT.** There is no crooked, insincere policy about them, no lack of righteousness or equity. Let our works be as his.—S. C.

Ver. 5.—*Meat given to them that fear the Lord.* I. **LITERALLY, THE DECLARATION OF THE TEXT IS TRUE.** Each harvest as it comes round, the daily supply of needed food, all are in evidence to support the declaration. Three facts are noted concerning this. 1. *It is the Lord who is the Giver.* To speak as so many do about nature and law, as if they were the producers of our food, is merely an evasion, and a not always creditable one, of the real truth. 2. *The gift is the special mark of the Divine favour to his people.* At once the reply arises—But are not the wicked fed as well as, and often better than, the good? Yes, this is so; but as Sodom would have been spared had there been found ten righteous men in her, so the world of the godless is spared and fed for the sake of the people of God, the salt of the earth. Without these, wherefore should God keep the world going? Therefore, though the ungodly do share, and more than share, these Divine supplies, they do not take them as gifts from God at all; still less do they believe what is the truth, that it is not for their sake, but for the sake of "them that fear him," God vouchsafes these supplies. "All things are yours," said St. Paul to the believing people of God; and his word but echoes the truth before us now. 3. *They are proofs of God's faithfulness and truth.* He never fails to do his part, though at times, by the cruelty and mismanagement of men, the portion of meat designed for some of his children gets terribly diminished,

and even intercepted altogether. But it is the duty of them that fear God to do their best to bring such wrong to an end.

II. SPIRITUALLY ALSO IT IS TRUE. We are authorized by our Lord to take the food of the body as symbol of the food of the soul; and so read, the text is still true, and, indeed, more so than read literally. 1. *Christ is that living Bread.* (John vi.) And as bread is that one food which all partake of because it ministers to the physical needs of all; so Christ, the Bread of life, meets the deeper spiritual needs of all, of every age, clime, rank, character, condition. 2. *And how freely and abundantly it is given,* and how indispensable is it likewise! 3. But as the bread for the body, so *this Bread of life must be eaten, not merely talked about*, if it is to do us any good. We must receive Christ into our hearts by a true faith, and we must do this day by day continually. If we do this we shall know how true the text is.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The duty of witnessing in public for God.* The terms used seem to include the narrow and the wider spheres in which our witness for God may be, and should be, made. The Prayer-book Version brings out this point. "Secretly, among the faithful, and in the congregation." It is a point with the psalmists that God's praise can be no private thing merely, no personal indulgence or enjoyment only. If a man feels thankful to God, if a man recognizes his indebtedness to God, if a man is impressed with the greatness of God or the goodness of God, he lies under the solemn obligation to say so to somebody. If he is a sincere man, he feels the impulse to say so to somebody. He will even want to speak of these things to everybody whom he can reach. The sentences of the fortieth psalm may be taken as characteristic of the psalmists, and there is something guileful in the man who is unable or unwilling to recognize this duty of publicly witnessing for God. "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart: my talk hath been of thy truth, and of thy salvation. I have not kept back thy loving mercy and truth from the great congregation."

I. EACH MAN HAS A PUBLIC SPHERE OF HIS OWN. A circle outside himself, of which he is himself the centre. Every man, in his own particular public sphere, is bound to make his witness for God. It is the same thing to say that every man must come into relationship with others outside himself; and these relations constitute his first public sphere. It may be a friendship. It may be the marital relation. It may be a family. It may be a business or social circle. If a man is for God, he must be active and voiceful for God in those first spheres. Illustrate by the stone thrown into a pond: it influences the waters that touch the shores only through influencing the little circle of waters just where it fell, and so on and on, through ever-widening circles. (1) Personal influence, (2) family influence, (3) social influence, must be used for the conviction of the claims and goodness of God.

II. EACH MAN HAS A PLACE IN THE GENERAL PUBLIC SPHERE. The congregation is made up of individuals, and the enthusiasm of each goes to make the enthusiasm of the whole. The congregation is no mere mass of receptivity. That mistaken notion spoils much of public worship. The congregation, as an aggregate of individuals, should make common witness, by praise, thanksgiving, and testimony. But the testimony that is healthy, and inspiring to others, is testimony for God and concerning God; not that weak and enervating thing, testimony concerning individual feelings and experiences.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Good will towards God guiding the search for God.* "Sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." "The pleasure in God's works is in germ the best incentive to thoughtful search, and in fuller measure its sufficient reward." In regard to man's search for God, it may be properly said that what he finds depends on what he seeks, and the spirit in which he seeks. This, indeed, is true even of scientific research. A man must know what he is looking for, or he will find nothing intelligent in the revelations of telescope or microscope. A man writes, "I have searched the heavens for God during fifty long years, and have never found him yet." He did not believe there was a God, and so he never would find him. Let a man *want* to find God, and his search will be fully responded to. God is revealed, God reveals himself, to moral moods, and not to mere intellectual research. Souls find God, not eyes or minds.

I. GOD'S WORKS ARE BEYOND THE REACH OF WISE INTELLECTS. Men by their science can find out things, and account for the forms of things. But they cannot explain the meanings of things, or the relations of things. Nothing in the world is more uncertain and untrustworthy than wise men's theorizings. The most humiliating book could be written on the 'History of Exploded and Worn-out Theories.' Illustrate by referring to "certain cruel and loathsome practices of the animal world—as, for example, those of apes, dogs, frogs, the barbarity of the cat to the mouse, the thefts of the eagle from the fish-hawk, the rapture of nests by stronger birds who turn out their original tenants to die of cold and slow starvation, the enslaving of the black ants by the red, and sundry other habits which shock our sense of justice or of decency." The intellect of man, without guidance from the sense of God, has never found the meaning of such things. The key to them is hid from the wise, who in fact blind themselves by refusing to carry to the consideration of such things those truths concerning God which are "spiritually discerned." Nature is only an open secret to the God-fearing man.

II. GOD'S WORKS ARE WITHIN THE REACH OF LOVING HEARTS. These only are prepared to think kind things, loving things, trustful things. When we have right apprehensions of the infinitely wise and gracious Doer, such apprehensions as enable us to set our love upon him, we simply refuse to accept explanations of nature-mysteries that are dishonourable to him. They cannot be true. We pass them by. There is something better to be "sought out." Our good will toward God will keep us from resting content with anything that is unworthy of him; and we search on, assured that mystery will yield at last to love.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*The excellency of the Divine memory.* "He will ever be mindful of his covenant." To the Jewish mind it was a source of constant satisfaction that Jehovah was actually under covenant-pledge to his people. Every look-back over the history of his race brought to view the fact, again and again, that Jehovah kept his covenant in mind. This, no doubt, seemed the more striking to him, because that same review of the history of the race revealed the fact that Israel had *not* kept in mind his covenant-pledge; but Jehovah's mindfulness of his covenant stood out in strong contrast with the people's unmindfulness of their covenant. See how this Divine memory of covenant becomes a ground of consolation and strength to the psalmist.

I. THE DIVINE MEMORY ENSURES PROMPT AND EFFICIENT HELP IN OUR TIMES OF NEED. It is memory of a solemn pledge to defend and succour. Illustrate by the influence which a vow, or pledge, or covenant has upon us. Illustrate by the freemason, who so solemnly pledges brotherly help to his brother freemasons wherever he may meet them. Long years after, and in distant lands, he meets a needy brother, remembers his covenant, and at once gives help and comforting and guidance. Whosoever his people are in need, God may be thought of as remembering what he has pledged. For his pledge we must look back to his entering into covenant with Abraham, and his renewing covenant with Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. What Jehovah promised to be to Israel, the Father of Jesus has promised, in the new covenant, to be to us. To see the importance of the Divine memory, we should conceive what our condition would be if our God were forgetful, and willingly disregarded his promises, on which we are permitted to hope. It would be sad and hopeless indeed if we were left to keep God in mind of what he has given us to rely on. There is always rest in the confidence we have in his faithfulness. He ever "remembers his word unto his servants."

II. THE DIVINE MEMORY IMPLIES DIVINE TRIUMPH OVER HUMAN UNFAITHFULNESS. The old covenant was broken by Israel, and so God was relieved of his pledge. No one could have complained if God had refused to recognize any further obligations. That he does remember his covenant is a triumph of Divine love, which will not be frustrated, in its beneficent designs, even by man's sin. Man may forget, God will not. The glory of Jehovah, and of Jehovah-Jesus, lies in this triumph of persistent redeeming love over all our failure, neglect, and transgression.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The distinction between truth and uprightness.* "Are done in truth and equity" (Prayer-book Version). The usual contrast to equity is "justice." Justice represents the absolute right according to standard; equity represents the practical

application of justice with due consideration of circumstance. Or we may say that justice is right in the sight of God, equity is right between man and man. This distinction seems to be expressed in the words of the text, "truth" and "uprightness." Truth stands for the absolutely right. Uprightness stands for the practically right. Truth God appraises, who can read heart and motive. Uprightness man appraises, who can only estimate conduct.

I. THE WORKS OF GOD JUDGED BY THE ABSOLUTE STANDARD. "They are done in truth." There is no standard of truth or of righteousness separate from and independent of God. God himself is the Standard. We learn it by observing the things he has done. He has made his own standard. It is far above, out of reach, beyond our criticism. It embodies and expresses every virtue that we can imagine, and we look to find that all God's works are up to the standard which God himself has set. But this comes to bewilder men. It is vague, speculative. Men cannot grasp any absolute things; and God's standard for himself is beyond intellectual grasp or imaginative setting. Therefore the absolute standard of truth and right is shown to us in the Person, words, and works of the Divine Son, the "Man Christ Jesus." And we can take that standard, apply it to the various works of God wrought in all the ages, and concerning everything we may say, "All his works are done in truth." It is so with the great work of redemption.

II. THE WORKS OF GOD JUDGED BY THE PRACTICAL STANDARD. The practical standard is the conception of righteousness and right, as between man and man, which is entertained in each particular age and nation. It is never perfect; but it always represents the highest and best thought attainable. Now, the psalmist is confident that all God's works, in their age, and in all ages, will even bear the testing of men's standards. They are done in "equity" as well as in "truth."—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*Reverence for the Name.* "Holy and reverend is his Name." "Reverend" here means "worthy of reverence." Horace Bushnell has a striking sentence: "This age is at the point of apogee from all the robust notions of Deity." And therefore this age is an irreverent age. Even in the shaping of religious beliefs there are signs of undue familiarity with God. And that undue familiarity explains much of the weakness of Christian living, and lightness of Christian worship. The nineteenth century lacks awe of God.

I. JEWISH REVERENCE FOR THE NAME. Explain that in older times a name was supposed to gather up, and suggestively express, the attributes of a person. Moses asked for a name which would express God—stand for God—to the people. And though the word given him was, properly, a declaration of fact rather than a name, it came to be treated as God's Name, and such a superstitious reverence for it grew up, that the Jewish people persisted in altering the vowels of it, so that never, by any accident, should they pronounce the hallowed Name. There was at least the danger of their coming to reverence the Name, rather than the Divine Being who was represented by the Name. If they did, their honouring of God was but a helpless and degrading formalism. A proper reverence for the sacred Name was enjoined in the third commandment (Exod. xx. 7); and such reverence was characteristic of all loyal and saintly souls. See Abraham (Gen. xviii. 22—23); Jacob (Gen. xxxii. 29); Moses (Exod. iii. 13, 14); Joshua (Josh. vii. 9); and also the psalmists and prophets. It may be said that reverence for the sacred Name was the key-note of the Jewish system. Of nothing were they more jealous. And if in this they were sometimes wrong, they were mostly right; for "holy and reverend is his Name."

II. CHRISTIAN REVERENCE FOR THE NAME. The Name of God revealed in Christianity is not the same as that revealed in Judaism. To the Jewish Church God is the *one Existence*, unique, spiritual; absolute Being. To the Christian Church God exists in *relations*, and only the highest and dearest of human relations is fitting to represent him. He is our Father. But that is the most reverend of all names. And the *filial* feeling ought to triumph over the superstitious. Show the reverence that is due from us in all our relations with the heavenly Father, the holy Father, the righteous Father. The Father-Name must never be "taken in vain."—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*The starting-point of human wisdom.* "The fear of the Lord is the

beginning of wisdom." This is the familiar statement of the Book of Proverbs (see Prov. i. 7; ix. 10). "Here the fear of God, keeping his revealed commandments, is the key of 'wisdom,' which is the knowledge of the true end and purpose of life." The "fear of the Lord" is the Old Testament term for *piety*. The fear is not dread, but loving reverence, which finds its expression in ready and hearty obedience. It includes belief in God, knowledge of God, recognition of the claims of God, awe of the power and holiness of God, and the cherished sense of the presence of God. The fear of piety is a glorified fear.

I. PIETY IS THE INSPIRATION OF THEORETICAL WISDOM. It always awakens a thirst for knowledge. It has been constantly observed that when a man becomes pious he begins to become intelligent. His eyes are opened to the supreme mystery, and he wants to know all mysteries. He who becomes interested in God is sure to become interested in God's works and God's Word. And it may further be urged, that wisdom cannot be limited to the knowledge of material things which the senses can give us. There is a spiritual world apprehensible by those spiritual faculties which are only quickened by the revelation of God to the soul. The scientific man who ignores the spiritual cannot attain true wisdom. Belief in God is the absolute foundation on which alone can rest a complete knowledge of the world, of facts that are both sensible and spiritual. "Spiritual knowledge—the knowledge of self, the universe, Christ, and God—is the true knowledge. This grows out of piety—grows out of reverent love."

II. PIETY IS THE INSPIRATION OF PRACTICAL WISDOM: which is, obedience. Every man has the practical ordering of a human life, and human relations. A man of himself can only shape his life under the impulse of what he finds pleasing to himself. And no life can be ordered wisely under that rule. Man cannot act wisely if he be his own king, because he is created as a dependent being; and can no more bear fruit by leaning on himself than can the trailing vine. Dependent man must *fear God*. He must cherish the sense of duty; must carry out the designs of his Creator. Practical wisdom is taking our lives to God day by day, and saying, in filial love, to him, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Life is only ordered aright when God orders it.—R. T.

Vers. 1—10.—"*The works of the Lord.*" I. GOD'S WORK CLAIMS OUR EARNEST STUDY. 1. *His work in nature.* Presents three aspects. (1) The poetical. (2) The scientific. (3) The religious. 2. *His work in providence.* God in history is working out a righteous government of the world. 3. *His work in redemption.* This the manifestation of his grandest power—the power of God unto salvation. Three kinds of power. (1) Physical. (2) Intellectual. (3) Moral or spiritual.

II. GOD'S WORKS ARE A REVELATION OF THE DIVINE THOUGHT AND NATURE. 1. *They reveal his infinite greatness.* (Vers. 2—4.) 2. *They reveal his unchanging righteousness.* (Ver. 3.) 3. *They reveal his grace and compassion to the sinful.* (Vers. 4, 5.) 4. *They reveal his laws for the government of our lives.* (Ver. 5.) *They show that obedience is the highest wisdom.* (Ver. 10.)—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXII.

In this "complementary psalm" the writer sets forth the blessedness of the true worshipper of God. He is blessed in his seed (ver. 2), in his possessions (ver. 3), in his unchanging goodness (vers. 3, 9), in the light vouchsafed him (ver. 4), in his many virtues (ver. 4), in his management of affairs (ver. 5), in his great trust and confidence in God (vers. 6—8), and in his attainment to honour (ver. 9). The ungodly man is consumed with envy at the sight of him (ver. 10).

Ver. 1.—Praise ye the Lord. Again a "heading," or "introduction" (see the comment on Ps. cxi. 1). Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord. Connect this with Ps. cxi. 10. The closing thought of Ps. cxi. is taken up and expanded in Ps. cxii. That delighteth greatly in his commandments (comp. Psa. i. 2; cxix. 16, 17, 24, 70, 77, etc.). "True obedience can only come from pleasure in the commandments of God" (Hengstenberg).

Ver. 2.—His seed shall be mighty upon earth. The phrase used of Nimrod in Gen. x. 8, but not necessarily to be taken in exactly the same sense; rather as *gibbor had*

in Ruth ii. 1 and 1 Sam. ix. 1, "wealthy, prosperous." The generation of the upright shall be blessed; *i.e.* shall receive blessing from the Most High, and shall therefore prosper. To be blessed in one's seed was, under the old covenant, the highest of blessings.

Ver. 3.—**Wealth and riches shall be in his house.** Bishop Butler has well shown how, in God's moral government of the world, virtue tends to accumulate to itself the good things of this life, and vice to disperse and dissipate them ('Analogy,' pt. i. ch. iii.; comp. 1 Tim. iv. 8). And his righteousness endureth for ever. Human goodness—here called "righteousness"—is a thing which does not change, since character is formed by habits, and habits are "a second nature."

Ver. 4.—**Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness.** God's Word is "a lantern unto their feet, and a light unto their paths" (Ps. cxix. 105)—sufficient under most circumstances to guide their steps aright. When this is not enough, he vouchsafes an inward light to them (Pss. xxvii. 1; xxxvi. 9; Isa. lviii. 10; xlix. 6, etc.). He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. It is a very forced interpretation to understand this as said of Jehovah. The entire subject of the psalm is the righteous, God-like man. In him are reflected shadows of all the Divine qualities.

Ver. 5.—**A good man showeth favour, and lendeth; rather, well is it with the man that showeth,** etc. The verse is exegetical of the latter clause of ver. 4, and shows how the righteous man's compassion works. It makes him "show favour," or "kindness," to men generally, and "lend" to those who are in necessity (comp. Ps. xxxvii. 26; and for the duty of lending to the needy, see Deut. xv. 8, 11). He will guide his affairs with discretion; rather, perhaps, *with equity*. Scarcely, as Professor Cheyne suggests, "in courts of justice."

Ver. 6.—**Surely he shall not be moved for ever.** God's blessing shall abide with him, and make his happiness sure and stable. (On stability as a necessary element in happiness, see Aristotle, 'Eth. Nic.' i. x. § 7, 8.) The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance; *i.e.* everlastingly remembered by God.

Ver. 7.—**He shall not be afraid of evil tidings.** Confident in God's goodness to-

wards him, he will not anticipate misfortunes. They may come, as even the best man is not exempt from them; but he will not meet them half-way. **His heart is fixed;** *i.e.* firmly established (see ver. 8)—settled on a sure basis—trusting in the Lord—the one basis that is solid and immovable.

Ver. 8.—**His heart is established.** Almost a repetition of the phrase in ver. 7, "his heart is fixed"—seemingly, therefore, superfluous, but really emphasizing the point, which is of great moment (see the comment of Hengstenberg, and compare the "just man" of Horace, 'Od.' iii. 3, ll. 1—8). He shall not be afraid. "Perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John iv. 18). He who feels himself always and altogether in the hands of a loving Father cannot be afraid of what is about to befall him. Until he see his desire upon his enemies. He knows that his enemies have no real power to harm him, and that ultimately he will "see his desire upon them;" *i.e.* will triumph over them (see Pss. liv. 7; lix. 10, etc.).

Ver. 9.—**He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor.** There is no virtue in mere "dispersing," since spendthrifts "disperse" even more lavishly than virtuous men. The only laudable "dispersing" is that which has for its object the relief of distress, and which (it may be added) is wisely directed to that object. **His righteousness endureth for ever** (see the comment on ver. 3). **His horn shall be exalted with honour.** The esteem of men, on the whole, follows upon goodness, and the righteous obtain more honour than others.

Ver. 10.—**The wicked shall see it, and be grieved.** The wicked hate the righteous (Ps. cv. 25), and are naturally "grieved" to see them prosper. "When shall he die, and his name perish?" is the thought of their heart against the godly man. He shall gnash with his teeth (comp. Job xvi. 9; Pss. xxxv. 16; xxxvii. 12; Lam. ii. 16; Acts vii. 54). Civilization represses these emotional displays, but the feeling remains nevertheless. **And melt away;** or, "consume away"—"waste away"—through envy and hate. **The desire of the wicked shall perish** (comp. Ps. i. 6). "The desire of the wicked"—that which they earnestly long for, which is the downfall and destruction of the righteous—does not come to pass, but falls to the ground, "perishes," comes to nought.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*The promise of piety.* In Bacon's celebrated saying that "prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament, but adversity of the New," there is a measure of truth; but it is far from covering all the ground. We may set against it the apostolic declaration that "godliness hath the promise of the life that now is." And though we

may not press the sentences of this psalm to any nice exactitude, yet it is substantially as true of the good man, and as applicable to his life on earth now, as it was at the hour when it was written. Piety, a reverence for God which shows itself in ready obedience to his will, has these solid advantages: it ensures—

I. **THE BLESSEDNESS OF HOLY SERVICE.** (Ver. 1.) The man who fears God “delights greatly in his commandments.” Others may be tasting the bitter fruits of self-will, may be reaping the sad consequences of disobedience, but his heart is filled with the peace and with the joy of holy service. He finds a pure, elevating, lasting happiness in doing everything unto God his Saviour, even in bearing his will. Languor and dissatisfaction are banished from the life of devotion, and in their place are serenity of spirit and gladness of heart. “I delight to do thy will, O my God.” For us to live is Christ—to be engaged every hour in his blessed service.

II. **THE EFFICIENT TRAINING OF THE YOUNG** (ver. 2), and all which that includes. Not from the home of the holy do there go forth sons and daughters unprincipled, vicious, mischievous, short-lived. Taught God’s truth and trained in Christian principles, young men and women leave the home of the godly prepared for the battle of life. It is they who are most ready for serious duties, for responsible positions, for offices of trust; it is they who are most likely to rise to power and to honour. Exceptions being excepted, it is distinctly true that “the generation of the upright are blessed.” Even from a temporal standpoint, it is a very great advantage for any son or daughter to be trained in a Christian home.

III. **WORK THAT WILL LAST FOR LIFE.** (Ver. 3.) If the upright man does not obtain “wealth and riches”—though the virtues which are the fruit of piety are the root of much material success—he has the far more precious wealth of moral and spiritual worth, and “his righteousness endureth.” It is not a brief flash that goes out and is lost; it is a steady light that shines through all his days. He has the favour of God, the esteem of his neighbours, actual intrinsic goodness, for his possession. And of this no accident or misfortune can rob him.

IV. **DELIVERANCE IN THE DARK HOUR.** (Ver. 4.) He does not expect to go through life without his share of trial. If he were wise he would not choose such a dubious exemption (see Heb. xii. 5—11). But he knows he will not. “Many are the afflictions” even “of the righteous,” and they will surely come to his door. He, too, will know something of “the power of darkness.” But to him there will “arise light.” 1. Present deliverance will come. He will patiently and devoutly pursue his course of integrity and of waiting upon God, and God will give him his heart’s desire; his name will be cleared, his health restored, his property regained, his friendship renewed, his work prospered. 2. Divine support will be so abundantly bestowed that his soul will be filled with peace even in the midst of his trouble (see 2 Cor. xii. 10). 3. After bearing the burden of earthly trial, and passing through a long night of temporal adversity, there will gleam the bright light of the heavenly home.

V. **THE BLESSING OF ENDURING GRATITUDE.** (Vers. 4—6, 9.) He is gracious, compassionate, generous, full of practical kindness, just to others (guiding his affairs with a due regard to what is owing to other men); the result will be that he will earn the esteem and the thanks of many hearts, and he will live long in their grateful remembrance. The unholty and consequently self-centred man passes through life without awakening any affection or evoking any appreciation,—he is disregarded, perhaps denounced; men either forget or disparage him when he is dead; but the holy and unselfish man lives in the love of his fellows, and when he dies leaves a fragrant memory behind him.

VI. **DEVOUT CONFIDENCE IN FACE OF THE FUTURE.** (Ver. 8.) Unaccompanied, undefended, by a heavenly Friend, we may well fear as we look before us. Who can tell what the next turn in the road will reveal to us? Who can say what losses and disappointments await us? Who can count on continued health or prosperity? Who can be assured against calamity or sudden death? But the Christian man, who is well assured that all events are in the hand of God, that the life and death of his saints are precious in his sight, that all things work together for good to them that love God, that in the saddest sorrows there may be disguised the truest love and the greatest blessing, that death itself is but the sombre gateway of eternal glory,—he need not fear. His heart is established; he will not be afraid. All will be well with him; everything will conduce to spiritual good and to a lasting heritage.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—10.—*The blessed life.* This psalm, like the previous one, begins with "Hallelujah," and is also an alphabetical psalm. That one gave glad thanks because of what the Lord God himself, in his ways and works, was declared to be. Now this one gives like thanks for what, by the grace of God, his servant is enabled to become. "The one sets forth God, his work and his attributes; the other tells us what are the work and character of those who fear God." So that the same affirmations are made both of God and of his servant (see Ps. cxi. 3; cxii. 3; also cxi. 4 and cxii. 4). In Ps. cxi. God's faithfulness is celebrated; in this, man's faithfulness. The whole psalm is a continued reiteration of the blessedness of God's service. But—

I. AFTER THE MANNER OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, THAT BLESSEDNESS IS TOLD OF AS BEING SHOWN IN PRESENT EARTHLY AND TEMPORAL REWARD. The seed of God's servant is to become both mighty and blessed. Health should be his, and, yet more, righteousness. Mercy shall go forth from God to him, and from him to his fellow-men. He encourages those who need a helping hand, showing favour and lending; and his enemies, for he will have enemies, he will overcome in the judgment. He shall be long and lovingly remembered, and his trust in God shall deliver him from all fear. His enemies he shall meet in the might of confident faith, and see his desire upon them. He is generous to the poor; he maintains his righteousness and rises to great honour. The ungodly see this with rage and vexation, and perish in his sight. Such was the form which God's recompenses to his faithful people took in the days of old.

II. BUT EVEN SINCE THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST HAS BEEN PUBLISHED, THE BLESSEDNESS OF GOD'S SERVICE IS NOT LESS, BUT IT COMES IN A FAR DIFFERENT MANNER. For serving God may mean, and has meant to myriads, the loss, not the gain, of all earthly good (cf. 1 Cor. xv. 19). So that if we had no other than earthly good to hope for, we should be miserable indeed. But we have. Take the suggestions of this psalm, referring them to that form of blessing which the servant of God realizes now. 1. *His seed shall be mighty and blessed.* Is it not so? Are not the most effectual influences which are now bearing on men those which stream forth from the Church of God? Slow, no doubt, is their operation, but ever sure and increasing. And as to being blessed—ask the faithful themselves. 2. *Spiritual wealth is his.* The treasure store of Christ is opened to him, and his part therein is seen in the maintenance of holy character and standing before God and man. 3. *The consolations of the Lord are his,* and they make him a son of consolation likewise (2 Cor. i. 4). 4. *He is endued with kindly dispositions,* and his fair fame his enemies cannot traduce (cf. Revised Version, ver. 5). 5. *He abides in the love of God,* and when he departs hence his memory is sacred and perpetual. 6. *He is kept in perfect peace.* (Ver. 7.) He shall be kept trusting in God, and shall see his soul's enemies destroyed. 7. *Selfishness is not in him,* but a generous loving heart, for which all men bless him (ver. 9). 8. *His life convicts the wicked man of his miserable folly,* and robs him of all power to do him harm (ver. 10). Is not all this the blessed life?—S. C.

Ver. 4.—*Light arising in darkness.* I. LIGHT DOES SO ARISE. Morning by morning, if only we were astir to see it, the light arises out of the darkness. There comes the paling of the dark, and then the gradual dawn. And the method of it is full of suggestion as to like times of darkness. The light comes because the earth swings itself round into the light. The earth, unlike the people who dwell upon it, is obedient to the Divine law concerning her; and hence, though she be in darkness, she comes out of it in due time by obeying her Creator's will, and turning towards the light.

II. THIS IS TRUE OF OTHER FORMS OF DARKNESS. 1. *That of mental perplexity and doubt.* This is very prevalent. All thoughtful minds seem doomed to pass through it. The getting at the real truth of things, especially in the matter of religious faith, is not easy. And if doubt be the prompting only of a sincere love of truth, then it is right, and it will be dispersed ere long. But then it often is not so prompted, but springs from quite other motives. The liking to be thought intellectual and mentally capable is often the pure origin of so-called doubt. If a man owns himself a believer,

he incurs the risk, in many circles, of being regarded as weak, credulous, and more or less foolish and ridiculous. Yet more, the plea of doubt absolves a man from taking a decisive stand for God. He knows he ought to, but he gets out of the obligation, or thinks he does, by pleading his doubts. And doubt condones sin. Hearty belief brings obligation to self-restraint along with it, but doubt is free from such incumbrance, and is therefore welcomed by the sinful heart as a friend. Light will not arise to such, but the darkness will deepen more and more. But to the upright, the sincere seeker for truth, and who is not doubting because of any lurking liking for what is evil and self-pleasing to him, in due time the light will arise. 2. *The state of soul-darkness also.* How much of this there is! The faith of Christ ought to make men happy, to fill their souls with light and joy. But it very often fails to do this. The gladness of God's love seems only conspicuous by its absence in the case of all too many Christians. They are not sure that they are forgiven; they are certain they are very far from being holy; their sanctification is anything but complete; they cannot realize the love of God to them; they walk in darkness, and have little, if any, light; and death is still a terror to them. But are they sincere, true-hearted seekers after God? If so, their light shall arise, in spite of temperament, ill health, bad teaching, earthly care and trouble, and any other of the many causes of soul-darkness. Only let them rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. 3. *And so, too, when the child of God is in darkness as to the conduct of life.* How often we seem unable to make out the right way, to know the right thing to do! It is so in the home, the business, the Church. But again the promise holds good.

III. THE CONDITION IS EVER THE SAME. As the earth would ever be in the dark if it did not turn round to the light, so will men be unless they turn to the light. Do this in thought, in prayer, in practical obedience, and ere long the darkness will have passed, and the light will shine.—S. C.

Ver. 7.—*Not afraid of evil tidings.* I. MOST PEOPLE ARE. The postman's knock, much more a telegram, will often set their hearts palpitating. They realize how precarious is the tenure by which they hold their good things; they have many times had experience of the instability of that in which they have most trusted; and hence they are afraid, etc.

II. BUT OF THE SERVANT OF GOD IT IS SAID, "HE SHALL NOT BE AFRAID OF EVIL TIDINGS." 1. *As a fact, real religion does ensure this.* See Daniel, when he knew the decree was signed (Dan. vi. 10). See Paul's letters in his imprisonment. See Nehemiah, etc. 2. *It does not mean that evil tidings do not come to them as to others.* They do, and often of a disastrous sort, affecting them in body, mind, and estate. 3. *Nor does it mean that such tidings have no effect upon them.* They do, saddening and distressing them much. Jesus wept. 4. *But they are not afraid of them.* They do not recognize such things as having power to touch them where their real treasure is, or as having any power in themselves at all; they are but God's ministers, and the ultimate issue of them cannot but be good. And those foreboding fears which so often precede them, God's servants are delivered from; for they believe the words, "As thy day so shall thy strength be."

III. THE SECRET OF THIS BLESSED FEARLESSNESS. It is plainly pointed out in our text. 1. *"His heart is fixed;"* that is, he has come to a settled conviction as to his relation to God, and as to God's mind to him. He is as certain of God's good will and all-sufficient power and grace as a dear child is of his mother's love. His feet are on a rock; he has come to be fixed in heart as to the Lord's leading him in the right way; he does not merely think it, he is fully persuaded of it, he knows in whom he has believed (Isa. xvi. 3). 2. *This fixedness of heart, which is so blessed, is the result of habitual trust.* "Trusting in the Lord." We can form habits of trust, as of any other act of the mind. It is not a single act of faith, or a spasmodic intermittent trust, which will ensure this fixedness of heart. But it must be perpetually repeated until the habit is formed. We must put our will into it, and we must abandon everything which would render such trust impossible, as all allowed sin will and must.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*Goodness repeated in new generations.* It has been very suggestively said "that God is, from the first, looking for a godly seed; or, what is nowise different,

inserting such laws of population that piety itself shall finally over-populate the world. There are two principal modes by which the kingdom of God among men may be, and is to be, extended. One is by the process of conversion, and the other by that of family propagation; one by gaining over to the side of faith and piety, the other by the populating force of faith and piety themselves." Bushnell coins words in which to express this, and calls it "the out-populating of the Christian stock." The modern doctrine of heredity is usually seen in its application to bad things: men deal with the laws which preside over the propagation of physical diseases and moral dispositions and bodily characteristics; but Christians are interested in the working of the laws in relation to good things. They equally—perhaps in even a more effective way—preside over the propagation of physical health and vigour, of moral virtues, and of bodily beauty. It may even yet be shown that there is a propagation into new generations of the new and Divine life in Christ; a deeper fulness of meaning than has yet been discovered in the expression, "Instead of the fathers shall come up the children." Bible language even suggests that heredity works more strongly on behalf of the good than on behalf of the evil, for while judgment on sin continues for three or four generations, reward of virtue keeps on its benedictions unto *thousands* of generations.

I. PARENTAL GOODNESS GIVES CHILDREN A CHANCE. Think how many children are born into the world over-weighted with disabilities. For extreme cases, take the vicious and criminal classes. But the fact is for us more effectively illustrated by cases of self-indulgence in youth, which involve weakened health and lowered moral tone. Good parents give their children a fair chance in the struggle of life. The children are not burdened with low vitality, self-indulgent appetite, or inability to find pleasure in pure things. Sometimes good people's children fail, but reasons for the exceptional cases can usually be found.

II. PARENTAL GOODNESS IS RECOGNIZED BY BLESSINGS ON THEIR CHILDREN. And this is the form of reward that parents best appreciate. They live over again in honourable, successful, and pious children. Therefore Easterns desired families. No nobler ambition possesses humanity than the passion to make the coming generation wiser, stronger, and better than the passing one.

III. PARENTAL GOODNESS IS THE ONE GROUND OF HOPE FOR THE RACE. Napoleon was asked what one thing France supremely needed. His reply was almost an inspiration. He said, "Better mothers."—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*A man's righteousness.* "Righteousness" has come to be a sort of exclusively religious word; a theological word, with a connotation fitting to a particular creed, over which learned men long have wrangled. Why cannot we let common sense win it for common, everyday uses? "Righteousness" is *rightness*. It is being right—right with God, and right with man, and *doing* right because we *are* right. How to become right, and how to be right, are the supreme questions for all moral beings. Every great teacher who has arisen in any age or any nation has set himself to answer these two questions; and our Lord Jesus Christ, with Divine authority, answered them in his Sermon on the Mount. He did a prophet's work in recalling men to the spiritual conception of righteousness as heart-rightness inspiring life-rightness, i.e. rightness of conduct and relations. Possibly, in our text, the main idea of the word is beneficence, kindness to others. But this only presents righteousness on its side of relation to *man*; it has also a side of relation to *God*. Both have to be included.

I. A MAN'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AS MAN CAN ESTIMATE IT. We have a human standard of rightness. It varies in expression; it is really everywhere the same. It is the standard of the best man of our nation or race. The psalmist said his goodness could stand the test of the "saints that are in the earth," but not the test of God. Man's idea of rightness includes purity, energy, and charity.

II. A MAN'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AS THE MAN HIMSELF CAN ESTIMATE IT. There is a consciousness of rightness, a conscious will for the right and love of the right, which are a man's dignity and strength; which a man has a perfect right to cling to as his chief treasure. Job firmly says, "Till I die I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go." David said, "Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me." And

our Divine Lord, as a man, said, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." A man's rightness is no sufficient basis for his acceptance with God, but it is good so far as it goes.

III. A MAN'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AS GOD ESTIMATES IT. He knows the distinction between its accidental and its essential features. He distinguishes the thing which appears from the foundation on which it rests. Rightness, judged by human standards, may rest on a basis of self—self-pleasing and pride. Some men respect themselves too much to do a wrong thing. But the highest type of rightness is built upon the recognition of God as the standard rightness, who requires those who would *do* right to be "all glorious within." He asks for "truth in the inward parts."—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Advantages of the good in times of calamity.* "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." The illustration is taken from the beneficent and charitable man. Everybody is ready to help him when trouble assails him. But a widely operating principle is illustrated in his case. The good man always has the best of it in the dark times of life. Spurgeon says, "He does not lean to injustice in order to ease himself, but, like a pillar, stands erect; and he shall be found so standing when the ungodly, who are as a bowing wall and a tottering fence, shall lie in ruins. He will have his days of darkness; he may be sick and sorry, poor and pining, as well as others; his former riches may take to themselves wings and fly away, while even his righteousness may be cruelly suspected; thus the clouds may lower around him, but his gloom shall not last for ever, the Lord will bring him light in due season, for as surely as a good man's sun goes down, it shall rise again. If the darkness be caused by depression of spirit, the Holy Ghost will comfort him; if by pecuniary loss or personal bereavement, the presence of Christ shall be his solace; and if by the cruelty and malignity of men, the sympathy of the Lord shall be his support." The advantages of the good in times of calamity may be thus indicated—

I. HE CANNOT BE LEFT ALONE. The self-contained man, who wishes to be left alone in his prosperity, must not wonder if he finds himself alone in his adversity. The dependent man, who leans on God in his success, will surely find that God is there, to be leaned upon, when his time of trouble arises. He who joins himself to God finds himself everywhere with God.

II. HE CANNOT LOSE WHAT HE VALUES MOST. All that human calamity can do is to affect our possessions and our circumstances—the things that we *have*; it has no injurious power on the things that we *are*. Trouble cannot take away our faith in God, our loyalty to God, our joy in God. "The Lord is the Portion of mine inheritance," and no earthly calamity can take him away. "When heart and flesh fail, the Lord is the Strength of my heart, and my Portion for ever."

III. HE CAN SEE LIGHT AND CHEER WHEN OTHERS CANNOT. Many were distressed about Daniel in the lions' den, but there was light in the darkness for him. St. Paul and Silas were dark enough in the inner prison at Philippi, but there was light in the darkness, and, in the joy of it, they "prayed and sang praises unto God." St. Paul sees such a shining forth on the darkness of his life-troubles, that he can speak of "this light affliction, which is but for a moment, and worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The Bible use of the word "everlasting."* This word is one which is used in common speech. Every one who speaks intensely is apt to speak extravagantly, and figures of speech are always capable of larger usage than the person who first employs them intended. Round the words "eternal," "for ever," and "everlasting," Christian doctrines have gathered; the words have thus gained a precision of meaning; and it is difficult now to recover for them the simpler, colloquial meanings which belong to their common use in all languages. It is necessary to consider how *we* use the terms, if we would apprehend how the Bible-writers use them. We vow eternal friendship. We say we will *never* do things. But man has no right to use such terms, save as expressions of intense feeling.

I. "EVERLASTING" IS A FIGURE FOR A PROLONGED PERIOD. "For eternal remembrance," i.e. for all future time, as long as man can remember anything, "the memory of the just is blessed; but the name of the wicked shall rot." When a thing goes on

and on till we can no longer see it, and can think of no agency that can stop it, we call it "everlasting." An illustration may be taken from the familiar garden flower which we call "everlasting," because, in contrast with other flowers, it will last, in our vases, all the winter.

II. "EVERLASTING" IS A FIGURE FOR THE DIVINE. It belongs to the thought of God, because we cannot conceive any causes which brought about his existence, or imagine any forces, or combination of forces, which can make his existence to cease. The word is applied by Moses to God, "The eternal God is thy Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Mere continuity cannot be the thought. That can only be the figure in the word. What must he be who was, and is, and is to come?

III. "EVERLASTING" IS A FIGURE FOR THE SPIRITUAL. It is when it is applied to men and to men's future. Everlasting life is spiritual life, of which one feature is continuity. Eternal death is spiritual death. And this is explained by the associations of the figure. One of our chiefest "notes of value" is the length of time that a thing will last. The gnat that is born and dies in an evening is esteemed of small value; the cedar tree, that outlasts the generations, is esteemed of great value. In order, then, to bring to us the sense of its supreme value, the spiritual life is spoken of as lasting for ever. We raise the value of that which lasts for centuries; we reach the highest value in thinking of that which lasts for ever.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Trust-triumph over fears.* "He will not be afraid of any evil tidings; for his heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord." The good man of this psalm is evidently also a rich man, and a man in high position, who can exert a wide influence. Such men are more especially exposed to the influence of evil tidings. Illustrate by the case of Job, to whom the messengers of evil came one after another. Or give cases of merchants whose whole fortune is embarked in some ship, and who receive tidings of its loss. Explain how sensitive the Stock Exchange is to the slightest rumour of evil. They who have nothing to lose are not affected by news of calamities, save in the way of sympathy. But the psalmist points out that the godly man is freed from undue fear concerning his earthly possessions, because he has a heavenly treasure which is in every way more precious to him, and concerning the safety of that treasure he need never have a fear.

I. EVIL TIDINGS MAY DISTRESS THE GODLY MAN. Piety never either changes or deadens natural feeling. It would be true to say that it even made natural feeling more keen and sensitive. Loss of money, place, influence, and health do distress pious men; and the triumph they may gain over themselves should never be allowed to deceive us. Their victory is seldom, if ever, an easy one.

II. EVIL TIDINGS CANNOT OVERWHELM THE GODLY MAN. Because he never stakes his *all* on any venture. Come what may, he has a reserve, and an abundantly satisfactory reserve. "Moth and rust may corrupt, thieves may break through and steal," but they never yet found the godly man's "heavenly treasure." It is not only that, take everything away, and he still has God. It is that, in having God, he potentially has everything; what he has lost is restored, if that is best; but certainly he has the "supply of all his needs."

III. EVIL TIDINGS DRIVE THE GODLY MAN CLOSER TO GOD. He has learned the lesson of trust; and he is sure to practise it in the time of need. His heart is fixed. Trouble does not make it waver, but binds it closer, fixes it firmer. Just as the little child sits close by father in the train, but presses closer when the train rushes into the dark tunnel. "His heart being fixed in solid reliance upon God, a change in his circumstances but slightly affects him. He can be patient, waiting for the salvation of God."—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*Giving as a sign of character.* "He hath dispersed abroad, and given to the poor" (quoted in 2 Cor. ix. 9; see Prov. xi. 24, 25). The exact translation of the word suggests, not occasional or impulsive giving, but constant and systematic giving, frequent and customary giving. The temptation of riches is to love them for their own sake, and to hoard them in order to be proud of them and to rejoice in them. The Christian triumph over the temptation of riches is found in regarding them as a trust to be used in Christ's service. A man goes wrong when he thinks—These riches are

mine. A man keeps right so long as he feels—I am one of Christ's stewards, and it is "required of stewards that they be found faithful." The good man is "God's reservoir, and forth from his abundance flow streams of liberality to supply the needy." "Benevolence of heart, when displayed in the benefaction of the hand, is the surest mark and fairest accomplishment of a moral and religious mind."

I. GIVING IS A SIGN OF SERVICE TO GOD. It is a way of working for him. The man who gives acknowledges himself to be a servant, an almoner. None of the things he possesses are regarded as his own. Everything is a trust for use.

II. GIVING IS A SIGN OF SYMPATHY WITH MAN. "The poor" (in some sense poor) "we have always with us." Civilization tends to make very rich and very poor. Calamities bring sorrow; many are born with disabilities. Sentiment concerning the poor is a sign of poor character, unless it be conjoined with self-denying and wise efforts for their well-being. When the man said he felt for a poor sufferer, the Quaker replied, "I feel half a crown, friend; how much dost thou feel?"

III. GIVING IS A SIGN OF LIMITED HOLD OF THE WORLD. Compare the miser and the generous Christian in their grip of the world. The miser grips the world hard; he can have his treasure only as long as he lives. The Christian is but passing through the world, and wants to do as much good as he can while he passes along.

IV. GIVING IS A SIGN OF A MAN'S LIKE-MINDEDNESS WITH GOD. "He giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not;" "He so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." (See our Lord's teaching in his Sermon on the Mount, especially Matt. v. 42, 45; vi. 1—4.)—R. T.

Vers. 1—10.—*The blessedness of the eminently good*. "That delighteth greatly in his commandments."

I. HIS CHILDREN SHALL BE BLESSED. (Ver. 2.) "Mighty" in a warlike sense here.

II. SHALL PROSPER IN OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES. (Ver. 3.) "Godliness is profitable unto all things," etc.

III. SHALL ENJOY THE LIGHT OF GOD'S PRESENCE, AND OF HIS OWN COMPASSIONATE DEEDS IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY. (Vers. 4, 5.) "Gracious, full of compassion and righteous;" these attributes will irradiate his darkest hours.

IV. BEING RIGHTEOUS, HE IS IMMOVABLY GROUNDED IN GOD. (Ver. 6.) Fixed in his trust and hope, and in all the principles of his character.

V. HAVING A CLEAR CONSCIENCE, HE IS RAISED ABOVE ALL FEAR. (Vers. 7, 8.) Delivered from the terrors that beset the guilty.

VI. HAVING AN INNER RIGHTEOUSNESS, HE ENJOYS THE HIGHEST HONOUR FROM GOD AND MAN. (Ver. 9.)—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXIII.

THIS is the first of the "Hallel" psalms, or of those sung at the Feasts of the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. It is a "Hallelujah psalm," like the two preceding, but is not alphabetic. As a most joyful hymn of praise, it is selected by our Church to be one of the psalms for Easter Day.

The composition falls into three stanzas of three verses each. In the first (vers. 1—3) the servants of the Lord are called upon to praise him. In the second (vers. 4—6) God is praised in the heavens, with respect to his glory there. In the third (vers. 7—9) he is eulogized in respect of his great doings upon the earth.

Ver. 1.—Praise ye the Lord (comp. Ps. civ. 35; cv. 45; cvi. 1, 48; cxl. 1; cxli. 1). Praise, O ye servants of the Lord, praise the Name of the Lord. By "ye servants of the Lord," all faithful Israelites are certainly intended; but the phrase need not be absolutely limited to them (comp. ver. 3).

Ver. 2.—Blessed be the Name of the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. The prayer here is that God may be praised through all time, as in the next verse it is that he may be praised through all space. In connection with the praise of God, limits of time and place are unsuitable (comp. Ps. cxv. 18; cxxi. 8; cxxv. 8; cxxxi. 3; Isa. lix. 21; Micah iv. 7).

Ver. 3.—From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same (comp. Mal. i 11); i.e. all over the world, from the furthest

east to the furthest west. The Lord's Name is to be praised; or, "praised be the Name of the Lord" (Kay).

Ver. 4.—The Lord is high above all nations. As being "the great King over all the earth" (Ps. xlvii. 2). And his glory above the heavens. "The heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain him" (2 Chron. vi. 18). It is a "humbling of himself" to "behold the things that are in heaven and earth" (see ver. 6).

Ver. 5.—Who is like unto the Lord our God? (comp. Ps. lxxxix. 6; Isa. xl. 18, 25). The highest created being does not approach within anything but an immeasurable distance of God. Who dwelleth on high; or, "who sitteth enthroned on high."

Ver. 6.—Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth. It is a condescension in God to regard even "the things that are in heaven," since the very "heavens are not clean in his sight" (Job xv. 15). Much more is it a condescension in him to behold the gross material things of earth. Yet he gives them his constant care and attention, since otherwise they would cease to be.

Ver. 7.—He raiseth up the poor out of the dust. Heaven is full of his glory, earth of

his mercy and loving-kindness. The words of 1 Sam. ii. 8 are, consciously or unconsciously, quoted. And lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; rather, *from the dunghill* (Revised Version).

Ver. 8.—That he may set him with princes. The words of 1 Sam. ii. 8 are still followed. (For the sentiment, see also Job xxxvi. 7.) Historically, the statement is illustrated by the examples of Joseph, Saul, David, Daniel, Mordecai. Even with the princes of his people. Not merely with heathen princes, but with those who exercise sovereignty over Israel, as Joseph with Pharaoh, Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, Mordecai with Ahasuerus or Xerxes.

Ver. 9.—He maketh the barren woman to keep house. Hannah's song is still in the psalmist's thoughts, and suggests this illustration (see 1 Sam. ii. 5). But it must not be restricted to a literal interpretation. The true "barren woman" was Israel (Isa. liv. 1), whose curse of barrenness was ultimately removed, and who became, as here prophesied, a joyful mother of children (comp. Isa. xlix. 12, 18, 20; liv. 2, 3; lv. 5; Gal. iv. 27). Praise ye the Lord (comp. Ps. civ., cv., cvi., cxv., cxvi., cxvii., cxxxv., cxlvi.—1., which terminate similarly).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—9.—*Reasons for reverential praise.* The force of the psalmist's summons in the opening verse is felt as we proceed through the psalm itself, and when we reach the end of it; for there are brought out—

I. THE CONSTANCY OF GOD'S GOODNESS. In no less than three verses (1—3) the Lord's Name is put for himself. This is significant of the Divine constancy. The name of the Lord is never dissociated from the same class of thoughts and deeds. It is so invariably connected with these that one stands for the other. His name and his character are inseparable; utter his name, and there instantly rise to our thought the attributes which distinguish him; to sing of his Name is not to praise an imaginary or ideal one, but the very Lord God himself. We worship him "with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning."

II. THE GREATNESS OF HIS GLORY. He manifests his presence, exercises his power, and makes known his goodness (1) through all ages (ver. 2); (2) over all the earth (ver. 3); (3) in the highest heavens (ver. 4).

III. THE FACT OF HIS CONDESCENSION. (Ver. 6.) "He humbleth himself;" "who casts looks so low;" "and looketh down so deep." However we read it, the idea is that the "Most High God" interests himself in the children of men. He not only is concerned with the progress of our race generally (as a great emperor may occasionally bestow his attention upon the affairs of a distant province as reported to him by its representative), but he occupies his eternity with the intimate knowledge and practical government of each nation, province, family, individual soul. To the Infinite One nothing can be too small for his regard.

IV. HIS UPLIFTING POWER AND GRACE. (Ver. 7.) Obviously it could not be expected that every godly man would rise in worldly position; that involves an actual impossibility; nor would that, if it were possible, be a desirable reward of piety. But the good man—who is the faithful, thrifty, reliable man—is very often raised from obscurity to eminence, from lowliness to power. And the constant tendency of Christian worth and virtue is to convert poverty into competence, want into comfort, misery into

cheerfulness, despair into peace. Indeed, this last is one of the ordinary and continual effects of piety. In the gospel of Christ, God is lifting up those that have been brought down into a sense of condemnation and shame to the holy and blessed heights of hope and joy. Christianity is everywhere and always an *uplifting* power.

V. HIS ENRICHING KINDNESS. (Ver. 9.) We do not sufficiently realize the goodness of God in the domestic enrichment with which he blesses us; in all the love and all the happiness that come from the conjugal, parental, filial, fraternal relationships which his heart has conceived, which his hand is working for us. All these things bring into view—

VI. HIS STRONG CLAIM ON OUR REVERENCE AND PRAISE. As the psalm begins and ends with a "hallelujah," so should our lives, in every part, be encircled with the utterance of heartfelt gratitude.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 7, 8.—*The overflowing gratitude of the saved soul.* How intense is the fervour of praise with which this psalm is full! The soul of the psalmist can scarce contain itself, and we are inevitably led to inquire into the reason and occasion of such gratitude. It is told of in the verses before us. No doubt the salvation spoken of was primarily a national one; it was Israel who had been so visited of God. It was Israel who was sunk so low in misery and degradation—sunk down to the dust and the dunghill, so poor and needy, so lonely, sad, and filled with reproach, like a woman to whom had been denied the gift of children. But by the grace and condescending compassion of God, she had been lifted up, and set among princes, and she had become joyful, like as a mother over her children. From Egypt's slavery to the glories of the time of David and Solomon; from the misery and shame of the days of the destruction of Jerusalem, when they were carried into captivity, to the brighter times of the return and restoration;—such deliverances as these it was which called forth the psalmist's and the nation's enthusiastic, grateful song. And the lesson for every nation or community which has been blessed of God with great prosperity, as our own nation has, is to remember the small beginnings, the humble place we once filled, and to give God all the praise for what he has wrought on our behalf. But we take our text as descriptive of spiritual deliverance—of God's salvation of the soul. The gratitude of such soul is uttered here. And it rests on these grounds—

I. THE DEPTHS FROM WHICH IT HAS BEEN UPLIFTED. They are described as the dust, the dunghill, the state of the barren woman. These images present an accumulation of shame, degradation, and distress. And the soul that has known the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin will know that such images are fit and true. St. Paul called himself, to the last, "the chief of sinners." Guilt, bondage to sin, vileness of heart and, perhaps, of life too, hopelessness, helplessness, and a fearful looking for of judgment,—facts like these justify the strong images of the verses before us as telling of the soul unsaved.

II. THE HEIGHTS TO WHICH IT HAS BEEN RAISED. See again the images employed. And they are true. They express the ideas of honour, wealth, joy, strength, fruitfulness; and they are all realized in the experience of the saved soul now, and are to be realized infinitely more hereafter.

III. THE INFINITE CONDESCENSION OF GOD IN ALL THIS. The unbeliever has objected that it is monstrous to suppose that the great God, who controls the universe, amid which this earth of ours is a mere shred and insignificant fragment, can be concerned with the petty affairs of man, especially of a poor individual, worthless, and sinful man. But is it not true that he who governs the vast universe, worlds upon worlds, has yet been at the pains to paint and fashion the wing of the meanest insect in most exquisite and perfect manner? If he will stoop to that, he will stoop to me, poor wretched sinner though I be. I own it is wonderful; but it is true. Hallelujah!—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Servant-reasons for praise.* "Praise, O ye servants of the Lord." This psalm is the first of the series called the "Hallel," which was sung in connection with the annual Jewish festivals, and especially at the Passover and Feast of Tabernacles.

This and the following psalm were sung before the second cup. We need not think, however, that these psalms were composed for use at the feasts with which they were afterwards associated. Only Jewish minds could recognize any particular fitness for such scenes. To us they are simply praise psalms. Here we notice that praise of the Divine Master is properly claimed from all the servants of the Divine Master.

I. PRAISE IS PROPERLY CLAIMED FROM ALL GOD'S CREATION. "All thy works praise thee, in all places of thy dominion." Poet-souls and pious souls find voice for Nature, and utter forth the joy in the Divine wisdom and goodness which all things seem to feel. Many of the psalms are nature-psalms. When man is praiseful, he feels that everything around him is praiseful too.

II. PRAISE IS PROPERLY CLAIMED FROM THE MORAL BEINGS GOD HAS MADE. Inanimate things praise by answering the ends for which they are made, and meeting the conditions in which they are set. But moral beings praise by recognizing qualities and character in the Divine arrangements. They do not only see goodness, they see that only from a good and gracious Being can such goodness come. Man, as man, in distinction from man as sinner, or man as in special relations with God, is called to praise, as he recognizes the Divine providing, ruling, and overruling.

III. PRAISE IS PROPERLY CLAIMED FROM THE SERVANTS WHO DO GOD'S WILL. There may be a special call intended here to the officials of the temple—priests and Levites; but the term "servant" is used by the Prophet Isaiah of the whole people, of every person called to a ministry, and of Messiah. And the Apostle Paul delights to speak of himself as the servant, bond-servant, slave, of Jesus Christ. All God's people who have come into personal relations with him, and have received his regenerating grace, think of themselves as consecrated to his service, as having become his servants. It may be shown that they, in a special way, feel the duty of praise, and find reasons for praise. Servant-praise is based: 1. On knowledge. The intimacy with the Master is a continually fresh revelation. 2. On experience. The servant never forgets the grace that brought him into the servant-relation. 3. On office; for it is servant-work to secure the honour of the Master.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Universal praise.* "From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the Lord's Name is to be praised." These figures may be taken as representing two notes of universality. 1. From morning to evening, covering all time. 2. From east to west, covering all space. Note that the two conditions of human thought are "time" and "space." All space is filled with reasons for praise. All time should be filled with the spirit of praise.

I. TIME FILLED WITH PRAISE. It cannot be expected that our whole days should be occupied with formal acts of worship; though such a pious soul as David will even envy the priests of the temple, who spend all their time in praise. We need to see clearly that "praise" is a cherished spirit of trustfulness, obedience, and holy joy in God; that this can be with us, abiding with us, while we are occupied with our commonplace, everyday avocations; and that this spirit of praise ever gladly seizes fitting opportunities for formal expression. In this sense the good man's praise is universal; it covers all his time. It is cherished always; it is expressed often. And the relation of the frequent expression to the constant feeling may wisely be pointed out. Neglecting expression means fading feeling. Restraining the lips means losing the heart's joy and gratitude. If a good man's praise is not universal, as including all his time, it will soon become only weak impulse and sentiment.

II. SPACE FILLED WITH PRAISE. East and west are broader, larger suggestions than north and south. They cover all the zones in which man, in his multitudes, can dwell. So they include all humanity. It may be noted that this was a strange conception for the exclusive Jew; but in the time of the restoration from the Captivity the diffusion of the knowledge of God among the heathen had already begun. God's work is in all space. God's appeal is made to every man. God's goodness hallows every life. God therefore rightly claims universal praise. But there is an element in the redeemed man's praise which makes him the fitting leader of the universal choir. All the world over, man, should (1) extol his character; (2) magnify every high and sacred attribute; (3) glory in all his mighty and gracious works; and (4) honour the Name by which he is known.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*Likenesses to God.* “Who is like unto the Lord our God?” The precise point here may be thus expressed: “Who as he combines majesty with condescension?” Both heaven and earth, glorious and wonderful though they are, are alike immeasurably below the majesty of God. The psalmist evidently has the idolatry in mind which seeks for suggestions of God’s figure either in heaven or in earth. No fitting ones can be found. They are all *made* things; and the maker is always grander than the things he makes. No manufactured article can ever do more than suggest something about the man who designed or made it; it can never give an adequate and complete impression of him. Think of the sun as the sublimest of all created things, but it is no more fitting to represent God, it is no more worthily a likeness of God, than the images, hideous or beautiful, which idolatry or paganism may design. God absolutely refuses to permit any likeness to be made of him after anything in heaven, or earth, or under the earth. Nothing material must be permitted to limit our large, free, spiritual thought of him.

I. LIKENESSES TO GOD IN THE HEAVENS. Men naturally look up into the heavens first, because that is the sphere of mystery, and that inspires awe and leads to adoration. It does so to the uncultured, but how much more it does to the cultured, who know that the seemingly little star Uranus is eighty times larger than the earth, Neptune a hundred and fifty times larger, Saturn more than seven hundred times larger, and Jupiter more than fourteen hundred times larger! The general sentiment of humanity has found in our sun the best likeness of God; but, though this should bring to men sublime ideas of grandeur, purity, and power, even the sun is unworthy to represent God.

II. LIKENESSES TO GOD IN THE EARTH. The apostle regards it as a degrading descent, that men, unsatisfied with sun-figures, “changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” It is an impressive proof of the uselessness of the material to represent the immaterial, that men who once look to the material for figures of God always tend to go lower and lower in the scale. Nowadays, though we are not likely to worship the sun or manufactured idols, there are still thought-ideals, thought-idols, which may be as unworthy to represent the eternal God as the images of our heathen brothers.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The relative value of earthly things.* There is no absolute value in them. God cannot be thought of as interested in them for their own sakes. He humbles himself to regard them because of the relation his people bear to them, and because of the influence they have upon his people. Of him it has been suggestively said, “He stoops to view the skies, and bows to see what angels do.” This we say of God, because we have the revelation of him as a Moral Being, with moral as well as natural attributes. Once let a being take a moral view of things, and the material can never afterwards be the all-important thing to him. Once let us take the moral view, and we must always take it; for us the moral must have eternal precedence.

I. GOD CANNOT BE THOUGHT OF AS INTERESTED IN EVENTS FOR THEIR OWN SAKES. There is no quality in things. Even we men are not supremely interested in the things we make; we are concerned about the purposes for which we make them, and the uses to which they may be put. We go, in thought, past the things themselves. Even when God is pictured as calling each day’s work of creation “very good,” we are reminded that his eye was upon the moral beings for whom he was arranging it all. It would help us in gaining right views of God if we would clearly see that material creation is not his end, but his means to secure a higher end.

II. GOD MUST BE THOUGHT OF AS INTERESTED IN EVENTS FOR THE SAKE OF HIS PEOPLE. Material things, earthly events, human relations, do variously influence the moral beings that God has made; and these various influences we may think of as God’s supreme concern. It is not right to say—God made everything for the sake of man. This only fills man with pride. It is right to say that God made everything for the sake of *his purpose in man and through him*. Illustrate from the parental relation to the mere incidents and events of the boy’s life. Parents would not turn aside to consider the events if the boy were not in them. It is the boy they consider, not the events. All their concern is the influence of the events on the character and

life of the boy. Transfer this to the larger, sublimer family sphere of the heavenly Father, and then our point comes out clearly. God concerns himself with his world for the sake of his purpose through his people.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*God the Remover of disabilities.* “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust.” The expressions used in this and the following verse are taken from the song of Hannah (see 1 Sam. ii. 1—10), and similar expressions are found in the song of the Virgin Mary (see Luke i. 51—53). Historical illustrations of the passage may be found in the careers of Gideon, King Saul, and David. The psalmist may have in mind the restoration of the nation from the Babylonish captivity, which was an extreme national humiliation. As a fact of Divine dealing, this removing of disabilities may be illustrated from the preacher’s own experience and observation. But we can so fully recognize the Divine wisdom in such dealings in general as to remove all thought of Divine favouritism or mere sovereignty. Two of the reasons guiding Divine conduct may be considered.

I. GOD GRACIOUSLY RECOGNIZES AND REWARDS CHARACTER. Some of the best features of human character can only gain expression and culture under the pressure of poverty, burdens, and disabilities. It is the misfortune of many men that they cannot be noblest-typed characters because they have never known trouble and strain. There are qualities of character in the favoured ones which the poor and tried ones cannot attain; but they are not so important as the qualities of the humbled and suffering ones, which the favoured few cannot attain. Since God is specially interested in character, he is concerned for the poor and needy, and finds in them persons who are fitted for responsible positions. The rise of men of lowly station to offices of influence is mainly due to the power of character, and the Divine recognition of character. It may be shown that, though this is largely true, it must be taken with some qualifications, seeing that men do sometimes rise through force of mind, or characteristic qualities, which are quite distinct from moral and religious character.

II. GOD FINDS IN THOSE UNDER DISABILITIES FITTING PERSONS FOR HIS SERVICE. Here it may be pointed out that times of disability are often the schooling of the men God wants for his work. Poverty, toil, strain, burden, make the training-ground for the Lord’s heroes. And the man who is placed under any special form of disability may comfort himself with the assurance that the Lord is needing him, and so needs to have him disciplined, polished, furbished, by this trying experience.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*The mission of the children.* Here is an evident allusion to the joy of Hannah, when her prayer was heard, and Samuel came as the firstborn of a family. “The Lord visited Hannah, so that she bare three sons and two daughters,” and her adversary could provoke her no more. It is remarked that the Rabbins actually speak of a man’s wife as his *house*; and the same form of speech is current at the present day among the Arabs. This joy men have in children, which is characteristic of every age and nation, which is, indeed, the universal sentiment, leads us to consider the mission of the children. Why do they come in helplessness, and take so long growing up to their manhood and womanhood?

I. CHILDREN ARE SENT TO CULTURE CHARACTER. This is the other side of the truth with which we are familiar—that children have characters which we must culture. There is a good sense in which children are sent into the world to “train their parents.” What they can do is seen in the immediate effect their coming has upon their mothers. It changes them from thoughtless, self-centred maidens into thoughtful, self-denying women. And an equal influence, though not quite so evident, is seen in the father. Family life cultures all the graces, the stronger ones no less than the milder; and it lays the burden of personal example upon the parents; for a child makes demand of father and mother that they will show him the *ideal goodness*. Each element of refined and Christly character may be dealt with, and special stress may be laid upon “patience” and “charity” in the sense of going outside ourselves for our interests.

II. CHILDREN ARE SENT TO KEEP UP OUR INTEREST IN MORALS. This point is seldom dwelt on. Yet it is evident that the children come just at the time in our lives when material interests—business, society—become so absorbing. Moral and religious

interests would pass out of our thought if it were not that every day brings to us concern for the children, and that must be a *moral* concern. The children break into the monotony of material middle-life associations. Everyday morals for every parent, and morals and religion for most parents, are brought closely to mind. The children are God's voice reminding man of eternal things.—R. T.

Vers. 5—8.—*The Divine nature and character.* "Who is like unto the Lord our God," etc.? The views we form of God's nature and character are of the highest importance.

I. GOD'S INCOMPARABLE MAJESTY. (See the fortieth chapter of Isaiah.) But his moral greater than his physical greatness.

II. GOD'S CONDESCENSION. "Humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth." Displays a deep and everlasting interest in the works of his hands. 1. *Great men stoop to inferior things for the purposes of science.* But God has a perfect knowledge of all things. 2. *Men stoop to the wants and miseries of others, but do not relinquish their rank and station.* But God in Christ came in the form of a servant (Phil. ii. 6—8). 3. *Great men die for their country or their friends, but not for their enemies.* "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners [and enemies], Christ died for us."

III. GOD'S REDEEMING COMPASSION. 1. *Man's character as a sinner is described.* He is called poor and needy. Poor and needy indeed! As a sinner, he has no real treasure, and not even any hope. 2. *His misery is indicated.* In the dust and on the dunghill—a miserable outcast. 3. *His glorious elevation by the redeeming love of God.* (1 Sam. ii. 8.) He is translated to a seat with princes. "Who hath made us kings and priests unto God."—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXIV.

A PSALM of reminiscence, designed to encourage the exiles on their return from Babylon, during their "day of small things" (Zech. iv. 10; comp. Ezra iii. 12). If God had done so much for them when he brought them out of Egypt, if such glorious prodigies had marked that epoch, might they not be sure that his hand would be stretched out for them now? Formally, the psalm is more like a modern poem than most. It divides into four stanzas of four lines each, very evenly balanced, and perfect in its metrical arrangement. "The psalm is evidently by a skilled artist" (Cheyne).

Ver. 1.—When Israel went out of Egypt; literally, at the going forth of Israel from Egypt; ἐν ἐξόδῳ Ἰσραὴλ, LXX. The "going forth from Egypt" was the only thing parallel in Israelitish history to the going forth from Babylon. The nation should learn what to expect in the future by what occurred in the past. The house of Jacob (compare the more common "house of Israel," Pss. xcviii. 3; cxv. 12; cxxxv. 19) from a people of strange language; literally, from a stammering people; but a people of foreign speech is no doubt meant (compare the Septuagint, ἐκ λαοῦ βαρβάρου).

Ver. 2.—Judah was his sanctuary; or.

"became his sanctuary;" Judah—i.e. the land of Judah—received the special honour of being chosen for the seat of God's sanctuary. And Israel his dominion. While all the rest of Israel was accepted as constituting his kingdom or dominion. The whole people came under God's special protection.

Ver. 3.—The sea saw it, and fled. "The sea" is the Red Sea. It "looked," and saw God leading his people (Exod. xiv. 19—24), and then at once "fled," and left a dry channel as "a way for the ransomed to pass over." Jordan (literally, the Jordan) was driven back (comp. Josh. iii. 13—17). These two marvels "marked respectively the beginning and the end of Israel's long journey" (Cheyne). They were parallel facts, and are naturally alluded to together (comp. Hab. iii. 8).

Ver. 4.—The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs. The poet sees in the earthquake that shook Sinai (Exod. xix. 18) a general commotion of the entire region, in which both the greater and the lesser elevations take part (comp. Pss. xix. 6; lxviii. 8, 16).

Vers. 5, 6.—What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs? Most poetically, the psalmist apostrophizes the sea, the Jordan, the mountains, and the lesser hills, inquiring of them for

what reason they had forsaken their nature and done such strange things; or rather, addressing them as present, and as if the scenes were being enacted before his eyes, and asking why they are so strangely employed—what is causing the commotion and disturbance (see the Revised Version, where the present tense is used throughout the two verses).

Ver. 7.—Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord. The answer is given, but only indirectly given, in these words. Nothing less than “the presence of the Lord”—a miraculous and abnormal presence

—can have produced the strange phenomena. The earth has felt the presence of God, and has trembled, and has done right to tremble; but Israel may take comfort from the theophany, for it is a manifestation on her behalf. The presence that has made itself felt is the presence of the God of Jacob—the God who watches over Jacob, and will succour and protect him constantly.

Ver. 8.—Which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters (see Exod. xvii. 6; Numb. xx. 11). Miracles of mercy, showing at once God’s almightiness and his care for Israel.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*God with us.* This psalm, which is so full of fine poetry, is also charged with spiritual suggestiveness. In the few verses of which it is composed, it brings before us the nearness of God to us, and the power he is exerting on us. We have—

I. HIS DWELLING-PLACE IN US. “Judah was his sanctuary” (ver. 2). God dwelt in Judah in a sense in which he dwelt nowhere else. There was his manifested presence, and thither the tribes came up when they wanted to offer sacrifice, to make supplication, to hold high and happy fellowship. It was the place of his abode. Now God dwells not merely *with*, but *in*, his people. We are “the habitation of God through the Spirit.” Our human hearts are his earthly home. To the pure, obedient, believing heart that seeks his presence (see Luke xi. 13) God will come, and in that heart he will abide. “If any man love me . . . we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John xiv. 23).

II. HIS INHERITANCE IN US. “Israel was his dominion” (ver. 2). The kingdom of Israel, *i.e.* the *people who dwell within it*, were God’s inheritance (see Ps. xciv. 5; Jer. ii. 7). If God “rejoices in his works,” in those things which he made and “pronounced good,” much more does he rejoice in his own children—in those who know, who worship, who trust, who love, who serve, him. More precious than all fruitful fields, than “all the cedars of Lebanon,” is one human heart that, redeemed by his Son and renewed by his Spirit, reciprocates his Fatherly affection, is gladly subject to his will, and labours heartily in his cause. How great, then, is his inheritance in *all* his people, in all those of every age and beneath every sky who have returned to him, and who are rejoicing in him! Are we such, in spirit, in conversation, in life, that our God can find a part of his Divine heritage in *us*?

III. HIS ENERGIZING PRESENCE. (Vers. 3—7.) What was it that moved the mountains, that rolled back the river, that made the waters of the sea to stand up like a wall? It was the operative presence of God himself; it was the working of the unseen hand. What is it now that makes the tides of the ocean to keep their time, the streams and the rivers to fertilize the soil through which they flow, the seed to germinate in the soil, the corn and the fruit to ripen in the sun? When we have reached the ultimate physical cause, we have not obtained the explanation that we seek. We come finally to the great fact of God’s presence, of the energizing power which he supplies, without which there could be no life, no growth, no motion, no result. What the psalmist says in fine poetic language, our intelligent piety confirms; the answer to our questions *How?* and *Whence?* is this—The presence of the Lord, “without whom nothing can be made that is made.” “The Lord of hosts is with us;” “My Father worketh.”

IV. HIS CONVERTING POWER. (Ver. 8.) The “turning of the rock into standing water” was a Divine, a wonderful action. But the spiritual and the supernatural are as Divine as the miraculous. Equally wonderful as, and more gracious and more benignant than, such physical transformation is the changing of the flinty heart into the water of penitence, into the fountain of piety and purity. God is doing daily,

through his people, in his Churches, that which "calls for loudest songs of praise." But this, his greatest work, is not on rock, or soil, or sea, or river; it is on the hard tablet of the human heart, and on the sinful habits of the human life.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The soul's exodus.* The psalm is a wonderfully vivid and beautiful description of the deliverance of God's people from Egypt. In all ages of the Church this has been looked upon as the pattern and type of the soul's deliverance by the redemption of Christ. Much of that history is suggested here. We are shown—

I. FROM WHENCE THE SOUL WAS SET FREE. 1. *From Egypt*, the true type of the world. At first so pleasant, so prosperous, so Goshen-like, so free from care, life so easy and secure. 2. *But at length its true character is revealed.* They are a strange—a barbarous, or tyrant, so the word is variously rendered—people. And the redeemed soul has found that out.

II. WHAT HAPPENED AT THIS EXODUS. (Ver. 2.) 1. *There was the indwelling of God.* The soul became his shrine. He was worshipped, beloved, trusted day by day. 2. *There was willing obedience.* God was the Lord of their life. The soul becomes the dominion, the domain, of God. 3. *Things beforehand impossible, happened.* (Vers. 3, 4.) The sea, symbol of the whole power of spiritual death, saw and fled. "You hath he quickened who were dead," etc. It is a true picture of what takes place at the real conversion of a soul. Old things pass away. The stream and course of life are turned in an opposite direction, as was the Jordan. On and on, rapidly flowing downwards to the Dead Sea, so was it with the Jordan; so is it with the soul till its redemption comes. But then there is a conversion, a complete turning round, in the aims, principles, and motives of the life. The fixed habits and propensities—fixed like the mountains and hills of Sinai—the pride, unbelief, selfishness, love of sin, all which seemed firmly settled in our nature, are shaken, plucked up by the roots. The rock-like heart, so hard and barren and lifeless, becomes transformed as into a standing water, a very fountain of waters (cf. John vii. 37, 38). The soul is blessed, and becomes a blessing.

III. HOW IS ALL THIS TO BE EXPLAINED? Men will ask this, and no answer will they find save that it is the presence of the Lord (vers. 5—7). It is the standing miracle of the Christian Church.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*Man is God's temple.* "Judah became his sanctuary." Though neither the author nor the occasion of this psalm can be definitely known, it clearly belongs to the time of the returned exiles, when the remaking of the nation was the matter most prominent in the interests of the people. It was quite a familiar thing to compare the remaking of the nation with the first making of it; and to get the comforting assurance that God was presiding over the remaking, by realizing, in as forcible a manner as possible, how he had presided over the making. In the making there had indeed been very remarkable, truly miraculous, outward and visible signs of the Divine presence—the dividing of the Red Sea at the beginning, the quaking mountains in the earlier part, the smitten rock and flowing water in the latter part, the divided Jordan at the end. After these signs had fixed their impressions, the people could act as a nation.

I. GOD'S PRESENCE AND POWER WERE THE GLORIES OF THE NATION FROM THE FIRST. This truth was impressed by the marvels which were wrought in connection with their deliverance from Egypt. The plagues were indeed judgments; but they were, even more truly, teachings, sanctifying impressions made upon the people of Israel. They taught them God, and helped them to realize what God *with them* would involve. The truth was impressed by such signs as dividing the sea; but this only illustrated God's presence as the Ruler, Rewarder, and Judge of the people. From all material signs of the Divine relations, we should rise to discern the far more important moral signs. God himself moulding the national life; God himself directly ruling the moral and religious life of the nation;—these are the marvels of grace and wisdom which the Jews never tired of contemplating.

II. GOD'S PRESENCE AND POWER WERE THE GLORIES OF THE RESTORED NATION.

But what a moral advance had been made when men could discern God's working in ordinary providences, and no longer needed miracles of astonishment! To the restored exiles common providences became signs of direct working on their behalf. And they were right in so thinking. God was making things work together to work out the fulfilment of his promise.

III. GOD'S PRESENCE AND POWER ARE THE GLORIES OF THE CHURCH TO-DAY. But we have risen above the reach of the restored exiles. To us God is present and working—not in miraculous act, not specially even in providential orderings, but in the spiritual indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Then we may be reminded that there are conditions of this abiding in us, and that jealousy of our supreme possession is our fitting attitude of mind and feeling.—R. T.

Vers. 3, 4.—*Nature made to serve God's purposes.* These verses are poetical representations of three actual facts which are recorded in the history of God's people. We may see facts in their bare, bald nakedness, or we may see them with the colour on them which poetical genius can put. It may be disputed whether bald history or suggestive poetry is really the truer to nature, just as it may be disputed whether the realistic or the idealistic picture is the truer to life. If nature is to suggest thoughts to men, then men only see Nature aright when they know what she *says* as well as what she *is*. The poet tells us what Nature says. In these verses we are made to understand that the sea felt God working in it, and yielded to his touch. Jordan felt God working in it, and stopped its flowing. Sinai felt God working in it, and responded with a trembling of reverence and holy joy. The response of Nature is a lesson for man. God would work in his higher powers and his higher spheres; and his response should be more prompt than the hurrying waves, more complete than the check of the river's flowing, and more joyous than the trembling and dances of the divinely honoured hills. The psalmist was the moral teacher of his times, and had a definite purpose before him in thus recalling the most impressive events of the national history. His point may be thus briefly stated: Nature *does* respond to God and serve his purposes, —and man *should*.

I. NATURE DOES RESPOND TO GOD AND SERVE HIS PURPOSES. This may be illustrated from the *usual* and the *unusual*. Pagans peopled the woods and streams and hills with fairies; Wordsworth poetically conceived of Nature as a living being. Religion finds God working out his thought everywhere, and everything responsive to his use. Nature is not God; it is distinct from him. But it is so kin with him that, unhindered, his thought finds expression in it. And so responsive is Nature to God, that it readily yields itself to the unusual, to the miraculous, when these are necessary to God's purposes. Seas will part, rivers will stop, mountains will tremble, in response to him. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof."

II. MAN SHOULD RESPOND TO GOD AND SERVE HIS PURPOSES. He should, because he is a part of Nature, and ought to be in harmony with her. But man is a higher being than any thing or being in Nature—a being *with a will*, a being made in God's image. It is his *willing* response, it is his loving and obedient outworking of the Divine purposes, that God asks of restored exiles and of us.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The natural and the supernatural.* "Which turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters" (Revised Version). Wollaston tells us that "on the north-eastern face of Mount Sinai (Jebel Sufsafeh), in the Wady Shubeib, is a protruding mass of rock, about fifty feet in diameter, much water- and weather-worn, and presenting a smooth and striking appearance. It forms a part of the solid granite cliff which rises twelve hundred feet above it. In the lower part of this protuberance is a fissure of a semicircular, or rather horse-shoe, shape, about four feet long and four inches wide. Out of this fissure, inside which a small shrub is growing, runs a perpetual stream of the purest spring water, clear as crystal, and of delicious coolness and flavour, which, according to the testimony of the Arabs, has never been known to fail. The water thus flowing out of the very heart of the living rock of Sinai is received into an artificial basin, thence it descends to a succession of small and rudely constructed terraces, where the Bedouins cultivated a few fruit trees and vegetables, and is ultimately absorbed in the gravelly hollow at the base of the mountain."

The incident is, no doubt, thus poetically recalled to the mind of the restored exiles, in order to assure them that God, in his power to provide, and his power to meet emergencies, was all that he had ever been; and this suggests a very suitable subject of meditation, which may be very effectively applied to our times and needs. But a less usual topic is suggested by the discovery of what is probably the very spring that Moses brought to light. As our knowledge advances, we are coming more and more fully to apprehend that the natural and the supernatural are inextricably blended in human life, and that in God's working out of his purposes the natural and the supernatural are one. See how this is suggested by the smiting of the rock and the result which followed. No one would suggest that God put the water into the rock specially and on purpose for the Israelites. It was there. It was its natural habitat. The fountains of water, the pools into which the waters drain, are always in the rocks. Miners have to be careful lest they let in upon them the floods of waters that are stored in the rocks. Our towns are often supplied with water that is pumped up from the reservoirs of the rocks. It was quite natural for the water to be in the rock. And man brings the water out of the rock by smiting the rock. Just now the workmen of our town have been engaged in tunnelling the chalk rock to get a fresh supply of water; and the other day a workman, smiting with his pick, opened a fissure, from which a stream is pouring abundantly. To get water out of the rock by smiting the rock was also quite natural. It is fancy that makes Moses only give the rock a gentle pat. He *smote* it; on the second occasion he even roughly smote it twice before the fissure opened. So far the provision was natural, and the method of obtaining it also natural. But how evidently the supernatural was blended with the natural! Direct Divine direction fitted the time and the place. No mere human wisdom could have thus immediately discovered the exact spot where the rock would yield to a single smiting, and send forth its treasures. Only a divinely ordered man would think of such a way of relieving the necessities of a caravan. The supernatural character of the incident comes at once to view if we think of the leader of an ordinary caravan in that Sinaitic district going about tapping the rocks, hoping to meet with a fissure in which was a water-store. God directed Moses, and he went straight to the place. And the marvel that grows ever greater to devout souls, as they pass through the experiences of life, is not the mere presence of supernatural forces, but the way in which the supernatural blends with the natural, until the deepest feeling is that the natural is lost in the supernatural and God, working everywhere, in everything and through everything, becomes the most cherished thought. Men make sharp lines of distinction between the natural and the supernatural. When men come experimentally to know what God can do in their own souls and in their own lives, they cease to feel any interest in those sharp lines of distinction, for their sphere is the sphere of God. To them there is no natural. God is in it all, and his presence and actual working makes it *all supernatural*.—R. T.

Vers. 1—8.—*The spiritual exodus.* I. WE MAKE OUR ESCAPE FROM A STATE OF BONDAGE—EGYPT. 1. *A life of sin is a life of spiritual bondage.* (Rom. vi. 16.) 2. *Such a life of bondage brings us into "strange" and unnatural relations.* (Ver. 1.) Egypt was not the home of the Israelites.

II. THE SPIRITUAL EXODUS BRINGS US INTO OUR TRUE, OR DIVINE, RELATIONS. (Ver. 2.) 1. *We become consecrated temples for the indwelling of God.* (Ver. 2.) "Judah was his sanctuary." 2. *We are kingdoms over which God reigns.* "And Israel his dominion."

III. THIS EXODUS IS ACCOMPANIED BY GREAT EXCITEMENTS. 1. *There is a grand revelation of the presence of God.* (Ver. 7.) 2. *A wonderful proclamation of the Law of God.* Sinai is shaken by it, and so is the soul of man. Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." 3. *There is a revelation of the abundant mercy of God.* (Ver. 8.) This manifestation of God "turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters."—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXV.

A LITURGICAL psalm, in which a divided choir, together with a leader—a priest or precentor—take separate parts. The occasion is one of danger (ver. 2), but, at the same time, of confident hope and trust (vers. 3, 9—15). A portion of the choir begin with an appeal to God for help against the heathen, whose vain worship of idols they cover with scorn (vers. 1—8). The leader then exhorts to trust in God in the first clause of three consecutive verses (vers. 9, 10, 11), half the choir responding in the second clause. The whole choir raises a joyful strain in vers. 12, 13, the leader responding in vers. 14—16, and the choir and congregation together concluding the whole with a final burst of praise in vers. 17, 18.

Metrically, the psalm falls into four stanzas or strophes—the first of three verses (vers. 1—3), and the other three of five verses each (vers. 4—8; 9—13; and 14—18).

Ver. 1.—Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give glory. God is prayed to help Israel, but not for their sakes, not to cover *them* with glory—rather for his own sake, that glory may rest on his Name, and *himself*, among the nations. For thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. In order to be true to his qualities of mercy and truthfulness.

Ver. 2.—Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? (comp. *Ps.* xlii. 3, 10; lxxix. 10). If Israel is unhelped, the heathen will triumph, and ask scornfully what has become of Israel's God? Is he unable, or is he unwilling, to deliver them?

Ver. 3.—But—rather, and—as though he would say, “and all the while, as the heathen scorn and question”—our God is in the heavens; in his place, where he always is, watching over us. He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. He has the will to help us, and he has the power to do whatsoever he pleases.

Vers. 4—8.—The scorn of the heathen is retaliated. They scoff at the God of Israel. What, then, are their own gods? Silver and gold indeed (ver. 4), but the work of human hands. Fashioned into a human shape, as if they were sentient beings—but absolutely

devoid of all sense and intelligence. The satire is somewhat roughly worked out (vers. 5—7), but idolatry provokes rough speaking; and the tone here adopted is imitated in *Ps.* cxxxv. 15—18, and echoed in *Isa.* xlv. 9—20. The inspired writers seem to have felt, that, when idolatry came under consideration, the criticism should be brief and trenchant.

Ver. 4.—Their idols are silver and gold. At the best—often mere wood and stone (*Deut.* iv. 28); but the idols of the Babylonians were mostly of the more precious materials (*Herod.*, i. 183; *Dan.* iii. 1; *Ep. Jerem.*, i. 4, 11, etc.). The work of men's hands (*Ps.* cxxxv. 15; *Isa.* xlv. 12—17). To avoid this reproach, some images were said to have fallen down from heaven (*Acts* xix. 35).

Vers. 5—7.—They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. Possessing a semblance of every organ of human sense, they are wholly unable to perform any of the functions. That men should worship them, or believe in their power to help, is an utter absurdity.

Ver. 8.—They that make them are like unto them. Equally vain, futile, and powerless (comp. *Isa.* xlv. 9; *Jer.* ii. 5). So is every one that trusteth in them. To “trust” in an idol is an almost inconceivable folly. Yet there is abundant proof that the heathen actually did so trust (see *Herod.*, v. 80; viii. 64, 83).

Vers. 9—11.—The idols and the idol-worshippers having been sufficiently scorned, the latter especially, for their “trust” in idols, Israel is exhorted to trust in the only sure Object of confidence, Jehovah. Throo several times the leader of the choir gives forth the call—“Trust in the Lord”—and three several times the choir responds with the acknowledgment that he, and he alone, “is their Help and Shield.” The exhortation seems to be addressed, first, to the lay people generally (ver. 9); then to the clerical order (ver. 10); finally, to all, whether laity or clergy, who are true Israelites at heart (comp. vers. 12, 13).

Ver. 9.—O Israel, trust thou in the Lord. Follow not the example of the heathen

who trust in idols. Rather, be an example to them. **He is their Help and their Shield** (comp. Ps. xxxiii. 20). The change of person implies a change of speaker.

Ver. 10.—**O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord.** God's ministers were yet more bound than his people generally to trust in him. **He is their Help and their Shield** (comp. ver. 9).

Ver. 11.—**Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord.** Professor Cheyne explains this of proselytes, the *σεβόμενοι* of the Acts; but surely the order followed is one of climax—first, ordinary Israelites; next, those officially holy, the priests; finally, those actually holy, the truly faithful Israelites. **He is their Help and their Shield.** It would have been better in every case to have kept the Hebrew order of the words—"Their Help and their Shield is he."

Vers. 12, 13.—The whole choir, or perhaps the whole congregation, expresses its confidence in God. He has always been mindful of his people, and, in response to their threefold expression of trust, will bestow on them a threefold blessing.

Ver. 12.—**The Lord hath been mindful of us** (comp. Pss. xviii. 4; cxxxvi. 23). **He will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel** (comp. ver. 10). **He will bless the house of Aaron** (comp. ver. 11).

Ver. 13.—**He will bless them that fear the Lord** (comp. ver. 12). Both small and great; literally, *the small with the great*; i.e. all, without any exception.

Vers. 14—16.—Again the leader raises his voice and announces special—no longer general—blessings: (1) increase of their numbers (ver. 14); and (2) inheritance of the earth (ver. 16).

Ver. 14.—**The Lord shall increase you more and more.** This was the original blessing bestowed on Abraham (Gen. xiii. 16; xvii. 4—6), and continually reiterated (Gen. xviii. 18; xxii. 17; xxviii. 14, etc.). It is much dwelt upon by Isaiah (xlix. 8—12, 18—23; liv. 1—3; lx. 3—12, etc.). The main fulfilment of the promise

was through the conversion of the Gentiles, who, when converted, became the true "Israel of God." But, even apart from this, the lineal descendants of Abraham have "increased more and more," to an extent which is most extraordinary. You and your children. You yourselves shall increase; but your children shall yet more increase. The multiplying would begin at once, but would be greater and more striking afterwards.

Ver. 15.—**Ye are the blessed of the Lord which made heaven and earth; i.e. of the true Lord and God, the Creator of all things, visible and invisible.**

Ver. 16.—**The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; literally, the heavens are heavens of Jehovah.** They belong to him—he dwells there; but it is otherwise with the earth. But the earth hath he given to the children of men. For man God framed this fair world; to man's use he adapted it with minutest care; and certainly not least for his own people, who are "the salt of the earth"—the human race by representation.

Vers. 17, 18.—Once more the choir and congregation speak. The mention of "heaven and earth" (ver. 15) reminds them of the third place—*Sheol*. In *Sheol* is no praise of God, but only "silence." They, at any rate, while they remain on earth, and have the power to praise God, will praise him without ceasing.

Ver. 17.—**The dead praise not the Lord** (comp. Pss. vi. 5; xxx. 9; lxxxviii. 11; Isa. xxxviii. 18). Neither any that go down into silence. The notion of *Sheol* as a place of silence occurs in Ps. xciv. 17, and strongly in Isa. xxxviii. 18 (see the 'Pulpit Commentary on Isaiah,' vol. ii. p. 39).

Ver. 18.—**But we will bless the Lord; literally, we will bless Jah**—the shortened, and perhaps more emphatic, form of *Jehovah*. We, so long as we have any being, will sing praises unto our God (Ps. cxlvi. 2)—we will bless him, praise him, give thanks to him, from this time forth, and for evermore—not an absolute assertion of immortality, but a strong instinctive anticipation of it. Praise the Lord (see Pss. civ.—cvi., cxiii., etc.).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—11.—*True and false worship.* In strong, nervous language we have here presented to us—

I. THE MAJESTY AND THE POWER OF GOD. (Ver. 3.) The heathen, in their ignorance, want to know where *Jehovah is*; they cannot see him. The reply is that he does not dwell in temples made with hands; that he is not confined to one building, larger or smaller; that no earthly trappings or grandeurs in any sacred city give any notion of his state. "Our God is in the heavens;" he dwells in celestial glory; he is

high above us; his throne is not found here or there, but everywhere; beneath every sky you may look up and say, "God reigns on high." But not only does *majesty* belong to him, all *power* is his. "He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." The psalmist does not state, but he suggests, that everything the idols could not do was within the power of the living God. He was *speaking* to men everywhere and at all times—in the sunshine and in the storm, in the dew and in the snow, in the consciences of men, in the words of his prophets, in the divinely given Law. He *saw* all things and all men: "His eyes beheld, and his eyelids tried, the children of men." He *heard* everything; to his ears came the faintest whisper that proceeded from the lip of the lowliest, as well as the songs of the great congregation. He *wrought* everything; his hands fashioned us ourselves, and made all things about and above and beneath us: he "lays his hand upon us," to inspire and renew us. And though it never pleases God, and never can please him, to do anything that is unholy or unjust or unkind, yet is there no limit to his power. "All things are possible" to him. The spheres of nature, providence, and grace supply ample evidence that apparent impossibilities give way before his Divine wisdom and overcoming might.

II. THE FOLLY AND THE DOOM OF THE IDOLATER. (Vers. 2, 4—8.) 1. He thinks that God cannot be anywhere because his eyes have not rested on his form (ver. 2). 2. He continues to worship an image which owes its existence to his own cunning (ver. 4), and which cannot use its own organs (vers. 4—7), which are helpless and powerless (see Isa. xlv. 9—20). 3. He is destined to be miserably disappointed in the object of his trust; he will gain no help in his time of need, and, being thus unfriended, he will himself lose heart and strength; the impotence of the idol will be conveyed to its deluded worshipper. 4. He will become like his idol in the moral character he ascribes to the deity. "Like priest, like people" is not so true an adage as "Like god, like people." Men always tend to become such, in character and life, as is the deity they adore.

III. THE PRIVILEGE AND THE DUTY OF THE DEVOUT. (Vers. 9—11.) The worshippers of the true and living God: 1. Have at their right hand an Almighty Friend, one who (1) will enable them to spend their powers and their life in usefulness and happiness,—God is their *Help*; (2) will be their Defence in time of trouble, guarding them from evil, or sustaining them in sorrow,—God is their *Shield*. 2. Should place in him an unflinching trust. It becomes *all* the people of God (ver. 9), especially all those who hold any position of prominence in Israel (ver. 10), and particularly those who know and who declare themselves to be his servants, to put their trust in him. It is a painful spectacle when the avowed children of God begin, even at the very outbreak of trouble, to show signs of agitation and alarm. That does not "become the gospel" (Phil. i. 27); it does not "become saints" (Eph. v. 3). It is unworthy of those to whom Christ has spoken such words as those he uttered (Matt. vi. 25—34; xxviii. 20; John xiv. 1, 2, 21—23).

IV. PIETY IN ITS MATURITY. (Ver. 1.) We may begin our Christian life by an earnest craving for the salvation of our own soul. Later on, when we have learnt something of the wisdom which is in Christ, we make our personal hope second and subordinate to the glory of Christ. We pray that his great and holy Name may be magnified. We are willing to be nothing, that he may be all in all. 1. Because of all that we have experienced of his mercy and his truth—the mercy that redeemed and restored us, the truth that has nourished and strengthened us—we long and pray for this. 2. In order that his mercy and his truth may be extended to every land and every home, this is our prayer. We may test the progress we have made in our Christian course by the unselfishness, the Christwardness, of our devotion.

Vers. 12—18.—*God's practical kindness, past and future.* Much as is said in ver. 12, more is implied. Written in full, it would read thus: "The Lord has been mindful of us: he has blessed us; he will still be mindful of us, and will still bless us." We have—

I. GOD'S GREAT KINDNESS IN THE PAST. 1. His thoughtfulness of us. He has had us in his mind, has "remembered us in our low estate," has been concerned for our true welfare, has rejoiced in our well-being, has sympathized with us in our sorrows. 2. His action on our behalf. He has blessed us; he has given to us a great estate—

this earth—for our use (ver. 16). He has blessed us with material bounties, with the nappy bonds of kindred and friendship, with the treasures that feed and satisfy the mind, with all sacred privileges.

II. ITS CONTINUANCE IN YEARS TO COME. "He will bless us," will "increase" us. The guarantees of this continuance are found: (1) In his own unchangeableness—he is the same for ever. (2) In the fact that we are his own people, those whom his Son has redeemed with his own blood. If Israel, if the house of Aaron, might count on his kindness by reason of their relationship to him, much more may we, who are his children by faith in Jesus Christ! (3) In the loyalty and obedience we intend to maintain: those who "fear him" (ver. 13), who worship and serve him, will, as his servants, draw down his benediction and his blessing; the humblest as well as the highest of these may claim his mercy and his grace. But is there not—

III. A TIME-LIMIT TO HIS SERVICE. "The dead praise not the Lord" (ver. 17). We have it in our heart to seek and serve the Lord; and we believe that, so long as we do, we may reckon on his abounding kindness. But how long will that last? At any moment "death may interrupt these songs." A flash of lightning, an engine off the rails, a puff of poisonous air, a chill, may bring the holiest and the wisest to the grave. And there is perpetual silence—no more song, no more service, no more rejoicing in that "long home." That is so; but then we have—

IV. THE TRUER AND THE LARGER OUTLOOK. Coming after Christ, we can give to the "evermore" of ver. 18 a meaning which goes beyond the psalmist's thought. We think not of our departed as silent in the grave; we think of them as blessing and praising Christ in the heavens, as spending their powers in his higher service there, as taken *out of*, and not *down into*, the shadows of time, and introduced into the blessed light and unfading glories of eternity.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—18.—*The heathen taunt, and what came of it.* To Israel, recently returned from exile, that taunt still seemed to sound in their ears. In this psalm, apparently a liturgical one, and used at high festivals in the service of the second temple, the mocking question of those who had held them in captivity—"Where is now their God?"—was yet audible, through the keenness with which it was remembered. The sting and anguish of it still rankled in their hearts; and this psalm is the result of it. Consider, then—

I. THE MOCKING QUESTION OF THE HEATHEN, "Where is now," etc.? This, no doubt, was often asked. They had heard of the ancient glories of Israel, and the wonderful works God had done for them; but what a contrast was now presented—the abject condition into which Israel had fallen! And the character of the people also, as a whole, won scant respect. It was but a remnant, an elect few, that cherished the sacred memories of the past, and who were prepared, when opportunity came, to go back to their own land. But to the faithful few the question was full of pain. And here, in this psalm, we see—

II. THE EFFECT OF IT UPON THE MINDS OF THE FAITHFUL. 1. *It humbled them before God.* Ver. 1 is a confession of their own unworthiness, that no glory was due to them. And to-day, when the world mocks and scorns as it does, the people of God may well make like confession and similar disclaimer of all merit. Had the Church been different, the world would not have mocked as it does. 2. *It led them to God to seek his aid*, that this mockery on the part of the heathen should cease (ver. 2). They desired that God would manifest his glory, and so silence the heathen scorn. And this is the need of the Church to-day. Let God be seen in our midst, and the taunt of the world will sink into silence. 3. *Submission to God's will.* (Ver. 3.) They knew that God was in the heavens, possessed of all power, wisdom, holiness; and whatever he pleased could only be right. It was not for them to dictate, but only to submit. They could trust him, that in due time he would interpose. 4. *Scorn of idols and those who worshipped them.* (Vers. 4—8.) The very brightness of their conception of God showed up all the more the darkness of ignorance in which the heathen lived. And the psalm pours out its sacred scorn of these mere dolls before

which the heathen bowed down. Hence the scathing sarcasm and concentrated contempt of these memorable verses. But has the day passed when men's "idols are silver and gold"? Is not that the exact description of ourselves as a nation? Do not we worship silver and gold? Would that we could but catch the contagion of the contempt which pervades these verses for our idols of to-day! We need to, and shall have to; and if we will not learn by gentle means, God will have to purge us of our idolatry by methods sharp and terrible, like as those by which Israel was brought to a better mind. 5. *Earnest endeavour to arouse one another to trust only and altogether in God.* (Vers. 12—15.) Would that the world's contempt of Christians to-day led them thus earnestly to stir one another up to a more completely God-surrendered life! 6. *Renewed assurance of the grace and goodness of the Lord* in his faithful people. (Vers. 12—15.) This follows on—it always does—earnest endeavour to deepen the hold of God on the hearts of others. Our own hearts come to be filled with deep and blessed sense of God's love, and the witness of the Spirit is heard full and clear within. 7. *Fresh consecration to God.* This seems to be the force of the concluding verses of the psalm (vers. 16—18). The Lord in the heavens is sure to do his part; but we are here to do ours. Our time, however, is but short, for we are hastening to the grave where the dead are, and where none can praise God; therefore let us use our time well; and, God helping us, we will (ver. 18).

III. LESSONS FOR OURSELVES. 1. *How completely was the heart of Israel turned round!* Their besetting sin before the Exile had been idolatry and departure from God. But now! God knows how to turn our hearts altogether to himself. 2. *The contrast of the Christian's faith as to the life after this with the faith of Israel.* Theirs is dark, ours is bright.—S. C.

Ver. 12.—*Looking back and looking on: a new year's sermon.* There never has been a year in which, when we look back, we have been unable to say, "The Lord hath been mindful of us." And we may be sure there never will be a year of which, when we look forward to it, we may not say, "The Lord will bless us." The psalmist is quite sure about this: may we be so likewise! But—

I. LET US LOOK BACK ALONG THE COURSE OF THE OLD YEAR. 1. *We affirm our conviction that we all should make thankful confession of the Lord's mindfulness of us.* 2. *But many will look back in far other ways.* (1) Some in self-congratulating spirit, but with no thankfulness to God. They will say to themselves, that what good they have won has been all their own doing. But for their own mindfulness of themselves, there would have been but little to be glad about. (2) Others will deny that the Lord hath been mindful of them; it seems to them that he has forgotten them, if he has not turned against them. They point to their lessened, much lessened, resources. They were ever so much better off at the beginning of the year than they are now. Or here is a widow mourning bitterly the loss of her husband and the father of her now helpless children. Or a husband, whose home is darkened by bereavement of his beloved wife. Or others, who are kept prisoners on beds of weakness, hopeless disease, or pain. "What!" say these, "hath the Lord been mindful of us? It does not at all seem like it." 3. *Well, we reply, if he has not, then it is very unlike him.* (1) For his mindfulness of us is certainly not a recent thing; he says to his people that the kingdom has been prepared for them from before the foundation of the world. (2) And all around us are proofs of his loving forethought. See in the history of creation how all our needs were thought of before man was placed on the earth. You cannot do so simple a thing as put some coal on the fire without being reminded of this. Where did that coal come from? Was it not got ready for our use long ere we could need it? (3) And in the kingdom of his grace this mindfulness of us is conspicuously seen. Christ was the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world. God was not taken by surprise when sin entered our world and began to do its deadly work. God had reckoned with it, and had determined that where sin did abound, grace should much more abound. The two arms of Christ's cross embrace—one, all the sinners of the past; the other, all that shall be to the end of time. "The mischief is more than met by the remedy, the malady by the medicine, and the plaster is as wide as the wound" (M. Henry). (4) And it is true also in God's personal dealings with us. Reckon up your mercies—spiritual, temporal, personal, relative—and set

them over against your sorrows, and see which are most numerous. (5) And think, too, of what our deservings have been. Then see if you can deny any more that God has been mindful of you.

II. LET US LOOK ON THROUGH THE NEW YEAR, AND BE ASSURED THAT GOD WILL HELP US. 1. *It is an argument drawn from what has gone before*—and it is valid. We reckon, in regard to men, that what has been will be. The law of habit ensures this. And we may reverently say that God himself conforms to this law. Hence we may reason from what he hath done to what he will do. 2. *Furthermore, he has known all along what reasons there are why he should not bless us.* No one can tell God anything worse of us than he already knows. 3. *And we are in Christ by faith in him.* Therefore we are accepted in Christ. Shall not, then, God with him freely give us all things?

CONCLUSION. 1. We will believe that he will bless us. 2. Inasmuch as his blessing is given into the hands outstretched in prayer and faith, and that move in obedience to him, so shall our hands be, and thus will we confidently expect his blessing. 3. And we will tell others of this.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Honour in honouring God.* This psalm evidently belongs to the time when the restoration from Babylon was only partially accomplished. The little colony settled in Jerusalem and the district immediately round the city, were the scorn of the neighbouring petty nations, which were all heathen, and of the Samaritans, whose assistance in building Jehovah's temple they, perhaps unwisely, had refused. This psalm in a way meets scorn with scorn. Jehovah's people scorn the idol-worship of the nations, and the idol-nations scorn the insignificance of the company that talked so grandly about restoring the kingdom of David. But that is the darker side of the psalm. It is better to see that the scorn was but an unworthy expression of a state of mind and feeling that was good and right. Among the restored exiles there was great zeal for God, great jealousy for the honour of Jehovah; and it was this that made them refuse association with the semi-heathen Samaritans, and think so scornfully of the idol-worshippers. Not limiting ourselves to the state of mind of him who wrote, and those who sang, this psalm, let us regard the psalm as expressing generally the humble, loyal, zealous feeling of all true Jehovah-worshippers, and then three things are suggested.

I. PUTTING OUR HONOUR ASIDE. "Not unto us . . . give glory." It is a universal experience that when God is really apprehended, self goes into the second place. It must be so. God can be in no place but the first. In the sphere of morals it is true that the most miserable of men is he who is anxious about his own dignity. He will turn everything into offence. In the sphere of religion it is true that the first sign of regeneration is the humility that claims nothing for self. "Not by works of righteousness which we had done;" "Not of works, lest any man should boast."

II. SEEKING GOD'S HONOUR. "Unto thy Name give the praise." Dr. Chalmers spoke of "the expulsive power of a new affection." It is fully true of the soul's affection for God. It expels self and everything else, and compels a man to set God's honour first, to live for God (compare St. Paul's exclamation, "To me to live is Christ"). God's honour is sought by *being* good and by *doing* good; in relations, worship, and work. This aim glorifies all forms of life.

III. FINDING THAT WE GAIN OUR HONOUR IN SEEKING GOD'S. In two ways. 1. The very effort to seek God's honour cultures us in the character that wins for us honour. 2. And God makes the honour of men come to us as his benediction on our loyalty.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The taunt of the unbeliever.* "Where is now their God?" (comp. Ps. xlii. 3). The expression is to be understood by the help of the associations of the psalm. It is always trying to be despised; always hard to work on faithfully under jeers and taunts. The neighbours of the restored exiles did not dare actually to interfere with them, because they were under the protection of the Persian authority; but they could taunt them and laugh at them. And it must be admitted that there was apparent occasion. The exiles were poor and few. They had been stopped in building their temple, and there were nothing but foundations to be seen. It might be said—If your

God can do anything, he surely can get his own temple built. They dare not attempt to raise the walls and fix new gates and enclose the city; for every attempt would be checked. It might be said—If your God really cared for you, he would help you to defend yourselves. The pious souls were deeply hurt by this reproach cast on their God, and could only find rest in assuring themselves that if his will was a sovereign will, it was influenced by covenant promises. We can always turn from our doubtings as to what God *does*, and find our satisfaction in what God *is*.

I. THE STRAIN INVOLVED IN INCOMPLETENESS. We start out with a distinct life aim and purpose; but the years pass by, and all we have, as the result of labour and waiting, is an unfinished building, like some of the cathedrals. Then we are apt to lose hope, and to say—Not done now, it will never be done. So the years had passed for the exiles, and the new nation was still in a most incomplete state. No walls, no temple, no real freedom, no independent native government. It was a big strain on faith to see the nation's hope *ever* realized.

II. THE INTENSIFYING OF THE STRAIN THROUGH MISCONCEPTIONS. It was hard to see and to feel the incompleteness; but it was harder still to be told about it, to have it pointed out, and to be taunted with it. Those enthusiastic Jews who came out from Babylon expecting at once to accomplish great things, could see well enough the mere foundations of the temple, and the heaps of the ruined walls; but it was bitterness indeed to have some one come up as they were looking, and whisper in their ear, "Where is now thy God?"

III. THE RELIEF OF THE STRAIN BY CHERISHING TRUSTFUL THOUGHTS OF GOD. (Ver. 3.) The check on our work God puts. Incompleteness is his permission. Failure is his discipline. If God is in them, and their state pleases him, then our incomplete things are blessings in disguise.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The inefficiency of idolatry.* "The work of men's hands." Denunciation of the idolatry of the heathen is characteristic of the psalms of the restoration. With this passage may be compared such passages as Isa. xlv. 9—20. In treating of idols it should be borne in mind that they are differently regarded by their intelligent and unintelligent worshippers. The mystical Hindu will tell us that his idols are to him nothing more than are to us the pictures of absent or dead friends. They are helps to memory and imagination. But to the great mass of heathen the idol-figure is the actual god worshipped, the embodiment of the god, the shrine of the god. So Scripture is justified in its scorn of the idol-deities. The point presented here is the helplessness of idols, in that they have organs of sense, but no sensibility. There is an argument in the simple statement that they are "the work of men's hands."

I. MAN'S HANDIWORK IS INFERIOR TO HIS BEST THOUGHT. No man ever yet reached with his hands what he had conceived in his mind. The artist's idea is better than his picture. It is inferior to the artist himself. The sculptor's figure is better than the model he produces. The literary man never writes as good a book as he intends to write. It is the universal fact that a man is always greater than anything he creates, or anything he accomplishes. And this must be true when a man attempts to mould with his hands the figure of his thought of God. He cannot imprison in gold, or silver, or clay, or wood, his whole thought. And he himself remains a nobler being than the god he creates; and so the god should worship him, and not he the god.

II. MAN'S BEST THOUGHT MUST BE INFERIOR TO DEITY. This is true of the *best* man's *best* thought. But what guarantee can we have that the idol-maker is a *best* man, and that *best* man at his *best*? Grant that the primary creations of Baal or Vishnu were the best conceptions of best men, still we face the fact, that, necessarily, the conception was short of the reality. No man by searching can find out God; and no man by imagining can find him out so as to represent him. Then this follows: God himself must give to men the earth-pattern of himself. He has done it. But the earth-pattern is no *thing*, no likeness of any *thing* in heaven and earth and sea. It is the living Being, the "Man Christ Jesus," "express Image of his Person."—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Like god, like people.* "They that make them shall be like unto them." This suggests a topic in the line of the previous homily. It is a law which works in a twofold way. As is the god who is worshipped, so are the people who worship. As

is the people who worship, so are the gods whom they create for worship. It is, indeed, the very essence of the idea of a God worthy to be worshipped, that he shall be revealed to man, not created by him; that he shall be in the sphere of man's thoughts, and so apprehensible; but beyond the reach of man's thoughts, and so a perpetual inspiration to him. The reproach which Jehovah makes to his people is that they have not kept him beyond them, but have reduced him to their level. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." We have seen that what men attempt to embody when they make their own gods is themselves; the gods are like the people. The characteristics of any nation can be known by a study of its gods; and the characteristics of any particular age of a nation can be known by its relation to, and treatment of, the national gods. Therefore the history of the nations is so largely the history of the national religions.

I. Let men make their own gods like themselves, and **THEY WILL NEVER MAKE THE GODS LIKE THEMSELVES AT THEIR BEST.** Whatever may be thought about the formulated doctrine of original sin, the fact of universal moral deterioration is bound to be generally accepted. And the sign of it is that man is not interested in his best; perhaps not even able to set before himself the image of himself at his best possible. So there never yet was an idol-god made that even represented its maker at his noblest.

II. Let men make their own gods like themselves, and **THEY WILL BE SURE TO MAKE THE GODS LIKE THEMSELVES AT THEIR WORST.** This can be effectually illustrated by the Kali, Sarasvati, Juggernaut, of India; the Baal and Ashtaroth of Phœnicians; the Moloch of Amorites; and even the refined and artistic creations of Grecian genius; for these represent man sensual, which really is man at his lowest. And this fact, that if man makes his own gods he makes them like himself at his worst, may be shown to be equally true of those *immaterial, mental*, figures of God which men now make as the idols of an intellectual age. They are no more worthy of God than the hideous figures of India, and this is the serious feature of the case. Let man make his god after the pattern of himself at his worst, and the god he makes and worships will inevitably debase him lower and lower.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*The call to trust implies imperilled trust.* This and the following verses were, apparently, sung as responses. This explains the repetition of the same idea. The scornful taunts of the surrounding peoples *might* have had a serious influence on Jehovah's servants. It might have taken all heart out of them. Probably many of the weaker ones did flag under the discouragements, and so there was a real need of this pleading of the psalmist for full and even rejoicing trust in God. The confidence felt by one man will often inspire the confidence of others. When one man can see God plainly working as Helper and Defender, he, in a very wonderful way, opens the eyes of others to see the same signs of Divine presence and power. Our trust in God passes from one to another, even as does an epidemic disease. And it may also be shown how often *psalm* and *song* help us to fetch back imperilled trust. Treating the case of the restored exiles as illustrative, we may see how our trust in God may now be imperilled—

I. **BY GOD'S UNFULFILLED PROMISES.** Some of God's promises really belong to our future, and we have no right to look for their present fulfilment; but such is the restlessness of man, that he persists in thinking he ought to have everything now. And as he cannot, he readily regards some of God's promises as unfulfilled. So through long ages men expected the promised Messiah, and often lost their faith and dimmed their hope because he did not come. But God's promises never are unfulfilled. It is only this—he has our whole lives to work in, he has all the ages to work in. Compare our Lord's saying, "My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready." Trust should make a treasure of the promises.

II. **BY GOD'S INCOMPLETELY FULFILLED PROMISES.** It is harder to keep trust when a promise has *begun* to be fulfilled, and has been *checked* in the fulfilment, than when it is altogether delayed. It was harder for the exiles to look on the new foundations of the temple than on the old ruins. There is no feature of Divine discipline that so severely tries our power to keep on trusting, as this checking of blessings that have begun to be bestowed; this asking us to accept of incomplete fulfilments.

III. **BY GOD'S MISUNDERSTOOD PROMISES.** So often we take God to promise what

we *wish* him to promise, rather than what he does promise. Then we raise unreasonable expectations, and get unreasonably depressed when they are not fulfilled. God may test and try our trust, but he never puts it *in peril*; we do that when we cannot wait, and persist in misunderstanding.—R. T.

Ver. 12.—*The certainty of the Divine benediction.* “He will bless us.” The repetition of the word “bless” adds great effect to this passage. The Lord has many blessings, each one worthy to be remembered—he blesses, and blesses, and blesses again. Where he has once bestowed his favour, he continues it, his blessing delights to visit the same house very often, and abide where it has once lodged. Blessing does not impoverish the Lord; he has multiplied his mercies in the past, and he will pour them forth thick and threefold in the future. He will have a general blessing for all who fear him, a peculiar blessing for the whole house of Israel, and a double blessing for the sons of Aaron. It is his nature to bless, it is his prerogative to bless, it is his glory to bless, it is his delight to bless; he has promised to bless, and therefore be sure of this—he will bless, and bless without ceasing. The subject dealt with should be this—The past is the pledge of the future. A nation makes a fatal mistake when it separates itself from its past; though it misuses the past when it binds itself with precedents, and so destroys its own freedom and individuality. A man makes the gravest mistake when he separates himself from his past, but he makes as grave a mistake when he persists in forcing his present life and relations into the old moulds. What is always safe to do is, keep in mind what God has been to us in the past. Our-selves in our past seldom teach us much. In regard to human experience, Froude’s word is a wise one, “Experience is like the stern-lights of a ship, which throw their rays on a way which *has been taken*.” God in our past always teaches us much, seeing that we have no very definite aim in working for ourselves, and he has a very definite aim in working for us.

I. GOD HAS BLESSED US. How true this is seen to be in a review of the history of God’s people Israel! Especially if we take, as the chief idea of God’s blessing, *over-ruling for God*. The more clearly we understand our own lives, the more fully we shall realize *that* as our best idea of God’s blessing. Certainly it is what would most come home to the restored exiles.

II. GOD IS BLESSING US. This is a fact of observation; a conviction of feeling; and an argument from the nature of God. We cannot conceive of him as beginning to do a good, and leaving it off; and the blessing we need is blessing that we continuously need.

III. GOD WILL BLESS US. Since we are well assured that our conditions, relations, and needs will remain much the same, and call still for his merciful overrulings and blessings.—R. T.

Ver. 17.—*The responsibility of being alive.* “The dead praise not the Lord.” Joy in life is the characteristic of every healthy, right-minded person. Pining for death is, altogether and always, a sign of a morbid condition of body or of mind. It is a delusion to imagine that religion requires of us an indifference to life, and a yearning for heaven. The psalmists and kings of the old Israelite times loved life and dreaded death. One says, “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore, but he hath not given me over unto death” (Ps. cxviii. 17). Hezekiah expresses but the universal sentiment of the good men of his day when he says, “The grave cannot praise thee; death cannot celebrate thee; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day; the father to the children shall make known thy truth” (Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19). But if we have life, we must take it with all its responsibilities, and the first of these is that we acknowledge the God who made us, on whom we are wholly dependent, and who lays his righteous claims upon us. One of those claims is indicated by the psalmist. God calls for praise. All his works praise him in their order and fitness, in the precise fulfilment of the end for which they were designed. But God seeks that higher praise which can be offered by intelligent and free-willed beings. And the time in which they can offer the praise is the time of their lives amid terrestrial things. It is the praise of the living that God wants. It is praise while living that man can alone render.

I. PRAISE-TIME IS THE PRESENT TIME. It is never a mere duty that has been done ; a demand that has been met. The praise that is God's due can never be paid, so that we can get a receipt in full for all our obligations. It is never a duty that can be put off to some by-and-by, something that we can promise to do some day. It is the duty of the hour. It is immediate response to God's present blessings.

II. PRAISE-TIME IS A LIMITED TIME. It is limited to life, and life is always short and always uncertain, so that a man's call to praise is a call of the moment. For praise "*now* is the accepted time." No man has any to-morrow until God gives it to him, and then he must call it to-day. Only by doing just the duty of the hour can any man meet his human obligations.

III. THE OCCASIONS OF PRAISE BELONG TO THE PRESENT TIME. It is true that there is call to praise for God's past dealings with us ; and call to praise in view of the promises on which we are permitted to hope ; but we can always find, if we will, calls to praise in the things actually around us ; God's good hand is ever on us for good. —R. T.

Vers. 1—18.—*The honour due to God.* A call to the God of Israel, the living God, to rescue the honour of his Name from the reproach of the heathen.

I. GOD IS WORTHY OF THE HIGHEST HONOUR. In contrast to heathen idols. 1. *Because of his loving-kindness or mercy.* (Ver. 1.) 2. *Because of his truth or faithfulness.* (Ver. 1.) Emphatically "truth and grace came by Jesus Christ." 3. *Though invisible, he reigns and rules from the exalted heaven.* (Ver. 3.) The idols are earthly things, and have no power. 4. *God is omnipotent, able to execute his own will.* (Ver. 3.) The idols are dead things, with no will ; and their worshippers become as dead as they are.

II. GOD IS WORTHY OF TRUST. (Vers. 9—14.) 1. *Because he is the Helper and Defender of those who trust in him.* (Vers. 9—11.) 2. *Because his past goodness is the pledge for future blessing.* (Vers. 12—14.) He will bless and multiply both the great and the small together.

III. GOD IS WORTHY OF PRAISE AND WORSHIP. (Vers. 15—18.) 1. *As the Creator of heaven and earth.* (Ver. 15.) And the heavens are for the dwelling-place of Jehovah. 2. *Because he hath given the earth to men for their possession.* 3. *God must be praised now and for ever—before we go down into the silence of Hades.* (Vers. 17, 18.) "The Old Testament," says Delitzsch, "knows nothing of a heavenly exclusion that praises God without intermission, consisting not merely of angels, but also of the spirits of all men who die in the faith" (but see Ps. ciii. 20—22).—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXVI.

A PSALM of thanksgiving on deliverance from an imminent peril, placed in the mouth of an individual, but possibly intended for liturgical use on some occasion of a national deliverance. Hengstenberg regards it as composed for use at a festival service shortly after the return from the Captivity. Others adhere to the old Hebrew tradition, which ascribed it to Hezekiah, and considered it to have been written on the occasion of his deliverance from death, as narrated in Isa. xxxviii. Many resemblances are traced between the phraseology of the psalm and expressions attributed to Hezekiah in Isa. xxxvii., xxxviii.

Vers. 1, 2.—An introduction, in which

the writer declares his love to God, and his resolution to call on him continually, on account of his having been delivered from an imminent peril.

Ver. 1.—*I love the Lord, because he hath heard ; literally, I love, because the Lord (Jehovah) hath heard.* The object of this love is not expressed, but can only be Jehovah. Still, the grammatical construction is unusual, and has caused the suggestion of an emendation. For אהבתי Professor Cheyne would read דאמנתי, as at the beginning of ver. 10. *My voice and my supplications ; literally, my voice, my supplications*—the latter expression being exegetical of the former.

Ver. 2.—*Because he hath inclined his ear unto me* (compare the expression of Hezekiah in Isa. xxxvii. 17, "*Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear*"). *Therefore will I call upon him*

as long as I live; literally, *in my days*—another expression attributed to Hezekiah in the history (Isa. xxxix. 8). Lifelong gratitude and praise are promised by Hezekiah to God in Isa. xxxviii. 20.

Vers. 3—9.—The psalmist describes his trouble (ver. 3), his prayer for deliverance (ver. 4), and his actual deliverance (vers. 5—9).

Ver. 3.—The sorrows of death compassed me; literally, *the cords of death* (comp. Ps. xviii. 4, where the same expression is used). Death is pictured as seizing his victim and binding him with cords. And the pains of hell gat hold upon me; or, “the straits of hell” (comp. Ps. cxviii. 5; Lam. i. 3). Death and hell (*sheol*) are closely connected together in the prayer of Hezekiah (Isa. xxxviii. 10, 18). I found trouble and sorrow; or, “anguish and woe” (comp. Isa. xxxviii. 12—17).

Ver. 4.—Then called I upon the Name of the Lord. “Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord” (Isa. xxxviii. 2). O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul (compare the words of Isa. xxxviii. 3, “Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee”).

Ver. 5.—Gracious is the Lord, and righteous. God’s answers to prayer show him to be both “gracious” and “righteous”—gracious, because it is of his mercy that he listens to men; righteous, because, having promised to hear prayer, he is bound to keep his promises. Yea, our God is merciful; or, “compassionate.”

Ver. 6.—The Lord preserveth the simple; i.e. “the simple-minded”—those who are without guile or artifice (comp. Ps. xix. 7). I was brought low. The same verb is used here as in Isa. xxxviii. 14, where it is translated “fail” (“mine eyes fail”). It expresses extreme weakness, or exhaustion. And he helped me; or, “saved me” (comp. Isa. xxxviii. 20).

Ver. 7.—Return unto thy rest, O my soul. “Return,” i.e., “to thy state of tranquillity, the condition in which thou wast before the imminent danger showed itself.” For the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. If Hezekiah is the writer, the “bountiful dealing” will be the addition of fifteen years to his life (Isa. xxxviii. 5). If a poet just returned from the Captivity, the return and the reoccupation of the Holy Land will be especially in his thoughts (comp. Ps. lxxxv. 1).

Ver. 8.—For thou hast delivered my soul from death. This verse is exegetical of the last clause of ver. 4. The expressions are taken from Ps. lvi. 13, and suit a personal better than a national deliverance. Mine eyes from tears. Hezekiah, when told that

his death was approaching, had “wept sore” (Isa. xxxviii. 3). And my feet from falling; literally, *and my foot from slipping*. When man is greatly tried, there is always danger lest his foot should slip. Whether the trial befall an individual or a nation, there is the same temptation to rebel and murmur.

Ver. 9.—I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living; rather, *lands of the living*; i.e. my deliverance will enable me to walk at leisure, unhurried and free from care, in the broad regions of earth inhabited by the living.

Vers. 10, 11.—Parenthetic and obscure. Both the connection and rendering are doubtful. Professor Cheyne translates, “I was confident that I should speak thus;” i.e. even while my affliction was going on, I felt confident that relief would come, and that I should one day speak as I have just spoken. I was, however, too sorely afflicted to give utterance to my feeling. Instead of so doing, I vented my unhappiness in abuse of my fellow-men. Thus understood, the words are an *apologia*.

Ver. 10.—I believed, therefore have I spoken. So the LXX., *Ἐπίστευσα, διὰ τῆς ἀληθείας*. But many other meanings are suggested. See the preceding paragraph. I was greatly afflicted (comp. ver. 3).

Ver. 11.—I said in my haste, All men are liars. The connection of the thoughts is not apparent, unless God’s faithfulness (vers. 5—8) suggests man’s unfaithfulness.

Vers. 12—19.—The psalm closes with a thanksgiving for the deliverance vouchsafed. What return can the psalmist make? First, he will accept the blessing joyfully; next, he will ever continue to call upon God (ver. 13; comp. vers. 4, 17); thirdly, he will pay his vows openly in the temple, in the presence of the whole congregation (vers. 14, 18); fourthly, he will offer continually the sacrifice of thanksgiving (ver. 17) for the benefits vouchsafed him. The enumeration of his pious intentions is itself a song of praise to the Almighty.

Ver. 12.—What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? Natural piety suggests a return for favours received. What shall this be? the psalmist asks, and then proceeds to give the answer.

Ver. 13.—I will take the cup of salvation. It has been usual to explain this of actual participation in the contents of a cup offered at a sacrificial meal, and then passed round

to the worshippers. But there is no clear evidence of any such usage, except in connection with the Passover, which cannot here be in question. Hengstenberg therefore proposes to regard the phrase as a mere metaphor, like the "cup of trembling" (Isa. li. 17, 22); and understands the psalmist to mean that he will gladly and thankfully receive God's mercy vouchsafed to him, and thus show his gratitude for it. And call upon the Name of the Lord (comp. vers. 4 and 17).

Ver. 14.—I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people (comp. vers. 18, 19, where the thought is repeated, and lengthened out). We are not told in Isaiah or 2 Kings that Hezekiah made any vows when he lay on his sick-bed, but he may probably have done so. He certainly intended, as soon as his cure was complete, to "go up to the house of the Lord" (2 Kings xx. 8; Isa. xxxviii. 22).

Ver. 15.—Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints (comp. Ps. lxxii. 14). It is not a matter of indifference to God, when and under what circumstances each of his saints dies. Rather, it is a matter of deep concern to him. "In him are the issues of life and death" (Ps. lxxviii. 20), and he appoints to each man the day and attendant circumstances of his demise.

Ver. 16.—O Lord, truly I am thy servant; rather, *even so, O Lord, for I am thy servant*. Entitled, therefore, to thy care and considera-

tion. I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid (comp. Ps. lxxxvi. 16). "Thine handmaid"—the Church; or, if the writer is Hezekiah, "thy handmaid, Abiyah, the daughter of Zechariah," who "had understanding in the vision of God" (2 Chron. xxvi. 5; xxix. 1). Thou hast loosed my bonds. The "cords of death" (ver. 3) are probably intended.

Ver. 17.—I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Scarcely an actual sacrifice. Rather, simple thanksgiving, which, from a sincere heart, is the best sacrifice (see Ps. i. 14 and Hos. xiv. 2). And will call upon the Name of the Lord (comp. vers. 4 and 18).

Ver. 18.—I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people. Compare the comment on ver. 14, whereof this is a repetition.

Ver. 19.—In the courts of the Lord's house. Thanksgiving was always most appropriately offered in the temple courts, where close at hand dwelt the mysterious presence of God, and where God had appointed that his worshippers should appear before him. In the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. This expression and the preceding suit well with Hezekiah's authorship of the psalm, as Dr. Kay well argues. Praise ye the Lord. The writer calls on all those present (see ver. 18) to join him in singing praise to God (comp. Ps. civ., cv., cvi., cxiii., cxv., cxvii.).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—19.—*Danger and deliverance.* It is probable that the danger to which the psalmist was exposed was due to a very serious illness, threatening to end in death. It is certain that this is the most common danger we have to confront now. We look, therefore, at—

I. A RECURRING EVIL IN OUR MORTAL LIFE—SICKNESS. With so complicated a structure as the human frame, and so intricate a system as that which has to be kept in working order, if we are to be in perfect health, it is no marvel that there should be frequent disorder within. And though improved sanitary conditions and the advance of physiological and medical science are favourable to health and long life, yet the increasing artificiality and luxuriousness of our age are counteracting forces; so that it may be fairly questioned whether serious sickness, in *more varied* forms than ever, is not as often a recurring feature of life as it was in the psalmist's day.

II. ITS COMMON ATTENDANTS. These are: 1. *Pain*, to which no reference is made in the text, though it may be included in "trouble and sorrow" (ver. 3). 2. *Dependence*; being so reduced that the feet would fall (ver. 8) without help from a friendly hand; the strong man, accustomed to sustain others, is brought down in a few days, or even hours, to depend on the ministry of the servant or the child. 3. *Displacement*. The most serious "trouble" (ver. 3) which worries and perplexes the busy man is found in being laid aside from his activities; it is nothing less than "sorrow" to him to feel that his work is undone, and that he does not know how provision is to be made for his home. Many and bitter are the tears (ver. 8) of anxiety and distress. 4. The apparent approach of *death*. (Ver. 3.) How bitter to the soul is the vision of death, when it comes in the midst of life, is well exemplified in the grief of Hezekiah (Isa. xxxviii.); so also Epaphroditus (Phil. ii. 25—27). It is not the bodily sufferings

endured at death which men fear; it is the departure from kindred and friends, the laying down of work and leaving a happy sphere of usefulness, the going away from so much that is fair and good, leaving the light and joy and hope that our soul has loved below. Even to him who is looking for so much that is better beyond, this deep feeling of regret is not unnatural or unbecoming. 5. *Despondency*. (Vers. 10, 11.) As with the psalmist, so is it often with us: when the strength is feeble, the spirits are low; we are distrustful; we begin to doubt those in whom we did confide; we come, hastily and without ground, to unfavourable conclusions; we think we are forgotten, ill-treated, abandoned.

III. ITS ALWAYS PRESENT AND MOST PRECIOUS REFUGE. "Then called I upon the Name of the Lord," etc. (ver. 4). Him whom we are apt to overlook in the light, we remember when the shadows fall. To him who, though unperceived, is ever at our right hand we gladly turn, when human helpers and our own resources fail us. God is "our very present Help in trouble." We are sure of his pity, and we may ask for the exercise of his power. We know that he who is interested in the flowers of the field and the birds of the air (Matt. vi.) will not suffer one of his own children to die until his hour has fully come; that "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (ver. 15). Who shall estimate the measure of comfort and relief which afflicted humanity has found in submission to the will and prayer for the succour of the heavenly Friend!

IV. ITS MERCIFUL REMOVAL. (Vers. 5—8.) Recovery from illness, though a very ordinary and familiar thing, is a reason for reverent wonder. *How is it that the organ which is impaired, after getting worse and worse and becoming less and less effective recovers its efficiency, and begins to do its proper work again?* This we do not understand. We can only say that the Divine Lord of our life has implanted recuperative powers within us which bring about recovery, and make us well and strong. We supply the ascertained conditions, but the unseen Hand does the work. God is the Healer of our sicknesses. It is not only piety, but truth, to say, "I was brought low, and he helped me" (ver. 6).

V. THE GLADNESS AND GRATITUDE OF CONVALESCENCE. (Vers. 1, 2, 5, 7—9, 13, 14, 16—19.) There is a tone of great gladness of heart—perhaps we may detect some exuberance of spirit—in this outpouring. Is not the affliction amply repaid by the joy of returning strength and the sense of newness of life and power? Let such gladness always take the form of gratitude and praise; let it "lift up its eyes to heaven and say, Father, I thank thee." There should be: 1. *Gratitude*; the distinct reference of the good received to God himself, "Thou hast dealt bountifully with me" (vers. 7, 8). 2. *Praise*—offered in the sanctuary as well as in the home (vers. 17—19). 3. *Love*. The hearing and answering of our prayer may well deepen our attachment to our loving and faithful Lord (ver. 1). 4. *Reconsecration*. (Vers. 2, 16.) The best spiritual result of this experience of sickness and recovery is the solemn renewal of the vow by which we first yielded ourselves to the Person and the service of our Saviour.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—"*I love the Lord, because—*" I. WE MIGHT FILL UP THE TEXT IN MANY WAYS. As St. John does, "because God first loved us." Or because of what he is in himself. Or because of what he has done for us, is doing, and will do for us or for others dear to us. And there are other ways still.

II. HOW IT IS FILLED UP. "Because he hath heard my voice," etc. God's hearing of our prayer is the reason given for loving him. 1. *Now, can we say this?* Not if we never pray. Not if we do not look out for the answers in the right way—believing—and in the place where they are to be looked for. 2. *But many, like the psalmist, can say this.*

III. AND HOW REASONABLE IS THIS FILLING UP! It is fitting that we should "love the Lord, because," etc. If we think of the sad characteristics of our prayers. How unworthy! How slow we are to pray! What a number of desires we have! What unbelief mingles with them! How trivial! How impatient! How misused! What his answering of our prayers has cost!

CONCLUSION. 1. If he hears our prayer, he shall hear our praise, and we will hear his word. 2. And we will tell others of this.—S. C.

Vers. 3, 4.—*The experience of a deeply distressed soul.* The psalm is the utterance of the glad gratitude of some devout Israelite on his deliverance from mortal sickness. But it is capable of many applications. In the temple service it was used as a psalm of thanksgiving for God's deliverance of Israel from their exile. Many have seen in it the setting forth of the sufferings of our Lord, and have applied the psalm generally to him. Others, again, take it, as do we, as describing, in vivid, impressive way, the experience of a soul that has known deep distress, but has been delivered therefrom by God's exceeding grace. Therefore note—

I. THE DISTRESS. It is told of: 1. *As the sorrows of death and the pains of hell, or the grave.* Some render it "the snares," others, "the cords," of death. But the meaning is much the same, however the word be rendered. It must be remembered that the psalm was written in the dim light of the Old Testament as to the believer's condition after death. And, compared with our own, that light was very dim. To the faithful servant of God now, who "dies in the Lord," there are no sorrows of death. Christ hath abolished death; and still less are there any pains of hell. But the writer of this psalm did believe in them, as did all the saints of his day. And they meant for him, not burning flames or purgatorial fires, but exclusion from the presence of God (see Pss. cxv. 17, and parallels; xxxi. 22, etc.). These were the sorrows they dreaded. In death they would no more see—so they feared—God's power and glory as they had seen them in the sanctuary (Ps. lxiii. 2). The grave was to them the pit, the land of darkness and the shadow of death. These were the sorrows of death and the pains of hell, and they caused the deepest spiritual distress. 2. *And there are the like of these still.* When the soul feels itself shut out from God; when it has no hope; when nothing but the Divine condemnation seems possible to it; when it knows and feels itself to be utterly and hopelessly wrong; when it gazes wistfully upon the blessed promises of God, but is in abiding despair as to ever realizing them—is certain it never shall; and that for it there is nothing but the fearful looking for of God's indignation and of his fiery wrath. Souls not a few have passed, and are passing, through experience like that. 3. *It is caused in various ways.* Sometimes through deep conviction of sin when first the soul is awakened. And it is well for the after-life of the soul that there should be deep conviction wrought by the Holy Spirit, for then there is likely to be a permanent work done, and not a mere ephemeral and superficial one, such as is all too common. And oftentimes this experience is the result of backsliding from God (see Peter after his denial; Judas after his betrayal of the Lord). "Keep me, O Lord, as the apple of thine eye," let every Christian pray. At other times it is through a perverse habit of mistrust and doubt. The melancholy mass of miserable Christians are nearly all begotten of this wretched and God-dishonouring habit. And sometimes it is the result of disease in mind or body, or both. Then it is a pure affliction, and has to be accepted as such. But this is not often the case.

II. THE DELIVERANCE. 1. *See how thorough it was.* (Ver. 8.) "My soul from death." Sin is death, and until we are not free from that, whatever else we may be, we are not saved. "Mine eyes from tears." There has come peace and joy in God instead of anguish of soul, "My feet from falling." I not only begin the better life, but go and keep on in it. God's salvation means this for us. 2. *How it was won.* Through prayer (ver. 4). How direct, definite, and to the point, this prayer was! So is all real prayer. 3. *And how evident.* (See vers. 9, 13.) When we are saved, people will know it. Walking is a very visible act. So is the walking before the Lord. There is no invisible religion.

III. THE DIVINE TEACHING FOR US ALL IN ALL THIS. 1. *If till now you have never been convicted of sin, be thankful for your soul-distress, remembering its gracious intent.* 2. *If you are in Christ, pray that you may never come into the soul-agony that the backslider knows.* 3. *If from any cause such distress be on you, despair not, but turn to God in prayer, earnest and definite, and persevere in faith till the deliverance comes.* 4. *If you have been delivered, go and declare to others what God has done for your soul.* 5. *And let your life show your love to God.*—S. C.

Ver. 7.—*Rest.* These well-known words show—

I. THAT REST IS ONE OF THE RIGHTFUL POSSESSIONS OF THE SOUL. It was designed for the soul. God would not have created a soul to be the perpetual victim of fret, worry, and distress, as we see many souls now are. It must have belonged to the soul. Hence it is called “thy rest.” In the primal paradise, in which our first parents were placed, they enjoyed this rest. Theirs was the repose of the intellect, of the affections, of the will; all were at rest in God.

II. BUT THE SOUL HAS GOT AWAY FROM THIS REST. What need to labour any proof of this? 1. *You can read the fact in men's very looks*—the careworn countenance, the anxious mien, the sad, disappointed air. 2. *In their words*, whether spoken or written; weariness is written on them all. 3. *In the frantic but futile efforts they make to find a substitute for what they have lost.*

III. THAT IT CAN, IF IT WILL, RETURN UNTO ITS REST. Yes, in forsaking sin, surrender to Christ, and trust in him, rest is still attainable.—S. C.

Ver. 7.—*God, the Rest of the soul.* Text is addressed to those who have already known God as their Rest. Before we can return, we must have turned to God. But arguments for the one are the same as for the other. Hence let believers take the text as it stands; let others read it as if it were “turn” instead of return. It teaches—

I. THERE IS A REST FOR THE SOUL—God. He is so by virtue of his atonement, his Spirit, his Word. And this for the individual soul.

II. BUT WE FOOLISHLY LEAVE THAT REST. By neglect of communion. By unbelief. By disobedience.

III. NEVERTHELESS, WE ARE BIDDEN RETURN. We do so as we first of all turned to him—in penitence and prayer and trust.

IV. WE HAVE A MIGHTY ARGUMENT FOR THIS. “He hath dealt bountifully with thee.” Thus he meets us.

V. WE MUST EACH DO THIS FOR OURSELVES. “Return unto thy rest, O my soul!”

VI. HE IS CERTAIN TO RECEIVE US.—S. C.

Ver. 12.—*The inquiry of the grateful heart.* Many are the blessed spirits that worship God—penitence, faith, reverence, hope, and others. But none are more acceptable than the spirit of gratitude. It is that spirit which speaks here in our text. The following verses contain the answer which the same spirit gives. The inquiry before us implies remembrance of—

I. THE BENEFITS WHICH THE LORD HATH CONFERRED UPON US. 1. *It is difficult* because of their number, character, variety; and because of Satan's never-ceasing endeavour to hinder us herein. 2. *But is full of advantage.* More glory comes to God. Our own soul is blessed. We become able to help others. 3. *It is a habit which we should cultivate.*

II. THE RESPONSE WHICH THESE BENEFITS DEMAND. That of a grateful heart, first and chief of all. God is ever seeking to make up this response; and the devil is ever seeking to prevent it.

III. THE LORD WHO PROMPTS THE INQUIRY WILL ENABLE US TO GIVE THE RESPONSE.—S. C.

Vers. 13, 14.—*The answer of the grateful heart.* That answer is threefold.

I. HE WILL ACCEPT GOD'S SALVATION. This the meaning of the words, “I will take the cup of salvation.” God has designed salvation for each one of us; he puts it before us as the master of a feast was wont to hand the cup to each guest. And the grateful heart here says, “I will take thy salvation, O Lord, the pardon which is in Christ, the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life.” No worship or service is pleasing to God until this is done.

II. HE WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD. Thus, by fervent prayer, will he keep in communion with God, and look to him day by day for all needed grace.

III. HE WILL OPENLY ACKNOWLEDGE GOD. “I will pay my vows,” etc. What has gone before has been transacted between God and the soul; this should be before all men. If there be these three things, all holy obedience will follow; there will be the consecrated life.—S. C.

Ver. 15.—*The Divine estimate of the saint's death.* The text is one of the precious words of the Bible—one of the instances in which the Bible sheds bright light over the darker facts of life. Sorrow, temptation, disappointment, sin, and, as here, death, are all irradiated by the light the Bible sheds upon them. Our text calls death “precious.” This a strange epithet for death—one we should never have given to it. But it is true, nevertheless, as here used. Therefore note—

I. THE MEANING OF THE WORD “PRECIOUS.” It is used frequently in a like sense, and means: 1. *God will not suffer death to come to his saints save as he permits*; and never shall his saints cease from off the earth. The fact of the old age to which they commonly attain seems to confirm what the text affirms. But: 2. *The word “precious” denotes also the mind of God in contemplating the death of his saints.* He delights in all their life—in its beginning, its progress, and now its end. This is the last step of the saint, and our text tells with what loving regard the Lord looks down upon it.

II. THE REASON OF THIS DIVINE ESTIMATE. 1. *Because of his love and sympathy.* His saints are dear to him. 2. *At the time of their death there is more than ever a response of trust and desire made to the heart of God.* In the full vigour of life we are apt to forget, or to think but seldom and slightly, of God; we do not feel our dependence upon him as we should. But when heart and flesh fail—when all our strength is gone, then there is that utter casting of the soul upon God in which God delights. 3. *The wondrous witness to others on behalf of God which the death of many a saint has borne.* See how Paul never forgot the dying speech of Stephen. The blood of the martyrs has been ever the seed of the Church. And in calmer deaths than these witness for God has also been borne, and with power unknown before. 4. *The precious blood of Christ is glorified.* For at such times that is all their trust. During life we discuss all manner of questions, doctrines, and beliefs; but when we come to die, it is, “Thou, O Christ, art all I want!” 5. *It is the moment of their safe ingathering.* Till then, they have been, as the sheep in the wilderness, liable to wander, exposed to peril, watched for hungrily by the wolves of hell, often all but lost. But death is God’s angel gathering them safe within the eternal sheep-fold. Such are some of the grounds wherefore “precious in the sight,” etc.

III. BUT NOTE THE CONCLUSIONS THIS WARRANTS CONCERNING THE FUTURE OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. 1. *Death cannot end all.* How could such death be “precious”? 2. *Nor can it introduce us into a state of mere unconsciousness.* Death for God’s saints is not a sleep, but the entrance on fulness of life with Christ. 3. *Still less into any purgatory.* Scripture has nothing to say of such condition for God’s saints. But: 4. *It is a departing and being with Christ,* which is far better. Surely we may “comfort one another with these words.”

IV. THE ONE LIMITATION OF THIS STATEMENT. 1. *It is not as to time.* We may die at any moment. 2. *Nor as to place.* It may be anywhere. 3. *Nor as to manner.* It may be in deep peace or dreadful pain. 4. *But it is as to character.* Of the saints of God alone is it said that their deaths are “precious in,” etc. Therefore, by surrender to Christ, be one of God’s saints.—S. C.

Ver. 16.—*The Lord's service commended.* It is so—

I. BY SCRIPTURE. (See text.) The one trouble of the psalmist seems to be lest he should not be owned by the Lord as his servant. Hence: 1. *He asserts with emphasis, “Truly I am thy servant.”* Here is not a mere make-believe, as so many professed servants of the Lord are. 2. *And he reasserts it.* “I am thy servant,” not was, or will be, but I am, here and now, this day, thine. 3. *And he cites a fact which unanswerably proves his assertion.* I am “the son of thine handmaid.” Slaves born in the house, home-born of another slave, were regarded as the property of their master, even more than those gained by purchase or taken captive in war. The meaning, therefore, is, “I am thy very own.” Thus completely and altogether does the psalmist dedicate himself to God. 4. *And he brings forward the mighty motive which had led him thus to do.* “Thou hast loosed my bonds.” He was speaking, probably, of the bonds of death, from the very gates of which he had been delivered (ver. 8). In his overwhelming gratitude for this deliverance, he yields himself entirely to God. What a contrast does the psalmist present to the ordinary run of men! They care nothing for God’s service. If they begin it, they soon forsake it; or if perchance they seem to

continue in it, with what sloth and slackness is it pursued! But the psalmist feels that no service he can render is too great; his one desire is to be confessed as the servant of the Lord.

II. AND RIGHT REASON ENDORSES THIS COMMENDATION. 1. *We cannot escape service of some sort*; some lord will have rule over us. Where is one whose rule is righteous and reasonable as is that of the Lord? 2. *Has he not all claim?* He is our Creator, Preserver, our Redeemer, and daily Benefactor, our heavenly Father. 3. *The noblest of mankind have been the first to confess this.*

III. SO ALSO DOES EXPERIENCE. Who ever repented of having served the Lord too well, or thought he had done so sufficiently? The best of his servants are eager to have all those they love, and all whom they can influence, in his service. It brings here and now such rich recompense of reward, and promises eternal reward by-and-by. Our happiest hours are those spent in serving him. "He has loosed my bonds, and I must and will serve him."—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The various bases on which love rests.* A tradition associates this psalm with the serious sickness of Hezekiah. It may not be a trustworthy tradition. The Aramaisms of the language suggest that it belongs to the time of the restored exiles. It is a psalm of one who passed through a similar sickness to that of Hezekiah; and we are justified in illustrating the psalm from the experiences of the good king. The writer was evidently a man who had been brought through a sickness which had imperilled his life. He feels and sings as one who has just stepped up from the "borderland." He is in the first flush of restored life, deeply feeling what God has done for him, and realizing a new personal affection for God, which is bringing to him a thrill of holy joy. Compare Hezekiah's psalm on his recovery. One thing especially seems to be present to thought, and it is made the basis of new love. That restored life was a direct answer to prayer. It therefore indicated God's personal interest in him. God loved him; and love surely begets love.

I. GOD HEARING IS A BASIS OF LOVE. "He hath heard my voice and my supplications." Then God is a living Being; in his image we are made; and he is responsive to his children. Contrast the feeling of the heathen, who prays to the stone figure of his god. He can only vaguely fear or vaguely hope, for there is no response from the stone face; and if he gets what he asks he cannot associate it with the action of the god,—it is but a happy accident. We can only love living persons. We use the term "love" in a very secondary sense when we apply it to *things*. God hearing is God living; and the living God can be the Object of human love.

II. GOD LOVING TO HEAR IS A FURTHER BASIS OF LOVE. "He hath inclined his ear unto me." Inclining the ear is a sign of disposition, even of personal feeling and regard. When we do not care for those who make requests of us, how short and sharp we are with them! When we have personal regard for them, how patiently we listen! how we bend down to attend to them! how we *incline our ear*! The psalmist read personal interest and affection in that inclining of the Divine ear; and it was precisely fitting that he should respond to love with love.

III. GOD'S ACTING ON WHAT HE HEARS BECOMES A FURTHER BASIS OF LOVE. He may incline his ear, and so show his interest in us, but go no further. Then he would but be like so many of our earthly friends, who sympathize with us, but can or will do nothing for us. For God to hear is for God to heed, and for God to heed is for God to bless and help. And new love to him is kindled as we experience his deliverances and salvations. From every man God asks worship. From his healed, restored, redeemed ones he asks the worship of *love*.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Depression attending sickness.* There is a most subtle connection between the body and the mind. This was recognized by the psalmist, when he found such comfort in saying of God, "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." It is embodied in the familiar idea of the healthy man—*Mens sana in corpore sano*. The mind can only work through the body as its agent, and is as dependent on its condition as the workman on the state of his tools. The influence of body on mind is fully recognized in certain forms of sickness. When the nerves or certain vital organs are affected by disease, fits of depression are characteristic features, and extremely

distressing features. When life is imperilled, there is often a bodily prostration which acts upon the mind, and produces something approaching despair. It is often hard to get sick folk to see the "bright light in the cloud." We are in danger, however, of making two mistakes in connection with this subject. We may make too *much* of the influence of the body on the mind, and so unworthily excuse bad mind-conditions. We may make too *little* of the influence of the body on the mind, and so unduly distress ourselves about our mental conditions. Both extremes should be avoided.

I. THE DIVERSE INFLUENCE OF SICKNESSES. Different diseases have different effects. And the influence of any disease depends on the bodily organization, mental disposition, and even religious sentiments of the man in whom it works. It has different effects according to the season of the year, and the state of the atmosphere; and it varies even according as the patient is well or badly nursed. All these things man cannot estimate, but we may be sure God does.

II. THE SPECIAL EFFECT OF SOME DISEASES. They directly affect the brain. They make a man become a sort of double self, as did the devil-possession of our Lord's time. There is the man of Christian trust and hope, and at the same time a man saying all sorts of bitter and unreasonable things against himself, and so a distress to himself and to all who have to deal with him.

III. THE MENTAL CONFLICT OCCASIONED BY SICKNESSES. When this dual life is created, there must be conflict between the man of trust and the man of despair. The soul's love to God struggles hard to hold its own. It persists in hoping on. And its persistency is seen at every moment when the tight grip of the disease is loosened. It is the constant conflict of the flesh and the spirit.

IV. THE CONDITIONS OF SOUL-VICTORY UNDER SICKNESSES. To use a business expression—we must *discount* the influence of the body. We must keep from thinking about our spiritual state till we are free to judge it fairly. We must cling to what God is, and is to us.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Simple as opposed to guileful.* "The Lord preserveth the simple." This is not the "simple" of the Book of Proverbs—the young, inexperienced, susceptible souls, who are only too easily led astray. "Simple" here rather means gentle, sincere, genuine, inoffensive, guileless, not ordering conduct by the subtlety of this world's wisdom; this very simplicity, which lays them most readily open to attack, is in itself an appeal for God's protection. Compare our Lord's commendation of the passive graces in his Beatitudes, especially this, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

I. THE SIMPLE MAN LETS GOD WORK. "The Lord preserveth the simple." He has no confidence to make his own plans; he waits to know and fit in with God's plans for him. This may seem weakness; and it sometimes is weakness. But it need not be. It should only be the simplicity of the child-spirit, which depends on the father, and has the fullest confidence in the fatherly wisdom and ways. He has no confidence in his own working out of the plan. So he leans on Divine help continually, ever saying, "What I know not, that teach thou me;" "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." This, too, may seem to be weakness, but it is not; it is only man meeting fully the conditions of his being, for man is as a climbing plant, only strong and able to attain his best when he leans upon the strong. It is the problem of life, and the simple man most easily solves it—How can humanity reach its best? The simple man says, "By being always open to God's working in us."

II. THE GUILFUL MAN DOES HIS OWN WORK. He is quite satisfied with his own plans. They are such as will bring the best possible to himself. He has an eye to the "main chance" always, and means to secure it—straightforwardly if he can, otherwise if he cannot. And he is quite satisfied with his resources. There is nothing that he cannot do, or thinks he cannot do. Life is to him the sphere in which things have to yield to his wishes. The guileful man has no particular need of God, and, indeed, he sometimes finds him in his way, and so is aroused to an active antagonism. "God is not in all his thoughts." There is no place in him for humility—self-confidence fills all the space. There is no call to prayer, for he wants no help. He is sufficient unto himself, or thinks he is. The guileful man will not have it that he is a dependent creature.

III. THE GUILFUL MAN REACHES PRESENT RESULTS; THE SIMPLE MAN REACHES

ABIDING RESULTS. This is precisely the difference which having God makes. Without him there is nothing that abideth. With him everything worth having abideth for ever.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—Rest won and re-won. I. A problem to solve is given to every dependent moral creature, and to the human race. It is this: **WHERE, IN WHAT, OR IN WHOM, WILL YOU FIND YOUR REST?** A husband finds rest in home. A thinker finds rest in truth. A worker finds rest in the products of his toil. Israel found rest in Canaan. The saint hopes to find rest in heaven. Where does the soul find its present rest? As the psalmist uses the expression, "Return," we infer that he had solved the problem and found his rest. He must have found it in God, and in personal relations with God. The soul's rest comes in the voluntary uniting of the soul with God; it comes when the soul goes out of itself to trust God fully; or, more precisely, rest comes by winning the *character* that can trust. And that character is gained only by discipline, which roots out the self-reliance. This rest is no mere idling quiescence. It is not destroyed individually. It is such rest as the "Man Christ Jesus" knew all the while he was going to and fro on the earth's highways. Many, looking over the conflicts of their early life, can remember how they won rest. They can recall their soul-struggle. They can remember how it ended in a glad surrender, which brought them peace.

II. **THE SOUL'S REST, WHEN WON, NEEDS PROVING.** It must be tried. It may have to be tried "so as by fire." In Birmingham there is a "proving-house." The gun-barrels are skillfully made, but there is no security in their use until they have been tested and proved. The bridge may be completed, but traffic cannot be permitted until it has been proved. Young people go from country homes with good characters, but the full strong manhood does not come until those characters have been submitted to stern city-tests. Our earthly life, more especially, perhaps, the early years of our manhood, are the proving-house of the soul-rest that we have gained. 1. Our soul-testings often come in the way of enlarged faculties and increasing knowledge. Perhaps there never was a time when our discipline in this way was more severe. The man must grow out of his childish notions. Every year is bringing us richer stores of knowledge. Much of it is antagonistic to our previous knowledge; more of it is felt to be incompatible with it. We are half tempted to associate ignorance with faith, and knowledge with doubt, and then to wish that we need not know. But the trouble passes when we can see that this is a part of the soul's proving-house, one feature of the discipline through which alone can come virtue and strength. "Let knowledge grow from more to more:" what matter, if only "more of reverence in us dwell"? 2. Our soul-testing often comes in the self-activity demanded in order to win world-success. Many a godly man has, for a time, lost his soul in the all-absorbing business, and civic, and political strain. There is no pressure put on men equal to that of heaped-up daily responsibilities. Under it their souls are flattened right down, silenced, stifled, crushed. 3. Our soul-testing often comes in the discipline of disappointment and failure. This we find represented in the psalms of Asaph. Such experiences made him feel uncertain about God—whether he really was on the side of the good. But these provings need but have a passing and temporary influence. Bunyan shows his pilgrim sleeping in the arbour, and letting his roll drop out of his bosom, losing it thus for a while. Only when lost soul-rest becomes a permanent state does it become fatal.

III. **THE SOUL'S REST, THOUGH TEMPORARILY LOST, MAY BE REGAINED.** God is always watching for the first opportunity to give it back; and the soul that has once had it is keen enough to seize the first occasion to get it back. Here is the peculiarity of the psalmist—he had lost his soul-rest, but he was *troubled by the loss*. 1. All through the dark time in the proving-house he wanted to keep trust if he could. That made all the difference. There are two attitudes which we may take. We may *want to doubt*, if we can. We may *want to trust*, if we can. And though the false notion prevails that doubting—wanting to doubt—is the more intelligent, it is surely more reasonable that dependent creatures should want to trust. 2. All through the dark time in the proving-house the psalmist kept that love to God on which his trust was based. The trust was no mere intellectual conclusion, which could be upset by enlarging knowledge. He had gained his soul-rest by self-abandonment. He gained it

by entering fully into the sonship which is based on affection. There is no fear of love-relations with God. Love may have its faded times. Other interests may seem to come in, and for a time push love aside. It will never consent to be pushed aside very long; it will soon say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul!"—R. T.

Vers. 7, 8.—*God works in our human lives.* It seems as if God had *not* done something for the psalmist which he wanted him to do; and this troubled the psalmist, and filled him with doubts. He found consolation in thinking how much God *had done* for him. If he could not see God in a particular circumstance, he could see God in his life. The varied movements in a factory are quite bewildering to us, but the master knows, and guides them all to ends of his fashioning.

I. GOD'S DELIVERANCE FROM BODILY PERILS. "Soul from death." The "soul" here is the animal life. Spiritual need is not, here, in the psalmist's mind. We all have had perils of death—from drowning, accident, or disease. Illust.: Hezekiah. Man walking in the dark, stopped at very edge of quarry. Do we keep the memory of God's restorations of imperilled life? In this God has "dealt bountifully with us." And we are bound to God by the claims (1) of life given; and (2) of life restored.

II. GOD'S DELIVERANCE FROM HUMAN SORROWS. "Eyes from tears." The thought here is of the trouble that causes grief-tears. We can look back over trials that were distresses, anxieties. Illustrate by the pathetic picture of David going up Olivet weeping, when fleeing before his wilful son Absalom. Cannot bear to see a man disheartened unto tears. It is always a sad sight. It has been such to God. For us he has "wiped the tears away." Illustrate by the fact that, in our family discipline, we let the child cry; but it is very hard to us to see it cry; and all the while we mean to wipe the tears away. See the bountifulness of God in dealing with us thus.

III. GOD'S DELIVERANCE FROM MORAL TEMPTATIONS. "Feet from stumbling." Who can look over life and fail to see times when the "feet were almost gone, the steps had well-nigh slipped"? We are liable to fall. "Prone to wander." Exposed to temptation. We may learn a lesson from the spread of infectious diseases. Everything depends on the measure of inward susceptibility. Then, should it not be our unceasing wonder that we have not fallen? Why have we not? There can be but one answer: "The Lord hath dealt bountifully with us." There is, then, a threefold memory-bond binding us to God, and ever setting us upon asking, "What shall we render unto the Lord for all his mercy to us?" There is one fitting answer: "I will pay thee my vows." We can just be God's servants, in all holy love and obedience.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*Hasty thought and hasty speech.* "I said in my haste, All men are a lie" (Revised Version). The idea is not simply that all men tell lies. It is that men constantly disappoint our expectations; and no security can come by reliance upon men. This kind of feeling comes to the good man still at times, especially when friends fail, and human reliances prove as broken reeds. It is so easy for a despondent soul to argue that since one trusted friend has failed, all must be untrustworthy. But the argument is a hasty one, and is quite unfounded, since one instance can never suffice to establish a rule. 'This also has to be taken into account—men are constantly ready to undertake and promise more than they can possibly perform. Then their failure ought not to surprise us; it is a natural and necessary failure. The fault, indeed, is in part *ours*, seeing that we put an unreasonable trust in them. Before we complain of men's disappointing us, we should question and criticize our trust in them. Dr. Barry explains the term, "in my haste," thus: "in that sweeping and precipitate generalization of bitter experience, despairing of humanity, which is a sign of our own human frailty." We are all liable to hasty thinking; but it is a special temptation to those who, like the Apostle Peter, are of an impulsive disposition. They form ideas on first impressions; and before there is any opportunity of weighing them and criticizing them, they speak them out, and act them out. Only the discipline of life cultivates wise self-restraint and careful reserve.

I. HASTY THOUGHT IS BEST KEPT AS THOUGHT. It is not always clearly recognized that suggestions made to the mind are not sin. They may be made by circumstances, or made by our fellow-men, or made by the spirit of evil. So far as they only awaken

thought in us, no sin has been committed; *our will* has not been concerned in the matter. There is no more than response to suggestion according to the ordinary working of mental laws. So far there is something which we cannot help. If left alone, it will soon pass away. Only that is kept in memory on which the attention is fixed. Passing thought passes into oblivion. And this is the best fate for such a hasty thought as this of the psalmist.

II. **HASTY THOUGHT DOES MISCHIEF WHEN IT GETS INTO SPEECH.** So our Lord taught that the things which come out of a man defile him. It takes an act of will to give expression to a thought. That act of will makes the thought our own. If it is a bad thought, it must do a bad work by getting expression; for that expression starts bad thoughts in others. The psalmist's hasty word sowed the seed of mistrust, which spoils the relations of human society.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*The only return God looks for.* "I will take the cup of salvation." Visiting Müller's Orphan House at Ashley Down, Bristol, some years ago, we were shown into a room where, ranged on a gallery, were some seventy or eighty infant orphans of from three to five years of age, fatherless, if not motherless too. They sang to us a little hymn, and the pathetic refrain of it, as sung by those infant voices, we hear still in our souls—

"What shall we render, O heavenly Friend, to thee,
For care so tender, for love so free?"

It is the feeling of all pious souls, the ever-growing feeling of the deepening experience, that no fitting return can be made to God, and that the only possible return we can make is to let him do all his work of grace in us—to take his "cup of salvation." We know how, sometimes, in the ordinary associations of life, the gifts of our friends altogether overwhelm us. We cannot keep pace with them in returning their gifts. At last we give up attempting to do so, and just let them spend their love on us as they will. This may help us to understand the psalmist's feeling concerning God. Possibly there is a reference to the "cup of blessing" in the observance of the Passover, which may have been introduced after the Exile; but it is better to regard it simply as a poetical figure, and as meaning, "I will accept thankfully and with devout acknowledgment the blessings which God gives me as my portion." The Christian can fill the term "salvation" with higher and holier meanings.

I. **THE HOPELESSNESS OF FINDING ANY WAY OF RETURNING GOD'S GOODNESS.** Because he wants nothing of us. When we would return a gift, how anxiously we try to find out what our friend wants! But it is hopeless to think of finding out any *thing* that God wants. Illust. by the reproachful plea through the psalmist (Ps. l.), "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." And because we could find nothing that he wanted, if he did want. Things are not in our possession or control. How can we give when we have nothing? and all the things we seem to have are his.

II. **THE HOPEFULNESS OF RESPONDING TO GOD'S WAY FOR OUR RECOGNIZING HIS GOODNESS.** What he asks of us is to let him bless us—to be willing recipients of his benedictions, to take his cup of salvation; he wants not things, but thanks; not gifts, but love; not offerings, but praise. "Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving." That we *can* do.—R. T.

Ver. 14.—*Vow-making and vow-paying.* An important duty of Christian life is keeping ever fresh and vivid the memory of God's saving mercies to us. Constantly throughout their history the Israelites were reminded of their deliverance from the house of bondage, and of the vows and pledges involved in that deliverance. The effect of every quickened memory should be a new examination of our vows, that we may discover what of them we are failing to pay or to keep. God does expect a return from us for all his mercies towards us. That return is put in three forms.

I. **"I WILL TAKE THE CUP OF SALVATION."** It honours God for us cheerfully to accept the blessings which he sends. It may be proper to refuse gifts offered by our fellow-men. It is never a true and worthy humility that hesitates to act upon God's

promises, or to accept what God offers. And yet that we find beginners in the Christian life, and even experienced Christians, often do, especially when what God provides is not just "according to their mind." Note also how the very freeness of God's gifts makes them unacceptable to human pride. We like to have things on our conditions, and at our price.

II. "I WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD." That is, in the spirit and act of thankfulness. Thankfulness should be regarded (1) as an important Christian obligation; (2) as an enjoined Christian duty; and (3) as a most real help to the brightness, the joyfulness, and the steadiness of the Christian life. The utterance of thankfulness is a public testimony of our recognized and happy dependence on God. "I have set the Lord always before me."

III. "I WILL PAY MY VOWS UNTO THE LORD." Give some account of Jewish vow-making in times of special thankfulness; as when recovering from a serious sickness. 1. Sincere and right-intentioned, vow-making is acceptable and pleasing to God. 2. The earnest endeavour at vow-paying is much more acceptable. Our resolves match the ancient vows; and our lives have witnessed many resolves made and few resolves carried out. Illust.: resolves in times of conversion, of success, of sickness, of trouble, of rescue from peril. Try to think what unpaid vows or resolves of yours God has on his record. Vow, but be sure to "pay your vows unto the Lord."—R. T.

Ver. 15.—*Consolations for the bereaved.* Health and sickness, joy and sorrow, life and death, are strangely intermingled in the stories of human lives. They are the threads, the warp and the weft, of which the web of life is woven. Until sin is gone, it is better for us to keep the sorrows and the sicknesses and even the dyings; for these are God's agents for stamping upon sin its true character, and he makes them to be but the anguish of our deliverance from sin's power and dominion. In our times of bereavement we ought to know—

I. THAT THE DEATH OF OUR BELOVED ONES IS A PRECIOUS THING TO GOD. These "deaths" are certainly very precious things to us, whether they come as a sudden call or follow upon many days of weary watching. There is peculiar sacredness in a time of death for a family. The family bond never seems so closely knit as then. Each member makes so much of each other member in those hours of common sorrow. Our text says that the dying of our friends is so precious to God. We may think of God as our Father; as one of our family, the very Head of our family, and therefore the one on whom the heaviest part of the burden falls. No one feels so deeply as the father and the mother; and in calling himself the great Father, he unveils a heart of infinite sympathy, that "bears our griefs, and carries our sorrows." How God feels toward us finds its illustration in the manifested God—Christ Jesus. The sympathies of Nain, the tears of Bethany, show us our God. The death of the saint is so precious to God: 1. Because the trust of the dying is so severely tested. What the mysterious conflicts of the time of death are none of us can know, perhaps none of us can imagine. In perilous disease we may have been to the "border-land;" but, then, the border-land is a very wide space, and we have not really felt what it is for the soul fully to face the eternal. The struggle must be a great and sore one, for even the best of men, when they come to die, have a time during which their faith seems to fail, and their hope to die out. It is a most "precious" thing to God for a human soul to be in struggle. 2. Because the living who are left are so overwhelmed with sorrow. Of the heavenly sphere it is said, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." That means that the sympathy felt by God in their tear-bringing sorrows will by-and-by be able to express itself without limit or hindrance. Our tears are precious things to our heavenly Father, though, for the holiest ends, he may bid them flow on while we tarry here below. 3. Because through death God brings his children home to himself. To him death is precious; he thinks about it, is anxious about it, rejoices in the anticipation of that which follows it, looks on it much as the parent looks on the perilous journey which brings his absent child home. If we could always think of our beloved as gone home to our Father and theirs, their death would become precious to us. We think of them as dead, gone from earthly love and fellowship. Better think of them as having found the true love and the eternal fellowship.

II. THAT THE DEATH OF OUR FRIENDS FITS IN WITH GOD'S PERFECT AND LOVING

PLAN FOR US. When we look over our past lives we often can see the wisdom and goodness manifested in isolated scenes and incidents; but we fail to see the wonderful ways in which the various experiences fit in together. It is not always an easy thing to discern what the common things have to do with the special things, or how the special things have become necessary in order to teach more effectively the lessons learned from the common things. We fail to discern the plan. God's plan in our life is not at present offered to our comprehension. It is offered to our faith. Our life is a worked pattern of various colours; the pattern is large, and it scarcely comes out until it is nearly complete. Our life is a complicated mosaic, and each day new shapes and new colours are added. God makes the pattern complete, but keeps it for a heaven-view.

III. THAT THE MYSTERY HANGING ABOUT THE DEATH OF OUR BELOVED WILL ONE DAY BE DISPELLED. Familiar as we are with death, its ways always seem strange to us. We think it has stricken the wrong *person*; it has come at the wrong *time*; or it has done its work in the wrong *way*. Sometimes Death comes too suddenly. In a moment our friend went in, and all left to us was the outer robe flung off as he passed through. Sometimes Death tarries wearily. Sometimes Death gathers about him circumstances which add peculiar painfulness to the death-scenes. We incline to say, "It is all wrong." And yet it is God who arranges it. The wise God. The faithful Creator. The loving Father. It is precious to him. "Thou shalt know hereafter." Let us wait. We all have some mysteries to keep until the time for unfolding mysteries shall come. By-and-by "we shall know as we are known."—R. T.

Ver. 17.—*Spiritual sacrifices.* "Sacrifice of thanksgiving." Acceptable to God, the great Spirit, not as thanksgiving, which may be as much a formality as a sacrifice, but as the sign of the thankful, loving heart, which gives itself to God in the thanksgiving. The story of Cain and Abel, in the earliest age, stamps this truth. They did not merely bring their offerings as expressions of their thankfulness for temporal prosperity. The story clearly indicates that they looked for the Divine acceptance of themselves, in some sense, for the sake of their gift. Abel's humble, earnest, grateful, trusting heart can receive God's favour; from Cain's formalities God's favour must be withheld. Religion is not acts, but it can express itself in acts. Religion is heart-feeling. It is the devotion of a man's self to God. Formal sacrifices are but the representation of the spiritual sacrifices for which God calls; and their value depends on the spiritual sacrifice being offered through them. "They that worship the Father must worship him in spirit and in truth." "Not sacrifices, not temples, not services, not prayers, not good deeds, not steadfast morality, not generous giving, can of themselves ever gain Divine favour. The Spirit-God asks for spirit-worship. Because man is a spirit, it is beneath his dignity to offer, and it is beneath the dignity of God to accept, other than spirit-worship."

I. SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES AS THANKSGIVINGS. The formality of thanksgiving was strikingly illustrated in the great national services held when the Prince of Wales was restored to health. It was an appropriate national act; and to many devout souls it was also a spiritual sacrifice. The worship of the Church is a sacred duty to be formally done; but it only rises to its highest when the souls of the worshippers are fully in the praise. The spiritual element in formal worship is an unceasing care to all devout souls. God asks to hear men's souls sing when their voices raise the psalm.

II. SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES AS ADORATIONS. Calling upon the "Name." There is a feature in the early Jewish ritual which it is difficult to retain in the Christian. The Jew had sublime, reverent, oppressive views of the majesty and holiness of God. So there was an element of adoration in the worship, and an element of adoration in the psalms. The truth of the Divine Fatherhood is misapprehended if it is allowed to lighten the soul's august impressions of the Divine glory.

III. SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES AS PRAYERS. Our Lord spoke against "vain repetitions." Prayer is soul-dependence and soul-desire. It may be spoken out, but it may not. God reads hearts.—R. T.

Vers. 1—9.—*God the Deliverer.* I. CELEBRATES A GREAT DELIVERANCE, (Vers.

3—8.) 1. *From threatened death.* (Ver. 3.) 2. *From the pains of the unseen world or of death.* (Ver. 3.) 3. *His whole nature is troubled and sorrowful.* (Ver. 3.)

II. THE MEANS OR INSTRUMENTS OF HIS DELIVERANCE. 1. *Prayer.* (Vers. 1—4.) 2. *The goodness and mercy of God.* (Vers. 5, 6.)

III. THE EFFECTS OF THIS DELIVERANCE. 1. *An increase of love.* (Ver. 1.) 2. *An increase of obedience to the Divine will.* (Ver. 9.) 3. *A more untroubled rest in God—the rest of faith.* (Ver. 7.)—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXVII.

It has been doubted whether this exceedingly short psalm can ever have been intended for a separate composition, and was not rather written as a conclusion to Ps. cxvi. or an introduction to Ps. cxviii. In Hebrew manuscripts it is often attached to one or other of these two psalms; but in the versions and in the best manuscripts it is always separate. The writer calls upon all the nations of the earth to laud and praise Jehovah, on the ground of his great mercy and faithfulness to Israel. The solidarity of the rest of mankind with Israel is assumed (comp. Ps. xlvii. 1; lxvi. 1, 8; xcvi. 4; c. 1, etc.).

Ver. 1.—O praise the Lord, all ye nations; or, “all ye Gentiles,” as in Rom. xv. 11. The *goyim* are especially the heathen nations of the earth (comp. Ps. ii. 1, 8; ix. 5, 15, 19, 20, etc.). Praise him; rather, *laud him* (Revised Version). The verbs in the two clauses are different. All ye people; rather, *all ye peoples*.

Ver. 2.—For his merciful kindness (or, *his mercy*) is great towards us; literally, *has been great over us*. The appeal is to history, and the mercy intended is that shown in God’s continual protection of Israel. And the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. God’s “truth” is here, as so often, his faithfulness to his promises, the promises being especially those made to Abraham and David. His “mercy and truth” to Israel were an indication of what the Gentiles might expect of him in his dealings with them (comp. Rom. xv. 8, 9).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The kingdom of God.* The psalmist, consciously or unconsciously, anticipates the glories of the kingdom of God, as that is now being established under the reign of Christ. We have—

I. ITS STRONG FOUNDATION. It is founded on mercy and truth. Not on irresistible power, not on unchangeable law, but on Divine mercy and truth. 1. God’s mercy to mankind, secured by the redeeming work, and promised by the unchanging word, of Jesus Christ, is one stone of that foundation. 2. The other is the whole body of truth spoken by him or by his apostles under his inspiration. Those who go everywhere preaching “the gospel of the kingdom” are charged to make known God’s abounding grace to all men, from the best to the worst, from those “near” to those that are “afar off.” They are also charged to declare the will of God in the righteousness, the truthfulness, the purity, the charity, the peacefulness, of those who give themselves to his service. These two great principles may never be disjoined. With the message of mercy carried to the worst of the children of men must be closely and inextricably associated all that utterance of God’s mind and purpose which requires holiness, wisdom, love.

II. ITS BOUNDLESS RANGE. “Praise the Lord, all ye nations,” etc. (ver. 1). It is difficult to understand how a Jew, under the Law, could expect all the heathen to be worshippers of God. The psalmist’s must have been a pious wish rather than a serious expectation. Not such is the Christian’s hope; he looks forward to the time when God will be honoured under every sky, and his praises sung in every language. He sees islands, communities, nations, that were once barbarous and idolatrous now converted to the truth; he sees the hoary systems of antiquity honey-combed with doubt and distrust; he sees groups and companies of men and women, as well as individuals, inquiring at the feet of Jesus Christ. He sees the Churches of Christ “putting on their

beautiful garments" of faith and zeal, and sending out their messengers to the ends of the earth. He sees the truth and mercy of God printed in every known language on the globe; he sees the prophecies of the Old Testament and the New in the very act of fulfilment; he has reason to say, with a heart full of hope and joy, "Praise the Lord, all ye nations."

III. ITS PERPETUITY. "To all generations;" or, "for ever." At least seventy generations have come and gone since this psalm was written, and eighteen centuries have passed since Jesus Christ brought "grace and truth" to the world in his own Person. And this Divine wisdom shows no other signs of age than those of maturity and advancement. There is no fear as to its future; for it comes from God, and it meets the deep needs of man. It brings pardon for his sin, peace to his burdened heart, comfort in his sorrow, sanctity to his joy, steadfastness for the time of temptation, nobility to his life, hope in the solemn hour of death. With whatever humanity can dispense, it cannot do without the mercy and the truth of God as these are revealed and secured by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The doxology.* This is the shortest psalm, but it is long enough to show—

I. THAT THERE IS ONE SUPREME OBJECT OF WORSHIP FOR ALL MEN. It is Jehovah, the Lord. He and he alone. Three times in this short psalm is this affirmed. 1. *The atheism—by whatever name it is called—of the day denies this*, saying, either God does not exist, or, if he does, we cannot know it. 2. *Falsa ideas of the Trinity practically deny this*. Many Christians are tri-theists, though unconsciously. But such error is not the less harmful on that account. 3. *The doctrine of God as given in the whole Bible never teaches other than the unity of God*. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." The human race is one in its moral condition—sin; in its need—a Saviour; in its consciousness of both these facts. One God, one Saviour, should be worshipped by all.

II. THAT THERE IS ONE DUTY INCUMBENT ON ALL—THE PRAISE OF THE LORD. It is not in many things that all can unite; but they can, and one day will, in this. And we should seek to begin this now. It is due to God; he deserves as well as desires and demands it. It is full of blessing to ourselves. Prayer is good, but praise is better still. And it blesses others. The spirit of praise is winsome, for "praise is comely." In the walls of the city of God its gates are praise (Isa. lx. 18). We go in that way, and draw others to go in with us.

III. THAT THERE IS ONE ARGUMENT AND MOTIVE WHICH WILL CONVINCE ALL—WHAT OUR GOD IS. He has not merely kindness, but merciful kindness. And it is great; no insignificant and occasional thing. And it is "toward us;" not a mere abstraction, but a positive reality. And he is ever faithful and true; his righteousness endureth for ever. Not mercy without truth, nor truth without mercy. Alone, neither would have saved us. But together they constitute the salvation of God. They who know it will praise the Lord.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*God in national life.* "Laud him, all ye people" (Revised Version). This psalm was called by the Puritans the "Dunbar Psalm," because Cromwell, the lord-general, when at the foot of Doon Hill, after the battle of Dunbar, made a halt, and sang this psalm, "till the horse could gather for the chase." It is agreed that it is a kind of doxology, and was used either at the beginning or at the close of a liturgical service; somewhat as we use, "Glory be to the Father," etc. It was the one most distinctive characteristic of the Jews that they were keen to recognize the presence and working of God in their national life. The tendency of nations is to distinguish between politics and religion. The tendency of sentimental religion is to keep aloof from politics. The true idea is exhibited in the Jewish national life at its best. The freest scope for all individual statesmanship and patriotism, combined with the ever-cherished conviction that God was in all, using all, inspiring all, and overruling all.

Jewish politics and religion were one thing. Moses' revelation from God was as truly national as religious. So far as the Jews had a universal mission, a witness to make to "all peoples," it was of the one and only God in their national life, who ought to be recognized as the God of *every* national life. We can trace God in the history that is *past*; we may find him in the history that is now *in the making*. To that recognition of God in the present this psalm calls men. "The God of the whole earth shall he be called." Monotheism involves (1) the universal claim of God to be every nation's God; (2) the determined opposition to every form in which the notion of deity is *localized*. The one God is all men's God. The psalm declares that this should be the occasion of universal rejoicing; because, being what he is, this one God meets every conceivable need of all men.

I. Men need an INFALLIBLE DIRECTOR OF CONDUCT. This one God is the Ruler of all, guiding all "with his eye."

II. Men need a VINDICATOR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS in whom they may have absolute confidence. This one God is the Judge of all, the holy Avenger of all the wronged.

III. Men need a RESCUER AND DELIVERER to whom in every sense of sin and peril they may flee. This one God is the Saviour of all. These are universal human peculiarities found in every nation. So every nation wants the one God.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*God's merciful dealings with nations.* The psalmist, no doubt, refers to the character of God's dealings with Israel, but he implies that they do but present a model of God's dealings with all nations; and he calls upon those nations to examine and see what God's dealings had been with *them*, so that they might find cause for praise. The early Jews realized monotheism as a special possession of their nation. The later prophets and psalmists realized monotheism as a trust, concerning which the Jews were to make witness to all nations around them. What we still do is what the psalmist here calls upon us to do. We study the records of God's dealings with his ancient people, in order that, seeing his mercy, loving-kindness, and truth to them, we may come to know him better, understand his ways with us more perfectly, and praise him with the praise that comes of perfect trust.

I. It is quite true that we can learn God's faithfulness and considerateness (merciful kindness) in *nature*, which, if it be a system of law, is a system of varying and opposing laws, whose relative working must be in some restraint and presidency. And in *providence*, which is the adjustment of nature-workings to meet the needs of individuals, and implies a Divine Director, who knows the individuals, and has power over everything, and, with infinite kindness can fit the two together.

II. But the term "merciful kindness" suggests something better and deeper than this. True, the people of Israel were *men*, even as we are *men*. And what God did for them as men illustrates what God can do for us as men, and even assures us what he is doing. But we must never lose sight of this point—God dealt with Israel as *sinful men*; and the merciful kindness is so impressive because it was pitiful and compassionate dealing with *sinful men*. But that is precisely *what we are*, and therefore God's merciful kindness to Israel is so interesting to us. It reveals *him* who is also our God. When the idea is once in our mind, we can read our lives, individual and national, aright, and speak of his merciful kindness to *us* also.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Truth regarded as reliability.* "The truth of the Lord endureth for ever." The term "truth" is constantly employed without a well-defined and precise meaning. Truth sometimes only means that which seems true to a particular individual at a particular time. Sometimes it only means "veracity," or the correspondence between a proposition and a man's belief. Truth is the correspondence of the proposition with fact. There is a standard truth. It is close kin with eternal righteousness. The love of truth is the love of realities; the determination to rest upon facts and not upon semblances. But when the psalmist spoke of the "truth of God," no such abstract or critical ideas were in his mind. He thought of the truth or righteousness of God as seen in his faithfulness to the promises on which he has ever made his people to hope. To him the truth of God was not his *verity*, but his *reliability*. His truthfulness, his dependableness, regarded as a basis of trust. His reliability has never failed his people; we may be absolutely confident that it endureth, and will endure for ever. A

man's truth is the basis of our trust in him. God's truth is the basis of our reliance on him.

I. TRUTH, AS A FEATURE OF CHARACTER, IS A SIGN OF STABILITY. When we speak of a man as a man of truth, we know that we describe a firm, steadfast man; a man who can make up his mind, and stand to his mind when it is made up. There is no wavering, no "shilly-shallying," about the man. He is a prop fixed firmly into the ground, and can bear a good strain. To some men there seems to be no such thing as truth, only varying opinion, nothing worth suffering for, worth living and dying for. Such men easily bend this way or that, swayed by every passing wind.

II. TRUTH, AS A FEATURE OF CHARACTER, IS A SIGN OF CONSISTENCY. Consistency is keeping strictly to a line of conduct which we have marked as right. But only a man of truth will ever look on a line of conduct as right, for only such a man has an absolute moral standard. And only the man of truth will have any anxiety about deviations from the line.

III. TRUTH, AS A FEATURE OF CHARACTER, IS A SIGN OF PERMANENCE. No disintegrating forces can ever destroy it. By the necessity of things the truthful character endures; nothing can end it. These things may be applied in their sublimest forms to God, in whose image man is made. Because he is truth, and his truth endures, we may trust in the Lord for ever.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Praise*. "Praise ye the Lord." It may be interesting to inquire what "praise" is; and what are the proper forms and features of human praise as offered to God. What praise does God reasonably demand? And what praise is man, at his best, able to offer? But those considerations may lead us into somewhat familiar lines. There may be some freshness in considering what the response to this call, what the offering of this praise, is to *men*. It is a glorifying of God; but it is also a benediction of men. We may not offer our praise for the sake of getting the benediction; we may only offer the praise for the glorifying of God. But we may keep the comforting assurance in our hearts, that God does make it return upon us in benedictions.

I. PRAISE AS BOASTING. Boasting is a part of the human character. It is the natural expression of the energetic, confident, and hopeful disposition. Boasting is a good thing as well as a bad. He is but a poor soul who does not boast, or cannot. The question is—Does the boasting concern self, or some one else? Boasting about self is offensive; boasting about some one else may be most noble. And praise is that noble and ennobling thing—boasting about *God*. That lifts us wholly away from self.

II. PRAISE AS MINISTRY. A man never offers praise to God without morally and spiritually helping some one beside him. That praise declares his faith in God; his sense of the claims of God; and his experience of the mercies of God. So praising is not our duty, it is part of our *service*. This is too often lost sight of, and then public praise is easily neglected.

III. PRAISE AS RELAXATION. The religious life is no continuous strain of wearisome duties that must be done. It is full of relief-times. And the praise-times of religious life are precisely similar to those resting and refreshing times which we all value so much as relief from business strain. Therefore the *praise*-feature of all religious services should have the most careful attention, that full efficiency may be secured.

IV. PRAISE AS CULTURE. By "culture" we mean the complete and harmonious development of all a man's bodily and mental powers. When used in relation to religion, it means the complete and harmonious development of all a man's *spiritual* powers. There is a *praise-side* to every man's religious nature, and that can only be cultured by fitting and continuous exercise. So man is blessed, and God is glorified, by the offering of praise.—R. T.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXVIII.

AN antiphonal hymn, composed for a joyful occasion, when there was to be a procession to the temple, a welcoming of the procession

by those inside, and the solemn offering of a sacrifice upon the altar therco. Dr. Kay's conjecture, that the occasion was the joyful Passover which followed the dedication of the second temple in B.C. 516 (Ezra vi. 19—

22), is not improbable, though it cannot be regarded as more than a reasonable hypothesis.

The first eighteen verses are the song of the procession as it winds its way slowly up the hill to the great gate of the temple, sung alternately, as it would seem, by the two halves of the procession. Ver. 19 is the utterance of the leader, in the name of the whole band, on their arrival before the gates. Ver. 20 is the reply made to them by those inside. The procession, as it enters, sings vers. 21—24 antiphonally as before, all joining in ver. 25. Those already inside sing ver. 26 in welcome of their friends. Ver. 27 belongs to the leader of the procession, and initiates the actual sacrifice. Vers. 28, 29 are then sung, either by the whole congregation or by the two parts of the procession.

Ver. 1.—**O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good; because his mercy endureth for ever** (comp. Ps. cvi. 1, and the comment *ad loc.*).

Ver. 2.—**Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth for ever.** (For the triple division of the people made in this and the next two verses—(1) Israel, (2) house of Aaron, (3) those who fear the Lord—see Ps. cxv. 9—11, and 12, 13.) The nature of the division is considered in the comment on Ps. cxv. 11.

Ver. 3.—**Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endureth for ever.** Let the priests endorse what the people generally have declared, that God's mercy is everlasting.

Ver. 4.—**Let them now that fear the Lord say, that his mercy endureth for ever.** Let the real Israel, the true worshippers of Jehovah, those who worship him in spirit and in truth, set their seal also to the great confession, and solemnly sanction what the people and the priests have done.

Ver. 5.—**I called upon the Lord in distress; literally, from the strait place; i.e. from the straits in which I was.** It is generally agreed that the Babylonian captivity is intended. The nation had called to God in its distress by the mouth of Daniel (ix. 4—19) and of other holy men. The Lord answered me, and set me in a large place; literally, *the Lord answered me on the open plain.* The idea is, "The Lord gave me enlargement"—took me out of my straits—"set my feet in a large room" (Ps. xxxi. 8).

Ver. 6.—**The Lord is on my side.** "At this point the speaker transfers his point

of view into the past; he is once more fearless in the midst of foes" (Cheyne). **I will not fear** (comp. Ps. xxiii. 4; xxvii. 1; lvi. 4, etc.). **What can man do unto me? Man is powerless against God.** "If God be for us [*i.e. on our side*], who can be against us?" (Rom. viii. 31).

Ver. 7.—**The Lord taketh my part with them that help me; literally, the Lord is on my side among my helpers** (comp. Ps. liv. 4). **Therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me** (comp. Ps. liv. 7; lix. 10).

Ver. 8.—**It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man** (comp. Ps. lxxii. 8, 9). Israel, on its return from the Captivity, had begun by putting a good deal of trust in its human helpers, as Cyrus and the other friendly heathen mentioned in Ezra i. 4—6; iii. 7. But this help, after a little time, had failed them (Ezra iv. 1—24), and they had found themselves in great difficulties.

Ver. 9.—**It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.** The "princes" after Cyrus had proved "broken reeds," and, instead of favouring Israel, had favoured Israel's enemies (Ezra iv. 6—24). At last Darius had done them justice, but it was felt that no sure dependence could be placed either on him or on his successors. Jehovah alone was Israel's safe ground of confidence. He "would not fail them, nor forsake them" (Josh. i. 5).

Ver. 10.—**All nations compassed me about.** This is, of course, hyperbole. But it was a fact that all, or almost all, the nations among whom the Israelites dwelt were at all times hostile to them, and sought their destruction. **But in the Name of the Lord will I destroy them; or, "I will mow them down"** (comp. Job xxiv. 24).

Ver. 11.—**They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about** (comp. Ps. lxxxviii. 17). The special compassing about alluded to is probably that in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, when not only the Babylonians but the Syrians, the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Edomites took part in hostilities against Israel (2 Kings xxiv. 2; Ps. cxxxvii. 7). **But in the Name of the Lord I will destroy them.** The threefold repetition of this trenchant phrase (vers. 10, 11, 12) lends it vast additional force. It is no casual utterance, no mere wish, or thought begotten of a wish, but a deep and firm conviction.

Ver. 12.—**They compassed me about like bees; i.e. in vast numbers, and with intense energy, and a furious desire to injure** (comp. Deut. i. 44; and the powerful description of Virgil, 'Georg.' iv. 236—238). **They are quenched as the fire of thorns.** Their fury dies away and goes out suddenly, like a fire

kindled among thorns, which blazes up with vast heat and noise, but in a short time dies down and disappears. For in the Name of the Lord I will destroy them (see the comment on ver. 11).

Ver. 13.—Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall; rather, *thou didst thrust* (Revised Version). The psalmist recalls the past, and throws himself, as it were, once more into the midst of the struggle. Thou—mine enemy, Babylon—didst make a desperate onset upon me, fully intending my destruction. But the Lord helped me. Frustrated thy purpose—preserved the life, the national life, which thou aimedst at destroying, and so did most effectually “help me.”

Ver. 14.—The Lord is my strength and my song, and is become my salvation. The deliverance was such that no words but those of the Song of Moses (Exod. xv. 2) could fitly celebrate it.

Ver. 15.—The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous (comp. Ezra vi. 16, 22). “Tabernacles,” or “tents,” is continually used by the sacred writers as a synonym for “dwellings.” The use of the expression here by no means implies that the Israelites of the time were actually living in tents. The right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly (comp. Exod. xv. 6, 12). God’s right hand was at the time stretched out to protect and preserve Israel.

Ver. 16.—The right hand of the Lord is exalted (compare the parallel expression in Exod. xv. 6, “Thy right hand, O God, is become glorious in power”). When God’s right hand effects a deliverance, it gets, as it were, additional glory to itself. The right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. So, already, in ver. 16. Repetition is a special characteristic of this psalm (see vers. 1, 2, 3, 4; vers. 8, 9; vers. 10—12, etc.).

Ver. 17.—I shall not die, but live. The psalmist speaks, not in his own person, but in the name of his nation. They had been brought very near to extinction; but now the danger was past. God had given them “a reviving” (Ezra ix. 8, 9); and they felt that henceforth they would “live.” And declare the works of the Lord. They would employ the new life granted them in “declaring God’s works” (see Ps. xl. 5, 10; xvi. 3; cxlv. 4—6); i.e. they would witness to all men of “the might of his marvellous acts,” and “abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness.”

Ver. 18.—The Lord hath hastened me sore. By the long sufferings of the Captivity. But he hath not given me over unto death (see the comment on ver. 17).

Ver. 19.—Open to me the gates of righteousness. The great gate of the temple

being now reached, admission to the interior is requested. The gates are called “the gates of righteousness,” (1) as gates which none but the righteous ought to enter (see the next verse); and (2) as gates through which access is gained to the sanctuary of him who alone is truly righteous, and the source of all righteousness in others. I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord. Praise could be given to God anywhere; but it was most appropriately offered “in the courts of the Lord’s house, even in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem” (Pa. cxvi. 19).

Ver. 20.—This gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter; rather, *this is the gate of the Lord: the righteous [and they alone] shall enter by it.* “This verse seems to stand apart—a *solo*, chanted by a voice out of the temple gate” (Kay). Though sinners doubtless sometimes entered (2 Kings xi. 13; 2 Chron. xxvi. 16—20; John ii. 14), none but the righteous had any right to enter.

Ver. 21.—I will praise thee; for thou hast heard me. The chant of the procession as it enters—a prolongation of the strain begun in ver. 19. And art become my salvation (comp. ver. 14).

Ver. 22.—The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. The primary and literal meaning seems to be—“Israel, which the great of the world, those who think to arrange the world according to their own ideas, have rejected and would fain have cast aside, has, nevertheless, despite their rejection, attained to eminence, and been advanced, by the course of events, into such a position, that it may be regarded as the head corner-stone—the most important of all the nations of the world.” Any Messianic reference is secondary and subordinate.

Ver. 23.—This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This fresh elevation of Israel to importance—especially to such great importance—can only be attributed to the work of Divine providence. It is “the Lord’s doing”—literally, “from the Lord”—and is one of the most marvellous events of history.

Ver. 24.—This is the day which the Lord hath made. The thanksgiving day is one which has been fore-ordained of God, and brought into existence by him for a special purpose. We will therefore carry out God’s purpose, and rejoice and be glad in it.

Ver. 25.—Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord; or, “we beseech thee.” The interjectional *MM* is as suitable to the several speakers as to one. O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity; i.e. continue to save, continue to send prosperity. Israel feels its constant dependence upon God, and that

if the Divine care were remitted for a day, or for an hour, all would be lost. Tears, as Professor Cheyne observes, continually mingle with Israel's laughter.

Ver. 26.—Blessed be he that cometh in the Name of the Lord. Once more a voice issues from the interior of the temple (comp. ver. 20). The priestly choir there stationed to receive the procession, blesses it as coming "in the Name of the Lord;" i.e. for a religious purpose, and with pious intentions. We have blessed you, they say (or, rather perhaps, *we bless you*) out of the house of the Lord. "The house of the Lord is the fountain and the treasury of all blessing" (Hengstenberg).

Ver. 27.—God is the Lord, which hath showed us light. Having received the priestly benediction, the processionists resume their strain. They have entered within the courts; they are approaching the altar of sacrifice; they have brought their offering. "Jehovah," they say, "is God, and hath given us light" (see the Revised Version). That is, he has enlight-

ened our spirits to see and acknowledge his mercies; or, perhaps, he has led us, as he did the people, by a pillar of fire in the wilderness; and now we stand before the altar with our offering—receive it at our hands, ye priests—and bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. So shall the act of thanksgiving be complete, and the solemn service ended. The fanciful exposition of Luther, lately revived by Professor Cheyne, will scarcely approve itself to critics generally.

Ver. 28.—Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. This is the acknowledgment made by each and all, and probably repeated many times, while the sacrifice is being consumed upon the altar.

Ver. 29.—O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. The psalm ends, as it began, with the usual thanksgiving refrain (comp. 1 Chron. xvi. 34; 2 Chron. v. 13; Ezra iii. 11; Pss. cvi. 1; cvii. 1; cxviii. 1—4; cxxvi. 1—26).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—21.—*Opposition, deliverance, thanksgiving.* The psalmist (or the nation) is passing, or has just passed, through great distress. He (it) has been the object of malignant and determined attack; he has been surrounded by enemies, and been in peril of his life; he has then, as always, sought help from above; and he has been so graciously relieved that he has the sense of deliverance in his soul, and the song of triumph on his lips.

I. HUMAN OPPOSITION. This begins in: 1. *Hatred*; or a hostile feeling (ver. 7). It is had enough that men should cherish a spirit of enmity toward us, that they should wish us evil. But this passes into: 2. *A hostile attitude*. Those who are opposed to us "compass us about" (vers. 10—12). They quietly surround us with the network of their intrigue. They go beyond this; they bring to bear on us: 3. *Active opposition*. They "thrust sore at us" (ver. 13); their voice is raised in accusation, in detraction, in opposition; they take active measures to defeat, to distress, even to ruin us. It may be that their efforts conduct to: 4. *The most grave results*. Positive disaster may impend (vers. 17, 18). It may be war "unto death."

II. THE HOPE OF THE AFFLICTED. When thus engirt with enemies, our health, or our peace, or our position being seriously threatened, we have a refuge in God. 1. This trouble is *so far* of him that he has permitted it, and he has it under his control. Our appeal is therefore rightly directed to him. 2. His power against our adversaries is unquestioned and unbounded; let him lift his hand, and they are discomfited (ver. 16). With God at our side, animating and inspiring us, we ourselves shall prove wiser and stronger than they (vers. 10—12). 3. Conscious of our own integrity, with clean hands and a pure heart, assured that we are not seeking our own interests but those of the kingdom of Christ, we count confidently on his sympathy and succour (vers. 6, 7).

III. DIVINE BELIEF. We call on God, and he answers us, and sets us "in a large place" (ver. 5). He takes us out of the straits in which we were hemmed in, and places us where we can breathe freely and can act happily and fearlessly. He has become "our salvation" (ver. 14). Our liabilities are met, our enemies disarmed, our reputation cleared, our position secured, our friends reconciled and restored, our path is made plain; we "return unto our rest." Then comes the blessedness of—

IV THANKGIVING. 1. In the heart. (Vers. 1—4.) Let every one that has been thus

delivered, to whatever tribe he may belong, say that the pity of the Lord "endureth for ever," that it never fails. 2. In the *home*. (Ver. 15.) The voice of praise should be heard beneath every roof where God is known and his goodness has been felt. 3. In the *sanctuary*. (Vers. 19, 20, 21.) In the psalmody which is heard in the Church there is many a note, detected by the ear of God, which is the outpouring of a rescued and relieved human spirit.

Vers. 22—29.—*The great reversal*. To whomsoever these words (vers. 22, 23) primarily referred, we have the highest authority for applying them to our Lord himself. In his case we have—

I. THE GREAT REVERSAL. (Vers. 22, 23.) No reversal of fortune in human affairs can be comparable to his experience. Consider: 1. His course on earth—the circumstances of his birth, of his youth, and of his manhood; his claims disowned, his truth rejected, himself insulted, ill-treated, condemned, smitten, crucified! 2. The nature of his position now as the Divine Head of the Church. He may be said to be both the Foundation-stone and also the Corner or Top-stone (the "epistyle"); for his Church is built upon his truth and, still more truly, upon himself; and, at the same time, it looks up to him as the most conspicuous One on whom its eyes rest with reverence and love. 3. The exaltation he enjoys in the heavenly world (see Phil. ii. 9—12; Rev. v. 13).

II. THE LONG BRIGHT DAY OF GRACE AND GLADNESS. (Ver. 24.) The position of Jesus Christ as "Prince and Saviour, giving redemption and remission of sins," is a long, bright day, succeeding the darkness of heathendom or the twilight of "the Law;" it is a day which "the Lord has made" for the nations of the earth. We may well "rejoice and be glad in it;" not thinking and speaking and singing of it as if it were a dispensation of dreariness and gloom, but realizing that it is one of close fellowship with God, of holy and happy service, of ever-brightening hope (see Phil. iii. 1; iv. 4; Eph. ii. 6; iii. 19; Rev. i. 6). "The joy of the Lord" is that which becomes us; it is our duty and it is "our strength." Yet is there—

III. THE NEED FOR EARNEST PRAYER. (Ver. 25.) 1. That the individual soul may be "saved," strengthened, comforted, sanctified. 2. That the Church, the society, the institution, may be "prospered;" that its officers may be inspired and directed; that its action may be pure in motive and high in aim; that its efforts may be crowned with true and lasting success.

IV. THE PLACE OF SACRIFICE. (Ver. 27.) Jehovah, through his prophets, so enlightened his people that they brought to his altar the acceptable sacrifice. The great Teacher has so enlightened us by his Divine truth, that we have reached the place of purest and most well-pleasing sacrifice—the dedication of the entire *nature*, the mind, the affections, the will, and of the whole *life*, at home, in business, in society, to the service of the Lord.

V. THE SOUL'S DELIGHT IN GOD. The contemplation of God's goodness, and especially of his grace to us, may well lead us into an atmosphere of exultation, and call forth from us the language of fervent praise.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 16.—*The valiant right hand of the Lord*. The history of Israel was full of illustrations and evidences of this. The occasion of this psalm was one of them. But apply the thrice-repeated declaration of the text—

I. TO OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. For: 1. *See how he overcomes Satan*. He was tempted in all points like as we are, and again and again, and yet Satan found nothing in him. 2. *Sin*. He was holy, harmless, and undefiled; he did no sin. 3. *The Law's condemnation*. "He was just, and yet the Justifier of him who," etc. "He magnified the Law, and made it honourable." 4. *Death*. By his resurrection and ascension. 5. *All the works of the devil*. (Cf. 1 Cor. xv. 24.)

II. TO THE TRIUMPHS OF THE GOSPEL. Read the history of the Church, trace its growth and increase, see its onward march still.

III. TO THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVING SOUL. What hindrances we put, and still put, in

our Lord's way! what pride, unbelief, love of sin, and all the rest! and yet one after another he beats them all down.—S. C.

Ver. 17.—“*I shall not die, but live.*” I. THIS PSALM HAS BEEN WELL CALLED THE “HYMN OF DELIVERANCE FROM EXILE,” as the song of Moses was the “Hymn of Deliverance from Egypt.” It is such a *Te Deum* as was possible when as yet the gospel had not been revealed. The enemies of Israel had done their worst. They had compassed Israel “about like bees” (vers. 10—12); they had “thrust sore at him,” that he might fall (ver. 13). But with this recollection, and with the consciousness of bitter enmity still existing, there is mingled the glad confidence, the buoyant hope, that their enemies shall be “quenched as the fire of thorns.” “I shall not die, but live” (vers. 14—17). The psalm pictures Israel keeping high festival, probably at the dedication of the new temple. The day itself was solemnly set apart (ver. 24), and a joyous procession is seen advancing towards the sacred edifice. As it nears the entrance, the warders of the gates are summoned to open them (ver. 19), that the people may go in to praise the Lord. “And then, as the throng passes within, the psalmist notes a circumstance which forms a leading feature in his poem. In building the new temple, some block of stone had been, at first, laid aside as useless, and then, on fuller consideration, it had been lifted up to fill one of the most important positions in the structure.” The sacred poet fastens on this incident, and sees in it the striking suggestion of Israel's own history—a suggestion which our Lord himself takes up and applies to himself as being the most complete fulfilment of its prophecy. Israel had seemed useless, impossible of recovery, unfit altogether for the high purposes for which God had at first designed her. Carried off and apparently lost in the sweltering mob of nationalities in which she had been swallowed up, what good was she capable of? what useful part in the upbuilding of the kingdom of God could she serve? So all men thought, and with apparent abundant reason. But the festival which the psalm celebrates contradicted all that, and the stone, once rejected, but now filling so important a place in the new temple, was the type and prophecy of the high service which yet, and in spite of all past and present obstacles, Israel was called to render in the accomplishment of the good will of God to man. So that she could say, as here she does, “I shall not die, but,” etc.

II. IT WAS ADOPTED BY OUR LORD FOR HIMSELF. Not alone the special part of the psalm (ver. 22), which tells of the rejected but exalted stone (cf. Matt. xxi. 42), but the whole tone and spirit of the psalm. It looked, as the day of his death drew near, as if he were for ever the “Rejected of men.” But the words of our text were his conviction (cf. Luke xviii. 31—33). He, though humbled even to death, and that the death of the cross, yet should he conquer death and live for evermore (Rom. vi. 10; Rev. i. 18). The exile of Israel and their glad return were but shadows of the darkness of the cross, and the glory of Easter Day.

III. IT HAS BEEN EVER TRUE OF THE CHURCH OF GOD. She has been plunged into deepest woe, and brought down to death. 1. *By fierce persecution.* Let the martyr ages tell. 2. *By the growth and spread of false doctrine.* The faith once delivered to the saints has been tampered with, perverted, so that its true character has been lost. 3. *And worse still, moral corruption* has once and again seized on her, and made her a thing of horror to all holy souls. But in each case it has been possible for the faithful remnant to lift up the exultant chant, “I shall not die,” etc.

IV. IT IS THE WELL-WARRANTED HOPE AND CONFIDENCE OF EVERY CHRISTIAN SOUL. 1. *Sometimes the text comes literally true.* Life has all but gone; the powers of the body seemed incapable of recovery; but restoration has been given. Let such restored life be given up to the declaration of the works of the Lord. 2. *In the hour of terrible temptation.* How many a soul has been all but lost, but, grasping the hand of the Lord, has yet been saved! 3. *At the hour of death.* The body dies, but not we.—S. C.

Ver. 19.—“*The gates of righteousness.*” We can have little doubt that this psalm was composed for the dedication of the new temple built by the exiles after their return from Babylon (see Ezra iii.). The events alluded to in the psalm correspond with the history. They had been compassed about by enemies (see ver. 10, etc.). They were dwelling in tents (ver. 15). Nationally they had been near unto death (ver. 15), and

had been chastened sore (ver. 18). There were those that helped them (ver. 7). They were beginning a new work (ver. 25). For all these reasons the psalm has been assigned to the events told of in Ezra iii. They had been in bitter exile, exposed to fierce persecution (see histories in Daniel). But at length the Persian power under Cyrus advances, Babylon is overthrown. It is probable that the Jews sympathized with the Persians because of the similarity between the religions they each professed; and the Persians also with them. At any rate, Cyrus favours them. Under Zerubbabel, Joshua, and Zechariah, a vast throng of them—near fifty thousand—return to their desolate land. They are exposed to the attacks of their old enemies, Moabites, Ammonites, Amalekites; but the power of Persia helps them. At length they reach Jerusalem. Their first step is to build the altar (Ezra iii. 3), thus declaring their allegiance and confidence towards God. Afterwards the building of the temple is proceeded with, and in connection with that this glorious psalm was written. The priests with a vast multitude approach the temple, and, standing before the gates, they cry, "Open to me the gates of," etc. Now wherefore are these gates and all such gates so called? It is because—

I. THE TRUE WORSHIPPERS RECOGNIZE WHAT GOD REQUIRES IN THOSE WHO WORSHIP HIM. (Cf. Ps. xv., xxiv.) Israel, through what they had suffered, had come to see that righteousness was the one demand of God. Hence now they declare that it is only a righteous nation that can enter them. And so it is in the Church to-day. We may call ourselves members of the Church; but that we are not, save as we are righteous. And so it will be in the temple of the Lord on high.

"Those holy gates for ever bar
Pollution, sin, and shame;
None can obtain an entrance there
But followers of the Lamb."

II. WHAT GOD IN HIMSELF IS—THE RIGHTEOUS ONE. The temple is his, and therefore the gates; and therefore, because God is righteous, the gates are gates of righteousness. Zechariah says, "He shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness." The distinction of Israel was that they worshipped a holy God. "The Lord our God is holy." Other gods connived at sin, and set the example of it. But Israel was taught by all the institutions of their Law that God was righteous, and of too pure eyes to behold iniquity. How, then, can any one think that he will tolerate and condone it, that, in fact, he does not mind it? or how can any one pervert the gospel of Christ—as thousands do—and make his righteousness not the pattern, pledge, and form of their own, as it is, but a substitute for it?

III. WHAT GOD WILL GIVE TO HIS PEOPLE—RIGHTEOUSNESS. Those gates lead the true worshipper straight to this gift. It is by the way of the altar, telling of the blood which cleanseth from all sin. All the motive forces of holiness—repentance, faith, love, hope—all gather round the cross of Christ, the place of sacrifice. There we find life, and that life more abundantly.

IV. THE TRUE WORSHIPPER PURPOSES THAT THIS IS WHAT HE WILL RENDER TO GOD—A LIFE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. He has heard the call, "Be ye holy," and he has seen whence and how this holiness can be his, and now it is his fixed resolve to lead that righteous life which God desires, deserves, and demands. Hence he says, "Open to me the gates of righteousness. I will go in to them, and I will praise the Lord."—S. C.

Ver. 24.—*The day the Lord hath made.* The words primarily point to that joyful dedication day of the new temple. Perhaps Israel had been directed specially to observe the day; or, more likely still, the psalmist meant the day of joy and gladness of revived national and religious life. "This is the day the Lord," etc.

L WE MAY APPLY IT TO OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION-DAY. That has been called the day of days, as indeed it was and is to the Church of Christ. That first Easter Day was "the day in his life which he made his own beyond all others. Not his birthday; for that meant his entrance on a life of sorrows. Not his ascension day; for that was the closing scene of a triumph already achieved. Not his transfiguration-day; for that was a momentary flash of glory in a career of pain. Not the day of his crucifixion; that was a great day for a ruined world, but for him it marked the lowest

stage of humiliation and woe. The day of days in the life of Christ was the day of his resurrection." And to the first disciples especially, and to the believing Church still: 1. *This day has the joy of deliverance from a great dread.* They thought they had but their Lord, and that the redemption of Israel was now but an unfulfilled and impossible dream. But that dread departed, driven forth by the joy of the day of resurrection. 2. *And the day brings also the joy of full conviction as to the gospel we believe.* Our Lord and his apostles base all belief of that gospel on the Resurrection; they held it, as do we, as an infallible proof. 3. *The joy of renewed and radiant hope.* "Christ ever liveth:" what now is not possible? For all such reasons the words of the text may be fitly applied to the Easter joy.

II. TO THE LORD'S DAY—THE SABBATH. Who can over-estimate to man's body, mind, heart, and soul what the blessed Sunday brings? Fools and blind are they who, for any reason or by any means, would rob weary-hearted men of this priceless boon.

III. TO THE DAY OF OUR CONVERSION. It is not all that can, nor is it indispensable for any to remember the exact day when that great spiritual change passed upon them. But some have vivid recollection of it; they can tell the time, place, circumstances, and all connected with the day on which they were born again and passed from death unto life. And it may be they are to be envied who can do this, which assuredly many cannot. But they will not hesitate to take such words as these in our text, and apply them to this by them never-to-be-forgotten day.

IV. TO THE DAY OF REVIVAL AND RELIGIOUS PROSPERITY. How blessed such seasons are! God gives them to his Church from time to time. Spring-tide seasons, when there is an energy and quickening and force in the general life of the Church, such as has long been unknown. It was so for Israel when this psalm was first sung, and it has been so many times since. And let no one wait for the whole Church to be thus revived; the blessed time may come—will come, if really longed for—to the individual soul. And that will be a time of joy.—S. C.

Ver. 25.—*Church prosperity.* I. WHAT IS IT? 1. *Not mere numbers.* Crowd-winning is not soul-winning. 2. *Still less mere rank, wealth, and talent in the Church.* He is a fool who despises these things; but he is a still greater one who claims them to be identical with true prosperity, or a substitute for it. 3. *But it consists in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit of God.* This will be seen in the conversion of sinners; in the holiness and zeal of believers; in their increase of unity and love.

II. WHENCE IS IT? It is from God. We are to look to him. We are terribly apt to look elsewhere.

III. HOW IS IT OBTAINED? By waiting upon God with earnest, importunate prayer. "O Lord, I beseech thee," etc. And one such earnest seeker can do much to gain this. It is the prayer of one man—"I beseech thee"—that we have here.

IV. WHEN MAY IT BE HAD? Now! The earnest longing for it is an omen of its approach. The prayer of faith works marvels.

V. WHY SHOULD WE SEEK IT? For our own sake; for the Church's sake; for the world's sake; for Christ's sake.—S. C.

Vers. 27, 28.—*The song of the saved soul.* Thus also may this psalm be regarded. It is falsehood when sung by the godless and unsaved; but if we are Christ's by willing consent, then this song is ours.

I. GOD SHOWS US LIGHT. As at the Creation the Holy Spirit's first work was the giving of the light, so is it in the new creation of the soul. 1. Light as to its real condition—lost, helpless, guilty, condemned. 2. Revealing the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the lost. 3. And as our Keeper and Upholder when saved, by the power of his Holy Spirit. 4. Light as to his will-forces, and our capacity for and obligation to serve him. Has God thus showed us light?

II. THE SOUL PRESENTS ITSELF IN SACRIFICE. This is ever so. Christ is not our sacrifice, unless we are his. If his is for us, ours is unto him. The instinctive utterance of the soul is, "What shall I render unto the Lord?"

III. BUT THIS SACRIFICE WHICH WE BRING NEEDS TO BE BOUND TO THE ALTAR. It used to be said by the Jews that no animals were so restive as those which were brought for sacrifice to the altar. Certainly *our* sacrifice needs to be bound with cords

to the altar. Do we not find how our hearts would go off to the world again? What tendency to turn from Christ there is! The down-drag of the world, the flesh and the devil are terrible indeed. Do we not find this in our prayers? How our minds wander! how difficult to fix our attention! Satan is ever busy with suggestions and temptations to make us take back our sacrifice.

IV. BUT THERE ARE CORDS, TRUSTY AND STRONG, WITH WHICH WE MAY BIND THE SACRIFICE TO THE ALTAR. As it was with our Lord—to whom this whole psalm is for ever pointing us—there were cords which bound him, and the same will bind us. 1. *The cord of love.* This was his motive, and must be ours. Not fear, not the goadings of conscience, not mere sense of duty, but love. "The love of Christ constraineth me," said St. Paul. This is one chief cord. 2. *Faith.* Not mere creed, but trust, reliance. This was one of Christ's cords. His enemies mocked him on the cross, "He trusted in God, that he would deliver him!" They were right; he did ever trust in God. He was sure that his Father's will was right, and that the path ordained for him was the right one. And so must it be with us. We have to walk by faith, not by sight. If we let go our trust, we shall certainly take back the sacrifice we have brought. But trust keeps it on the altar of consecration. 3. *Obedience.* This was the habit of our Lord's life. He did always that which pleased God. And so with us. Let us form the habit of obedience, and we shall find that the very idea of a contrary course becomes alien to the mind. To do God's will becomes almost instinctive with us. 4. *Delight, not mere duty.* (Cf. our Lord's words, Ps. xl. 8.) It is good to do God's will, even when we feel no delight; but how much happier and more effectual is our service when we do! And if we persistently serve the Lord, we shall find delight in his service. These are the cords which held our Lord to his sacrifice, and will hold us to ours.—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*Family experience of Divine mercies.* This is evidently a liturgical psalm, and on the whole it seems best to associate it either with the dedication of the second temple by the returned exiles, or with *their* keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles. The personal expressions in it need not be misunderstood. The speaker is a typical individual representing the nation. (For the probable occasion, see Neh. viii. 13—18.) "The psalm is vividly dramatic, representing the leader of Israel with his train coming to the temple, calling for the gates to be opened to his triumphal entrance, and going in to worship the Lord. The psalm is dramatically distributed to different actors. In vers. 1—4 we have (a) the opening chorus of thanksgiving from the train of the king or leader without and the priests within; then (b) in vers. 5—9 the king thankfully records his deliverance and confidence in the Lord, and his thanksgiving is taken up by a response of like trust; next (c) in vers. 10—16 he again exults in his sure victory over all nations in the Lord's Name, in spite of fierce opposition and danger, and is answered similarly by utterance of triumph from the people; on this, (d) in vers. 16—20, follows his summons to open the gates, answered by consent from within; then (e) in vers. 21—24, entering the temple, he pours out his thanksgiving, and all alike, priests and people, glorify the Lord on 'the day that he has made;' finally, (f) in vers. 25—29, he prays, 'Save, I beseech thee' (*Hosanna*), and is 'blessed as coming in the Name of the Lord;' and the whole psalm ends with a chorus of universal praise to God" (Barry). "One or two writers have thought this psalm to be too legal in its constant dwelling upon the idea of duty. But duty is the fly-wheel of the spiritual machinery. It does not inspire the noble life, it regulates it, and the psalm is for the use of those who have already received inspiration from the sight of the city of God." We fix attention on the first sphere of the enduring Divine mercy. For his goodness in *family life* our thanks are continually due. The *house of Aaron* was the type and representative of the houses (families) of Israel. And God's dealings with it suggest his dealings with *them*.

I. GOD'S FAMILY MERCIES APPEAR AS DIVINE SELECTIONS. We are familiar with the idea that God, in his wisdom and mercy, selects individuals for particular ministries, and honours them with the trust of such ministries; and it is but an enlargement of the truth to see, that in a similar way he selects families and communities and nations. The selection of the *house*, or family, of Aaron for priestly services, and of Heman for musical services, and of David for kingly services, are illustrations. And it is well when families can realize that the mercies of God to them

are not merely comfortable provisions, or business successes, but their selection for high and holy trusts and responsible services.

II. GOD'S FAMILY MERCIES APPEAR AS DIVINE CORRECTIONS. This is very strikingly illustrated in the record of the "house of Aaron." We may even say that the visitations of Divine love in judgment were frequent and severe, as may be illustrated in the deaths of Nadab and Abihu; the limitation of Aaron's own life; the shifting of the priestly order in later years, etc. They who read their life-stories aright—their family life-stories—never hesitate to praise God most of all for the mercy in discipline that was hard to bear.

III. GOD'S FAMILY MERCIES APPEAR AS DIVINE DELIVERANCES. Family life has its perils, its disasters, its wilfulnesses, and its mistakes. These variously affect the heads of the family as well as the members. Every family story is made up of sicknesses, sorrows, follies, and sins, and God's mercies come into the family life at every point of need as redemption, as deliverance. This the psalmists constantly recognize. This we too recognize who fully believe that God is in our family life. He is ever delivering the family from its bad self, from untoward circumstances, and from active foes.

IV. GOD'S FAMILY MERCIES APPEAR AS STRENGTHENING FOR SERVICE. In the case of the "house of Aaron" we have unusually solemn service; but that is only typical of the service which every family has to render, and which it never can render well save as it realizes the strengthening and sustaining mercy of God. Under priestly burdens a man may say, "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake thou for me." But that is precisely what every man *should* say in the bearing of his *own burden*.

V. GOD'S FAMILY MERCIES APPEAR AS HELPS OF ONE ANOTHER. The clinging together and mutual helpfulness of family life are usually traced as due to family dispositions, paternal or maternal characteristics. It is altogether a higher and more inspiring view to see in family brotherliness the signs of the Divine mercy.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Personal experience of Divine mercies.* "Let them now that fear the Lord say, that his mercy endureth for ever." The term "fear the Lord" suggests personal apprehensions of God, personal dealings with God, and personal relations with him. It is inconceivable that there can have been these close personal associations with God without their having left a deep impression of the abundance, adaptation, and continuance of the Divine mercy. No man can look over his life, and trace God's manner of dealing with him, without being disposed to say, "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses;" "Also unto thee belongeth mercy, for thou renderest to every man according to his works." What impressions of the Divine mercies come to us out of our personal experience?

I. THE MERCY OF GOD HAS TAKEN SHAPE AS A DIVINE PATIENCE. That may well be put first, for, when the heart is tender, it is that comes to us most affectingly. When anything like a fitting sense of our own wilfulness and waywardness comes upon our hearts, it is the marvel, over which we never tire of brooding, that God has been so patient with us. Never offended with us, as our fellow-men have easily been; never "dealing with us after our sins, nor rewarding us according to our iniquities." It is not only that he has *quietly waited*, it is that he has so *gently borne* with us. Divine patience is never to be thought of as a mere sitting down and waiting. It is best suggested by a mother's ways with a sickly babe; or the doctor's ways with an irritable, fractious patient. There be many to whom God's mercy always appears as his patience and long-suffering, and they praise him for that.

II. THE MERCY OF GOD HAS TAKEN SHAPE AS A DIVINE DISCIPLINE. This is the thought that comes to us as life advances, and the events of the past gain their true perspective. At the time things seemed to be afflictions, calamity, needless strain, and we fretted ourselves weary in trying to find why such hard things were put into our lot. Distance from them increases, and we find they look quite differently. Things are related which we thought had nothing to do with each other. We see how our cultured power came out of our stern experiences; and then we see that God's *mercy* is the way in which he has made the hard things of life train and discipline characters meet for the heavenly spheres.—R. T.

Vers. 5, 6.—*God's power in a human life.* The figure in ver. 5 is very striking and suggestive. The Hebrew is, "I called upon the Lord from the straitness;" or, "From the narrow gorge I called upon Jah, and Jah answered me in the open plain." It is not necessary to fix any historical associations to the psalm in order to see the point of such a figure. It does but poetically represent a common experience. Continually in human life we come upon times of straitness; our way is hedged up; it is as if we were in a narrow gorge, full of fears lest the overhanging rocks should fall on us, and seeing no way out. Who has not thus felt hemmed in? "All these things are against us." Human wisdom, energy, and persistency alike are baffled and beaten back. "We cannot do the things that we would." Every one and everything seems to be against us. And at such times we easily think hard things of our fellow-men, and think that they are actively *against us*, when they are only indifferent. What can the psalmist say of such times?

I. FROM THE NARROW GORGE HE CALLED UPON GOD. That at least we can always do. No circumstances of human life need ever prevent the soul's uplook, or silence the soul's cry. Bunyan pictures his pilgrim in sore straitness, picking his perilous way through the Valley of the Shadow. Weapons are of no use there. Human care and skill and watching are of small avail there. But there is one thing the pilgrim can do, and that one thing is everything—he can pray; he can "call upon the Lord." It is well to fix that truth of fact, and to illustrate it fully. There is no perplexity, worry, disaster, or depression can ever come to any man, and destroy his *power to pray*. Oppress and alarm a man how you may, in any narrow gorge of life, he can always pray. Nothing can overwhelm a man while he can *call upon God*.

II. IN THE OPEN PLAIN HE HAD THE RESPONSE OF GOD. The figure is kept up. The pilgrim-soul, with the uplifted eyes, presses forward through the darkness or the mist, which permits him to see but one step at a time; and then suddenly the dawn breaks or the mist lifts, and he is filled with a joyous surprise. He is in the gorge no longer; behold, it is the "open plain;" there is plenty of space all around, and the restful blue sky up above, and a clear way before his feet; God has heard his call; he is on his side. Neither man nor things can hurt him now. And such is the experience of all the saints.—R. T.

Vers. 8, 9.—*The really better may not be the apparently better.* It may truly be said that the object of the discipline and experience of life is to deliver us from the fascination of what *seems*, and to get our conduct and relationships swayed and characterized and toned by what *is*. This, indeed, is presented in Eastern religions in extravagant forms (see the notion of *Maya*, illusion, from which men have to deliver themselves). But we never need refuse to accept a truth, because somebody, somewhere, has exaggerated it into a mischievous untruth. Creatures conditioned by senses, and placed in sense-relations, as we are, must live in a world of appearances; we can only know what our senses present to us, and they can only present the *accidents* of things. Reflection, working on the things which the senses offer to us, gradually helps us to the apprehension of that which is—the substance and reality of things. The psalmist here is expressing this fact of life in one of its forms and relations. Man is always disposed to trust in his fellow-man, and especially in those of his fellow-men who may occupy positions of authority and power. We all incline to trust in man, especially in princes. We can see them. We have sense-estimates of them. We can sensibly apprehend what they can do for us. We fly to, and lean upon, human helpers in every emergency of life.

I. LEANING UPON MAN MAY BE GOOD. It is not necessary to think or speak as if men were always untrustworthy. True, there is always an element of uncertainty in man, and an absolute reliance is not possible. But it would be wholly untrue to say that men always fail us. We have all proved, over and over again, how loyal, constant, and faithful the friends of our life have been. Some of the purest and most satisfying joys we have ever had in life have come out of our human fellowships. The psalmist is therefore true to fact when he speaks of something *better*, and implies that this confidence in man may be *good*.

II. LEANING UPON GOD MUST BE BETTER. Just what advancing life and experience bring home to us is that the *unseen* is the real and permanent. And the very heart

and essence of the unseen is God. All reality is unseen; it takes on appearance for the sake of the senses. We are passing on into the unseen; and we reach rest and satisfaction in the measure of our apprehending the unseen as we move towards the consummation. It is *better* to keep in the sphere of the "real." It is *better* to "trust in God."—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*Acting in the Divine Name.* "In the Name of the Lord I will cut them off." The idea in the mind of the psalmist may be illustrated by the old custom of going into battle in the inspiration of some motto. Thus Gideon gave his heroes this battle-cry, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!" Down to quite modern times it was the custom for generals to give their armies a motto, a word, or a name, under the inspiration of which they were to fight; and it does not take much observation of human nature to enable us to recognize the value of such mottoes or names in kindling enthusiasm, and inciting to heroic endeavour or endurance. The psalmist is using martial figures; he is thinking of *enemies*, and cheering his soul for the conflict with them by looking again and again at his banner, and seeing the Jehovah-name inscribed thereon.

I. ACTING IN THE DIVINE NAME IS THE RIGHT OF JEHOVAH'S SERVANTS. The good man—from the Christian point of view we say the *renewed* man—is a self-consecrated man to God's service, and a graciously accepted man as God's servant. Then he becomes everywhere an ambassador for God, a messenger from God, and has the absolute right of acting everywhere in his Master's Name. So the apostles persistently call themselves the "servants," bond-slaves, of Jesus Christ, and claim the right of speaking and acting in his Name. This opens up the question—What is the nature of the authority which can be claimed for the Christian teacher? He has authority so far only as he speaks and acts, genuinely and wholly, in the Name of his Master. Illustration may be taken from the pope's assumed infallibility in his *ex cathedra* utterances.

II. ACTING IN THE DIVINE NAME IS THE STRENGTH OF JEHOVAH'S SERVANTS. This may be opened in two ways. 1. The Name acts upon a true-hearted man as a reviving, inspiring, strengthening force, much as the queen's name does on a field of battle. 2. God actually gives strength for warfare and service to all who loyally act in his Name. Illustrate by 1 Sam. xvii. 45.

III. ACTING IN THE DIVINE NAME IS THE VICTORY OF JEHOVAH'S SERVANTS. Because God is jealous of the honour of his Divine Name, and cannot permit it to be associated with failure. Let our enemies encompass us as bees do their combs (see LXX.), they can do no harm. They flare up, as does the fire of thorns; but they die down at once. The Divine Name has never been dishonoured by any permanent defeat; nor has he ever been who loyally acted in the Divine Name.—R. T.

Ver. 18.—*What God seems to be and what God is.* We are constantly oppressed with the mystery of God's permissions. He permits afflictions to visit us, and often-times to take very trying forms. We can say, "He hath chastened me sore." But it is a great relief to find that our experience is but the experience of the saints of all ages. It is the old and age-long trouble of all who will live godly in this sinful world. God must put them into discipline, and the forms it takes must, of necessity, sometimes seem strange. Divine dealings would not always do their appointed work if we thoroughly understood them. There is no call to *trust* when we have perfect *sight*. "What I do thou knowest not now." In the olden days, and still, there appear, to the godly man, most oppressive differences between what God seems, and what God is. We are distressed while we do but look at what God *seems*, and we gain rest when we look at what God *is*.

I. WHAT GOD SEEMS. Illustrate from the mists of mountain-lands. "Clouds and darkness are round about him" (Ps. xcvi. 2). 1. See what God *seems* in nature. Take single things, and we may easily get wrong impressions. Look at nature as a whole, and it becomes clear that all things are working together towards issues that are right and good. 2. See what God *seems* in human lives. Take single incidents—an untimely death; a sweeping pestilence; a crushed enterprise; a wasting sickness; and it seems as if there were nothing but "cloud and darkness," the mystery of a strange

and unreasoning sovereignty round God and his ways. But look at life as a whole, and it soon comes into view that this thing is working in with that, and all are working together for good, through the controlling of him who is love and who loves. Only, if we would see things clearly, and apprehend them aright, we must keep two things in mind. (1) That God's *good* is not circumstance; it is character, which finds expression in varying circumstance. (2) For some of us God's idea may be our vicarious suffering for the sake of others. And of this the Lord Jesus affords the sublime example. Affliction is often an insoluble mystery (as was Job's affliction), until it is seen to be Divine agency for working good to others. And God graciously honours some to suffer as *his agents*. 3. See what God *seems* in Divine revelations. Here again single things are often most perplexing, because their form and shaping are, in the first instance, precisely fitted to times and seasons, and we find it so difficult to separate the form from the thing, the kernel from the husk. Single things can only be "parts of God's ways." But to us, in these latter days, the revelations of all the ages have been given, duly set in order and relation. We ought to be able to fit so many things of Divine revelation together, as to fully convince ourselves that all *do fit*.

II. WHAT GOD IS. This we find out through personal experiences. "He hath not given me over unto death," though he seems to be a "sore chastener." Experiences correct appearances. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee." "We walk by faith"—soul-vision, which reveals what *is*—"not by sight"—bodily vision, which only reveals what *seems*. To some the clouds about Sinai were God; just as to some travellers the mists hanging about the mountain are the mountain. We want to know what God *is*. "This is eternal life, to know thee, the only true God." And it is infinite satisfaction to discover that he is *righteousness*. And righteousness involves and includes *love*, as certainly as it does *holiness* and *wisdom*. When we find for ourselves what God *is*, we can describe him thus: "The Being who is always right;" or, as a psalmist expresses it, "Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of his throne." He is right in himself, "just;" and right in his doings, ever doing justice—and justice is not justice unless mercy is at the heart of it. When this is well fixed into our very mind and soul, then we get above and beyond all the evil influence of the *things that seem*; we begin to get vision of the *things that are*. Right may still seem stern; but we know it must be kind. Right may still seem strange; but we know it must be wise. We cannot stop with this—"He hath chastened me sore." We must go on; we must say what else—what is the full fact, what *is*? And then we have to say, "*But* he hath not given me over unto death."—R. T.

Ver. 19.—*Public praise for personal deliverance.* The psalm may be taken as expressing individual experiences or sentiments, or the psalmist may be regarded as representing the nation, and expressing national feeling. There is distinct recognition of past trouble and suffering, as God's well-deserved chastening. The returned exiles looked on their humiliating captivity in Babylon as such a time of chastening. Then our text will associate with the dedication of the new (Ezra) temple; and we may picture the nation in procession, with the governor at the head, advancing to the gates of the temple, and then, in formal Eastern style, making loud public demand for admittance. But it is even more directly practical for us to think of the psalmist as using these public events to help his own private meditations. Certainly we may use the psalm in this way, when we have recovered from some Divine chastisement, which imperilled life, and feel that we want to go into the house of the Lord, to give thanks unto the Name of the Lord.

I. OUR DELIVERANCES FROM DANGER SHOULD HAVE PRIVATE RECOGNITION. On this it would be too familiar to insist. He who receives is honourably bound to thank the giver, and feels a natural impulse so to do. But a man may fairly urge that his duty is done when he has thanked the donor personally and privately; and that he is under no obligation to talk about it to everybody, or to send a notice of his thankfulness to the newspapers. On this line men plead when more than the private recognition of God's goodness to them is demanded. They *have* thanked God, and that is enough.

II. OUR DELIVERANCE FROM DANGER SHOULD HAVE PUBLIC RECOGNITION. Because he from whom we have received the blessing is a public Being, who sustains relations

to others as well as ourselves; and whose direct acts in relation to one are designed to inspire confidence in the others, and therefore must be made known. If our donor is the sovereign of the land, it is a right feeling that impels us to *make known* her goodness to us. When the prince was brought back from the gates of death, the right feeling of the nation demanded a national service of thanksgiving, and this psalm may be efficiently illustrated by the great service at St. Paul's. In this matter Christian sentiment needs to be directed. In communities where the element of worship is not prominent, public acts of praise and thanksgiving are sadly neglected. True feeling says, "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the Name of the Lord."—R. T.

Ver. 22.—*The stone in the corner.* "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner." This may be the rejoicing of the leader of the procession, when it is admitted within the gates of the new temple, and advances towards the great altar. We must remember that we have here poetical figure, and we must not endeavour to force the language, as if it were descriptive fact. The figure is a very familiar one. God constantly makes the "weak things of this world confound the things that are mighty." Israel, as a nation, was like a despised stone in Babylon; now that it had again its sacred temple, it might easily be thought of as having become the corner-stone of the temple of religion for humanity. "This saying was true of David, the despised one among the sons of Jesse, but raised to be the ruler of Israel and the progenitor of Christ. It was true of his descendant Zerubbabel, the head of the returning Israelites after the Captivity, whose person and work were despised (Zech. iv. 10), but who began and finished the building, and who 'brought forth the head-stone with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it!' (Zech. iv. 7). But it was to be fulfilled in the largest sense by Messiah, as the Jews themselves acknowledge." "Israel is this stone, rejected as of no account in the political plans of those who were trying to shape the destinies of the Eastern nations at their own pleasure, but in the purpose of God destined to a chief place in the building up of history." "The emblem applies with the fullest meaning to our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though rejected by the Jewish authorities, was nevertheless destined to unite both Jews and Gentiles in one vast and glorious spiritual building."

I. THE ELEVATIONS AND BENEDICTIONS OF GOD ARE ALWAYS A SURPRISE TO THE MODEST AND HUMBLE SOUL. Their natural feeling leads them to wonder why God has dealt so graciously with them. They contrast their insignificance in themselves with the dignities to which God lifts them; and feel the surprise of Divine grace.

II. MODEST AND HUMBLE SOULS ARE THE ONES BEST FITTED TO RECEIVE DIVINE ELEVATIONS AND BENEDICTIONS. The man who glories in what he attains, as if he had obtained it himself, is proved unworthy of the elevation, and is not likely to make the best of it. The David-mood is always more hopeful than the Solomonic. In what mood do we regard the triumphs of Divine grace in our lives?—R. T.

Ver. 24.—*The God-made day.* Jesus, rejected by the whole Hebrew nation, and put to death, but raised from the grave, may be taken as the subject of these verses. In our variable climate we often have a cold and dark day followed by one full of sunshine and warmth. Such was the last sabbath of the old dispensation, when Jesus was in his grave. Suddenly the clouds disappeared, and God made another day—the first day of the week—a holy and joyful sabbath to all Christians. The first sabbath was desecrated by the Crucifixion; the Lord's day was hallowed by the Resurrection.

I. THE LORD'S DAY IS COMMEMORATIVE OF THE GREAT VICTORY OF JESUS OVER HIS ENEMIES. Apparently everything had succeeded that aimed at ending the life and career of Jesus. The Corner-stone was rejected by the chief builders of the day. Jesus was in his grave; the disciples were disheartened; and Jerusalem was exulting over the temporary triumph of Friday. The contest, however, was not decided; on the morning of the first day of the week, Jesus rose from the dead; his disciples sprang to their feet, and the Resurrection sealed every word that he had uttered, and every deed that he had accomplished. It was the *confirmation* of his life. 1. It was a victory over calumny and misrepresentation. He came forth the Son of God. 2. It was a victory over the weakness and faithlessness of his disciples. The Crucifixion made them

cowards, the Resurrection made them heroes. 3. It was a victory over death and the grave. He who rose has "the keys of Hades and of death."

II. IN THE LORD'S DAY WE HAVE THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL GREAT DAYS. The day of creation here finds its consummation. Had not the Lord made this day, we might think that God had made all things in vain. The sabbath at the end of creation was only a symbol of the Lord's day. God then rested from all his works; but that rest was disturbed by the entrance of sin. The day Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage; the day the tabernacle of Moses was consecrated; the day the promised land was reached; the day Solomon's temple was dedicated; the Day of Atonement; the birthday of Jesus; and even the day of final judgment, point to, and derive their significance from, the Lord's day. 1. Here we realize the end of created things. 2. Here we find the bond of union between time and eternity. 3. The significance of all religious festivals is found in this day.

III. THE LORD'S DAY IS THE CHRISTIAN FESTIVAL. Not only is it a sabbath of rest from manual labour; it is also the token of spiritual peace and blessing. 1. A day of communion with God. 2. A day of association with the saints. 3. A day of fellowship in the home circle.

IV. THE LORD'S DAY IS THE PORCH OF IMMORTALITY. The light shines from the tomb. 1. The day that promises the absence of all mental darkness. The Sunday disperses the gloom and doubt of the week. A little while ago we had snow and sleet for several days; but one bright warm day came, and swept away the snow. 2. The day whose light dies into the light of immortality. The sabbath of time dissolves into the peace of heaven. 3. The day that will bring everlasting praise to the Name of Jesus. (From *Weekly Pulpit*.)—R. T.

Ver. 27.—*Sacrifice as a sign of devotion.* "Bind the sacrifice with cords, yea, even up to the horns of the altar." The various interpretations of this difficult passage are given elsewhere in this work. There is a various rendering, "up to the altar," instead of "unto;" and a various reading, "with willows," instead of "with cords," which are very suggestive. From Lev. xxiii. 40 we learn that tree branches and willows were used as decorations for the Feast of Tabernacles, and therefore "willows" may stand for decorations as expressions of rejoicing. We have then to picture the procession, representing the nation, advancing to dedicate the new temple, and join in the first public service of thanksgiving. It is certain that they would have with them, in the procession, the representative national sacrifice, the bullock which was to be the burnt offering for the nation, and, in the most solemn way, carry the full consecration of the nation to God. When the procession has reached the court near the great altar, and the leader has spoken his words of humble and reverent rejoicing and thanksgiving, what is more natural than that he should call out to bring forward the burnt offering? "Deck it gaily; cover it with boughs; bring it on; lead it right through the crowd; bring it right up to the altar; fasten it to the very horns." In this light the difficult passage becomes simple and natural, and suggests the following:—

I. GENUINE DEVOTION WANTS TO GIVE SOMETHING. Pious and devout minds never can content themselves with *words* of trust, thankfulness, or worship. There is a kind of inward suspicion that words are not enough, and may cost little, and be insincere. Let a man be really thankful, and he will want to make some outward and visible sign of his feeling.

II. GENUINE DEVOTION SEEKS A GIFT THAT CAN FITTINGLY REPRESENT ITSELF. And so it always takes form as *sacrifice*, a gift that costs something, some self-denial. If devotion is at its fullest, it is a whole consecration of ourselves to God; and just this is the thing represented by the "burnt offering" of Mosaism. But when full devotion seeks to represent itself in its gift, it counts it essential to the worthiness of the gift that it should be offered willingly and cheerfully. It always wants to give its burnt offering gaily decked with flowers and willows—as beautiful as it is complete.—R. T.

Ver. 25.—*A sermon on religious revival.* What is a revival of religion? In general terms it is synonymous with the *prosperity* here prayed for; or the wider salvation implied in the "Save now, I beseech thee!" If this was a psalm composed for the opening of the second temple, as is likely, after the return from exile, we can see

plainly what the "saving" and "prosperity" mean—a renewal of more than the faith and heroic words of the patriarchs, warriors, psalmists, and prophets of former days—a renewal that should embrace the whole of the people.

I. A REVIVAL, WHETHER INDIVIDUAL OR NATIONAL, SUPPOSES AN ANTECEDENT RELIGION, THE POWER OF WHICH HAS DECLINED OR BEEN LOST. The *spirit* of our relation to Christ has evaporated, and left little but the forms of Christianity. "I have somewhat against thee, because *thou hast left thy first love*;" "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead;" "Thy *works* are not perfect before God;" "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm." And all this may be conjoined with a complacent satisfaction with ourselves. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," etc.

II. A REVIVAL DOES NOT MEAN SIMPLY A RECOVERY OF WHAT HAS BEEN LOST, BUT OF HIGHER AND STRONGER QUALITIES IN ADVANCE OF THE PREVIOUS STAGE. Such as will preserve us from future declensions. Much of the power of our early religion is immature, and needs recasting in a higher mould. Our first love decays because it is not pure enough to live—has so much selfishness mingled with it; our early *faith* encountered few doubts and difficulties, and, till it has been tried in many a fiery ordeal, it is only superficial impression, and not the power that overcometh the world, the flesh, and the devil. The *first works* are only partial and imperfect obedience; the sacrifice of the whole being to Christ comes later, if it comes at all.

III. TRUE REVIVAL DOES NOT MEAN, THEREFORE, SPASMODIC EXCITEMENT, BUT STEADY CONTINUOUS GROWTH OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. True manhood is not the recovery of our youth, but a development into a greater, nobler life; an increase of acquired power for thinking and doing greater things than the youth could ever conceive or do. It is the symmetrical, harmonious development of the spiritual faculties of our nature—the reason, the heart, the conscience, and the imagination. And all such growth means the culture of the whole man; religious discipline—discipline by means of *faith* that realizes the invisible, of *prayer* that realizes our relations with the power of God, and of the will and the affections teaching us where the true secrets of our power lie.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXIX.

THIS is an "alphabetic psalm" of a more stringent character than any other. It consists of twenty-two stanzas, each of eight verses, every verse in each stanza beginning with its own proper letter—those of stanza 1 with *aleph*, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet; those of stanza 2 with *beth*, the second letter; and so on. The writer, having thus fettered himself, moves with some difficulty, but still has produced what has been justly called "a sweetly monotonous meditation" (Cheyne). He takes the Law for his one and only subject, and, further, seems to have bound himself, almost absolutely, to introduce the word "Law," or something which he regards as a synonym of "Law," into every verse. The synonyms are nine in number—

1. **TORAH**, "the Law" itself; but not merely the law given on Mount Sinai; rather, God's law in the widest sense, all

whereby he has intimated his will to man.

2. **'EDVOth**, or **'EDOTH**, "testimonies." God's commands, considered as witnesses to his character, and as attesting his will.

3. **MISHPATIM**, "judgments." Judicial pronouncements by act or word against particular lines of conduct.

4. **KHUQQIM**, "statutes"—once translated "ordinances" (ver. 91). Enactments of God as Legislator, but not confined to the written Law.

5. **DABAR** or **DEDARIM**, "God's Word" or "Words." His actual spoken or written utterances.

6. **PIQQUDIM**, "precepts." Instructions given to men to direct their conduct.

7. **MITSROTH**, "commandments." Only slightly differing from *piqqudim*—rather wider.

8. **IMEAH**, properly "promise," but used rather as a variant, instead of *dabar*, and extending to all God's utterances.

9. DAREK or DERAKIM, "way" or "ways." Prescribed lines of conduct (very seldom used).

The synonyms from 1 to 8 occur, each of them twenty times, or oftener, in the psalm. *Darek* (*derakim*) occurs only four times. *Emunah*, which has been called a synonym (Kay), scarcely deserves to be so considered. It is only wanted as a synonym once (ver. 90).

The excellence of "the Law" is considered in almost every possible aspect.

N ALEPH.

Ver. 1.—Blessed are the undefiled in the way; rather, *the perfect*, or *those that are perfect* (Revised Version). The "way" intended is, no doubt, "the way of righteousness" (Pss. i. 7; xliii. 3, etc.). Who walk in the Law of the Lord. Compare the introductory paragraph for the meaning of "Law" in this psalm. This clause is exegetical of the preceding.

Ver. 2.—Blessed are they that keep his testimonies. A variant expression for keeping the Law, rather than the specification of a particular part of it. And that seek him with the whole heart. This is the emphatic portion of the verse. An obedience "from the heart" is alone acceptable to God (see Pss. xxxvi. 10; lxi. 10; cxix. 34, 58, 69, 145).

Ver. 3.—They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. Positive righteousness includes negative. Those who walk always in God's Law (ver. 1) will, *à fortiori*, keep clear of all iniquity.

Ver. 4.—Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently; rather, *thou hast ordained thy precepts for diligent observance*, or *for men to observe them diligently*. Men sometimes give precepts which they do not care to have obeyed; but God's precepts are intended for careful, diligent, and continual observance. The "thou" at the beginning (*attah*) is emphatic.

Ver. 5.—Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! The first four verses of the stanza are concerned with the Law in itself; the last four treat of the writer's relation to it. He begins by expressing the wish that he, at any rate, may always observe it.

Ver. 6.—Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments. In that case I shall not be ashamed, either before God or man. Shame follows transgression: I shall escape shame, if my obedience is perfect.

Ver. 7.—I will praise thee with upright-

ness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments. But, before the Law can be observed, it must be known and understood. This, then, is the first thing. Then obedience and acceptable praise will follow.

Ver. 8.—I will keep thy statutes. This is my will and wish (see ver. 5); but, that I may be able to carry it out, O forsake me not utterly. Without thee I have no strength to do aright.

2 BETH.

Ver. 9.—Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? It does not follow from this inquiry that the writer is a "young man"—rather the reverse. He is anxious to give advice to young men, which is naturally the part of one somewhat advanced in life. By taking heed thereto, according to thy Word. This is the answer to the question raised in clause 1. By looking to God's Word, and guiding himself thereby, the young man may "cleanse his way"—not otherwise.

Ver. 10.—With my whole heart have I sought thee (comp. ver. 2). O let me not wander from thy commandments; *i.e.* "let me not accidentally and through ignorance stray from the right path."

Ver. 11.—Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee; rather, *thy promise* (*imrah*). To have God's word of promise laid up in the heart is the only security against being surprised into sin.

Ver. 12.—Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes. God's statutes are really known to those only whom God teaches. By nature we have but a faint glimmer of their meaning. God must teach us by his Spirit ere we can apprehend them aright.

Ver. 13.—With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." The "word" hid in the psalmist's heart (ver. 11) could not but rise to his lips on fit occasion, and be set forth before the people for their edification—more especially as there was an express command binding upon all Israelites to teach the Law to their children and dependants (see particularly Deut. vi. 7).

Ver. 14.—I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches (comp. ver. 72). God's Word is a treasure, beyond expression precious, calculated to rejoice the heart of all such as possess it.

Ver. 15.—I will meditate in thy precepts. The full force of the Divine precepts is not to be grasped except by prolonged meditation on them. God's commandments are "exceeding broad" (ver. 96). And have

respect unto thy ways; or, "consider them," "reflect upon them."

Ver. 16.—I will delight myself in thy statutes (comp. vers. 24, 40, 47, 70, 77, etc.; and see also Ps. i. 2). I will not forget thy Word. That which is "laid up in the heart" (ver. 11) can never be forgotten.

1 GIMEL.

Ver. 17.—Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy Word; rather, *grant unto thy servant that I may live*. Give me the blessing of a long life, that so my keeping of thy Word may be long. The psalmist seems to be praying especially for himself; but the argument of his prayer will extend to all "servants of the Lord."

Ver. 18.—Open thou mine eyes. Since the Fall, men's eyes are naturally blinded, or, at any rate, have a veil over them, which God must remove before they can see clearly (compare the comment on ver. 15). That I may behold wondrous things out of thy Law. Wonderful spiritual truths that lie hidden, even under the very simplest precepts of God's Law (comp. Matt. v. 21-37).

Ver. 19.—I am a stranger in the earth; or, "a sojourner" (Cheyne, Kay, Revised Version); comp. Ps. xxxix. 12; Heb. xi. 13-16. Earth is not our true home. We all "seek a country." Hide not thy commandments from me. God "hides" things from the wise and prudent which he reveals to "babes." The psalmist prays that the true meaning of God's Word may not be kept back from him.

Ver. 20.—My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times. This is given as a reason for the prayer of ver. 19.

Ver. 21.—Thou hast rebuked the proud. It is difficult to connect this with the preceding. But perhaps the link may be found in the double sense of *mishpatim*, "judgments," which includes verbal sentences against sinners delivered in the Law, and also actual sentences upon them in deed and fact. These last are in the writer's mind in the present verse—such judgments as those upon Pharaoh (Exod. xiv. 23-31), Zerah (2 Chron. xiv. 9-15), and Sennacherib (2 Kings xix. 32-37). That are cursed. This clause is questioned, as metrically redundant. But Hebrew metrology is scarcely as yet an exact science. And the clause finds its justification in Deut. xxvii. 26. Which do err from thy commandments. Such error brings under a curse those who commit it. If it be a blessed thing to walk in God's Law (ver. 1), it must be a cursed thing to transgress against it.

Ver. 22.—Remove from me reproach and

contempt. God's servants almost necessarily incur the reproach and contempt of the worldly, to whom their conduct seems folly or madness. Christ himself was "despised" (Isa. liii. 3) and reproached (Matt. xi. 19). For I have kept thy testimonies (comp. vers. 31, 51, 87, etc.).

Ver. 23.—Princes also did sit and speak against me. The great of the earth too often take part against the righteous, and join in persecuting them and calumniating them (comp. ver. 161). But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes; i.e. I took no heed of their calumnies—they did not trouble me. I gave myself to meditation on thy commandments.

Ver. 24.—Thy testimonies also are my delight (comp. vers. 16, 47, 70, 77, etc.) and my counsellors; i.e. my best advisers. I learn from them—better than in any other way—how I ought to act (comp. ver. 105).

7 DALETH.

Ver. 25.—My soul cleaveth unto the dust. My soul is greatly depressed—lies, as it were, in the dust of death (comp. Ps. xlii. 25). Quicken thou me according to thy Word. Raise me up to life and health and vigour.

Ver. 26.—I have declared thy ways, and thou heardest me; i.e. "I have opened my griefs to thee, O God, and poured forth my heart before thee. I am confident that thou didst listen to me." Teach me thy statutes. That I may show my gratitude by keeping them (comp. ver. 33).

Ver. 27.—Make me to understand the way of thy precepts. Exegetical of the last clause of ver. 26. What the psalmist longs for is to have a perfect knowledge of God's Law in all its breadth (ver. 96) and depth (Ps. xcii. 5) and fulness. So shall I talk of thy wondrous works; rather, *so will I muse upon thy marvels* (so Kay, Cheyne, and the Revised Version). The "marvels" spoken of are "the wondrous things of God's Law" (ver. 18).

Ver. 28.—My soul melteth for heaviness (comp. Ps. cvii. 26; and, for the sentiment, see ver. 25). Strengthen thou me according unto thy Word; i.e. according to thy promise to help thy faithful ones (comp. vers. 25, 41, 49, 58, 76, etc.).

Ver. 29.—Remove from me the way of lying; i.e. the way of apostasy, or irreligion, of departure from God. And grant me thy Law graciously. Make it known to me by a Divine illumination.

Ver. 30.—I have chosen the way of truth. The converse of "the way of lying" (ver. 29), the path of true religion, of faithfulness and steadfastness to God. Thy judgments have I laid before me. Thy

commandments have I set before my eyes as rules to be observed constantly.

Ver. 31.—I have stuck unto thy testimonies; or, “cleaved” (ver. 25); i.e. kept firm and steadfast to them. The writer does not mean to assert sinlessness, but only sincerity of intention, and a general endeavour to do right. O Lord, put me not to shame. Suffer me not to fall from thee in such sort that I am put to an open shame.

Ver. 32.—I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart. The phrase used in the second clause is ambiguous. It may mean, “For thou hast enlarged my heart.”

II. H.

Ver. 33.—Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes. This is the main prayer of the psalm—a prayer for spiritual enlightenment. It occurs eight times (vers. 12, 26, 33, 64, 68, 108, 124, and 135). And I shall keep it unto the end. Either “to the end of my life,” or (as Dr. Kay thinks) “to the uttermost.”

Ver. 34.—Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy Law; i.e. make me fully to understand thy Law, and then I shall assuredly keep it. If I fail now, it is from lack of wisdom, not of will. Yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart (comp. ver. 69).

Ver. 35.—Make me to go in the path of thy commandments. Keep me, i.e., from straying out of the right path, through ignorance or negligence. For therein do I delight (comp. vers. 16, 24, 47, 70, 77, 111, 174).

Ver. 36.—Incline my heart unto thy testimonies. The writer recognizes that the right inclination of the heart, which he claims to have (vers. 7, 10, 32, 34, etc.), is itself the gift of God. And not to covetousness; or, “to gain” (comp. ver. 72).

Ver. 37.—Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity. Let me not be distracted from thy service by the “vanities” of the world—wealth, honour, power, glory, and the like; rather, quicken thou me in thy way. Give me increased life, strength, and vigour, to walk continually in the way of thy commandments.

Ver. 38.—Stablish thy Word unto thy servant; or, “make good thy promise unto thy servant”—thy promise of aid and support in all times of temptation and difficulty. Who is devoted to thy fear; rather, *which belongeth unto thy fear*. The antecedent to the relative is “word” or “promise,” and not “servant;” and the prayer is that God will make good to his servant that promise, which lies at the root of all reverence and godly fear (comp. Ps. cxxx. 4, “There is

forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared”).

Ver. 39.—Turn away my reproach, which I fear; i.e. “turn away from me the only reproach of which I am afraid—the reproach of transgressing against thy Law” (comp. ver. 31). For thy judgments are good. Right in themselves, and conducive to man’s happiness.

Ver. 40.—Behold, I have longed after thy precepts (comp. vers. 20 and 131). There are those—few, it may be, but truly blessed—who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt. v. 6). Quicken me in thy righteousness (comp. ver. 37). Help my efforts to walk in thy righteous ways.

I. V. A.

Ver. 41.—Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord; rather, *and let thy mercies come unto me*. Each verse of this stanza begins with the *con* conjunctive. Even thy salvation, according to thy Word; or, “thy promise” (*imrah*). God’s Word was pledged, that he would grant mercy and salvation to all his faithful servants (Deut. xxviii. 1—13).

Ver. 42.—So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me (comp. ver. 22). If God’s favour were manifestly shown him, his enemies would be sufficiently answered. For I trust in thy Word. This is what he looks for, since he has a full trust in God’s promises to his servants.

Ver. 43.—And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth. “The word of truth” here is the “well-grounded answer” that the psalmist looks to make to those who reproach him (Hengstenberg). (See the preceding verse.) If God does not grant him “mercy and salvation” (ver. 41), this answer will be “taken out of his mouth.” For I have hoped in thy judgments. I have trusted in thy vindication of my character, and in thy judgments upon my foes.

Ver. 44.—So shall I keep thy Law continually for ever and ever. God’s mercy will draw forth the psalmist’s gratitude, and make his obedience perfect and perpetual.

Ver. 45.—And I will walk at liberty. *Rekhabah* is literally “the open square of a city,” hence “a wide, open, free space.” In obeying God’s commandments the psalmist will not feel himself under constraint, but a wholly free agent. For I seek thy precepts. Inclination, not constraint, makes him obey God’s precepts—he “seeks” them, “loves” them (ver. 47), “delights in” them (vers. 16, 24, 47).

Ver. 46.—I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings. If occasion offer, I will bear my witness to the excellence of thy Law, even before kings. And will not be

ashamed; i.e. will not allow shame to stop my mouth. The writer is evidently not a king himself, probably not among the great ones of the earth (see vers. 51, 69, 78, 85, etc.).

Ver. 47.—And I will delight myself in thy commandments (comp. vers. 14, 16, 24, 35, 77, etc.). Which I have loved (see below, vers. 48, 97, 113, 119, 127, 159, 163, 167).

Ver. 48.—My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved. In a sort of qualified worship (comp. Gen. xiv. 22; Pss. xxviii. 2; cxxxiv. 2; cxli. 2; Lam. iii. 41). And I will meditate in thy statutes. Almost a repetition of ver. 15a.

† ZAIN.

Ver. 49.—Remember the word unto thy servant; i.e. "the word spoken to thy servant." Some special Divine communication made to the writer is perhaps meant. Upon which (rather, *because*) thou hast caused me to hope (comp. vers. 74, 81, 147).

Ver. 50.—This is my comfort in my affliction. *Nekhamah*, "comfort," occurs only here and in Job vi. 10; but the meaning is well ascertained. For thy Word hath quickened me; or, "thy promise." The "word," whatever it was, referred to in ver. 49. This had given the psalmist new life.

Ver. 51.—The proud have had me greatly in derision; rather, *proud men*. There is no article. (For the "derision" to which the righteous are always exposed, see Job xxx. 1, 9; Pss. xxxv. 16; xlii. 13, 14; Lam. iii. 14; Jer. xx. 7, etc.) Yet have I not declined (or, *swerved*) from thy Law (see the comment on ver. 31).

Ver. 52.—I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord. Not merely thy sentences upon wicked men, but all the course of thy providential government of the world, including thy deliverances of thy servants. And have comforted myself. Have found comfort, i.e., in calling them to mind, and dwelling upon them.

Ver. 53.—Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy Law. The Revised Version has "hot indignation" instead of "horror;" and so Rosenmüller, Hengstenberg, Cheyne, Professor Alexander, and others; but Dr. Kay well defends the Authorized Version ("The Psalms," Appendix i. pp. 462, 463). The feeling intended probably resembled that described by Ezra (ix. 6). The *ἀθυμία* of the LXX. does not ill express it.

Ver. 54.—Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage; literally, *songs have thy statutes been to me in the house of my sojournings*. I have made thy statutes the theme of my songs, as they are of this

present one. "The house of my sojournings" is either this present world, where all men are "strangers and pilgrims" (Heb. xi. 13), or perhaps some foreign land in which the writer had been a sojourner.

Ver. 55.—I have remembered thy Name, O Lord, in the night (comp. Pss. lxxiii. 6; cxlix. 5; and Job xxxv. 10). And have kept thy Law. The night is the time when wicked men do their most wicked deeds (Job xxiv. 14—16). I keep thy Law both night and day.

Ver. 56.—This I had, because I kept thy precepts; rather, *this I have, that I keep thy precepts*; i.e. this one thing I have, and it is my best and dearest possession, that I keep thy commandments.

Π CHETH.

Ver. 57.—Thou art my Portion, O Lord (see Pss. lxxiii. 26; cxlii. 5; and comp. Numb. xviii. 20; Josh. xiii. 33). I have said that I would keep thy words; or, "I have resolved" (Cheyne).

Ver. 58.—I intreated thy favour with my whole heart; literally, *I have supplicated thy face* (comp. Ps. xlv. 12). Be merciful unto me, according to thy Word. A repetition of the prayer of ver. 41.

Ver. 59.—I thought on my ways; i.e. I examined my conduct in the past, considered it, and passed judgment upon it. And turned my feet unto thy testimonies. When I found my conduct amiss, I altered it, turning my feet into the way of thy commandments.

Ver. 60.—I made haste. Men are apt to put off their repentance—to delay it to a more "convenient season" (Acts xxiv. 25). The psalmist was not so foolish—he "made haste," he says; and delayed not to keep God's commandments. This was wise, for "now is the accepted time" (2 Cor. vi. 2).

Ver. 61.—The bands of the wicked have robbed me; rather, *the snares of wicked men entangled me* (comp. vers. 23, 157, 161). But I have not forgotten (or, *I did not forget*) thy Law.

Ver. 62.—At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee (comp. ver. 55). Because of thy righteous judgments (see the comment on ver. 7).

Ver. 63.—I am a companion of all them that fear thee; i.e. I do not consort with the ungodly or the careless, but only with those who love and reverence thee. It is well to live "separate from sinners" (comp. Ps. i. 1). And of them that keep thy precepts. Obedience necessarily follows on reverence and godly fear.

Ver. 64.—The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy (comp. Ps. xxxiii. 5). God's mercy is "over all his works" (Ps. cxlv. 9). The whole world is full of it. Pessimistic views

are opposed to the entire tenor of Scripture. Teach me thy statutes (comp. vers. 12, 26, 33, 68, 108, 124, 135).

III TETH.

Ver. 65.—Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord. Notwithstanding all that he has suffered from the "persecution" of princes (ver. 161) and the "contempt" (ver. 22) and "derision" of the wicked generally (ver. 51), the psalmist feels that God's dealings with him have, on the whole, been good and gracious. According unto thy Word. As thou hast promised in thy Word to deal with thy servants (comp. vers. 41, 58, 170).

Ver. 66.—Teach me good judgment and knowledge; *i.e.* give me sound judgment and wisdom, to discern right from wrong. For I have believed thy commandments. I have looked to them, and trusted in them as my guides in the way of righteousness (comp. ver. 105).

Ver. 67.—Before I was afflicted I went astray. "Sweet are the uses of adversity." The psalmist feels and confesses that the afflictions, which he has suffered (see comment on ver. 65), have been good for him. They have made him less apt to "go astray" than he was (comp. ver. 71). But now have I kept thy Word (comp. vers. 51, 56, 87, etc.).

Ver. 68.—Thou art good, and doest good. Even chastening is a proof of thy goodness. By it thou "doest good" to thy servants (see Heb. xii. 10, 11). Teach me thy statutes. Impress thy Law upon me, even though it be by chastening.

Ver. 69.—The proud have forged a lie against me; literally, *patched up a lie against me* (comp. vers. 22, 23, 42, 78, etc.). But I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart (comp. vers. 2, 10, 34, etc.). "The connection of the clauses is—that all the craft and malice of his enemies should only lead him to obey God with a more undivided heart than ever" (Professor Alexander).

Ver. 70.—Their heart is as fat as grease; *i.e.* dull, gross, insensible to spiritual things (see Ps. xvii. 10; Isa. vi. 10). But I delight in thy Law. My heart is unlike theirs. Thy Law is a "delight" to it (comp. vers. 16, 24, 35, etc.).

Ver. 71.—It is good for me that I have been afflicted (see the comment on ver. 67). That I might learn thy statutes. The whole nation "learnt God's statutes" by the affliction of the Babylonish Captivity. Individuals "learnt" them equally by their special chastisements.

Ver. 72.—The Law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver; *i.e.* I value it more than any amount of earthly riches.

YOD.

Ver. 73.—Thy hands have made me and fashioned me (comp. Psa. c. 3; cxxxviii. 8; cxxxix. 14). The "fundamental passage" is Deut. xxxii. 6; but the present psalmist seems to follow Job x. 8. Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments. If thou hast done so much for me, wilt thou not do more? Without "understanding" this body that thou hast given me is nothing worth (comp. ver. 34).

Ver. 74.—They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; literally, *will see me and be glad*. I shall be a fresh proof to them that God does not forsake his servants. Because I have hoped in thy Word. I have not fallen from grace—I have continued to trust in thy promises.

Ver. 75.—I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right; literally, *are righteousness*—have in them nothing that is not just and good. And that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me. The Prayer-book Version brings out the full sense of the words, "And that thou in *very faithfulness* hast caused me to be troubled" (comp. vers. 67, 68, 71, with the comment furnished by Heb. xii. 5—11).

Ver. 76.—Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort (comp. ver. 41 and Ps. xc. 15). After affliction man feels the need of "comfort," and longs for some manifestation of the Divine "kindness." According to thy Word unto thy servant. According to the general tenor of thy promises.

Ver. 77.—Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live. The psalmist's afflictions have brought him near to the gates of death. God must visit him with his "tender mercies" for him once more to "live." For thy Law is my delight. His renewed life will be an exercising of himself in God's Law, since that Law is his "delight" (comp. vers. 16, 24, 47, 111, 174).

Ver. 78.—Let the proud be ashamed; *i.e.* put them to shame (comp. Psa. xxxv. 4, 26; xl. 14; lxx. 2; lxxxiii. 17, etc.). For they dealt perversely with me without a cause; rather, *for with lies they subvert me* (comp. ver. 69). But I will meditate in thy precepts. Repeated from ver. 15.

Ver. 79.—Let those that fear thee turn unto me; or, "return to me;" *i.e.* recover their confidence in me, when they see that I am not forsaken of thee (see ver. 76, 77), but am the recipient of thy "tender mercies." And those that have known thy testimonies; or, according to another reading, "and let them know thy testimonies;" *i.e.* "let them learn from my experience to know thy precepts better."

Ver. 80.—Let my heart be sound in thy

statutes; or, "perfect in thy statutes"—in the knowledge and in the practice of them. That I be not ashamed (see ver. 31)

▷ CAPH.

Ver. 81.—My soul fainteth for thy salvation (comp. Ps. lxxxiv. 2). The phrase used expresses the most intense desire possible. But I hope in thy Word. (So also ver. 74.) While almost fainting, the psalmist is sustained by his hope and trust in God's promises.

Ver. 82.—Mine eyes fail for thy Word. Yet even here his "eyes fail"—he has looked so long for the aid promised, and it has not come. Saying, When wilt thou comfort me? "Lord, how long?" is the constant cry of God's servants under affliction or persecution. When will relief come and the tyranny be overpast?

Ver. 83.—For I am become like a bottle in the smoke. Keble's paraphrase brings out the true sense—

"As wine-skin in the smoke,
My heart is sere and dried."

Wine-skins were smoked to toughen and harden them. Yet do I not forget thy statutes. The severity of the discipline does not alienate me from thee, or cause me to depart from thy Law (comp. vers. 23, 51, 161).

Ver. 84.—How many are the days of thy servant! i.e. How little of my life is left! If thou delayest much longer, my days will all be gone. When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me! (see the comment on ver. 82b).

Ver. 85.—The proud have digged pits for me; i.e. "have set traps to catch me" (comp. Psa. vii. 15; ix. 15). Which are not after thy Law. God's Law is opposed to all underhand and treacherous dealing—therefore to all traps and snares.

Ver. 86.—All thy commandments are faithful; literally, are *faithfulness*. This is said in respect of the promises attached to them. They (i.e. my enemies) persecute me wrongfully; or, "with lies"—lyingly (comp. vers. 69, 78). Help thou me; i.e. help me against them, so that their "lies" may do me no harm.

Ver. 87.—They had almost consumed me upon earth; or, "made an end of me," "destroyed me." But I forsook not thy precepts (comp. vers. 69, 78, 83). Persecution made the psalmist cling the more to God's Law.

Ver. 88.—Quicken me after thy loving-kindness (comp. vers. 25, 37, 44, 107, 149, 156, 159). So shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth (compare "the law of thy mouth," in ver. 72). It is God's "quickening"—i.e. his life-giving grace—which alone enables

his servants to observe and keep his commandments.

↳ LAMED.

Ver. 89.—For ever, O Lord, thy Word is settled in heaven. God's Word, or Law, is eternal and unchanging—fixed and established for ever in the heaven of heavens (comp. Ps. lxxxix. 2; Jas. i. 17).

Ver. 90.—Thy faithfulness is unto all generations. God "keepeth his promise for ever" (Ps. cxlvi. 6, Prayer-book Version). If his "Word" generally is unchanging, so especially must be his promises. Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. Even God's physical laws have a character of perpetuity about them. "The constancy of God in his works is an argument for the faithfulness of God in his Word" (Chalmers).

Ver. 91.—They continue this day according to thine ordinances. Heaven and earth continue to observe the ordinances given them by God at the first (comp. Jer. xxxi. 35, 36; xxxiii. 25). For all are thy servants; rather, *all things*, or *all creatures*.

Ver. 92.—Unless thy Law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction (comp. vers. 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77). Only a real love of God's commandments can sustain men under severe affliction.

Ver. 93.—I will never forget thy precepts (comp. vers. 16, 61, 83). For with them thou hast quickened me (comp. ver. 50, "Thy Word hath quickened me").

Ver. 94.—I am thine, save me. "Save me," i.e. as being thine own—thy true servant and follower. For I have sought thy precepts. And thus shown my fidelity.

Ver. 95.—The wicked have waited for me to destroy me; or, "laid in wait for me" (comp. Ps. lvi. 6, where the same verb is used). But I will consider thy testimonies I will look to thy word of promise, and so sustain their assaults upon me.

Ver. 96.—I have seen an end of all perfection; i.e. to all other perfection I have seen, and see, a limit; but there is no limit to the perfection of thy Law. Thy commandment is exceeding broad. Unlimited—measureless in its range. It inculcates on man an absolute perfection.

▷ MEM.

Ver. 97.—O how love I Thy law! (comp. vers. 47, 48, 113, 119, 127, etc.). As the psalmist goes on with his meditation he becomes more and more filled with a deep love of the Law of God, which is not to him a restraint or a burden, but a solace and a "delight." It is my meditation all the day (see vers. 15, 23, 42, 78, etc.).

Ver. 98.—Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies (comp. Deut. iv. 6, 8). The knowledge of God's Law gives a wisdom and an understanding infinitely above the cunning and craft of worldly men. If to the knowledge is added a faithful and habitual obedience, a wisdom is attained which can be reached in no other way (see ver. 100). For they are ever with me. Always present to my thoughts, as my rule of life.

Ver. 99.—I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. Teachers of secular knowledge are intended, wise in their special branches of learning, but not "wise unto salvation." Such "teachers" have often no spiritual knowledge or discernment.

Ver. 100.—I understand more than the ancients; or, "the aged." Advanced age does not necessarily give wisdom (see Job xxxii. 7—9). "Antiquity is no help against stupidity" (Luther). Because I keep thy precepts (comp. ver. 104 and John vii. 17).

Ver. 101.—I have refrained my feet from every evil way. This had been the psalmist's intention and endeavour, but he had not always succeeded in carrying it out (see vers. 67, 176). That I might keep thy Word. God's Word is not kept by such as allow themselves in any evil way.

Ver. 102.—I have not departed from thy judgments (comp. vers. 30, 31, 51, 157, 168, etc.). For thou hast taught me. Thy teaching, thy guidance, thy help, have kept me straight.

Ver. 103.—How sweet are thy words unto my taste! (comp. vers. 14, 16, 40, 47, etc.). The metaphor is new, but the sentiment one which pervades the psalm. Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth. So David, in the nineteenth psalm, speaking of the judgments of God, says that they are "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb."

Ver. 104.—Through thy precepts I get understanding (see the comment on vers. 98 and 100). Therefore I hate every false way. A "false way" is one that leads to error and sin (comp. vers. 29 and 128).

2 NUN.

Ver. 105.—Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. It shows me the way wherein I should go, both night and day (comp. Prov. vi. 23).

Ver. 106.—I have sworn, and I will perform it; rather, *I have sworn and am steadfastly purposed* (see the Prayer-book Version). That I will keep thy righteous judgments; literally, *the judgments of thy righteousness*; i.e. the judgments which thy righteousness has caused thee to put forth.

Ver. 107.—I am afflicted very much

(comp. vers. 23, 28, 50, 51, 61, 71, 78, etc.). Spoken against by princes, reproached by the proud, persecuted without a cause, the psalmist felt his "affliction" to be grievous, almost intolerable. Being brought near to death, he prays for a "little reviving." Quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy Word (comp. vers. 25, 37, 40, 88, etc.).

Ver. 108.—Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord; i.e. my prayers and praises. The lifting up of the hands to God is a kind of sacrifice (Ps. cxli. 2). And teach me thy judgments. And, in return, make me to understand thy statutes (comp. vers. 12, 26, 33, etc.).

Ver. 109.—My soul is continually in my hand; i.e. my life is in constant jeopardy (comp. Judg. xii. 3; 1 Sam. xix. 5; xxviii. 21). Yet do I not forget thy Law (comp. vers. 16, 83, 93, etc.).

Ver. 110.—The wicked have laid a snare for me (comp. vers. 85, 95). Yet I erred not from thy precepts. I have not allowed their machinations to interfere with my obedience.

Ver. 111.—Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever. I regard thy Law as my best and most valuable inheritance—one with which I am resolved never to part. For they are the rejoicing of my heart. My chief joy and delight (comp. vers. 16, 24, 35, 47, etc.).

Ver. 112.—I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway (comp. vers. 34, 44, etc.). Even unto the end. The end of life is probably meant, as in ver. 33.

D SAMECH.

Ver. 113.—I hate vain thoughts; rather, *unstable or double-minded men* (Kay, Cheyne, Revised Version); i.e. "those who are undecided in religion" (Cheyne). But thy Law do I love (comp. vers. 97, 119, 127, 159, 163). There is nothing "unstable" or "double-minded" in thy Law. It is clear, direct, unmistakable.

Ver. 114.—Thou art my hiding-place (comp. Ps. xxvii. 5; xxxii. 7; xci. 1). And my Shield; i.e. my protection (see Ps. iii. 3; xviii. 2, 30, etc.). I hope in thy Word. The promises contained in thy Word are my only sure hope (see ver. 43).

Ver. 115.—Depart from me, ye evil-doers. There is no fellowship between light and darkness, between righteousness and unrighteousness (2 Cor. x. 16). Good men must separate themselves from those who are manifestly workers of iniquity (comp. Ps. vi. 8). For I will keep the commandments of my God (see ver. 106). Association with the wicked hinders men from keeping God's Law. Not only is there the danger of corruption (1 Cor. xv. 33); but, at the

best, attention is distracted, and energies weakened.

Ver. 116.—Uphold me according unto thy Word, that I may live; or, “according to thy promise.” God’s sustaining grace, always needed to “uphold” the righteous, is graciously “promised” them. Their “life” depends upon God’s faithfulness to his promise. And let me not be ashamed of my hope. As he would be, if God’s promise were not kept.

Ver. 117.—Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe; i.e. from falling away. And I will have respect unto thy commandments continually (comp. ver. 112).

Ver. 118.—Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes; rather, thou despisest all them that go astray from thy statutes. Thou makest light of them. The LXX. have, *ἐξουδένωσας*. For their deceit is falsehood. “Their subtle policy is but a lie” (Kay). It rests on lies, and ends in disappointment.

Ver. 119.—Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross. The wicked are ultimately separated from the righteous, and cast away “as dross,” since they can serve no good end (comp. Matt. xiii. 30, 49, 50). Therefore I love thy testimonies. Not because the wicked suffer, but because they are prevented from injuring the righteous.

Ver. 120.—My flesh trembleth for fear of thee (comp. Isa. vi. 5; Jer. xxiii. 9; Hab. iii. 16). And I am afraid of thy judgments. Thy “judgments” upon the wicked cause me to shudder with fear.

2^d AIN.

Ver. 121.—I have done judgment and justice (comp. vers. 30, 31, 55, 56, etc.). Leave me not to mine oppressors; rather, thou wilt not leave me to mine oppressors. The nexus of the thought seems to be, “As I have not oppressed any, so wilt thou not suffer me to be crushed by oppression.”

Ver. 122.—Be surety for thy servant for good (comp. Job xvii. 3; Isa. xxxviii. 14). “For good” means “so that it may be well with him.” Let not the proud oppress me (comp. vers. 51, 69, 78, 85, etc.).

Ver. 123.—Mine eyes fail for thy salvation; i.e. through looking for it, and vainly expecting it (comp. vers. 81, 82). And for the word of thy righteousness; i.e. and through looking for the fulfilment of thy righteous promises.

Ver. 124.—Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy (comp. vers. 41, 77). And teach me thy statutes. This phrase occurs so often that it becomes a sort of

refrain (comp. vers. 11, 26, 33, 64, 68, 108, 135).

Ver. 125.—I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies. As thy servant (see vers. 17, 23, 38, 49, 65, etc.), I have a claim upon thee for thy help. What I ask is discernment—to understand the full meaning of thy Law (comp. vers. 34, 66, 73, 144).

Ver. 126.—It is time for thee, Lord, to work; or, “to act;” i.e. to lay aside quiescence, and come forward as the active Ruler of the universe. For they have made void thy Law. The wicked have cast thy Law behind their back, and, so far as lay in their power, “made it void”—repealed it, cancelled it.

Ver. 127.—Therefore I love thy commandments. Because the wicked “make void” thy commandments and cast them aside, “therefore” I all the more “love” them. Above gold; yea, above fine gold (comp. ver. 72).

Ver. 128.—Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right. I do not pick and choose among thy commandments which I will neglect and which I will obey, but esteem them all as perfect, and obey them all. “Eclecticism of every kind in reference to the Word of God is rejected” (Hengstenberg). And I hate every false way (comp. vers. 104, 163). All ways are “false” except the way of God’s commandments

D PE.

Ver. 129.—Thy testimonies are wonderful; literally, *wonders*; i.e. prodigies of moral excellence. Therefore doth my soul keep them. I obey thy Law, not only because it is thy Law, but still more because it is intrinsically “holy, just, and good” (Rom. vii. 12).

Ver. 130.—The entrance of thy words giveth light; rather, the opening (or opening up) of thy words. Their full exposition and interpretation (comp. vers. 98—100, 104, 105, etc.). It giveth understanding to the simple (comp. Ps. xix. 7; Prov. i. 4).

Ver. 131.—I opened my mouth, and panted (comp. Ps. xxxviii. 10). The idea intended to be expressed is that of earnest and eager desire. For I longed for thy commandments (see vers. 20, 40).

Ver. 132.—Look thou upon me; rather, turn thee unto me, but in the sense of “turn round and look upon me.” And be merciful unto me (comp. vers. 41, 58, 76, 77, etc.). As thou usest to do unto those that love thy Name; literally, as thy rule is with those that love thy Name.

Ver. 133.—Order my steps in thy Word; perhaps rather, establish my steps by thy

Word (comp. Ps. xl. 2). And let not any iniquity (i.e. any wicked persons) have dominion over me. The prayer is not for deliverance from internal corruption, but from the external oppression of enemies (see the next verse).

Ver. 134.—Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts. Out of gratitude for thy interposition.

Ver. 135.—Make thy face to shine upon thy servant (comp. Ps. iv. 6; xlv. 3, etc.). And teach me thy statutes (see the comment on ver. 124).

Ver. 136.—Rivers of waters run down mine eyes; literally, *mine eyes run down [with] rivers of water* (comp. Lam. iii. 48; and see also Jer. ix. 1; xiv. 17). Because they keep not thy Law (comp. ver. 53).

Y TZADDE

Ver. 137.—Righteous art thou, O Lord (comp. Ps. vii. 9; xi. 7; xxv. 8; cxvi. 5; cxlv. 17). And upright are thy judgments (see vers. 106, 160, 164).

Ver. 138.—Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful; literally, *righteousness and very faithfulness* (see the Revised Version). "Harsh and severe as thy testimonies may seem, they are all thoroughly for man's highest good" (Kay).

Ver. 139.—My zeal hath consumed me (comp. Ps. lxi. 9). Because mine enemies have forgotten thy words (see above, vers. 53, 136). The psalmist was at once grieved and angered by man's disobedience to God's commandments (comp. Ps. cxxxix. 21).

Ver. 140.—Thy Word is very pure; or, "is purged, assayed, tried in the fire." God's "promises" are especially meant, which the course of events tests. Therefore thy servant loveth it (comp. vers. 97, 113, 119, 127, 159, 163).

Ver. 141.—I am small and despised (comp. vers. 22, 51). Some translate, "I am young." But the writer can scarcely have been really a young man. His thoughts are the thoughts of one who has had much experience of life. Yet do not I forget thy precepts. As do those that persecute me (see ver. 139).

Ver. 142.—Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness. With God there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas. i. 27). His righteousness (צדק) is pure abstract right (צדק), one and the same always—not shifting, like human ideas of justice. And thy Law is the truth. An embodiment of that immutable morality which rests upon a basis of absolute eternal truth.

Ver. 143.—Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me (comp. vers. 22, 23, 28, 50, 51, 61,

67, 69, etc.). Yet thy commandments are my delight. I am happy in the midst of my troubles, for the joy that I have in thy Word (see vers. 16, 35, 47, 77, 174).

Ver. 144.—The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting (comp. vers. 138, 142, 152). Give me understanding, and I shall live; i.e. "give me full understanding of thy commandments, of their depth and breadth and exceeding excellence." Then shall I truly "live." My spirit will shake off its torpor, and be quickened into a "life" that will deserve the name.

P KOPH.

Ver. 145.—I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord. "Earnest and patient prayer for grace" (Kay) seems to be intended, not mere prayer for deliverance. I will keep thy statutes. If thou hearest and answerest my prayer, I shall have both the will and the power to keep thy commandments.

Ver. 146.—I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies. The thought of ver. 145 is repeated in other words.

Ver. 147.—I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried (comp. ver. 62). Evening, morning, and noonday were the three usual times of prayer (Ps. lv. 17). The writer could not wait for morning. Either he woke up to pray at midnight, or at any rate he anticipated the dawn, and began his morning prayer while it was still dark. I hoped in thy Word. Hope was so strong in him that it did not suffer him to rest.

Ver. 148.—Mine eyes prevent the night watches. As ver. 146 is a repetition of ver. 145, so this verse is very nearly a repetition of ver. 147. The only change of idea is in the second clause—that I might meditate in thy Word; or, "on thy promise"—which makes meditation rather than prayer the psalmist's object in his early rising.

Ver. 149.—Hear my voice according unto thy loving-kindness; i.e. "hear me, and, according to thy mercy, grant my prayer." O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment; or, "according to the rules that thou settest thyself" (comp. ver. 132).

Ver. 150.—They draw nigh; i.e. come near me to threaten me. That follow after mischief; or, "after wickedness." They are far from thy Law (comp. vers. 21, 53, 118, 126, 136, etc.).

Ver. 151.—Thou art near, O Lord. If "they draw nigh," still more near art thou, ready to succour and defend and save (comp. Ps. cxlv. 18). And all thy commandments are truth (comp. ver. 142, "Thy Law is the truth;" and see the comment on that passage).

Ver. 152.—Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever; rather, *from thy testimonies*. The study of God's commandments has long ago convinced the psalmist that they are no passing or temporary enactments, but eternal laws, decreed and laid down for ever. The "testimonies" spoken of are, of course, the moral precepts of the Law, not its economical or political enactments.

7 RESH.

Ver. 153.—Consider mine affliction (see above, vers. 50, 67, 71, 75, 92, etc.). And deliver me. The "affliction" intended is that which the psalmist suffers at the hands of his enemies, who "reproach" him (ver. 22), "deride" him (ver. 51), and otherwise "persecute" him (ver. 161). For I do not forget thy Law (comp. vers. 16, 83, 93, 109, 141, 176).

Ver. 154.—Plead my cause (comp. Ps. xxxv. 1; xlii. 1; Micah vii. 9). God "pleads the cause" of his servants when he takes up their quarrel, and avenges them upon their enemies. And deliver me; or, "rescue me" (Cheyne). Quicken me according to thy Word (comp. ver. 25).

Ver. 155.—Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes. "Salvation" is only attainable by man through obedience to the commandments of God. If men will not even "seek" to know and do his commandments, they put "salvation" from them.

Ver. 156.—Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord; rather, *many* (comp. Ps. xxv. 6, and note the antithesis between this verse and the next, "Many are thy mercies;" "Many are my persecutors"). Quicken me according to thy judgments (comp. ver. 149).

Ver. 157.—Many are my persecutors and mine enemies. Hitherto this had been implied (vers. 22, 23, 51, 61, etc.) rather than expressed. Now the thought of Ps. xxv. 18 comes over the writer, "Consider mine enemies, for they are *many*." Yet do I not decline from thy testimonies. Repeated from ver. 51.

Ver. 158.—I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; literally, *the treacherous dealers*—those who dealt treacherously against the Divine covenant. Because they kept not thy Word (comp. ver. 136).

Ver. 159.—Consider how I love thy precepts (comp. vers. 97, 113, 119, 127, 163). Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy loving-kindness. Slightly varied from ver. 149.

Ver. 160.—Thy Word is true from the beginning; rather, *the sum of thy Word is truth*. (So Hengstenberg, Kay, Cheyne, and the Revised Version.) "After examining the Divine Word, and estimating the

value of its several parts, the psalmist found that the final sum was '*truth*'—pure, absolute truth" (Kay). And every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever. An emphatic repetition of the statement made in ver. 144.

7 SHIN.

Ver. 161.—Princes have persecuted me without a cause. The "princes" may be either foreign or native; but from ver. 23 it would rather appear that native princes are intended. But my heart standeth in awe of thy Word. Yet I do not fear them, or heed what they say. Of nothing do I stand in awe, except "thy Word."

Ver. 162.—I rejoice at thy Word, as one that findeth great spoil. We must not limit this to the promises contained in God's Law. The psalmist views the precepts of the Law as a real treasure (vers. 14, 72, 127), since they make him wise unto salvation.

Ver. 163.—I hate and abhor lying; or, "falsehood." False systems of religion are in the psalmist's thoughts; or, at any rate, false moral teaching. He is not speaking of the habit of lying. But thy Law do I love (see the comment on ver. 159).

Ver. 164.—Seven times a day do I praise thee; i.e. repeatedly, an indefinite number of times (comp. Ps. xii. 6; lxxix. 11; Prov. xxiv. 16). Because of thy righteous judgments (comp. vers. 137, 160).

Ver. 165.—Great peace have they which love thy Law (comp. Prov. iii. 1, 2; Isa. xxxii. 17; Jas. iii. 18). There is always disquietude where there is sin. A sense of perfect peace and rest belongs to those who love and keep God's Law. And nothing shall offend them; rather, *and they shall have no stumbling-block*. Nothing shall cause them to stumble, much less to fall away from grace.

Ver. 166.—Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation (comp. vers. 81, 123). I have waited for thee, continually expecting thee to come to my aid, and save me from my enemies. And done thy commandments; kept them, i.e., as far as human frailty would allow.

Ver. 167.—My soul hath kept thy testimonies. In will and intention I have always been faithful unto thee; I have striven to keep all thy commandments. And I love them exceedingly (comp. vers. 97, 127, 159, etc.).

Ver. 168.—I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies (comp. vers. 166, 167). The assertion is made more broadly than a Christian would make it. But there is no intention to claim absolute perfection (see vers. 67, 71, 116, 117, 133, 176, etc.). For

all my ways are before thee. Knowing that nothing which I do, or say, or think is hidden from thee, I have striven to keep thy Law in thought and word and deed.

II. TAU.

Ver. 169.—Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord. The “cry” is probably for deliverance from his enemies (see ver. 166); but this, he feels, depends upon his own faithfulness. Hence the prayer in the second clause, Give me understanding according to thy Word (comp. ver. 144).

Ver. 170.—Let my supplication come before thee. A repetition of the “cry” in the preceding verse, which is distinctly shown by the next clause to be a cry for deliverance—Deliver me according to thy Word; or, “according to thy promise” (*imrathka*). God had “promised” to deliver all those who in the day of trouble should call upon him (Psa. l. 15; xci. 15).

Ver. 171.—My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes; rather, let my lips pour forth praise, for thou teachest me thy statutes. The psalmist feels that his prayer for enlightenment (ver. 169b) is answered, or just about to be answered, and that therefore it behoves him to gush forth with praise like a fountain (comp. ver. 7).

Ver. 172.—My tongue shall speak of thy Word; or, “let my tongue respond to thy promise”—return praise, i.e., for the fulfilment of thy promise. For all thy com-

mandments are righteousness. And therefore are worthy objects of praise.

Ver. 173.—Let thine hand help me; literally, be to help me; i.e. be ever ready to help me. For I have chosen thy precepts. I have cast aside all other helpers, and have pinned my faith on thee and thy Word.

Ver. 174.—I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord (comp. vers. 81, 166). And thy Law is my delight (see vers. 16, 35, 47, 70, 77, 111).

Ver. 175.—Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; i.e. “quicken me; give me true life in my soul and spirit—my real self—and then my praise shall be ever of thee.” And let thy judgments help me. Let the course of thy providence be such as to help me to praise thee.

Ver. 176.—I have gone astray like a lost sheep (comp. ver. 67). Some see in this verse nothing but a reference to the outward circumstances of the psalmist's life. But this is certainly not the idea generally attached in Scripture to the image of the “lost sheep” (see Isa. liii. 6; Jer. l. 6; Luke xv. 4—7; 1 Pet. ii. 25). Dean Johnson's exposition is probably correct, “I have wandered far from thee and from home, as a sheep lost and ready to perish in the wilderness.” Seek thy servant. “Seek him, lest he be not able of himself to seek thee; and bring him again to thy fold.” For I do not forget thy commandments. In my worst wanderings I have not fallen away wholly from thee. Thy Law has been ever in my thoughts. I have not “forgotten” it, but meditated on it and longed for it (vers. 15, 20, 40).

HOMILETICS.

THE difficulty of treating this “alphabetical psalm” by any arrangement of its subject-matter must be apparent. An attempt has been made to gather its lessons around the more prominent doctrine in its successive sections, and to give a separate treatment of those subjects which cannot be so well included in this way.

Vers. 1—24.—*The blessedness of obedience.* The first two verses of the psalm leave no mistake as to the nature of true obedience; it includes: 1. *Integrity of heart.* Sincerity, being “undefiled,” seeking the favour and entering the service of God “with the whole heart” (ver. 10), with a spirit in which “is no guile.” 2. *Consistency of conduct.* “Walking in the Law,” “keeping his commandments;” it is “he that doeth righteousness that is righteous” (John). 3. *Patient continuance in well-doing.* Making an earnest and sustained endeavour to do the will of God (ver. 4). Such genuine obedience is attended with great blessedness.

I. IT INVOLVES PURITY OF HEART AND LIFE. “They do no iniquity: they walk in his ways” (ver. 3). Obedience is its own reward, apart from any recompense it may secure. To be pure-hearted, to be true and faithful, to be unselfish and helpful, to be like our Lord in spirit and in character, to be living a life that is worthy and honourable in the sight of God,—is not this the truest and the largest blessing?

II. IT BRINGS SALVATION FROM EVIL. 1. From sin itself, whether in the heart or the life (ver. 11). 2. From the shame to which sin constantly conducts (ver. 6). 3.

From Divine condemnation (ver. 21). 4. From the rebuke which comes from the lips of the Lord himself.

III. IT IS THE SERVICE OF SACRED JOY. (Vers. 14, 16, 24; see also vers. 35, 47, 54, 103, 111, 127, 162.) Sweeter than honey to the taste, more precious than gold in the heart's esteem, is the Word of God, "the mind of Christ." The sweet substance will soon pall, the spoil will soon be spent, the much-prized wealth may become a snare; but the study of God's will, meditation upon the truth and grace of Jesus Christ, the welcome given by the heart to the heavenly hopes and the Divine consolations with which the pages of Holy Writ are studded, sitting at the feet of the great Teacher and learning of him,—this is the source of pure, unfeigned, ever-deepening joy. The acquisition of any kind of knowledge is pleasant to the mind, but the enrichment of the soul by the reception of Divine wisdom means deep "delight," an intense satisfaction to the spirit. If such is the blessedness of obedience, we learn: 1. The excellency of steadfastness (vers. 5—10). How needful to have our feet "firmly fixed" in the way of life; to be saved from "wandering" first into byways and then into highways of evil! Hence: 2. The wisdom of keeping an open mind (ver. 7), of realizing that there is something more to learn. Hence also: 3. The need for serious, strenuous effort (vers. 4, 16), of being "diligent" in duty and of keeping the will of our Lord always before our mind, of continually refreshing our memory from his Word. Hence also: 4. The need for prayer (ver. 10). 5. The duty of teaching as well as learning (ver. 13). Such true and pure blessedness as we ourselves have gained, we should seek to pass on to other souls.

Vers. 25—48.—*Spiritual enlargement.* Throughout our whole life, as godly men, we have to recognize—

I. A DOWNWARD TENDENCY. "My soul cleaveth to the dust" (ver. 25). Our eyes are inclined to "behold vanity" (ver. 37). There is that within us and that around us which constitute a temptation to put our trust in man rather than in God, to seek our portion in worldly advantage rather than in the service and friendship of Christ, to allow ourselves to decline from a wise moderation to an unwise and even guilty indulgence, to set our hearts on the things which are below and to be too little affected by the inheritance beyond.

II. THE DIVINE POWER TO QUICKEN. "Quicken thou me" (vers. 25—40). God can "enlarge our heart" (ver. 32). By the incoming and indwelling of his Holy Spirit he can raise the thoughts and the hopes that are beginning to droop or to settle; he can so "enlarge" our sympathies and our affections that we love the best and take deep delight in the highest; he can so revive us that our spiritual languishing and despondency pass into full acquiescence and cheerful hope (ver. 28), and we become strong for waiting and for action; he can so continuously affect us, and thus so establish us, that we shall abide in reverential service all our days (ver. 38). By these holy influences instilled into our soul, acting quietly but effectually on the hidden springs of our nature, God "grants us his Law graciously" (ver. 29). Left to ourselves, we sink and suffer; upheld, quickened by God's renewing power, we walk in wisdom and in piety, nay, we rise Christwards, heavenwards. This is—

III. THE SPIRITUAL ENLARGEMENT WHICH ENSUES. It is found in many forms; it is active in many spheres. It includes: 1. Salvation from the worst evils. "Salvation" generally (ver. 41) from spiritual declension, which is an insidious and dangerous adversary; also from any sudden fall into sin and shame; and more particularly from "covetousness" (ver. 36), that evil spirit of selfishness which craves what God has not given, and issues in the strivings of an injurious ambition or in the mutiny of a discontented heart. 2. Whole-heartedness in obedience (ver. 34). All the powers and instincts of our nature leagued in a holy alliance of obedience to God. 3. Promptness and cheerfulness of obedience. We should not only walk, but *run* in the way of God's commandments (vers. 32, 60). Readiness and quickness to obey, in the little child, is the acceptable thing to the human parent: is it not equally so to the Divine? 4. Steadfastness in holy service (vers. 31, 33, 34). 5. Liberty (ver. 45). Sin at its worst means utter slavery; godliness at its best means perfect freedom. When we so love God's Law, when we are so filled with the desire to do the will of Christ and to please him, that we find his Word no sort of restraint upon us, that we move happily along those

lines in which we are free to go as far and as fast as we please, then we are "at liberty." Liberty is only found in its perfection when, as in God, inclination is perfectly parallel with duty. God's statutes are not our bonds; they are our songs (ver. 54). 6. Utterance (vers. 27, 43, 46). When the heart is enlarged the mouth is opened, and free, fearless speech comes forth. At first, indeed, there may be the hesitation of inexperience and self-distrust; but when this initial stage is past, there is fulness and fearlessness of utterance. We declare, with joyful lips, the grace and the truth which have enlightened and emancipated ourselves. But we must not overlook the fact that, while God's promises are great, there is—

IV. THE CONDITION TO BE FULFILLED—PRAYER. The psalmist frequently reminds us of our duty and privilege in this respect. In confession or supplication he calls our attention to it in vers. 23, 25, 26, 37. We may not expect the spiritual enlargement which comes from God's visitation unless we are daily, earnestly, expectantly, asking God to come to us and dwell within us, in all his gracious, victorious power.

Vers. 49—72.—*Comfort in affliction.* Those who construct a philosophy of human life, or who criticize any religious creed that claims their attention, are bound to recognize—

I. THE SERIOUS FACT OF AFFLICTION. For it is a very large element in our life, and powerfully affects our character. There is not one that has not occasion again and again to say, "in my affliction" (ver. 50). Most of us have, at times, to go much beyond this, and speak of being "afflicted very much" (ver. 107), or are even constrained to say, "Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me" (ver. 43). 1. Sometimes, often indeed, it is due to the injustice, or the cruelty, or the inconsiderateness of men (vers. 51, 61, 69, 78). The very worst suffering is the consequence of the betrayal and the hostility of those we once trusted and loved (Ps. xli. 9). 2. Affliction may spring from our religious earnestness (vers. 53, 136). The unbelief, indifference, impiety, immorality, and violence we see or read of constitute a heavy burden upon our soul. 3. God's apparent delay is another source of trial (ver. 82). "How long, O Lord, how long?" has been the painful cry of all generations of the persecuted and troubled children of God. Beside these are the common, everyday afflictions of sickness, loss, straitness, disappointment, bereavement. Then comes—

II. THE APPEAL TO GOD. (Vers. 58, 107.) While prosperity abounds we may forget God, but as soon as adversity comes we remember him. And those who walk with God in health and joy instantly and naturally look to him when they enter the dark shadows. "Remember me, my God, for good!" "Deliver me!"—these are the instinctive cries of the burdened heart. We may, as the psalmist does here, plead our close, spiritual relationship to him as a ground of appeal (ver. 153).

III. OUR REFUGE IN TIME OF TROUBLE. 1. We rest in God's promise—the "word on which he has caused us to hope" (ver. 49; see Pss. xli. 1; xlv. 1; xc. 15; Isa. xliii. 2; John xiv. 18; Heb. xiii. 5, 6, 8). 2. We find, in God's goodness to us in the past, an assurance of his pity at the present time, and his blessing in the future (ver. 65; Ps. xxiii.). 3. We find great comfort in the knowledge we have of God's character, assured that One so kind (ver. 68) and so faithful (ver. 75) must be leading us by the right and wise way, however strange the path may seem to us. 4. Whatever be taken from us, we always have left to us our God, our Saviour himself; and he is our portion (ver. 57); he himself is "our exceeding great reward." No loss, no discomfiture, no betrayal, can take away from us the inestimable treasure of the favour and the friendship of Jesus Christ.

IV. ITS ISSUE. (Vers. 67, 71.) There are some lessons which we cannot learn in the light, but can learn in the darkness. When all other means fail to affect us, the strong rod of affliction arouses us, and awakens us to the neglected truth. Then we see that to which we had been strangely blind; then we turn from the evil track and the fatal precipice, and enter once more the way of wisdom, the path of life. Instead of a dangerous indulgence is a wise self-restraint; instead of an increasing worldliness is a deepening joy in devotion; instead of questionable companionships is the society of the holy; instead of slackness in service is the steady flame of zeal; instead of half-heartedness is whole-heartedness in our Christian life.

Vers. 73—96.—*Human need and the Divine sufficiency.* These verses bring out—

I. THE GREATNESS OF OUR HUMAN NEED. The psalmist lingers over: 1. The evils which we suffer from persecution. The proud “deal perversely with us” (ver. 78); “they had almost consumed me” (ver. 87); “they persecute me wrongly” (ver. 86). The expressions cover all kinds of cruelty and injustice, as well as that which we understand by “persecutor,” making us to suffer for our religious convictions. Man is the chief enemy of man, everywhere and always. 2. He indicates the extremity to which we may be reduced; his soul “faints for God’s salvation” (ver. 81); he wonders at the long delay (ver. 82); his very life is endangered (ver. 77); he is ready to perish (ver. 92). 3. He is concerned lest he be put to shame, lest he fall into sin or into despair, and cause the enemy to triumph (ver. 80). 4. He finds that even the best prove to be in some respects unworthy (ver. 96). Our need is great, but we turn to—

II. THE SUFFICIENCY WHICH IS IN GOD. 1. His perfect knowledge of us, and his power over us. He who made us must know our nature and its needs, must be able to minister to us (ver. 73; see Ps. xciv. 9, 10). He “knows what is in man.” 2. His promised help (vers. 76, 81; see preceding homily). 3. His succour granted through his people (ver. 79). Let the troubled servants of God turn to one and another who are known to honour him, and they will not seek a brother’s sympathy in vain. If man is our enemy, man also is our friend. “A man shall be a covert” (Isa. xxxii. 2). 3. His faithfulness (vers. 75, 86). God is not forgetful of us; he is not indifferent to our distress; he is not unmindful of our service (ver. 94); he does not overlook the fact that we are his own children, closely related to him in his Son (ver. 94); but he is seeking our highest good; he is caring for our spiritual advancement; he is purifying us from all dross; he is preparing us for higher service in a nobler sphere. He is redeeming his Word at the very time when, and by the very treatment in which, he seems to be breaking it (vers. 128, 138). 4. The unchangeableness of his Word (vers. 89—91). We may quote for our own and others’ support any word of encouragement God has ever spoken at any time; for “the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations” (Ps. xxxiii. 11). What he was to our fathers in distant days, and has been to all those who came before us, he will be to us (see Ps. xc. 1; Heb. xiii. 8; Jas. i. 17). 5. The breadth of his Law (ver. 96). While the fact that his Law covers the entire range of human thought and action thus brings us into condemnation, on the other hand, the fulness and amplitude of his promises cover all our possible errors and wrong-doings, and leave the gateway into the kingdom wide open to all who approach it in the spirit of penitence and faith.

Vers. 97—120.—*Knowledge and action.* Of God’s Law these verses treat, calling our attention to—

I. STUDY THAT LEADS TO LOVE. (Vers. 97—103.) A cursory view of God’s Word may have no result; but a serious study of it, a continuous and prayerful meditation upon it, will end in a strong attachment to it. It will become the source of perennial enjoyment; it will be prized above all price (see vers. 1—24). Indeed, so close will the heart cling to it that even the greatest danger will only suggest its truths (ver. 109). Sickness will bring it near; death will turn towards it. As the value of other treasures lessens, its worth will be enhanced.

II. KNOWLEDGE. (Vers. 98, 99, 105.) The study of the Word of God, of the will of Christ, will make the disciple to understand (1) what his enemies are ignorant of; (2) what is of greater intrinsic value than any science, or art, or language; (3) what transcends all traditional lore, however venerable that may be (vers. 98—100). But of more account than this mental superiority is—

III. PRACTICAL WISDOM. 1. This begins in hatred of evil (ver. 104), having a sincere aversion to the various forms of iniquity. 2. It proceeds to perception of what is right and good (ver. 105), understanding the true character of human life, and knowing what is the way in which to walk. 3. It continues in deliberate avoidance of evil (ver. 101). 4. Then determined loyalty to the truth and will of God under all provocations to err (vers. 102, 110—112). However strong the pressure or clever the intrigue, the man who loves God’s Law is constant in obedience, and refuses to leave the King’s highway; he goes straight to the goal. 5. This ends in immunity from the sad penalties of sin which the guilty have, sooner or later, to pay (vers. 118—120).

6. And its issue is a blessed fulfilment of the good man's hope (ver. 116). This practical wisdom rests upon—

IV. A REVERENT PURPOSE OF HEART. (Vers. 106—115.) Enlightened by the Divine teaching, understanding what is the wise and what the foolish course, perceiving who are his friends and who his enemies, the disciple of the great Teacher (1) solemnly resolves that he will give himself, heart and life, to the pursuit and practice of righteousness; (2) dismisses, without reserve, any evil companions he may have admitted to his friendship; (3) makes a formal and solemn vow, before God and man, that he will walk in the way of life. Then come—

V. PRAYER AND PRAISE. 1. Daily supplication for the upholding hand of God, without which the fairest and strongest resolutions fail (vers. 116, 117). 2. Daily thanksgiving—the sacrifice of grateful speech and sacred song (ver. 108).

Vers. 121—136.—*Looking to God.* A very large part of our Christian life is found in the uplifting of our heart to God in silent or vocal prayer. We look up for—

I. HIS MERCIFUL REGARD. (Vers. 124, 132, 135.) We ask God to regard us as those who have humbled themselves before him, who trust in his mercy, who are his children in Jesus Christ; and we know that we shall not appeal in vain. To all such he has promised his merciful regard, the light of his countenance, his abiding favour, his Divine friendship.

II. SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT. (Vers. 124, latter part, 125—135.) It is the continually recurring note, "Teach me thy statutes." In the words of the awakened apostle, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" In our own ignorance, and in the confusion caused by so many contending voices, each purporting to be the truth, we may well cry, "Give me understanding," etc. (ver. 125). We want to know with whom, in the Church and in the world, we should be associated; what is the true meaning and what the real message our Master delivered by his own lips or through the writings of his apostles; how we can best serve him in the field of active work, etc. We want to be able to distinguish between the plausible and the true, between the attractive and the wise, in all the counsels that are uttered in his Name. There is nothing we more need than spiritual discernment, when so many lights are shining of which we may be sure that some are not kindled at the altar of heavenly wisdom.

III. HIS PROTECTION. (Vers. 121, 134.) Oppression is not so rampant now as it has been, but it still exists in many places and in many forms. So that there is still need for the psalmist's prayer; and it may be that many a heart, in loneliness and suffering, finds relief in this appeal to God, "Leave me not to my oppressors." The psalmist goes further; he asks for—

IV. THE ASSURANCE OF HIS PROTECTION. (Ver. 122.) Such as God gave to Moses when he sent him to Pharaoh, and to David and Solomon when he gave them their thrones; such as Christ gave to Paul when he was in Corinth and was shrinking in spirit before his stupendous task (Acts xviii. 9, 10). Our Lord gives us the assurance that no harm shall happen to us which he does not permit, which he will not control and overrule for good (Matt. v. 11, 12; x. 29—31).

V. THE PRESERVATION OF OUR SPIRITUAL INTEGRITY. (Ver. 133.) Our first and chief obligation is to continue in that path of holy service in which the grace of God has placed us, and to maintain our freedom from everything that degrades and enslaves us. But this is a great thing to do; many have set forth on their Christian course confident of success, and they have been defeated. They have wandered from the way of wisdom; they have become the victim of some degrading habit. They did not look up to God daily and earnestly, or they would have been upheld. If there be any signs, however slight, of moral entanglement, let "our eyes be ever unto the Lord, and he will pluck our feet out of the net" (Ps. xxv. 15).

VI. HIS INTERVENTION. (Vers. 126, 136.) Grieved at heart, perplexed in spirit, overwhelmed by the forces of evil and the temporary triumph of iniquity, what can we do? We may not cease to bear our testimony to the truth, but we may bring our burden to the Lord; we may plead that the cause of righteousness is not ours, but his, and pray, hopefully and even confidently, for the manifestation of his power. "It is time for thee, Lord, to work."

Vers. 137—160.—*Earnestness.* Much is said in this psalm about seeking and serving “with the whole heart.” This is, indeed, the secret of real success, of ultimate victory. Many will fail to reach the goal and to wear the prize because they set out in a languid, half-hearted spirit, or because they started with nothing more than religious excitement. What is needed is genuine earnestness of soul. This—

I. INCLUDES A PROFOUND REGARD FOR THE WILL AND WORD OF GOD. To this the psalmist gives utterance here (vers. 137, 138, 140, 142, 144, 151, 152, 159, 160). 1. It is the truth itself. 2. It makes perfectly just and righteous demands. 3. It offers only that which is certain to be granted, and requires only that which is truly necessary; it is “very faithful.” 4. It is free from everything that would wound sensitiveness or hurt the conscience, and it makes for absolute goodness and virtue; it is very pure. 5. It blesses and sustains through all the changes of a human life, and it outlives the changes of the centuries. It is as needful now as it ever was, and it will be the stay and strength of human souls for ever; it is “everlasting.” 6. It is worthy of our deep and true affection; it is something we “love.”

II. TRIUMPHS OVER OUR SENSE OF PERSONAL INSIGNIFICANCE. (Ver. 141.) Religious earnestness does not dwell upon, and is not arrested by, a sense of personal obscurity. Every human soul is great, because related intimately to God, and because bound to duty and capable of holy service. The most despised individual soul can hold in its mind the thoughts and illustrate in its life the truth and principles of God himself (see Ps. xl. 17).

III. TRIUMPHS OVER THE DEPRESSION OF GREAT SORROWS. (Ver. 143.) Troubles may accumulate, heavy burdens may weigh down the soul, saddest losses may darken the way, but the earnest spirit that trusts in God and looks to him for help will not be overwhelmed.

IV. INVOLVES DEVOTEDNESS TO THE CAUSE OF GOD AND TRUTH. (Vers. 136, 139, 158.) The reverent study of God’s Word will make us increasingly conformed to the likeness and deepeningly interested in the cause of God. Hence there will be growing in our hearts a profound grief as we witness the sins and the consequent sorrows and miseries of mankind. This will rest on our heart and sadden our life, even as it did with our Lord. The woe of the world will be our trouble; and the cause of Christ, so often defeated and so long arrested, will be the source of great and lifelong solicitude. Of ourselves, as of our Master, it will be relatively true that “our zeal has consumed us,” has worn us out (Ps. lxi. 9; John ii. 17).

V. SHOWS ITSELF IN A STRONG SENSE OF GOD’S NEAR PRESENCE AND GREAT GOODNESS. (Vers. 151, 156.)

VI. SHOWS ITSELF IN CONTINUAL DELIGHT IN DIVINE TRUTH. (Ver. 148.) Whether taken hyperbolically or literally, the text indicates a deep unbroken delight in meditating on the revealed truth of God; even weariness and sleep give way to the eagerness and interest which is taken in these high themes, in these precious promises.

VII. SHOWS ITSELF IN FERVENT PRAYER. (Vers. 145—147, 149, 154, 156, 159.) The psalmist tells us how much and how earnestly he cried and pleaded with God; he continually breaks into the strain of his song with the prayer, “Quicken thou me!” If we are in earnest in the service of Christ, we shall: 1. Realize that we have urgent need of constant Divine influence from the Holy Spirit. 2. Have our regular times of public and private devotion, which we shall not permit business or pleasure to invade. 3. Maintain intercourse with Heaven by the abiding sense of God’s presence and the frequent, ejaculatory prayer.

Vers. 161—168.—*True things.* Here we have—

I. THE TRUE DREAD. (Ver. 161.) 1. Not the displeasure or the opposition of man; though this may be incurred without cause, and we may feel that the suspicion, or the ill feeling, or the attack is altogether wanton and unprovoked. 2. But the displeasure of God. Undisturbed by human ill will or intrigue, we “stand in awe” of Divine disapproval; we shrink from thinking the thought, cherishing the feeling, taking the course, which Christ would condemn; we are afraid of leaving undone or unattempted that to which he is calling us with his sovereign voice.

II. THE TRUE TREASURE. (Ver. 162.) 1. Not the “spoils” of wealth, or rank, or power, or learning, or a round of pleasurable excitements; these soon lose their relish,

and they too often leave a bitter taste behind. 2. But the revelation of God's grace, of his mind, of his purpose and promise, as made known in his Word.

III. THE TRUE WORD. (Ver. 163.) Falsehood is utterly offensive to God, and it is most hurtful to ourselves; it spells spiritual ruin to him that indulges in it; it is an evil weed that grows with saddening rapidity. Truthfulness in utterance is a large and essential part of all spiritual worth.

IV. THE TRUE SPIRIT. That of thankfulness. (Ver. 164.) It is not, of course, the number of times we offer praise that is acceptable; for mere mechanical thanksgiving is worthless, though rendered a hundred times a day. It is the spirit of gratitude which is everything—the recognition by the mind that it is by God's grace we are what we are, and the feeling of thankfulness dwelling in the soul; it is the inner sense of God's goodness, carried with us everywhere, uttering itself simply and unaffectedly.

V. THE TRUE SECURITY. (Ver. 165.) In the ordering of our life, we want these two things among others—peace and integrity. The love and the practice of Divine truth will yield both of these. 1. It will save us from stumbling (nothing will “offend” us); we shall not fall into the vices or faults which lead down to shame and self-reproach; we shall not give way to the contentiousness which ends in feuds and separations. 2. Hence we shall have peace—the approval of our own conscience, the good will of men, the “well done” of God.

VI. THE TRUE HOPE. (Ver. 166.) The final “salvation” for which we hope (see Rom. xiii. 11) is the true hope for man. The “peace of the grave” is *not* a true peace, but a false one. Mere unbroken unconsciousness is not a thing to be desired by us. But the hope of eternal life, based on the firm promises of God, and secured by “doing his commandments,” by fidelity to the end (see Heb. iv. 1; 2 Pet. i. 10, 11; Rev. iii. 11), by being “faithful unto death.”

VII. THE TRUE SOURCE OF SANCTITY. (Ver. 168.) If we would maintain our obedience everywhere and always, we must realize the truth that “all our ways are before God.” We must “stand before God,” must “walk with God,” as the saints of olden time did. We must take with us everywhere the truth that we think our thoughts, speak our words, live our life, in the near presence and under the approving or disapproving eye of our Lord himself.

Vers. 169—176.—*God's salvation.* These verses may bring before us the successive stages of salvation.

I. SEEKING AFTER GOD. (Vers. 169, 170, 174.) The heart “longs for salvation;” it “cries for deliverance;” it looks to God under a deep and strong sense of danger and of need. Then comes—

II. OUR CHOICE. (Ver. 173.) The decisive hour comes when we have finally and fixedly to determine whether we will or will not accept Jesus Christ for our Divine Lord and Saviour; whether or not we will spend our days and our powers in his service. The crisis of our cause is past when we can say, “I have chosen thy precepts;” I have chosen to do “the will of God in Christ Jesus.”

III. A LIFE OF SUSTAINED DEVOTION. As the psalmist's prayer intersperses his other utterances, so should devotion blend with our outward life, sanctifying and ennobling it. Especially should we be constantly looking for Divine help (ver. 173), that we may be enabled to do our duty faithfully, to bear our burden meekly, to resist temptation manfully and successfully, to use our opportunity wisely and devotedly.

IV. OUR CONFESSION OF PARTIAL FAILURE. (Ver. 176.) This wandering (of the text) is not the first departure of the soul from God, the going away into the “far country” of estrangement or rebellion; it is rather the deviation of the good man from the straight line of holy service, calling for recognition and return to the favour of God. “If we (Christian disciples) say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” If, when we thus err, when we “go astray,” we “confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” “For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee” (Ps. xxxii. 6). It is a very great point in Christian life to understand and to acknowledge our error, our partial failure, our need of the Divine hand to lead us back into the path of righteousness and wisdom.

V. OUR STUDY OF GOD'S WILL AS REVEALED IN HIS WORD. (Vers. 174, 175.)

VI. OUR SERVICE OF SPEECH AND SONG. (Vers. 171, 172, 175.) 1. Recognizing the supreme excellency of Divine truth, its intrinsic worth, and its power to save and heal, "our tongue will speak God's Word." From the sustained and prepared discourse to the humble dialogue and the parting word of warning or encouragement, true service may be rendered to our Lord. 2. Taught God's will by his Spirit as well as his Word, our soul as well as our body alive because quickened by Divine power, our heart and our mouth will be filled with praise. Prayer and praise will be the two accompaniments that will never fail, along all the path of life, until the witness is borne, and the work is done, and the reward is ready.

SUPPLEMENTARY: Vers. 15, 23, 30, 48, 59, 78, 97.—*Meditation: its place in Christian culture.* In these days and in this country we may speak of meditation as a lost art, if not, indeed, as a lost faculty. We have become incapable of sustained thought, of prolonged consideration of Divine truth. Even with the aid of a well-studied and well-spoken discourse, and the presence of sympathetic fellow-listeners, it is found difficult to maintain continuous attention for more than half an hour once or twice a week. The psalmist again and again recurs to this sacred duty; he speaks of it as a much-prized privilege. The best men of Old and New Testament times were men of meditation as well as of action—Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah, Nehemiah, John Baptist, St. Paul, John the apostle—all of these illustrate the truth. Our Lord himself sought the mountain fold for solitude and communion with his own heart and with his Father. The best men that have lived and wrought during this Christian era have been men that found time for contemplation, and for the devotion in which that reaches its highest point. In a time and a land where action is felt to be everything; where there is a multitude of distractions; where every hour may easily be occupied with some lawful or even laudable activity; where a positive effort has to be made to secure a quiet hour;—there is serious danger lest our Christian character suffer from want of earnest and devout meditation.

I. THE TWO THINGS ON WHICH TO DWELL. These are God's Word and our own "ways." We should meditate on God's statutes or precepts; we should "think on our ways." What a field for thought is here! The nature and the character and the work of God as revealed in sacred history and in Jesus Christ; the truth spoken to us by our Lord, and written for our learning by inspired men; the ways in which Divine truth has been illustrated and enforced in human history; the path along which God has led us; the witness we have borne, and the work we have done; the failure to become and to effect what we might have been and have done; the lessening distance before us this side the grave; the immortal life beyond, etc.

II. THE STATE OR ACT IN WHICH IT CULMINATES. In prayer. Meditation is the best friend of devotion; it is its source and safeguard. There is much that passes for prayer which, in the absence of meditation, is only mechanical repetition; there is no real meditation which does not pass into genuine, acceptable, fruitful prayer.

III. ITS PRACTICAL ISSUE. "I turned my feet," etc. (ver. 59). To be nothing at all but a thinker, or even a student, is a sad mistake. We must come forth from the chamber of communion to the field of conflict. But there is little danger now of too much seclusion. Much serious consideration, passing into prayer, is the best preparation for the "world's broad field of battle" for the dangers to be dared and the duties to be done.

Vers. 2, 4, 10, 34, 58.—*Whole-heartedness.* Success in every sphere of action is attained by thoroughness, by concentrating our forces, and working "with our whole heart." Many a man has allowed his life to be a failure because he has dissipated his strength. He "has done a great many things badly." But in no sphere of thought or action is thoroughness so much demanded as in that of religion. Surely we should offer the very best, our whole self, to our Creator, to our Saviour. This applies to—

I. OUR APPROACH TO HIM AND PURSUIT OF HIS FAVOUR. (Vers. 2, 10, 58.) To engage in the worship of God, or to read his Word, or to seek his friendship and forgiving love, in a formal and ceremonious fashion, with little seriousness and no earnestness of spirit, is to make a sad mistake; it is to lose the battle. Our relation to God is immeasurably higher than any other relation can be; his claims are absolutely

supreme; our interest in his merciful regard is surpassingly great; and there cannot possibly be any engagement of the soul that demands such strenuousness, such concentration of powers, such fixedness and fulness of soul, as prayer, as devotion, as the seeking after God.

II. OUR LIFE-SERVICE. (Vers. 4, 34.) The languid and listless efforts which some "religious" men make in the service of God must be wholly unacceptable, as they are altogether unbecoming. "Worthy is the Lamb to receive riches"—the riches of our remembrance, our obedience, our submission, our service. To make a few feeble efforts to subdue our temper, to quell our repining, to preserve a sustained tranquillity or cheerfulness of spirit, to show friendliness to Christian brethren, or to speak words of guidance or warning, but to give up the attempt because we do not immediately succeed,—this is not to keep God's precepts "diligently," to observe his will "with our whole heart." It is to relegate religion to the second or third place in our esteem. Christ claims the *first*. He tells us that if we love any one or anything more than him, we are not worthy of him. He promises us that if we subordinate all other things to him and to his service, we shall receive a large reward at his hands (see Matt. x. 37; Mark x. 28—30).

Vers. 6, 22, 31, 42, 80, 110.—*God's Word and shame.* There are—

I. THE THREE KINDS OF SHAME. 1. The shame of which we need not be ashamed; of which we may be proud—"the reproaches of Christ;" being disregarded and even despised because we are loyal to our Lord, and true to the convictions we have learnt of him; the reproach which purity sometimes suffers at the hands of laxity, and integrity from the lips of dishonesty, and devotion from the ribaldry of ungodliness. This is all to our credit, and does us honour. But then there is: 2. Self-reproach, the accusation of our own conscience. There is also: 3. The condemnation of the good; that strong and sometimes stern reprobation with which an instructed society visits the crime, the vice, the cruelty, the selfishness, the wrong-doing which comes before its tribunal, and calls for its verdict.

II. OUR TRUE SUPPORT IN HONOURABLE SHAME. This is found in what God's Word tells us of: 1. Our Lord's esteem and strong approval (Matt. v. 10—12). 2. His own example. He "suffered the contradiction of sinners against himself," and stooped to the lowliest shame, "even to the death of the cross." 3. Our hope. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness."

III. THE TRUE PRESERVATIVE FROM THE SHAME WE SHOULD FEAR. This also God's Word affords us, for it supplies: 1. The constant, the eternal principles which save from sin and wrong—truth, probity, purity, temperance, faithfulness, etc. 2. The strongest inducements to integrity—that fear of God and love of Jesus Christ which will make us shrink sensitively from all that grieves his Spirit, and which will lead us to pursue that path which ends in his large reward.

Vers. 9, 63, 74, 113, 115.—*The way of life: the young.* Our attention is called to—

I. THE WAY OF LIFE; especially as it presents itself to the young. It is interesting to look forward to a long journey; to anticipate the scenes that will be witnessed, the companionships that will be formed, the memories that will be gathered for years to come, etc. But how much more interesting to look forward to the journey of life still in prospect; to anticipate its joys, its successes, its triumphs; to hope for its friendships and achievements; to guard against its dangers and its mistakes! The uncertainties of the future in the case of the young, the possibilities of failure or of victory, make the earlier years of life to be fraught with the deepest interest.

II. THE SECRET OF SUCCESS. This is twofold. 1. It is found in *manly thoughtfulness*. How shall a young man make his course sweet and clean and pure? "By taking heed thereto;" by refusing to treat his life with levity, to let things take their own course, to make his "way" nothing but a "chapter of accidents;" by determining that it shall be a matter of intelligent, deliberate choice; by devoting to that most serious subject his most earnest consideration, and bringing to bear upon it the full faculties of his nature. 2. It is found in *Divine guidance*—"according to thy Word." And this "Word" (1) counsels the application of *holy principles*—those of truthfulness, purity, temperance, honesty, generosity, etc.; (2) lays great stress on *right companion-*

ships. Here is: (a) *Rejection of some*—the resolute refusal to admit to our confidence those who are unworthy of it. I hate “vain thoughts,” or “doubters, sceptics, double-minded men” (ver. 113); the peremptory dismissal from friendship of those who are unprincipled (ver. 115). (b) *Admission of others.* (Vers. 63, 74.) Very few things go so far to decide the way of life as the choice of companions. Associate with the frivolous or the sceptical, and the path of life leads downward to folly, unbelief, ruin; walk with the wise, the earnest, the godly, and that path leads upward to wisdom, virtue, usefulness, heaven.

Vers. 29, 30, 128, 163.—*The false way and the false word.* The love of Divine truth cannot coexist with the tolerance of any kind of falsity; they are mutually exclusive. We have—

I. THE FALSE WAY AND THE FALSE WORD. 1. The false way. This may be the way of (1) religious error, involving the miserable falsities and the dark immoralities of heathenism; (2) religious affectation, the making pretence of conviction which is not held, and of feelings which are not felt; (3) vice, which cheats by promising continued pleasure and yielding dissatisfaction, pain, shame, and death; (4) vanity, which also fails to keep its promise, holding out high hopes at the start, but ending in disenchantment, dreariness, and disgust; (5) procrastination, which beguiles and betrays. 2. The false word. This may be either (1) falsehood itself—the open, unblushing lie; or (2) false suggestion—keeping to the truth in word, but conveying an essentially false idea; or (3) exaggeration, which is one part truth and one part falsehood, the former being often just enough to float the latter without excusing or even extenuating the wrong.

II. THE HOLY AND WISE HATRED OF EVIL. “I hate;” “I hate and abhor.” These strong words are not too strong. We are “to abhor that which is evil;” to turn towards it a spirit of uttermost aversion. This is: 1. *Holy*; for it is God-like. “Lying lips are an abomination” to him. It is Christ-like. We know what he thought of the pretentiousness of an unreal and worldly pietism (see Matt. xxiii.). 2. It is *wise*; for falsity of thought and speech undermines character, dissociates from the true and good, leads down to spiritual and eternal death.

III. THE RIGHT AFFECTION. It is well, indeed, for those who can say, “Now love I thy Law;” it is everything to delight in the loving, cleansing, upholding truth of God; and, more especially, to love and therefore follow him who himself *is* the Truth and the Wisdom of God (John xiv. 6; 1 Cor. i. 24).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—176.—*Introductory to whole psalm.* I. WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN BY? 1. *Some assert that it is David's work.* They profess to be able to find proofs of his style and manner, and there is no limit to the laudations they pass on this psalm; but extravagant rhetoric proves nothing. 2. *But all the chief and most reliable of expositors refuse to admit the Davidic authorship.* The style is far later than that of David. In the Lamentations of Jeremiah there is a similar alphabetical composition. It is altogether an artificial and didactic composition, widely different from that which we have most reason to assign to the age and pen of David. Moreover, so far as we know, that general reading of the Law, which this psalm presupposes, could not have been without the wide circulation of copies of the Law. But of such circulation we have no evidence until the time of Ezra. Moreover, the life of David, as it is portrayed in the Scriptures, seems quite out of keeping with the tone, spirit, and allusions of this psalm. 3. *It is not possible to name any individual person as the author.* But we gather from the psalm that it was written by a devoted servant of God, whoever he may have been; that he was probably a young man—one of those of whom St. John would say, “I have written unto you young men, because ye are strong, and have overcome the wicked one.” Vers. 9, 99, 100, warrant the supposition that he was young. But, nevertheless, deeply taught of God to love the Word of God, and to continually feed upon it. Very lowly minded and humble before God. See the general tone of the psalm, and especially the last eight verses. He seems to have been much tried (vers. 21, 23, 36, 37).

His one fear being lest he should prove unworthy, and be ashamed (vers. 6, 7, 22, 31). If we were to look for one in whom the various conditions of authorship meet, we should turn to the Book of Daniel; either he himself, or one of those three noble Hebrew youths his book tells of, might well have been the writer of this psalm.

II. WHEREFORE IT WAS WRITTEN. 1. Perhaps as a *memoir of the writer's own experience*, and for his own help. 2. But yet more probably for the *instruction of others*. Hence the alphabetic, acrostic style, which was adopted as an aid to memory; just as preachers now divide their sermons into various heads. 3. *And for the glory of God*—that his grace might be praised. 4. *For the commendation of the Word of God*. The psalmist would bear his emphatic testimony to the preciousness of that Word. 5. *And for the stirring up of those who should read the psalm to diligent search for the treasures of that Word*. Personal testimony such as is so largely given in this psalm has ever great power over the minds of others.

III. ITS GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS. 1. *It is from a believer to believers*. The infidel and scoffer are not contemplated in the design of the psalm. 2. *It is for the edification and growth in holiness of the people of God*. 3. *It is intensely spiritual*. Rites and ceremonies and appeals to the mere reason are absent from it; it speaks to the soul. 4. *It is universal in character*. Limited to no one period, to no one land, to no one nation, but for all. 5. *Its spiritual force and power are witnessed to by the God-fearing of all ages*.—S. C.

Vers. 1—176.—*Characteristics of the Word of God as declared by the various names given to it in this psalm*. There are eight such names.

I. IT IS CALLED THE "LAW." (Vers. 1, 18, 34, etc.) The word implies that which rules guides, directs, therefore a rule of conduct. And this was evidently the psalmist's meaning. God's Word was not something to be merely talked about, praised, or argued over, but it was to order a man's life, and be his constant guide.

II. "TESTIMONIES." The word signifies that which bears witness to. And the Word of God is this. 1. *It bears witness to us of God*, and of his will concerning us; and: 2. *It bears witness to our hearts of the acceptableness or wrong of our lives and conduct in the sight of God*. It will ever bear true testimony, which it is at our peril if we neglect. By it God's sentence upon us will be determined.

III. "PRECEPTS." This expression comes from a word which signifies "that which is entrusted to us." And so God's Word is the deposit of faith, which we are to keep and guard. St. Paul declared, at the end of his career, "I have kept the faith;" and he exhorted Timothy to "keep that which was committed unto" him. We shall be asked at the last what we have done with this precious entrustment. God's words to us are the talents which, whilst he is absent from our sight, we are to "occupy," that is, trade with, until the Lord comes.

IV. "STATUTES." The term is derived from a word which tells of that which is engraved, definitely and clearly drawn, as a chart, a map, and so prescribes the way that is to be taken. And is not this true of the Word of God? Is it not ever saying to us, "This is the way, walk ye in it"? How clear and plain is the course it marks out for us! And, perhaps, the psalmist thought also of the depth and clearness with which this word is written on the human heart, and especially on the believing heart. There God has engraved deeply and definitely his will for us. Christ, the Word, is the Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

V. "COMMANDMENTS." That which is ordained, as the commander of an army orders what is to be done. God's people are the army of the living God, and in this holy war success is only to be gained by strict and diligent obedience to his commands.

VI. "JUDGMENTS." This expression is used of the verdict in a court of law, that which has legal sanction, and which governs the sentence of the judge. And so the Word of God is the Divine sentence, and is in accordance with the law of nature, of reason, and of righteousness. Who are we to set up our flimsy ideas against the precedents, principles, and judgments of the righteous Judge?

VII. "WORD." (Vers. 9, 11, 17, etc.) This answers to that sacred name of Christ, who is the Word of God. It tells, not of a written letter, a series of documents drawn up by men; but it is that inner word of God which the spirit of man hears—it may be

through the written or spoken Word, but it may be also independently of either. It is that Word which, if not heard, no preaching or teaching of man is of any avail. This is the Word we need to hear.

VIII. "WAY." The road, the course, the path, along which God himself walks, and that in which he would have us walk. And that the Word of God is. It is the way of holiness, the King's highway, and blessed are they that walk therein.—S. C.

Vers. 1—8.—*Whole-hearted service of God.* I. THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF SUCH AS RENDER IT. 1. *They are undefiled in the way.* They are not merely in the way, but keep themselves undefiled. How difficult this! 2. *They walk in the Law of the Lord.* It is the habit of their lives, and its pleasure. 3. *They keep his testimonies.* Keep them in their memory, their affection, and their conduct. 4. *They seek him with the whole heart.* This sadly rare. The mass of Christians are of a divided heart; but whole-hearted service, how rare this is! 5. *They do no iniquity.* It is possible not to sin, and to keep a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man.

II. THEY ARE DECLARED TO BE "BLESSED." And that they are so let all experience tell. Certainly half-hearted service can lay no claim to such blessedness. Such have just enough religion to spoil them for the world, but not near enough to give them the blessedness here spoken of. Theirs is a miserable round of sinning and repenting, falling down and rising up again, a life under the perpetual rebuke of conscience and the sense of God's displeasure. But the life told of here in this psalm is lived in the sunshine of the love of God, and in the possession of that loving-kindness which is better than life.

III. SUCH SERVICE IS THE ONLY ONE THAT ANSWERS TO GOD'S COMMAND. (Ver. 4.) It is that which he has specially enjoined. Anything less would be dishonouring to him and disastrous to us, whilst this glorifies him, and is for us most blessed.

IV. THE BELIEVER KNOWS THIS AND LONGS FOR IT. (Ver. 5.) The vision of the true life has been shown him, and he desires it with a great desire. He would be holy as God is holy. And he has good reasons; for: 1. *This only will give him confidence before men, and, what is more important, before God.* If he has it not, he must "be ashamed." 2. *It will enable him to offer worthy praise—praise with uprightness of heart* (ver. 7). Insincerity, half-heartedness, vitiates and destroys all praise such as God can accept. He turns from it.

V. THEREFORE IN DEEP HUMILITY HE CONSECRATES HIMSELF TO GOD. 1. *"I will keep thy statutes."* It is a sacred vow. He knew that only in the path of obedience could he hope to realize what he so longed for. 2. *But he says this in deep humility.* "Oh forsake me not utterly!" He knows that God might justly do this, but he trembles lest he should.—S. C.

Ver. 5.—*Longing after holiness.* I. THE PRAYER OF OUR TEXT RISES UP FROM MANY HEARTS. 1. *From even the careless and the worldling.* They, not seldom, have to eat of the fruit of their own ways, and it is nauseous to their taste. They often realize how wrong they are, and then there rises up from their hearts such prayer as this. Only, alas! these desires fade away so soon. 2. *From the beginner in the Divine life—the newly regenerate.* This is the holy, healthy appetite of such a soul. Not alone desire for being saved from hell or admitted to heaven, but to be made like God, and so, well-pleasing to him. 3. *The backslider.* No more miserable soul can live on the earth than the backslider. Again and again is he made conscious of his wretched folly in leaving the ways of God, and he mourns and yearns for the better way. It is God who will not lightly let them go: it is his call; let such listen to it and obey, and that at once. Then this good desire may be as the slender thread which draws up the cord to the prisoner in the dungeon, and that the trusty rope whereby escape is gained. So this desire, if well used, may draw to you other gifts of God's grace, and they yet more, and so, blessed deliverance shall be yours. 4. *The earnest believer.* For he sees defects in himself where others do not, and is conscious of failure where others only praise his goodness. But he has an ideal, a vision of God, after which he is for ever panting, and hence this prayer, "Oh that my ways were directed," etc.!

II. THE REASON OF THIS. 1. *It is the way in which Christ walked.* Every place where he has been is invested with a charm and delight to those who love him.

“Those holy fields,
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet.”

How many love to walk there likewise! But it is not many who can do this literally; yet in the holy ways of love to God, and obedience and faith, in which he ever walked, we may walk if we will. 2. *It is the way for which we were designed.* Nothing works well in that for which it was not intended. The delicate instruments of the mathematician will not serve for the coarse work of the artisan. And so with man's nature—it is made for God, and in his obedience finds its real welfare. 3. *It is the way of peace.* 4. *And of eternal life.*

III. BUT FOR THIS WE NEED GOD'S DIRECTION.—S. C.

Ver. 6.—*How to steer clear of shame.* I. WE ALL SHRINK FROM SHAME. Whether it be: 1. *Before our own conscience.* An inward blush, though unseen by any fellow-man, is to many, and to all who are capable of it, a source of pain, and to some of very real pain. To be ashamed of one's self is the reverse of pleasant. 2. *Yet more, before our fellow-men.* That has often driven men to self-destruction, so intolerable has it been. Or: 3. *Before God.* (See Ps. xl. 12.) And who has not known, by reason of ingratitude and sin, what this shame is? And there is the last awful shame—that: 4. *Before the Lord at his coming.* (1 John ii. 28.) May he keep us from that!

II. THE SURE WAY OF AVOIDING IT. By having “respect unto all thy commandments.” 1. *But can any one have respect unto all God's commandments?* Not so as to merit salvation thereby; for “by the works of the Law shall,” etc. And even if we could for the future, what about the past? People often talk of turning over a new leaf, but what of the old ones? The new leaf will not blot out those old ones. If a man has broken the law of his country in the past, the plea that he will never do the like again will not avail for his pardon. 2. *But in reference to God's commandments it is possible* (ver. 3) to “*do no iniquity.*” Christ will keep the soul that daily, hourly, trusts in him. As the pebble that lies in the bed of the stream is ever kept bright and clean by the constantly flowing water that passes over it, so he who will “walk in the light,” that is, honestly strive to live in such wise as that his whole conduct will bear God's light, and who will, so to speak, keep touch with Christ, continually looking to him for grace, he will find that the blood of Christ does, as a fact of experience, cleanse him, keep cleansing him, from all sin. There are thousands that can attest this. And: 3. *This is what we should desire.* Not out of dread of wrath, but out of love for God (Ps. lxxiii.), has come to be our deep longing. 4. *Such desire will lead to conduct very different from that of most.* For most men do not have respect unto all God's commandments. They may be public duties, but not private ones. So the commands of the first table, but not those of the second, or it may be *vice versâ*. Or in great matters, but not in the little ones of daily life. The agreeable duties, but not the disagreeable.

III. BUT HE WHO WILL HAVE RESPECT UNTO ALL GOD'S COMMANDMENTS, SHALL NOT ONLY AVOID SHAME, BUT BE FILLED WITH THE LOVE OF GOD.—S. C.

Vers. 9—16.—*Sanctified through the truth.* We have here—

I. A DIFFICULT QUESTION. “Wherewithal shall a young man,” etc.? (ver. 9). 1. *The very word “wherewithal” implies this.* It seems to suggest that all manner of means had been tried, but found inadequate. 2. *It is also implied that the way is already defiled.* And this most true, as most sad. The young man starts with an evil bias, and he has made this stronger than before by frequent compliance with it. So that it is not a clean way that has to be kept clean—that is difficult enough, but a defiled way that has to be made clean. 3. *And youth is so open to temptation.* The passions and appetites of the body clamouring like a set of foul harpies for indulgence. The mind, impatient of control, giving heed to all manner of unbelief and doubt and denial of the truth; the heart inexperienced and untaught, ready to be ensnared with the varied deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Here is the fuel ready and the fire, and they come together in youth. What can prevent the conflagration?

II. BUT IT IS NOT A QUESTION THAT CANNOT BE ANSWERED. It has been again and again. See the history of Joseph; of Daniel and the noble Hebrew youths in exile

with him; see the young men to whom St. John writes (1 John ii. 13. 14). And there are many such to-day, glory be to God!

III. HERE WE ARE TOLD HOW THE QUESTION IS ANSWERED. “By taking heed thereto,” etc. (ver. 9). 1. *There must be taking heed to the way:* thought and care given to it. It will not come right by chance, or when we are asleep, but it will need strenuous endeavours. 2. *And this must be according to God’s Word.* For that Word supplies the pattern and model of such cleansed way; especially in Christ, “who did no sin,” who was “holy, harmless, and undefiled.” And it supplies the all-constraining motives—the love of God, the cross of Christ, the beauty of holiness, the eternal reward. And it gives the wisest counsel as to all holy living; there the right road is marked out for us. God’s Word is a sure guide (ver. 105). And it points to the one source of help—the Holy Spirit of God, by whom God causes us to will and to do according to his good pleasure. 3. *And all this he had done.* See the following verses in this section. He tells how he had sought God with the whole heart, had hidden God’s Word in his heart, etc., so that he had come to rejoice therein; and this, doubtless, because of their help.—S. C.

Vers. 17—24.—*The soul’s longing unto God’s Word.* Such seems to be the theme of this third section of this psalm. This longing is shown—

I. IN HIS DESIRE FOR GOD’S CHIEF MERCIES ONLY THAT HE MAY KEEP GOD’S WORD. If most of us were called on to fill up this ver. 17 after the word “and,” what should we insert? Most desire to live and have God’s bounty, that they may get rich and become prosperous or achieve some other earthly good. But the psalmist desires God’s bounty and life only that, etc. What an estimate of that Word does such prayer show!

II. IN HIS PRAYER FOR OPEN VISION. (Ver. 18.) He desires this because he is certain that there are wondrous things in God’s Word which as yet he has never seen, and which he never will see until God doth open his eyes. And this is true of us all. To how many the Bible is all dark and dull, incomprehensible in many parts, and void of interest in others! It is because the films of sin and prejudice have rendered their eyesight dark and dull. Let their eyes be but opened, and they will behold, not, as now they do, mere words, but wondrous things out of God’s Law.

III. IN HIS PITEOUS PLEA THAT GOD’S WORD MAY NOT BE HIDDEN FROM HIM. “I am a stranger in the earth.” Hence homeless, friendless, helpless, with none to sympathize or succour, lonely, unused to the ways of those around him, desolate in heart, and often in all else. Therefore thou who hast commanded thy people to show kindness to strangers, will not thou do so for me? Hide not thy commandments from me, for they are to me as home and friends and all needful help. Illust.: Robinson Crusoe’s joy on finding a copy of the Bible when on his desert island. The joy of the persecuted Malagasy in the Scriptures they had managed to preserve.

IV. BY HIS DEEP DISTRESS WHEN GOD’S WORD IS WITHHELD FROM HIM. (Ver. 20.) He may have had the letter of the Scriptures, but what he wanted was to find God in those Scriptures. Until this longing was satisfied, “all times” were alike sad to him. They who have known the joy of God’s manifestations through his Word will know no joy until they are thus blessed again.

V. BY HIS DEPRECATION OF THE DOOM OF THOSE WHO DESPISE GOD’S WORD. (Ver. 21.) Misery, shame, and ruin are along the path they tread—a path which he would ever shun. It is well for us to look steadily on to the end of the sinner’s path—the broad road—that we may the more steadily adhere to the ways of the Lord.

VI. BY HIS CONVICTION OF THE SURE DELIVERANCE THERE IS FOR HIM IN GOD’S WORD. 1. *From reproach and contempt.* (See homily on ver. 6.) He had kept God’s testimonies, and he knew that therefore reproach and contempt in all their power to distress or harm him would be taken away. 2. *From all fear of man.* (Ver. 23.) Princes may, and probably did, strive to browbeat and terrify him—as with Paul, Luther, and many such another; but the memory of God’s Word mused and meditated upon made his soul strong. How true is the verse!—

“Fear him, ye saints; and you will then
Have nothing else to fear:
Make you his service your delight,
Your wants shall be his care.”

VII. BY HIS CONFESSION OF THE GOOD HE HAD GOT OUT OF IT. (Ver. 24.) 1. *God's testimonies had been his delight.* See how our Saviour delighted in God's Word. 2. *His counsellors.* No one finds God's Word his delight unless he first makes it his counsellor. But if we will, then, etc.—S. C.

Vers. 25—32.—*Clinging to God.* Such seems to be the tone and spirit of this section. There has been the waking up to a great peril, and hence there has come the tightening of the grasp on God, the clinging to him with the greater tenacity because of the one peril seen and felt.

I. THE PENITENT CONFESSION AND PRAYER. (Ver. 1.) The psalmist owns that the world is getting too much and terrible power over him; that his soul, instead of mounting up to God in holy aspiration and endeavour, cleaves to the dust; and he dreads lest he should fall away altogether, and therefore prays, "Quicken thou me," etc.

II. HE ENCOURAGES HIMSELF BY RECALLING GOD'S ANSWERS TO HIS PRAYERS IN THE PAST. When before he had made like confession and supplication, it had not been in vain.

III. HE PRAYS DEFINITELY for what he feels will really help him. 1. *That God should teach him his statutes.* (Ver. 26.) That God should do this; he cannot teach himself, others cannot teach him, but God can. This is what we all want. 2. *That God should make him understand his Word.* He had heard it, read it, but he wanted that deep realization of it which only a true understanding of it could supply. 3. And he wanted this *that he might bear effectual testimony.* "So shall I talk," etc. (ver. 27). Such testimony would not only bless others, but would react on himself, as it ever does, and would be one of the effectual ways in which God would quicken him.

IV. HE TELLS THE LORD HOW GREAT HIS TROUBLE IS, and prays and pleads for help. 1. His trouble was that *he feared he was losing hold of God.* He was breaking his heart over it, for, to a godly man, there is no greater trouble than to feel as if every good in him, all that God had given him of his grace, were falling away from him. That is trouble indeed. 2. *He prays for help.* "Strengthen thou me." As if he would say he could not hold on much longer; unless help came, he must give way. 3. *He pleads the Word of God.* "According to thy Word" (see homily on ver. 25).

V. HE CONFESSES AND PRAYS AGAINST THE EVIL WAY INTO WHICH HE HAD FALLEN—"the way of lying." Not—so scholars say—the habit of falsehood and lies in common speech, but rather of unfaithfulness, falseness to God. Uttering vows and never fulfilling them, making holy resolves and forgetting and breaking them. How many do this! How easy it is to fall into this way! We use strong impassioned expressions in hymns and prayers, and when we look for the corresponding acts they are not to be found. And this, like the veriest vice, does, as Burns says—

". . . hardens all within,
And petrifies the feeling."

Well, therefore, may he pray, "Remove from me," etc. He asks for two things: 1. *The taking away of the old evil.* In all spiritual reformation this must come first. Repentance is just this. Then: 2. *The imparting of God's Law.* The forming and fashioning of the soul after that Law.

VI. HE MAKES PROTESTATION. 1. *That his will is ever on God's side.* (Ver. 30.) "I have chosen," etc. His deliberate choice and preference is, not the way of lying, but the way of truth, and hence he keeps ever before him God's judgments. 2. *That he has acted according to his resolve.* He has stuck unto God's testimonies. He had held on, clung tightly. He could appeal to the Lord's knowledge of this, and plead that he should not be put to shame. 3. *That he will live the quickened life* if God will enlarge his heart by shedding abroad therein his own love and the knowledge of his will.—S. C.

Ver. 25.—"Quicken thou me." I. THE DEPLORABLE CONDITION THAT CALLED FOR THE ANSWER TO THIS PRAYER. It was a very sad one; for consider: 1. *What it was that the psalmist confesses that his soul cleaved to.* "The dust." By this contemptuous phrase he means the things of this world generally. And he is right in thus speaking.

Not that in themselves the things of this world are no better than dust. Health, wealth, success, reputation, power, pleasure—the things that men strive after—these have their value, and that is far higher than mere dust. But it is when these things are put in opposition to, and too often preferred before—as they are—things that are spiritual and eternal, and that have to do with the destiny and character of the soul, that then they are rightly called “dust.” And they are like the dust, not only by their comparative worthlessness, but for other reasons—their power to defile the soul. Even the believer, though, by the blood of Christ, he is made clean, yet needs—so Christ tells us—that he wash his feet (John xiii. 10). Contact with the world’s dust, inevitable though it be, involves the continual need of the washing of the feet, that is, that portion of our spiritual nature that is exposed to the world’s defiling power. And how blinding is this dust! Men can see nothing as it really is, when thus blinded. And how suggestive as to the destiny of the soul that cleaveth to it—to be driven away “like the chaff which the wind driveth away”! Its proper place is under our feet; but how terrible that the soul should cleave to it! 2. *And that the soul should do this.* For think of what the soul of man is. Its nature—formed in the image of God. Its capacity—able to commune with God, to become like God. Its destiny—eternal blessedness or woe. The cost of its redemption—nothing less than the precious blood of Christ. The strife that is ever going on for its possession—between the gracious powers of heaven on the one side, and the awful powers of hell on the other. Can that be of small account concerning which all this can be said? And yet it is this soul which, too often, cleaves to the dust. 3. *And that the soul should cleave to it.* The attractions of this world we cannot but see, and their fascination we cannot but feel, and the devil is ever busy to make that attraction more fascinating still. But that we, the redeemed of the Lord, the temples of the Holy Ghost, should yield to this, and not only yield, but be so mastered as to cleave thereto, as the limpet cleaves to the rock, spite of all efforts to detach it,—how deplorably sad all this is! And yet our consciences must own how deplorably common a fact this is. Blessed be God, if we are led to see it, to mourn over it, to confess it, as here; and, best of all to turn to the sure remedy. For note—

II. THE HELP THAT IS CRAVED. “Quicken thou me.” 1. *The psalmist was wont to pray this prayer very often.* Seven times over in this psalm does it occur (vers. 25, 37, 40, 88, 149, 150, 159). 2. *What does he mean by it?* Not the bestowment of spiritual life—he had this already, or he would never have made this confession and prayer; but “more life and fuller,” the enlivening and reinvigoration of the soul,—this is what he craved. 3. *And he turns to God for this.* It is God’s work; he alone can answer this prayer. Man does not even know what life in its meanest forms is, much less is he able to create it. How, then, should he be competent when it is the highest form of life that is needed? 4. *But this does not mean that we are to be absolutely passive in the matter.* We are not. We can and we must pray for it, as does the psalmist here. 5. *And never does God refuse such prayer* when coming from a sincere heart. See the miracles of our Lord—how he quickened into life again the child-daughter of Jairus; the young man, the widow’s son; and Lazarus, on whom corruption had already fastened. Nothing can bar his power.

III. THE PLEA THAT IS URGED. “According to thy Word.” This answers to our “through Jesus Christ our Lord;” for he was the Word, the means by which we read the heart of God. He was the Word incarnate. But in the days before his advent, the Word which is here told of served the same end; not so much the written Word as that message of God to the soul which came through the written or spoken Word. Now, according to that, in harmony with the love, truth, wisdom, power, of that, so is it prayed, “Quicken thou me.”

IV. LET US PRAY THIS PRAYER. Maybe we need it, though we do not think so. Dislike of prayer and holy service, fret and anxiety, worry and continual care about earthly things for ourselves or for our children,—such are some of the signs that we need thus to pray. And think of the harm that such cleaving to the dust must ever involve.—S. C.

Ver. 31.—*Tenacity.* I. WE HAVE HERE AN ILLUSTRATION OF IT. “I have stuck unto,” etc. If, as we believe, this psalm is the production of one who in the days of Israel’s exile was pressed upon by all manner of inducements to renounce his faith in

God, but who, like Daniel and his companions, stuck unto God's testimonies, then his history would justify the assertion here made. And there have been many such.

II. TENACITY WILL ALWAYS BE TRIED. 1. *It could not else be known.* It might be professed, but could never be proved. Hence: 2. *Our Lord was wont to test the sincerity of all who came to him.* And he does so still. See the history of the Syro-phenician woman. How terrible was the strain and test to which she was subjected, but which, as the Lord knew she would, she triumphantly endured!

III. IT IS A VERY BLESSED GIFT. For, as this verse suggests: 1. *It delivers from shame.* The shame of a rebuking conscience; of men's contempt; of God's being ashamed of us; and of our dishonouring God. The want of such tenacity involves all this shame; and a terrible thing it is. 2. *It secures great blessing.* Inward peace and confidence towards God; the respect and admiration of our fellow-men; they cannot help themselves; they must admire such steadfastness; they ever have done so, and thus the blood of the martyrs has become the seed of the Church. It receives also God's great reward (Matt. x. 32), and brings glory to him now.

IV. IT IS ATTAINABLE BY ALL. This may seem an exaggerated, if not an untrue, statement, but it is neither. No doubt there are men, who by their temperament and physical constitution, their sound health and well-balanced and not too susceptible nervous organization, seem incapable of fear; but there are others, and these the majority, who seem constitutionally weak. But, nevertheless, this blessed endowment of strength all may have. See St. Peter giving way and cowardly denying his Lord at the challenge of a servant-girl; and that same man, when emptied of his self-confidence and baptized with the Holy Spirit, dauntless and firm as a rock. Out of weakness he, as myriads more, was made strong. God is able to strengthen us with all might by his Spirit in the inner man. Let self-trust go, his love come in, and the Spirit fill us, and so this great gift shall be ours.—S. C.

Ver. 32.—*Running the way of God's commandments.* I. WHAT THIS IS. 1. *It is not a common thing.* In ordinary men you do not see it at all; they very often run, and at headlong speed, but it is the reverse of the way told of here. And even when we have become Christians, there is too often only a creeping along, a very slow walking, and that interrupted by many a halt, and sometimes by positive turning back; but how little of this running! 2. *For running means increased energy in God's service.* The very word implies that. It is the very opposite of listlessness, taking our ease, and of all indifference. Go along by the side of a country mill-stream in the hot summer months. As you come to the mill you hear no sound. The pleasant beat of the wheel, the murmur of the grinding, and the cool splash of the water on the far side of the stream, are all missing. You draw near, and you see the cause. The stream has well-nigh disappeared; the muddy banks are steaming in the heat; there is but a small dribble of water at the bottom; the mill-wheel is motionless and blistering in the sun. But come that way again after the spring or autumn rains, or during the wet winter months. How the water rushes along! how it whirls the mill-wheel round! how it compels the miller to find an overflow, lest its force do serious damage! Now, the contrast between the miserable, scant supply of water in the hot summer months, and that other full, rushing flow, is no greater than that between the common life of too many Christians and that running in the way of God's commandments of which the psalm here tells. 3. *And careful laying aside of hindrances.* Many of our hindrances allow of quiet walking, but not of running (cf. Heb. xii. 1). 4. *More steadfast looking to the end of the way.* "Looking unto Jesus." If we look aside, we linger, swerve, and slacken our pace. 5. *Greater joy in God's service.* Running is a symbol of joy (Acts iii. 8).

II. IT IS VERY DESIRABLE. 1. *For its effects on our own spiritual life.* 2. *For its influence on the world.* 3. *And on the Church.* 4. *And, above all, for the honour of Christ.* Note—

III. ITS CONDITION. "When thou shalt enlarge my heart." That is: 1. *The understanding*; that we may see and know the truth. 2. *The affections*; that we may feel it. 3. *The conscience*; that we may be aroused. 4. *The will*; that we may resolve. —S. C.

Vers. 33—40.—“*Teach me, O Lord.*” The verses of this section contain, apparently, an enumeration of various facts which rendered it essential that the Lord should teach him, if ever he were to learn. As it has been said, the man who wrote this psalm knew two things—first, that there was something he must and would learn, for all his well-being depended upon it; and this something was the Word of God, which he calls now by one name and now by another. But he knew a second thing, and that was—he could never teach himself; God must teach him. This is the burden of his prayer, not only in this section, but throughout the psalm. For the difficulties in the way of his acquiring this knowledge were many and great. He suggests some of them here.

I. LACK OF PERSEVERANCE. What knowledge he already had gained was sufficient to make him set out on the way; but soon he became ready to halt, and did halt. God must instruct him if he were ever to continue steadily on to the end. “Ye did run well; who did hinder you?” So said St. Paul to some of his converts; and how often the like has to be said still (cf. the seed on the stony ground, Matt. xiii.)

II. HALF-HEARTEDNESS. (Ver. 34.) Here was another difficulty, as it is to this day. People can be got to keep part of the Law of God, but not all of it—they will make some reserves. And if they are not conscious of this, they know that it is not with the “whole heart” that they serve God. The psalmist confesses his failure here, and prays that God would so give him understanding that he may observe God’s Law with his whole heart.

III. INABILITY TO DO WHAT HE WOULD. He delighted in the path of God’s commandments (ver. 35), but yet was unable “to go” therein. No doubt he could talk about it, pray about it, feel warmly, speak fervently, and desire sincerely about it, but then came this miserable powerlessness which he asks God to overcome, and to *make* him “go in,” etc. (Rom. vii. 14—19). Here is another reason for seeking the help of God, and it exists still.

IV. COVETOUSNESS. (Ver. 36.) If the Lord does teach the soul, then there will follow “understanding” (ver. 34)—power of will (ver. 35) and inclination of the heart to God’s testimonies (ver. 36), so that all these requests are but different forms of that with which the section begins, “Teach me, O Lord.” And here in this thirty-sixth verse he names another hindrance—covetousness. St. Paul speaks of it as “the root of all evil,” as indeed it is (cf. 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10; Col. iii. 5; Matt. xiii. 22). It so drags the heart away from God, that only he can turn it back again.

V. LOVE OF VANITY. (Ver. 37.) The runner in the race that does not keep his eye fixed steadily on the goal, but turns his eyes now to this side and now to that, whenever they are attracted by some vanity, will indeed need quickening in God’s way. This wandering gaze of the soul, how many failures in the Christian race is it answerable for!

VI. INSTABILITY. Here it is again, as in vers. 35 and 40—delighting in the path of God’s commandments, yet needing power to go; so now here is the soul devoted to God’s fear, but yet needing to be established. The Word of God is not insecure and unstable, but the soul is so in regard to it. As to its truth, as to its value, as to its power, Lord, make it sure to us!

VII. FEAR OF REPROACH. This does, indeed, bring a snare. How many know God’s judgments are good, but yet fear “reproach”!

VIII. LACK OF SPIRITUAL ENERGY. (Ver. 40.) Longing, yet unable to attain. Longing without God’s quickening will not avail.—S. C.

Vers. 41—48.—*What God’s salvation does for a man.* This section begins with fervent prayer for the coming of God’s salvation unto the psalmist. He wants to have a personal realization of it. And he proceeds to tell wherefore he thus prays. His reasons may well be ours.

I. IT ENABLES HIM AND URGES HIM TO ANSWER HIM THAT REPROACHETH. (Ver. 42.) If a man knows that God’s salvation has come to him, he has that in his conscious possession which will make him despise, as mere idle tales, all and every reproach of the scoffer and the unbeliever. They may as well deny or decry the light of the sun as to do the like for that salvation in which the soul rejoices. His only fear is lest he should not be able to give clear testimony—lest, whilst he feels it in his heart, he should be

unable to declare it with his lips; hence he prays (ver. 43), "Take not . . . out of my mouth." God will not take it out of his heart, but he may out of his mouth, by refusing him power or opportunity of utterance. He longs to bear bold testimony for God and his salvation.

II. **ENDURES HIM WITH PERSEVERING GRACE.** (Ver. 44.) He will never desire to forsake the Law of God, but will go on therein continually for ever and ever. Its ways are ways of pleasantness (Prov. iii. 17).

III. **CAUSES HIM TO WALK AT LIBERTY.** (Gal. v. 1; John viii. 36.) Christ's yoke will give rest; but then we must have it really on, not half on and half off, for then it frets and chafes and galls. How could it be otherwise? The liberty of the children of God is glorious.

IV. **GIVES HIM FEARLESSNESS.** (Ver. 46; cf. Matt. x. 18—20.)

V. **AND PURE DELIGHT.** (Ver. 47.) There is such delight as is here told of (vers. 16, 35; Ps. xxxvii. 4). This delight was "the meat to eat which ye know not of," of which our Saviour spoke (John iv. 32—34). And what servant of God is there that has not known this delight? It is "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Phil. iv. 7).

VI. **AND HOLY RESOLVE OF CONSECRATION TO GOD.** (Ver. 48.) The lifting-up of the hands tells of solemn vows made to God (cf. Gen. xiv. 22). So here the psalmist takes his solemn oath—his *sacramentum*—that he will be true to God. How often, when the sense of the infinite love of God has come into the soul, has the like vow been made!

VII. **MAKES HIM TO BE EVER MEDITATING UPON GOD.** The run of his thoughts is ever after God and his ways.—S. C.

Vers. 49—56.—"*Songs in the night.*" The comfort of God in time of trial is the theme of this section. As to these songs, we are told—

I. **GOD GIVES THEM.** (Ver. 49.) The Word which it is prayed the Lord would remember is God's own Word; and it is told what that Word has done—"caused me to hope." This God's Word ever does.

II. **THEY ARE OUR COMFORT IN AFFLICTION.** (Ver. 50.) And what a number of these precious words there are! There is no conceivable stress of soul which is not thought of and provided for by some fit and sure word of the comfort of God.

III. **THEY HOLD US FAST IN THE RIGHT WAY.** (Ver. 51.) To be held up to scorn and derision is more than most can bear; they give way, yield, and swerve beneath its pitiless power; but not so he to whom the comfort of God is known. The sense of his approval, the gleam of the crown of life, the anticipation of his "well done," and of the joy of the Lord, hold fast the heart, and steady the wavering will. It has ever been so, and will ever be so.

IV. **THEY BRING TO MEMORY THE VERDICT OF GOD.** (Ver. 52.) This: 1. *When man's verdict has been clearly and cruelly given against us.* (Ver. 51.) They deemed him a miserable fool. 2. *When thinking of how God will judge them* who are now judging him. He can leave them to his tribunal, whence righteous judgment will go forth. 3. *When contemplating the high-handed wickedness of those that forsake God's Law.* (Ver. 58.) Burning indignation and horror take hold of him at the sight of them, but again the memory of God's judgments has been his comfort. The history of Israel had recorded many such judgments.

V. **THEY HAD BRIGHTENED THE WEARY JOURNEY OF THE DAY AND THE DARK HOURS OF NIGHT.** (Vers. 54, 55.)

"Such songs have power to quiet
The restless pulse of care,
And come like benediction
That follows after prayer.

"And the night shall be filled with music,
And the cares that infest the day
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away."

(H. W. Longfellow.)

VI. BUT ONLY THE FAITHFUL CAN HAVE THESE SONGS. (Ver. 56.) How true this! The joy of the Lord comes not to the half-hearted and the compromiser and the unfaithful. But to him who keeps God's precepts they do come.—S. C.

Vers. 57—64.—*God the Portion of his people.* This may be understood either way: as the portion which God gives his people—he bestows himself upon them; or the portion which they choose and claim. Probably the latter is the meaning here. They have turned their backs on the world as a portion, and have resolved that as for them they will be the Lord's, and he shall be theirs. Accordingly, we have given here sundry signs and effects of God being his people's Portion.

I. APPROPRIATION. The word "my" denotes that. Until our faith in God advances to this personal appropriation of him, it will not do much for us. We must believe in God, not only as a Portion for his people, but each one of us must be able to say, "He is my Portion" (cf. Ps. xci. 2).

II. CONSECRATION AND CONFESSION. "I have said that I would," etc. (ver. 57). Not only is there the inward resolve to live the life of obedience, but the open avowal thereof. Wonderful is the increased hold of God which confessing him gives to the soul.

III. SUPPLICATION. "More of God" is the soul's craving and cry; with the whole heart his favour is entreated (ver. 58). The hunger after God grows by what it feeds on. God is the one only satisfying Portion of the soul (cf. Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2). His loving-kindness is deemed better than life.

IV. CONSIDERATION. There will be the thinking on our ways. We shall consider them, examine them, hold them up to the light, so as to see if they be what God would have them be. And such consideration will be followed by its proper consequence—it will not stop short with itself, but will go on, and that speedily (ver. 60), to the practical result of turning "our feet unto," etc. (ver. 59). There is much consideration which never advances so far as this, much thought which never bears this blessed fruit. Then there will be—

V. CONSOLATION. This ever follows, never precedes, such practical consideration as that just spoken of. But it does follow. There will be trials to be met, and burdens to be borne, and many temptations; but there will be support and consolation abundant (vers. 61, 62).

VI. ASSOCIATION. The instinct of the regenerate soul is to find others like itself. They will associate, let the cost be what it may.

VII. ASPIRATION. The soul recognizes how full the earth is of God's mercy. It would enjoy more for itself.—S. C.

Vers. 65—72.—*The blessed effects of affliction.* I. THEY ARE CONFESSED. (Ver. 65.) Did not the following verses tell us, we should hesitate to say that the frank confession, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant," referred to afflictions that he had suffered. But such is the reference. Many a child of God has made the confession here on earth; all will make it in heaven.

II. WE NEED THE TEACHING OF GOD ERE WE SEE THEM. (Ver. 66.) This is what is implied; it is as if he had said, "Unless thou dost teach me, I shall never be able to see that it is good for me that I have been afflicted." He would have the teaching, that he may yet more clearly see how well God hath dealt with him. But it is so; for—

III. AFFLICTION OFTEN RESTORES AND RESTRAINS THE SOUL. (Vers. 67, 71. See history of Manasseh, 2 Chron. xxxiii.) The burnt child dreads the fire. "Lord, with what care thou hast begirt us round!" If the way of transgressors was not hard, we should all go that way. The meaning and intent of affliction is to keep us near and to draw us nearer to God. Happy are they who, when the storm of life beats heavily, hide the more closely within the sure shelter of the love of God! And this is what God would have us do. And what a holy restraint the memory of past affliction exercises upon us! The sin which before was very attractive has now, because branded with the dread marks of God's displeasure, lost most, if not all, of its attraction. And this is another end God designs.

IV. RIGHTLY READ, IT PROVES THE GOODNESS OF GOD. (Ver. 68.) It is because it is so often wrongly read that unbelief, pessimism, and atheism so largely prevail. But submission, prayer, trust, will ever lead to the right reading.

V. THEY BENDER THE PRACTICES OF THE PROUD POWERLESS TO DO US HARM. (Vers. 69, 70.) They would shrink from no falsehood to injure the godly, but they cannot separate him from the God in whom he trusts and delights.

VI. THEY MAKE GOD AND HIS WORD VERY PRECIOUS. (Ver. 72.) We say, "A friend in need is a friend indeed." But if when in deep affliction God came to our help, and sustained us under it, and sanctified us through it, and comforted us continually, must not that God be precious to our soul? Assuredly yes!—S. C.

Vers. 73—80.—*The sustaining power of the Word of God.* The psalmist has just come forth from some heavy affliction; but all through it God's Word has been his stay; and some of the results of such God-sustained affliction are shown in this section. They may be classed under the three heads of—

I. CONVICTION. This relates: 1. *To the fact that his life has been ordered of God.* (Ver. 73.) "Thy hands have," etc. He is speaking not merely of his body, that God created that, but rather he speaks of that as proof that all else concerning him had been made and fashioned of God—his life was according to the settled purpose and plan of God. "He knoweth the way that I take." Blessed is it when we come to recognize this truth; for then shall we know that we are not the sport of mere caprice or blind chance, but are under the control of God, who cannot err, and who, "like as a father, pitieth his children." 2. *That in righteousness and faithfulness God had afflicted him.* (Ver. 75.) Men find it very hard to say this now; they never do say it of themselves; but God's grace can enable a man to say it, as here and hereafter in heaven we shall say it. But it is good to be able to say it now.

II. ASSURANCE (ver. 74) that his trust in God under his affliction would win for him the glad welcome of those who feared God. The warm welcome of the people of God is one of the many recompenses with which those who for Christ's sake suffer will be met (Matt. xix. 29).

III. PRAYERFULNESS. Note his petitions: 1. *For understanding, so that he might learn, etc.* (Ver. 73.) This is a petition he is perpetually offering (see vers. 31, 125, 144, 169, 27, 100, etc.). It implies that if men did but understand, their hearts would turn to God (Psa. xiv. 2; lxxxii. 5; Isa. vi. 10). And, undoubtedly, it would be so. The failure is not in the intellect, but in the heart. 2. *For more knowledge of God's promised mercy* (vers. 76, 77); so that he may be comforted thereby, and that he might live (ver. 77). Life without the realization of God's tender mercies would not be worth having. 3. *For the bringing of the proud to shame*, if so be God's will; if it were not, then he would not be without help, for he would meditate in, etc. (ver. 78). 4. *For the friendship of the good.* How blessed to have this (ver. 79)! 5. *For soundness of heart in God's statutes.* The heart is the all-important thing.—S. C.

Vers. 81—88.—"*Persecuted, but not forsaken.*" I. PERSECUTED. That he was so is clear from the verses before us. For he says: 1. "*My soul fainteth,*" etc. (Ver. 81.) He was heart-sick at the long delay of the hoped-for help. Year after year, generation after generation, it has been at times the lot of God's people to suffer persecution. And then the piteous confession of these verses is heard. 2. "*Mine eyes fail,*" etc. (Ver. 82.) As one who steadily gazes out into the distance, looking for aid promised, expected, but does not come, at length his eyes become weary and dim, and his sorrow finds utterance in the plaintive words, "When wilt thou comfort me?" Hard, indeed, is the lot of such. 3. *His very countenance and his body generally showed the marks of his distress.* (Ver. 83.) Like as a wine skin-bottle hung up in the smoke of the fire would blacken and shrivel, become dry, parched, wrinkled, and useless, so the deep lines and the wasted look and the shrunken form told of the inward anguish of the soul. 4. *It was near the close of his life, and his persecution, so wrong and unjust, still continued.* (Vers. 84—86.) They sought to trap him as if he were a wild beast (ver. 85). So did the ungodly deal with him. Persistent, cruel, cunning, unjust, ever seeking his life—how piteous such a condition! 5. *He was "almost consumed."* (Ver. 87.) As a brand blackened and charred, and all but burnt up and reduced to ashes. It is an emblem of uttermost distress. Yes; he was persecuted, and it was hard to bear.

II. BUT HE WAS NOT FORSAKEN. 1. *For the promises of God were his stay.* Ho

hoped in them still (ver. 81). Did not forget God's statutes. Forsook not his precepts (vers. 83, 87). 2. *He was sure that God would fulfil his Word.* (Ver. 84.) It was only a question of "when?" 3. *His soul still turned to God.* Praying for help (ver. 86). For quickening, so that he might keep hold of God's testimonies. Believing absolutely in the loving-kindness of God (ver. 88). Now, a man who can do all this, persecuted he may be, as this man was, but forsaken he is not. Oh the blessedness of real faith in God! Life is often terribly stern. Gethsemane and Calvary are along the way God's people often have to take, though never can they be to us so awful as they were to our Lord. But as unto him, so to us, light ariseth out of darkness; for such is the blessedness of the people of God.—S. C.

Vers. 89—96.—*A grateful confession of Divine aid.* How fitly this section follows on the foregoing one! There was darkness, indeed; but here is light. The psalmist celebrates—let us do so with him—the help of God.

I. IT IS SETTLED IN HEAVEN FOR EVER THAT SUCH AID SHALL BE FORTHCOMING. (Ver. 89.) Therefore: 1. *No power of man can hinder it.* It is "settled." 2. *Nor any lapse of time.* Generations may come and go, but that matters not. God's promise abides, even as the earth which he has established. 3. *Nor any events or changes whatsoever.* (Ver. 91.) Divine decrees have ordained them, and all have to serve and minister thereto. Here is great consolation for the tried soul.

II. IT SUSTAINS THE SERVANT OF GOD IN UTMOST PERIL. (Ver. 92.) But for God's settled love, which was full of delight for his servant, he could not have lived. God has ways and means by his Holy Spirit to so write his Word on our hearts, that they shall be filled with delight, and all the power of hell cannot destroy us. So was it here; so will it be with all like-minded men.

III. THE EXPERIENCE OF ITS POWER MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE MEMORY TO LET IT GO. (Ver. 93.) If we have been "quickened" by it, as was the psalmist, memory and heart and will cleave to it with a tenacity which never relaxes, but ever tightens its hold. Nothing but the experience of religion in the heart will do this. Creeds and rituals and sacraments, religious profession and work, have all been proved frail and feeble in this respect; but he who knows by actual experience how God can quicken his soul will simply never leave him.

IV. AND LEADS TO ABSOLUTE SELF-SURRENDER AND CONFIDENT TRUST. (Ver. 94.) "I am thine." The man is no longer his own. "Save me"—I know thou wilt; such is the implied meaning.

V. IS AN ANTIDOTE TO ALL FEAR. (Ver. 95.) What matters it that the wicked wait, etc.? He will consider the testimonies of God, those borne to him by redeemed souls, those borne by them in the psalmist's own soul. Such considering banishes fear.

VI. THERE IS NOTHING LIKE IT. All human schemes and teachings are nought compared with thy commandment.—S. C.

Vers. 97—104.—*"O how love I thy Law!"* Then follows a series of reasons why.

I. IT FURNISHES HIM WITH HAPPY THOUGHT ALL THE DAY LONG. (Ver. 97.) It is good to cultivate the habit of turning our thoughts to the things of God as they are told of in his Word. The habit is not natural to us, but God, by his Spirit, will help us to cultivate it. And how full of help and blessedness it is, none but those who have acquired it can declare; but such have declared this, as the psalmist here, again and again.

II. WITH PRACTICAL WISDOM, SO THAT HE CAN ORDER HIS WAY ARIGHT. This is what is meant here by "wisdom" and "understanding." By means of it he can: 1. *Outwit his enemies* (ver. 98), no matter how crafty their policy. 2. *Become wiser than his teachers.* They may be full of sound doctrine, but the soul that is partaker of God's grace is wiser than they. 3. *Understands more than the men of olden time.* "Understanding gotten by the precepts of the Word is better than that gotten by long experience."

III. HOLDS HIM BACK FROM SIN. (Ver. 101.) He has come to love righteousness and hate iniquity; but he knows that if he is to keep in this mind he must refrain, etc. He that will go into sin grieves and banishes from his soul the Spirit of God. Many people desire to be holy, but they desire ever so many other things along with it—

this, for example, that occasionally they may allow themselves in some evil way. And so they never attain to holiness; such double-hearted ones never can. God must teach us this (ver. 102).

IV. BECOMES HIS DELIGHT. (Ver. 103.) This is the meaning of the metaphor of this verse. The soul has its relish as well as the palate. And it is a blessed thing when the soul has a real relish for the things of God. Christ said, "I delight to do thy will, O my God." So was it foretold of him (Ps. xl.). And he himself said, "My meat and my drink is to do the will of him that sent me." The religion of fear, of conscience, of sense, of duty, of hope, of reward, is feeble—must be so—but the religion that delights in God is strong for all things.

V. GIVES HOLY HATRED OF ALL SIN. (Ver. 104.) He whom God has taught so to understand will thus hate all sin. Blessed hatred is this.—S. C.

Vers. 105—112.—*The illuminated path.* We have here—

I. A BLESSED FACT, WITNESSED TO BY THE EXPERIENCE OF MYRIADS OF GOD'S PEOPLE. (Ver. 105.) There has been no age of the world since God's revelation has been given, no period of life whether in youth or age, no rank of society from the lowest to the highest, no condition of life in which men have been placed, but what they have found this Word true. God's Word has counsel for every difficulty, comfort in every trouble, guidance in all perplexity. Men go wrong, not from want of knowledge of the right, but from unwillingness to follow the right.

II. NOTABLE RESULTS THAT FOLLOW. 1. *A steadfast resolve to keep to this path.* (Ver. 106.) The soul has seen how well it is to abide in God's way, and here declares that what it has seen and resolved upon it will also do. And this is the secret of the perseverance of the saints. They have known by experience how blessed the ways of the Lord are—that nothing will induce them to depart from them. Their one desire is to be found walking in the ways of God more steadfastly and more vigorously. 2. *The soul will turn to it in trouble.* (Ver. 107.) Even the ungodly, when they are afflicted very much, will send for the minister, take down the hitherto neglected Bible, and begin to read it, under the influence of a conviction they have never been able to shake off, that here, after all, are to be found the words of eternal life, which can alone help them. But the godly soul at once turns to them. They are his songs in the night, the joy of his heart. 3. *Unbounded gratitude.* (Ver. 108.) For what, when we look back on our way, can we find that more makes up our grateful acknowledgments than the fact that God has so illumined our faith by his Word that we have been kept in the right way, and have not fallen? Oh, the joys of this! May we all know it, as we may, if we will! Of course, it leads to the insatiable longing to know more of God's judgments. 4. *Perpetual peril cannot drive him off from it.* (Ver. 109.) Such condition—"my soul continually in my hand"—by its distracting, alarming, depressing influence, is apt to banish all holy thought and all recollection of God's Word. Men have been known to become very beasts under such circumstances—selfish, sensual, brutal; the sort of spirit which the *sauve qui peut* is ever seen to engender in the ordinary run of men. But how different what is said here!—the calm, holy, soul-sustaining remembrance of God's Word. 5. *The traps and snares which the wicked plant for the soul utterly fail.* (Ver. 110.) Keep in that illuminated path, and you may laugh at these snares. For they are never placed where the light shines on them, but where there is no light. 6. *Desire that it may be the heritage of himself and his children after him.* (Ver. 111.) He who knows the blessedness of what is here told of longs for it, not for himself alone, but for a heritage for those who shall come after him. 7. *Steady guard upon the restless heart that would wander from this path.* (Ver. 112.) Strenuous care must be taken—watchfulness and prayer—or else the deceitful heart will wander away. Who knows not this?

III. HOW THIS BLESSEDNESS MAY BE REALIZED. If the Word is to thus illumine our path, we must take the Word, keep it continually, and bring it to bear on the path we are to take. Many turn the light of the Word skywards, or backwards, or on the right hand or left. Hold it down on your path.—S. C.

Vers. 113—120.—*Deceit denounced and detested.* The thoughts spoken of here are not mere idle thoughts, but deceitful and double-minded ones. We learn—

I. HOLY SOULS HATE THEM. (Ver. 113.) They constitute and create that lukewarmness which is so nauseous in the esteem of Christ (Rev. iii. 16). He would prefer that men were cold altogether rather than this (cf. also Elijah, 1 Kings xviii. 21). This double-mindedness, ever seeking to serve God and mammon, compromising and tampering with truth, well may it excite the hate of holy souls. For: 1. *It dishonours God.* The man makes profession of religion, and men judge by what they see in him, and, instead of God being glorified, he is dishonoured day by day. 2. *The Church of God is weakened.* Such men spread an awful contagion in a Church; they chill the ardour of fervent souls, they encourage those who are like themselves. 3. *The man himself is in fearful peril.* He is for ever saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before him. And who is to arouse and waken him? 4. *He enjoys none of the great blessedness which ever accompanies real religion and single-minded service of God.* Such as peace of conscience: the Spirit never beareth witness to such that they are saved, and there is often a terrible misgiving, especially at the hour of death. Purity of heart: that cannot be theirs. Calm amid trouble. Power to bless others, etc. For all these and other reasons such double-mindedness cannot but be hateful to all holy souls.

II. BUT IT IS A CONDITION VERY PREVALENT, NEVERTHELESS. Men like it: it avoids extremes; they would not be altogether without religion—that would be very sad; but yet they do not want to be considered as enthusiastic or fanatical; it enables them to get on very well with the world, and to maintain a pleasant religious reputation at the same time. No wonder, therefore, that it is common.

III. WE ARE SHOWN HERE HOW TO GAIN DELIVERANCE FROM IT. 1. *Let God be our Hiding-place and our Shield.* When such thoughts assail us, as they often will, let us turn to God. It is not enough to drive away the wrong; we must bring in the right. Therefore "with thoughts of God and things Divine" let us occupy our minds, and so will deliverance come. And we should habitually cherish such thoughts, for so they will serve as a shield to ward off thoughts of an opposite nature. 2. *Keep away from evil-doers.* (Ver. 115.) For they are ever tempting us to such deceitful serving of God: they will inevitably, if we make companions of them, lower the tone and sap the fidelity of our thoughts. 3. *Commit yourselves to the Lord for safety, so that you may not be ashamed.* Ask him day by day and hour by hour to uphold you and keep you true (vers. 116, 117). 4. *Call to mind the dreadful end of such double-mindedness.* (Vers. 118, 119.) They are trampled down, they are rejected like dross. 5. *Cherish a holy fear lest you should incur a like doom.* (Ver. 120.) Therefore bare your heart before him, and pray him to help you always and everywhere to hate all such deceitful and double-minded thoughts.—S. C.

Vers. 121—128.—*An appeal of the righteous to the righteous God against the unrighteous.* The psalmist—

I. PLEADS HIS INNOCENCE AND INTEGRITY. (Ver. 121.) "If I will not oppress others, I may hopefully pray that others may not oppress me" (1 John iii. 20). It was a great thing in those days of old, when might stood for right in well-nigh all men's estimation, when—

"They should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can"

—was considered "the good old rule, the simple plan." At such time for a man to be able to say, "I have done justice and judgment," was indeed a rare and remarkable thing. But if, by the grace of God, this has been true of us, and we know it, there is no wrong in the affirmation of it when pleading before God.

II. IMPLIES GOD'S PROTECTION. (Ver. 122.) "Be Surety;" that is, "be my Champion, my Defender." He knows the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and therefore he confidently appeals to him. Nothing so secures the putting forth of the Divine power as the consciousness and confession of the littleness of our own.

III. DEPRECATES ITS LONG DELAY. (Ver. 123.) "He wept, waited, and watched" for its coming, until from very weariness his eyesight began to give way. It is good to tell the Lord our trouble, to pour it out before him as the psalmist does here. Trouble is like water; it gets less by being poured from one vessel into another.

IV. CONFESSES HIS NEED OF MERCY. (Ver. 124.) Before men he could hold up his head, and declare that he was guilty of no wrong, as in ver. 121; but before God it is mercy that he implores, for he, as all who know themselves, knew full well his need thereof.

V. FOR THE THIRD TIME AVOWS THAT HE IS GOD'S "SERVANT." (Vers. 122, 124, 125.) Why this repeated avowal? Surely it is: 1. *A confession of God's absolute right to deal with him as he pleases.* He is the absolute property of God by creation, redemption, preservation, and personal choice. But: 2. *A profession of confident trust* that the Lord will be mindful of his own, will not give him over unto the will of his enemies. 3. *It is a renewal of his self-devotion.* He does not want to renounce his service, to take anything back, but rather, under the oppression of his enemies, he would all the more consecrate himself to God. Where God gives a spirit like this, it is the sure harbinger and herald of the speedy coming of the needed help. It lays hold upon God.

VI. CALLS ATTENTION TO THE PREVAILING CORRUPTION. (Ver. 126.) How often God's servants have said, "It is time for thee, Lord, to work"! and when they have been made deeply sensible of the sins and sorrows of men, so that their hearts grieve over them (see ver. 136), then it is a token that the time for the Lord's interposition is at hand. "Where the carcass is, there will the vultures be gathered together."

VII. PROTESTS THAT, HOWEVER IT BE WITH MEN GENERALLY, HE LOVES AND ESTEEMS THE LORD'S COMMANDMENTS AS ALTOGETHER RIGHT AND PRECIOUS. (Cf. John xxi. 15—17.) Such are the appeals and the appellants that have favour with God and prevail—righteous, lowly, earnest, devoted, grieved at sin, true, believing.—S. C.

Vers. 129—136.—"*Thy testimonies are wonderful.*" The tone and spirit of this section are much brighter than those of the foregoing one. Something had happened. The plaintive and heart-broken appeal of those verses is followed by the joyous confession with which these, in this section, begin. Believing that there is a real connection in these sections, and that they are not so many disjointed and disconnected sayings, we infer that help had come to the psalmist—had come through God's Word, and had come in wonderful way and power.

I. THESE WORDS DECLARE A FACT. 1. *In the psalmist's own experience.* He had found God's testimonies wonderful. They had lifted him up from the depths of sorrow to blessed calm, confidence, and delight in God. Not that his outward circumstances appear to have been much changed, but the mood of his mind about them, and the thoughts of his heart, had greatly changed. 2. *And this was because of the light-giving power of God's Word.* (Ver. 130.) Light reveals what was hidden before—truths that had remained in obscurity, and which had great bearing on his condition, he could now see. His mind had been illuminated, and he was as in a new world. And light cheers and gladdens the heart. By means of the Word of God such light had come to him, and with such power, that he could only exclaim, "Thy testimonies are wonderful." 3. *And the like experience has been reproduced in all men like-minded to the psalmist.* Wonderful is the book of Holy Scripture, for its age, preservation, interest, adaptation to all, for its inspiration, for its spread, for its blessed and ever-increasing power, for the revelation of God given in it, and for many more and personal reasons beside.

II. THEY REVEAL THE INFLUENCE AND EFFECT THEY EVER HAVE. 1. *They explain the tenacity with which the soul clings to God's Word.* (Ver. 129.) Of course, the soul which has had such experience of its power will "keep them." Do we fling gold away? Neither will such soul the testimonies of God. 2. *They produce deep humility.* Ver. 139 is a plea for mercy. The psalmist knew that he needed that. These wonderful testimonies had made that clear to him, as they ever do. But as one of the company of them that loved God's Name, he pleads for the mercy he needs. 3. *Made him long for complete rectitude in God's sight.* (Ver. 133.) He would have his every step, not merely his general walk, ordered in God's Word, and he would that no iniquity should have, etc. This is a constant result of such a realization of the power of God's Word. Nothing less than complete obedience will serve. 4. *Gives renewed force to his prayers for grace to obey.* Hence he prays (1) that man's oppression may cease (ver. 134). How often such oppression does hinder the keeping of God's precepts! Not entirely, but largely. How many would openly serve God, but are cruelly

forbidden or held back by fear! God's people have to hide away; they cannot do the things that they would. Also he prays (2) that God's face may shine upon him; for that is like the warm shining of the sun upon the plant-world, causing it to spring and grow as otherwise it could not. 5. *Made him deeply grieve over men's sin.* (Ver. 136.) We do not grieve over what we do not value. If, therefore, we do not value the grace of God, we shall not, etc.

III. THE CONDITION OF REALIZING ALL THIS. Fervent desire (ver. 131).—S. C.

Vers. 137—144.—*The righteous Lord and Word.* In this section we have, mainly, a further eulogium of God's Word. Righteousness is the key-note of these verses, even as the initial letter with which they all begin is the first and prominent letter in the Hebrew word for "righteousness." But the remembrance of the righteousness of the Word of the Lord sends his thoughts to the righteousness of the Lord himself. The name of Jehovah does not often occur in this psalm, but here it is openly and emphatically given. For the most part the psalmist has been praising the richness and volume and preciousness of the stream, which, of course, could not be done without implicitly praising the fountain whence the stream issued. But here that fountain—the righteous Jehovah—is explicitly named and glorified. It is good to rise up from the gifts to the Giver of all. Note—

I. JEHOVAH IS RIGHTEOUS. (Ver. 137.) To receive, retain, and hand on this foundation-truth was Israel's great function. To no other nation had God so revealed himself. It was not merely the unity of God that Israel was commissioned to teach, but, what was yet more important, the righteousness of God. But no other nation knew either the one truth or the other. When we remember that men become like the gods they worship, it is evident that the truth of the righteousness of Jehovah cannot be over-estimated in its practical power. And to-day, amongst ourselves, it is the foundation and stability of all our national life. We cannot understand all we see, but we can and do believe in a righteous God.

II. HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS EVERLASTING. (Ver. 142.) In days when the oppression of ungodly men was rampant and raging ruthlessly against the righteous, what could sustain their soul but this immovable conviction that the Lord's righteousness was everlasting? It might be for a while obscured, but it should surely shine out again ere long. Men die, but God liveth (Ps. xc. 1).

III. HE HAS GIVEN TO US TESTIMONIES OF HIMSELF. (Ver. 138.) The Scriptures in a very real sense are God's Word. They contain, embody, and enshrine it for all generations. To assert that they are of purely human origin, as are the poems of Homer, the works of Shakespeare, or any other product of human genius, is to be insensible to their distinguishing characteristic as a revelation of God. The treasure is often in earthen vessels, but it is there all the same, and is ever to be distinguished from the vessel that contains it.

IV. THESE TESTIMONIES ARE THEMSELVES RIGHTEOUS. (Vers. 138, 140.) Compare them with any, even the purest of human laws, or philosophies, or sacred literatures, and let honest verdict be given: will not their righteousness shine out as the light? There are few who will now dispute this.

V. THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS, LIKE HIS WHO GAVE THEM, IS EVERLASTING. The lapse of ages, the increased light of science and experience, the testing to which they have been and yet are perpetually subjected, has not lessened, but rather heightened, the estimate of their righteousness (ver. 144).

VI. THE RESULTS OF THESE CONVICTIONS UPON THE BELIEVING SOUL. 1. *Intense zeal.* (Ver. 139.) 2. *Ardent love.* (Ver. 140.) 3. *Affectionate retention of God's Word in the memory.* (Ver. 141.) 4. *Rejoicing in tribulation.* (Ver. 143.) 5. *Longing to understand more.* (Ver. 144).—S. C.

Vers. 145—152.—*The cry.* Very much are we told of it.

I. ITS EARNESTNESS. It was "with the whole heart" (ver. 145). The very word "cry," repeated in this section so often, is full of suggestion as to what kind of seeking God this is. It denotes not only earnestness, but also sense of helplessness: if a man could do anything he would not "cry." It indicates, too, humility, simplicity, trust. It is the kind of prayer that has prevailing power

II. ITS PETITION. "Save me" (ver. 146). We know not what the nature of the peril was in which he then was, but it was evidently very great. This petition, though very concise, is very complete and direct and definite. We have many such prayers recorded. Blessed is it when the soul seeks to be saved—seeks with a cry like this told of here! If we knew our need of salvation, there would be more such crying unto the Lord.

III. ITS SEASONS OF UTTERANCE. (Vers. 147, 148.) Very untimely they seem. Sleep, surely, should have claimed such seasons. Very early in the morning, in the dim twilight, and through the silent watches of the night. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence," etc. (Matt. xi. 12). Here was one of these violent ones. Blessed is the soul that is stirred to such intensity of earnest seeking as this man was!

IV. ITS TRUSTED PLEA. "Thy loving-kindness." (Ver. 149.) As suppliants for mercy, not as demanders of right due to us, must we come to God. As the publican, not the Pharisee.

V. ITS PROMPTING MOTIVE. (Ver. 150.) The drawing nigh of ungodly men. When we are going into the company of such, as we often have to do, we should specially seek for grace to be faithful and true. Here is a fit preparation for such a peril.

VI. ITS ENCOURAGEMENT. (Ver. 151.) True, they that follow after mischief are drawing nigh, but then, thou, Lord, art nigh likewise. Blessed recollection is this. It has helped God's people many a time, and ever will.

VII. ITS UNDERLYING CONVICTION AND SUPPORT. (Ver. 152.) He who possesses this will go to God, not as one who thinks his prayer may possibly do some good, there is just a chance—what a vast deal of prayer is of this sad sort!—but as one who knows that he cannot seek the Lord in vain.

VIII. ITS SUPREME AND CONSTANT AIM—HOLINESS OF HEART AND LIFE. See in every verse of the section how this aim is directly or indirectly avowed. To be right with God was his abiding desire.—S. C.

Vers. 153—160.—*God's quickening grace the real help in affliction.* It is evident from these verses that—

I. AFFLICTION WAS ABUNDANTLY PRESENT. (Vers. 153, 154, 157.) He prays God to consider it, to deliver him from it, and he tells how that it was caused by many persecutors and enemies. Hence, here as throughout the psalm we have presented to us the case of a man much troubled, but also much helped of God by means of his Word; and who can over-estimate the worth of this portraiture to the troubled children of God, who have needed his comfort in all the ages of the Church's history (2 Cor. i. 4)?

II. THE RESORT OF THE AFFLICTED SOUL WAS TO GOD. He prays God to "consider," etc., that is, as of old he considered the affliction of Israel when in Egypt, and in many like distresses since, for such considering ever led to his delivering them. The psalmist trusts to no stratagem, or clever policy, or armed force for his help, but to God alone.

III. THAT WHICH HE ESPECIALLY DESIRED OF GOD WAS HIS QUICKENING GRACE. "Quicken me" is the repeated prayer of this section, as indeed of the whole psalm, where it occurs nine times, three of which are in these verses before us (vers. 154, 156, 159). 1. *It does not imply that there was no spiritual life.* He was not dead in trespasses and sins, so that he needed to be quickened from that; unconverted, unregenerate men do need this, but the psalmist was not such as they. For he possessed a true and deep spiritual life, as all this psalm testifies (see here, vers. 153, 157—159). 2. *But what he craved was a renewed and intensified life.* More, far more of what he had already—that "more abundant life," which our Lord said he came to give: he would be "filled with the Spirit."

IV. THIS DESIRE MOST REASONABLE. For if it were granted: 1. *He would be strong for his burden.* It would not matter how heavy that burden, if he had—as he would have if this quickened life were given him—the strength to sustain it. 2. *He would be able to rise above his affliction.* His soul would mount up on wings as eagles, he would be able to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint. This is one of the choice present privileges of the soul that is filled with the Spirit of God. Often and often has it been proved (cf. Rom. viii., at end). 3. *He would be able to enjoy God in the midst of it.* Many such a one as himself had done so. God and his Word had

never been so precious, nor so clearly seen and understood. 4. *He would be able to comfort others* as he could not have done before. Then his words would come with power, for he himself would know not merely what deep affliction was, but how God can sustain the soul beneath it all. 5. *This very affliction would prove a means of heavenward ascent*—a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, up which his soul would surely mount. 6. *And God would be glorified.* His persecutors would see how God-sustained he was, and they would be compelled to confess the mighty power of God. How reasonable, therefore, was and ever is this prayer! Let it be our own.—S. C.

Vers. 161—168.—*The ever-blessed Word.* Here, again, there seems to be the joyful acknowledgment of answered prayer. The longing cry of the former section was for God's quickening grace; here there seems to be the proof and evidence that that cry had been heard. And the answer of God had come through his Word, that ever-blessed Word which he here so lauds and magnifies. For—

I. BY IT HE HAD BEEN DELIVERED FROM THE FEAR OF MAN. (Ver. 161.) Princes, with "the awe and majesty of kings," had persecuted him, innocent though he was; but instead of being abashed and afraid, the greater holier fear, the awe of God's Word, came to his help and drove out all other fear. It is ever so; but only by the fear of God is it so.

II. HIS JOY IN IT WAS THAT OF ONE WHO FINDETH GREAT SPOIL. Sometimes spoil is found unexpectedly, as by the lepers in the Syrian camp (2 Kings vii.); or as by the man who found the treasure hid in the field (Matt. xiii.). But the finding here spoken of seems to be that of the warrior who, after stern struggle and the hard conflict of battle, has at length conquered, and is rewarded by the great spoil which he now takes possession of. And it is in such way that the great spoils of the Scriptures are won. Doubt, indolence, distraction, love of sin, the world's clamour, and much beside, have to be met and overcome by faith and earnestness, toil of brain and heart, and by persevering prayer. To those who will thus strive, the Scriptures will open up to them its richest treasure, and they shall rejoice therein, as is here said.

III. IMPARTS A HOLY AND DEEP DETESTATION OF ALL DECEIT. (Ver. 163.) He who loves God's Law must hate and abhor lying. As the one comes in, the other goes out, and *vice versâ*. And what a blessing this holy hatred of lying is! All society and commerce of man must be based on truth and honesty. Lying is destructive of all good both in the liar and those lied to; but truth, the sure product of the love of God's Law, is for the blessing of us all.

IV. ITS PRAISE IS NEVER WEARISOME TO HIM. (Ver. 164.) He means that he is always, on all possible occasions, to praise God because of his Word, so great is his delight in it. And the reason is not far to seek. The sense of God's loving-kindness is the highest and purest joy of the soul (Ps. lxxiii. 3). But that is given only to the pure in heart and life. This purity, however, is the product of the Law of God loved and obeyed, and of this only. What wonder, then, that the instrument of such blessedness should be prized by him so highly?

V. IMPARTS A PEACE WHICH NOTHING CAN DESTROY. (Ver. 165.) For such peace has its anchor in God, and that anchor holds. Experience has proved this perpetually.

VI. SUSTAINS GOOD HOPE OF SALVATION. (Ver. 166; cf. Gen. xlix. 18.) The commandments of God obeyed create sunshine in the soul, part of which is this hope of salvation. The unfaithful and disobedient have it not.

VII. THE MORE IT IS KEPT THE MORE IT IS LOVED. (Ver. 167.) When not alone, there is external obedience; but that which is inward, of the soul, the love which led to this obedience, now becomes exceeding great. But all such keeping of God's Word is owing to his having set the Lord always before him (ver. 168; cf. Ps. xvi. 8).—S. C.

Vers. 169—176.—*The humility of holiness.* We suppose no one can have gone through this psalm but must have come more and more to the conviction that the writer of it was a true saint of God. The signs and tokens of true holiness of character could scarcely be more manifest than they are in this psalm. But now that he comes to the close, instead of there being any note of exultation or glorying because of his attainments in holiness, there is the profoundest humility. We might have expected

a tone of triumph and elation, but it is quite the reverse that we find. There is impassioned fervour in prayer, but no glorying; there is the same constant longing for deeper understanding of God's Word, which we have met with all through; but no self-congratulation that he has gained it; there is the same confession of his need and prayer for deliverance, for help, for life; and there is a lowlier confession still; for in the last verse of the psalm he speaks not merely as an afflicted soul, but as one who has gone astray like a lost sheep, and who therefore craves that God should seek after him. And the different sentences of this prayer are all in keeping with this humility of heart which characterizes this great saint of God. He speaks of his prayer as his "cry," as his "supplication"—that which a beggar would present to one who could befriend him. He disclaims the possession of understanding of God's Word, but prays that it may be given him. He takes the position of one who has no right to come before God, and asks that he may "come near." He makes no plea of merit or goodness of his own, but his hope is ever "according to thy Word." He deems himself powerless to praise God until taught of God. It is all of a piece, all the utterance of a profoundly humble soul. Now, concerning this humility, note—

I. WHENCE IT SPRINGS. 1. *From the effect on the mind of his afflictions.* If we would have the grace of humility, we must be content to be humbled; and so precious is this grace in God's sight, that he sends affliction for this very end. 2. *From his advance in the knowledge of God.* No human soul can thus perseveringly seek God without coming into very close contact and converse with him; but the result of that is ever the prostration of the soul in adoring humility (cf. Isa. vi.; Luke v. 8; Rev. i.). The vision of God's infinite holiness and glory bows down the soul of the beholder. But such vision had often been before the mind of the psalmist—seems to have been especially so here, when drawing to the close of this psalm. 3. *From the longing after God's salvation.* Earnest desire is ever lowly.

II. HOW BEAUTIFUL IT IS! 1. *Because it is just and becoming to man in relation to God.* It is what it should be. The opposite of it is revolting to the mind. 2. *Because we are made instinctively to admire it.*

III. AND HOW DESIRABLE! 1. *It has ever been a distinguishing mark of God's saints.* 2. *It is well pleasing to God.* He delights in it; will dwell with him in whom it is. 3. *It is such sure safeguard* for all other virtues of holy character.—S. C.

Ver. 176.—*Man helpless as a lost sheep.* Though in the foregoing homily we have spoken of this verse as a confession of sin, yet it is to be much questioned if the meaning of the metaphor in this verse, as in well-nigh all other places where it is found, be not that of *helplessness* rather than of sin. For in this entire psalm we have no confession of sin, no prayer for its forgiveness, though there be not a few for more of purity and knowledge of God. The prayer of the whole psalm is not that of a penitent returning to God from the paths of sin, but of one who has long known God, but yearns for yet deeper knowledge. We have many declarations of the psalmist's distress, and of the persecution under which he suffers, and of the extremities to which he has been reduced; and we have protestations many of desire after God, of cleaving to God, of delight in God; but have no confession of sin. This is very noteworthy. Not a few godly men deem it right, whenever they approach God, to make confession of sin and to bewail their wickedness. But there is none of this here in this protracted outpouring of the thoughts and desires of the great saint who wrote this psalm. Before he was afflicted he tells us that he had gone astray (ver. 67); "but now," etc. And the whole tone of the psalm is of one who had done with going astray, and was now faithfully walking in the ways of God. In this very verse he declares, "I do not forget thy commandments." If he had been conscious of sin, he would surely have confessed it ere he came to this last stanza of the psalm. It seems, therefore, impossible to put upon the expression here the meaning of ver. 67, or that of the Lord's parable of the lost sheep in Luke xv. But the idea of weakness, defencelessness, helplessness, is meant (cf. Jer. l. 6; Matt. ix. 36; x. 16). And so the psalmist protests that he is lost, as a stray sheep would be, unless the shepherd goes and seeks for him. There is no Pharisaism in all this, no coming under the condemnation of 1 John i. 8, 10; but there is, what there ought to be far more of, a simple taking the Lord at his word. He had been sinful (ver. 67), but he had been led to repentance and faith; and now he believed

that, according to God's Word, he was forgiven, even as he knew he was an altered man. God had pardoned him and renewed him. Why, then, should he think or speak of himself as if neither of these blessed facts was true? And for ourselves, if the blood of Jesus Christ is keeping me cleansed from all sin—and if I am sincere and walking in the light, I *am* so cleansed, not once for all, but hour by hour. Then, if I assert this, and confess it, I am not, any more than the psalmist, condemned as a self-deceiver, and without the truth, because of such confession. And this psalm is a perpetual and precious protestation and assertion of deliverance from sin. This last verse, then, tells of his sad circumstances, and not of sinful character. But it implies these three facts—

I. MAN'S HELPLESSNESS. We cannot make one hair white or black (Matt. v. 36) "We are crushed before the moth."

II. GOD'S LOVING, SHEPHERD-LIKE CARE OF US. He will be sure to come after us when in peril, and see that we come to no real harm. "I am the good Shepherd."

III. THE INWARD GUARANTEE AND PLEDGE THAT GOD WILL DO THIS FOR US. "I do not forget thy commandments." God has begun a good work in us, or this would not be true. Therefore, etc. (Phil. i. 6)—

"His honour is engaged to save
The meanest of his sheep."

S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Sincerity is perfectness.* The word "undefiled" in the Authorized Version is rendered "perfect" in the Revised Version; and the terms "sincere" and "upright" are marginal suggestions. The term "perfect" includes a variety of meanings, and the Old Testament use materially differs from that of the New Testament. The apostles express the idea of wholeness, completeness; their word is well represented by "entire," *i.e.* having every part and faculty according to standard, and every part and faculty in full health, vigour, harmonious development, and activity. The older writers have in mind rather what we understand by "simplicity," "genuineness," "sincerity." To the pious mind the supreme evil was *doubleness*, the divided heart, fearing God and worshipping other gods—the man whose body was in God's temple, but whose soul was absorbed in self-interests. And therefore, to the pious mind, the perfect became the sincere—the man who *was* what he *seemed to be*. This readily becomes the "undefiled," the man who is not stained by self-seeking motives or a spirit of hypocrisy; the man who *professes* to walk in the Law of the Lord, and *does*. The psalm affirms, in its opening verse, the blessedness of walking genuinely in the way of God's Word, and thus gives the key-note of the whole psalm, with which may be usefully compared the composition of Tennyson's 'In Memoriam.' Like that poem, the psalm represents a variety of moods in which a poetic soul may meditate on some leading thought or fact. It is not only that the subject is dealt with all round; it is that it is approached from a variety of points of view; and the points are decided by the mental and spiritual moods of the poet. It has been well said that in the first three verses we have described the three elements of obedience to the Law. (1) Purity of intention; (2) reverence in treasuring up; (3) and, as a result, freedom from the power of sin. Absolute perfection, that is perfection tested by comparison with the sublime idea we have of God, is necessarily unattainable by the creature. The perfection of a creature must be in the range of possible attainment for the creature. We can think of a man reaching the standard or ideal of manhood. We know that the standard manhood has been presented to us historically in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that life helps us to realize the point before us now—that, for the created being, man, who must stand in dependent relations to his Creator, *perfection is sincerity*. We may recall the saying of Shakespeare—

"To thine own self be true, and it shall follow . . .
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

I. INSINCERITY LIMITS PERFECTION IN THE SIGHT OF MEN. Some advantage is gained by putting the truth before us in this negative form, because we are so much quicker to discern the evil than the good, to condemn insincerity than to praise

sincerity. The one supreme offence to man, and to our Divine Lord, the Son of man, is hypocrisy. The suspicion of it kills trust. Let a man have an apparently complete set of good qualities, if we suspect insincerity it is all spoiled for us, as is the good shield across which lies the "bar sinister." All the goodness will not suffice to win confidence. And, on the other hand, if we are convinced of a man's sincerity, we are well able to deal with his infirmities. This may be illustrated from imaginative literature even more effectively than from actual experience. The one thing we look for in the characters presented to us is sincerity; and the most fascinating persons lose all charm for us if we are led to suspect that they are not genuine or true. Nothing so convincingly limits human perfection as the sense of two-facedness—the sense that a man is not when away from us what he seems to be when before us.

II. **INSINCERITY LIMITS PERFECTION IN THE SIGHT OF MEN.** Distinguish between God's idea of perfection for himself and his idea of perfection for man his creature. God looks for no perfection that is not within the range of possibility for the creature man, and for the particular man whose character he may be estimating. But, to use familiar language, God draws the line somewhere. He draws it at sincerity. A man must be true; he must *be* what he seems to be. No profession can take the place of fact. Illustrate by the glass carefully ground for the telescope. It seems to be perfect. Nay, there is a flaw, and it must be rejected. The acceptance of God is absolutely conditioned upon this—the man must be "undefiled in the way" by any trace or suspicion of insincerity.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Care in obedience.* "Observe them diligently." There are possible obediences which cannot be acceptable to God. The things required are done, but there is no heart, and therefore no merit, in the doing. "Diligently" implies attentively, carefully, intelligently, persistently. And when we worthily apprehend God, we discover that what he accepts is the spirit in the doing, not the mere doing. It is not enough for God that he gets what he wants done; he fixes attention on the *spirit* that finds expression in the doing. This is made quite plain in the Mosaic persuasions to the keeping of the Law. "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently;" "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments, that ye may learn them, and keep and do them;" "Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee."

I. **DILIGENCE IN OBEDIENCE AS A SIGN OF CHARACTER.** It is more especially the indication that a man has his *heart in his work*, and that is the condition of all good work. None so aggravate the business man as the servants who only get through their work. Character is revealed by the heartlessness of it, and there is no disposition to put fuller trusts in the hands of such persons. Diligence is distinct from ability. And it is quite possible to trust ability and neglect diligence. But ability has nothing to do with character, and diligence has everything to do with it. Diligence is a sign of (1) self-control; (2) of a cherished sense of duty and obligation; (3) of reverence for high things; (4) of humility; (5) of desire to win approbation. "Seest thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings." Diligence in the spheres of Divine obedience is precisely what it is in ordinary relations.

II. **DILIGENCE IN OBEDIENCE AS A CONDITION OF ACCEPTANCE.** Is it conceivable that God's favour can rest upon a mere doing of what he requires? A father will accept such obedience, but he hardly cares to smile on the child who has only *that* to offer. A business man accepts such obedience, and does nothing for the man who has only *that* to offer. God accepts it as bare duty, but he has no favour, no smile, for him who has but that to offer. We must put our hearts into keeping God's Law. Then we shall be *diligent*, and meet the conditions of full acceptance.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*Good habits confirming goodness.* "Oh that my ways were established to observe thy statutes!" The importance of settling good habits in the religious life is seldom dealt with in public teaching, and yet there are few subjects of more directly practical importance. It is quite true that perils attach to the fixing of habits; they are chiefly (1) the disposition to judge others by our own ways; and (2) the loss of spiritual force through the routine character of our doings. But we need never depreciate good things because it is possible to misuse them and make mischief out of them. In

a thousand things of daily life we prove the usefulness of good habits. We do things again and again, or do things at the same time and in the same way day after day, until they become not so much easy to do as a joy to the doer. They make up the life, and provide the pleasure of the life. Let, then, any one purpose to live the godly life, and he must take due account of the helpfulness of well-formed habits. The subject may be illustrated in connection with both the *culture* and the *expression* of the religious life.

I. GOOD HABITS IN RELATION TO THE CULTURE OF GOODNESS. The gardener knows well the importance of regular habits in the tending of plants. The godly life is cultured by the Word of God, prayer, and pious conversation; and in each of these the formation of good habits early in life is singularly helpful. The custom of devoting some time daily to Bible-reading may become a mere routine, and even to the liveliest Christian it is at times a formality; but its helpfulness is clearly seen when the negligences of those who have formed no such habit is duly contrasted. The best of us are constantly needing to be carried over our wilfulnesses and indispositions, as only good habits can carry us.

II. GOOD HABITS IN RELATION TO THE EXPRESSION OF GOODNESS. We have no right to permit any divorce between the cultured heart and the devoted life. If we have soul-life, it must find fitting expression in daily service. These may be classed under acts of worship and acts of ministry. Habits very materially aid in maintaining family worship, and in meeting the obligations of God's house; and they exert an important influence on our acts of charity and ministry. We all need to have our "*ways established*," that we may thus be helped in "*observing God's statutes*."—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*Cleansing one's way.* This should be a familiar text to us all—one of those that are enshrined in memory, and made an abiding power in the life. Occasions for its consideration and for its counsels are ever recurring, because: 1. Among us are always boys coming out into the responsibilities of youth and young manhood. 2. While phases of youthful sin may vary for each generation, Bible counsels fit to every age, because they deal with *principles*.

I. THE GROUNDS ON WHICH THE INQUIRY OF THE TEXT IS BASED. The moral perils to which the young are exposed. The text does not say that the way of the young is actually unclean, but it views the young as just beginning to walk in a way that is miry and dangerous. To compass the whole truth we should consider: 1. The moral weakness of the young man himself. It partly lies in (1) the relics left of evil influences, and the imperfect and incomplete results of early training; (2) in an inexperience of life which young people never estimate worthily; (3) in susceptibility to influences that are merely attractive, not deeply true; (4) in the intensity with which they enter on present pleasures, heedless of future issues and results. These make dangers on the side of the young man himself. 2. The evils actually lying in the way of the young. (1) The appeals of evil to the sensual side of human nature. See the warnings in the Book of Proverbs. (2) The pride of independence loosening the moral restraints of education and home influence. (3) The false maxims that are attractive to opening mental faculties, and readily meet youthful dispositions; such as "Youth is the time for pleasure;" "Gaining wealth is the true end of life;" "Religion is a gloomy affair, and awfully dull;" "No certainty—nothing that can be called 'knowledge,' is to be obtained about morals, or about spiritual things." Show the moral influence exerted by such prevailing evil sentiments.

II. THE GROUNDS ON WHICH A WISE ANSWER TO THIS INQUIRY MAY REST. 1. No other answer than that given in the text can fully meet the case. 2. The Word of God *can* become a deliverance from young men's moral weaknesses and perils. It *can* be a power of practical wisdom and self-restraint. Illustrate by our Lord's use of the Word, as a weapon, in the time of his temptation as a young Man. 3. The Word of God acts as do beacons and lighthouses and sign-posts—it points out the dangerous parts of the way, and indicates the safe and direct roads. 4. The Word of God delivers us from the mischievous influence of false maxims by its revelation of truth and duty.

But the Word does not, once for all, cleanse any man's way. All through life the way in which we walk will be foul and full of perils, traps, and temptations. The Word enables us to pick our path safely amidst the dirt and the snares and the

pitfalls that may be put in our way. "Not defiled their garments;" "Unspotted from the world." Appeal thus: In view of life, do you think you can safely go all alone? Can you certainly triumph over all the subtlety and all the strength of evil in your own sufficiency? "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*The perils of youth.* Because the psalmist refers to the "young man," we need not imagine that, at the time of composing the psalm, he was himself a young man. The stanzas represent a variety of moods; and for this one the psalmist was in a mood of retrospection; he was looking back over the past, and seeing what a help God's Word had been to him amid the perils and temptations of his youthful years. He had "ruled himself after God's Word," and rejoices in having come through his youth-time clean-souled and unspotted from the world. The Prayer-book Version suggests that no external defences will ever suffice to keep the young man from "city snares and town traps." He will be kept if he keeps himself; he will only keep himself if he asks God to keep him; and God will only keep him as he diligently seeks direction and counsel from God's book of instructions and warnings. "Even by *ruled himself* after thy Word." It is implied in the expression, "cleanse his way," that there are things surrounding the young man that may easily defile him. But that is true for old men as well as young men. What is of special importance to young men is that (1) by bodily constitution, (2) by disposition, (3) and by inexperience, they are unusually exposed to defiling influences.

I. THE YOUNG MAN WANTS A STANDARD AND A GUIDE. The ship of a young life has to sail over unknown seas, and there must be culture for managing the vessel, and a chart for directing its course. This the young are not ready to admit. "Why not wait and gain power out of experience?" Experience is a dear school, and its lessons are only learned aright when the life is in the ordering of God's infallible guide. Experience is to a man according to what the man is.

II. THE YOUNG MAN CANNOT SAFELY BE A LAW UNTO HIMSELF. Can any man? "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." If any man can, it is the experienced and sanctified Christian. But he is the very man who is sure that he cannot. If he cannot, how can the youth? What always happens when youth takes the ordering of life into its own hands?

III. THE YOUNG MAN CAN GO RIGHT WITH THE HELP OF GOD'S WORD. Which is no mere set of rules, but the Father-God finding counsel and warning and help for every emergency. It is a strengthening of the soul to resist, as well as a clearing of the eyes to avoid all that would befoul.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*Scripture-stores.* "Thy Word have I laid up in mine heart." Another psalmist describes the righteous man in this way, "The Law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide" (Ps. xxxvii. 31). The point of the text lies in the assertion that the Word of God is in the man's heart because he had *put it in*, and put it in *carefully*.

I. STORING THE MIND WITH SCRIPTURE AS THE DUTY OF TEACHERS. It is a primary duty of all who have to do with children. Storing the memory with the material of after-thought comes before the cultivation of the mind for using its material. And if we would have the after-thought of life inclusive of the highest things, we must take care that the mind is early stored with Scripture truth and fact and counsel. It is not suggested that the child-mind should be crammed even with that which is good, nor should Scripture ever be made a task. But that child is in an especially effective manner equipped for life who has God's Word stored as a treasure in his memory. In modern times this hiding of Scripture in the heart is sadly under-estimated.

II. STORING THE MIND WITH SCRIPTURE AS A MAN'S OWN DUTY. It will not, in his case, be a merely formal memorizing, as it must largely be in the case of the child. A man will store what the Scripture says *to him*, and not merely what the Scripture says. This involves: 1. A personal interest in the revealed Word of God. 2. Well-formed habits in relation to its study. 3. Careful attention to the relations of the Word to personal life and needs. 4. Such persistent habits of meditation as press the Word in, and lay it up on the secret places of the soul. It is not necessary to say any strong things concerning the "criticism" of the Bible, because of that the psalmist knew

nothing. To him the Word of God was a book of practical directions for godly living. And we need to have its actual relation to life and conduct so deeply impressed on us, that we should feel impelled to store its truths and counsels.

III. THE AVAILABleness OF SCRIPTURE-STORIES FOR THE EMERGENCIES OF LIFE. From those stores our Lord readily fetched effective weapons in the time of his temptations. We have often fetched our best comfortings in time of trouble; our best warnings in times of danger; our best answers when the enemies of faith and righteousness assailed. "He who hides can find;" and if the *laying up* has been carefully done, the recovery for use is sure to be prompt and easy.—R. T.

Ver. 15.—*The treasures of meditation.* "I will meditate in thy precepts;" "In his Law doth he meditate day and night." There would be no need to explain to an Eastern man what is meant by meditation, and wherein lies the pleasure of it. He can sit still and think; both the physical and social atmosphere of the East encourage quietness, slowness, broodiness, and these favour meditation. Perhaps the proper warning of Eastern religious persons would concern the exaggeration of meditation, which tends to give men sentiment rather than truth. They need to be aroused to the exercise of the intellectual powers in the *study* of God's Word. But in the West meditation is almost despised. It seems like *doing nothing*, and that is offensive to active and energetic Westerns, who are so keen for results. Consequently, meditation on God's Word has become almost a lost art. It has little or no place in the ordinary routine of a Christian life. The West has much to learn from the East, but it need not copy any of its exaggerations. Perhaps we are misusing the Bible, failing to make it in our lives what it was intended to be, because we do not *meditate* in the precepts, dwell on them long and lovingly, so as to realize their helpfulness.

I. MEDITATION IS A NECESSARY METHOD OF DEALING WITH THE REVEALED WORD. It is necessary that we should see this clearly. There are some studies which only call for active mental application. Put your whole mind into them while concerned with them, and put them wholly out of your mind when you have done. But these lie outside the *man himself*, and are but matters of knowledge. The revealed Word gives truth in relation to men—truth for the sake of men; and the relations will only appear in response to that kind of mental action which we call "meditation."

II. MEDITATION DEPENDS MUCH MORE UPON HEART-MOOD THAN UPON BRAIN-POWER. It is really moral faculty using brain-power as its agency, and carefully keeping the brain-power in subjection. Interest in meditation is found to be in precise relation to spiritual culture; and it is akin with the spiritual insight that gets to the heart of things, and the deeper relations of things, and cannot be trammelled by the mere *forms* and *settings* of things.

III. MEDITATION PROVIDES THE MOST SATISFYING PLEASURES OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. It unfolds the most precious truths, and gives them personal relations and personal interest. And it brings to a man the most satisfying sense of Divine communion; for God speaks his best things to the soul that is still and open to receive Divine thought.—R. T.

Ver. 17.—*The largeness of Divine dealings.* "Deal bountifully with thy servant;" Prayer-book Version, "Oh do well unto thy servant." The thought is expressed in another psalm (cxvi. 7), "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." It reappears in the assurance of the New Testament, "He giveth more grace;" "He is able to make all grace abound." The psalmist felt straitened in his own circumstances, but he was quite sure that there was no straitening of the sufficiency of God. His very straitness seemed to make large demands on God; but he felt that he might pray for large and bountiful dealings.

I. THE LARGENESS OF THE DIVINE DEALINGS INVOLVES COMPREHENSIVENESS. A large thing *covers all*. No satisfaction can be felt in God unless we are sure that every feature of our life stands in relation to him. The author of Ps. cxxxix. puts this into poetical figure when he presents the hopelessness of ever getting from the presence of God. In heaven he is. On earth he is. In hell he is. Go where we may, God's hand is on us. Do what we may, God's grace and strength are there for our helping. We could not rest in God if we could, even mentally, fix any limit to the sphere of his

operation. He would not be God to us if there was a single relation of life with which he was not dealing, or could not deal.

II. THE largeness of the Divine Dealings involves adaptation. The charm of all human relationships lies in adaptation. A thing that *fits* us helps us much more than a far better thing that does not fit. We have a notion that largeness tends to make us indifferent to adaptation. If it covers, it need not fit. But all the best things we possess are not quantities, but adaptations. And God's bountifulness is chiefly apprehended in the surprise with which we find he can meet every form of recurring need.

III. THE largeness of the Divine Dealings involves generosity. The man who barely and exactly does for us what we immediately need gives us no impression of bountifulness. It seems to us that he has not much to give, so must carefully watch his giving. God shows himself in nature, pouring out a wealth of flowers and fruits, and going altogether beyond our need. He giveth spiritual grace and help *generously*, as if he would convince us of a sufficiency which should inspire us to "trust in him at all times."—R. T.

Ver. 18.—*Eye-opening*. "Open thou mine eyes." This figure of speech is a familiar Eastern one. It is based on the observed fact that the eye, as an organ, is dependent on the mind and the will. Men have to be *helped* to see everything that is really worth seeing; and if they are to apprehend Divine and spiritual things, it can only be with Divine illuminations. He who sees the unseen must have come into the eye-opening power of God. The servant of Elisha, with the partly closed eyes, could see nothing but the chariots and horsemen of Syria. With opened eyes he saw all round the hills the chariots and horsemen of God. Our Lord opened the blind bodily eyes of men in order to illustrate his gracious work in souls. And the living Lord connsels his half-blinded Church at Laodicea, "Anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." The opening of the soul-eyes is a figure of speech for the quickening of the *spiritual discernment*. Nothing do we need more than keen sensitiveness to Divine and eternal things; insight of the Divine will; the sharpness of vision that can detect at once the pointing of the Divine finger. The prayer of the text implies—

I. A CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE DIMNESS OF OUR SPIRITUAL VISION. Our Lord reproached the Pharisees because they were blind, yet thought they saw with unusual clearness. "Ye say, We see, therefore your sin remaineth." There is no prayer in the man who thinks he sees. There is no conscious want to find expression. It is not merely that the vision is *distorted* by the self-willed spirit; it is that in the godly life things seen and temporal have the power to dim and darken the vision of things unseen and eternal. If humility proves mightier than self-satisfaction, the sense of dimness is a constant source of anxiety; but that is an anxiety which is altogether healthy.

II. A CONSCIOUSNESS OF OUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD FOR THE CLEARING OF OUR SPIRITUAL VISION. A man may feel the imperfectness of his soul-vision, but think to clear it himself. It is not always duly considered that the idea of *self-help* spoils the religious life as truly as it prevents our *entering* the religious life. It may have to come through a bitter experience, but it must come somehow, that we may discover the helplessness of self-help for clearing the soul-vision; and then we pray to God, "Open thou mine eyes."—R. T.

Ver. 20.—*The soul breaking through its forced watchings*. "My soul breaketh out for the very fervent desire that it hath always unto thy judgments." This expression reminds us of our Lord's beatitude, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." "True godliness lies very much in desires. As we are not what we shall be, so also we are not what we could be. The desires of gracious men after holiness are intense—they cause a wear of heart, a straining of the mind, till it feels ready to snap with the heavenly pull. A high value of the Lord's commandment leads to a pressing desire to know and to do it, and this so weighs upon the soul that it is ready to break in pieces under the crush of its own longings." The idea seems to be that the psalmist is really trying to know God's will, and strictly and carefully watching himself, and seeking to get what he knows to be God's will adjusted to his conduct. But he is dissatisfied; he wants to reach a freer and nobler kind of obedience. It is

all too formal for him. He wants to serve with a bound: to fly at the Lord's bidding. His loving soul frets against all limitations and restraints. He would break out of his cage. He would get into the large liberty of unhindered service of God. The apostle gives the answering Christian mood when, fretting against body-bonds, he says, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

I. IT IS WELL TO HAVE THE SOUL BIGGER THAN THE CIRCUMSTANCES. Consider this especially in relation to the obedience of God's Law which circumstances permit. Bodily conditions and earthly circumstances put limits on our obedience. It is a bad sign if a man keeps contentedly within his limits. We must want a higher, fuller, worthier obedience than we have ever attained.

II. IT IS WELL TO HAVE THE SOUL ACTUALLY PRESSING OUT OF THE LIMITS OF ITS CIRCUMSTANCES. What a humdrum life it would be if we had always to keep within what we call *facts*! We press beyond facts into the glorious world of imaginations and possibilities. And so there is an imagined obedience to God, and joy in his Word and will, toward which we should ever be pressing, breaking bounds to get into that higher world of service. And a measure of triumph over circumstances limiting obedience is attainable now, and it prepares us for the full liberty unto righteousness which is the glory of our by-and-by.—R. T.

Ver. 25.—*Quickening the exhausted.* In this verse there is characteristic extravagant Eastern figure, which is difficult for the calmer Western mind to appreciate. Such exaggerated descriptions of mental conditions seem to us untruthful. The presentation does not accord with the fact. But the Eastern would urge that his mode of speech suggests the fact, and does not pretend to state it. And that is strictly true which it suggests. We may think of the worm, laboriously creeping over the ground, and longing to become a butterfly, and be quickened into the higher life that is possible to it. It is possible to find allusion to the custom of sitting in sackcloth and ashes as an expression of mourning. Sitting in dust is the attitude of humiliation, and so it fittingly expresses the depressed and exhausted spiritual mood of the psalmist. It may be that in the Christian life we ought never to be depressed; it is certainly the fact of Christian life that we often are. Depression does not *always* come as response to outward circumstances, but it *often* does; and we may think of conditions that encourage it.

I. DEPRESSION FOLLOWS ON THE DIFFICULTIES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS OF BUSINESS LIFE. "Souls cleave to the dust" of worldly care. When things will not go rightly, mind and heart are very full day and night, and brooding always tends to encourage fears, and to make the dark things grow darker. When the soul is full of care, better things are pushed out, and faith fails. At such times we need the prayer, "Quicken thou me"—give me life, new life, life of energy to battle with difficulty; life of hope to keep me in good cheer.

II. DEPRESSION FOLLOWS ON BODILY PAIN AND VARYING CONDITIONS OF HEALTH. Then the "soul cleaves to the dust," self and feeling are made too prominent; they force themselves out of place and proportion; and all truth seems discoloured and distorted. Illustrate by the effect of looking through coloured glass. The self of feeling can never give other than distorted views of life. At such times we need the prayer, "Quicken thou me"—give me the life of strength to bear; give me to keep sure of the fatherliness of chastisement, and to cherish the trustful and patient spirit of a son.

III. DEPRESSION FOLLOWS ON AFFLICTIONS AFFECTING THOSE WHOM WE LOVE. We cleave to the dust of kindred, and are afflicted in their afflictions. Some of our worst times of depression are times of sympathy. Then we need to pray, "Quicken me into the life of trust, that will enable me to commit all I love to God." True Christian life is a series of Divine quickenings into higher forms of life.—R. T.

Ver. 32.—*Strength to run.* Running is to be distinguished from walking, as involving active determination and persistent energy. A man may walk in simple habit and routine; a man only runs when he wills to run, and makes positive efforts. So the psalmist is not satisfied with a kind of obedience to the Law of God which is a sort of regular thing in which he has been brought up; he cannot be content without having his

heart in it, putting energy into it, and making a life-work of it; and this he expresses in the figure of *running*. The Revised Version gives, "when thou shalt enlarge my heart." The Prayer-book Version gives, "when thou hast set my heart at liberty." Putting these together, we learn that the "enlargement of the heart" is not so much any expansion of the faculties, as deliverance from oppressing fears that prevent the free movement of the soul. The heart enlarged is the heart set in a large place, where there is room to run; then run it will. So often, by reason of bodily conditions or hindering circumstances, our hearts are limited and confined—they can neither "fly nor go." It is a good sign if then the heart frets against the bondages, and is ready to run whenever God is pleased to set it free. The key-note of the whole psalm may be expressed in the words, "I would if I could;" and the whole prayer of the psalm is, "O God, let me."

I. IT IS WELL THAT WE SHOULD WANT TO RUN IN THE WAYS OF OBEDIENCE AND GODLINESS. The peril of the godly life is drifting into ease and indifference; the doing of religious duties as mere routine; the meeting of religious obligations listlessly and without heart. It may be that we cannot run; it ought always to be that we *want* to run. We must not rest without energy and activity in the religious life. A formal obedience should be as distressing to us as it is to God.

II. IT IS WELL THAT THE CHERISHED WANT SHOULD KEEP US WAITING ON GOD FOR THE OPPORTUNITY. The want would soon die down if we trusted to ourselves for cherishing it. It never dies down if we keep turning it into the prayer of patient, but persistent, waiting upon God.

III. IT IS CERTAIN THAT GOD RESPONDS TO THOSE WHO IN THIS SPIRIT WAIT ON HIM. The liberties and enlargements always come. And God makes the *waiting* for them as true a blessing as *getting* them.—R. T.

Ver. 33.—*Man's purpose, and God's help.* In multiplied forms the difficulty of reconciling God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, God's help and man's energy, is presented to us in Scripture. But the difficulty is always intellectual only. It is one that the heart solves with perfect ease. It knows well how the inspiration of unseen ones does ennoble and strengthen our human activity; and its apprehension of God makes him to be nearer and dearer than any unseen friend of human fellowship. Ask the *mind* to explain how we can be "working out our own salvation" and God can be "working in us," and it is baffled into silence. Ask the heart if this twofoldness of the religious life is ever actually realized, and it will say, "It is true, I know it to be true in the experience of my life." He who said, "I live, yet not I, Christ liveth in me," was at the very heart of the deepest truth. The psalmist, in his own way, arrives at the same conviction. Let the Lord teach him his will, and he will set all effort upon keeping it. Let God give understanding, and obedience shall be maintained. "I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me."

I. MAN MUST CHERISH RIGHT PURPOSES. God puts no force on any man; he overrides no man; he does nothing for any man that the man can and ought to do for himself. Unless we resolve to live the godly life; unless we set ourselves upon seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness, nothing can be done for us. God never comes with help until he is *wanted*.

II. MAN MUST WANT DIVINE HELP IN CARRYING THEM OUT. This sense of need is often a later experience, into which a man comes only on the failure of his self-effort in carrying out his resolves and purposes. But it must come before godly living can take on its higher and more hopeful forms. The earnest man comes at last to say, "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake thou for me."

III. MAN OBTAINS DIVINE HELP WHEN IT IS MADE EVIDENT THAT HE WANTS IT. It would be wasted on him *before*; it is fully effective on him *then*. It is true that God "helps those who help themselves," but the point to dwell on is, that he who tries to help himself in Divine things is the man who most feels his need of God's help.—R. T.

Ver. 35.—*A path for our goings.* "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments." To *go* is to keep moving, to keep advancing. The earnest man wants to progress in the Divine life. The Christian stamp is put on this truth by the apostle,

when he says, "I count not myself to have apprehended;" "I press toward the mark." The good man wants—

I. PROGRESS IN THE APPREHENSION OF GOD'S COMMANDMENTS. All the commandments of God cannot be made clear even to the understanding of a child or of a young Christian. They concern spheres and things which are known only through the experience of life, and cannot be made plain to the child or the young Christian. And it is a deeper thought that only the formality and externality of Divine Law can ever come to any man at first; he must *grow* into the spirituality of it. Contrast the spheres for which the young Christian needs Divine rules, with the spheres for which the advanced and experienced Christian needs the guidance of the Divine eye, and the progression will at once be manifest.

II. PROGRESS IN FIXING THE RELATION OF THE COMMANDMENTS TO LIFE. At first the commands seem outside us, and are interesting studies. As we "go in the path" of them we gradually recognize their personal relations; they directly concern us; they fit to unfolding circumstances and conditions. Getting God's will applied to cherished moods of mind, to fixed habits of conduct, to unfolding relations and responsibilities, to unexpected times of strain, comes to be the most real work of the religious life. Life is the path which God's revealed will marks out for us, and it is our work to keep the path.

III. PROGRESS IN THE CHARACTER AND SPIRIT OF THE OBEDIENCE OFFERED. At first the service of God, and obedience to his holy Law, is a *strain*. Perhaps not absolutely at first, because the waves of early impulse bear young souls for a while into an easy obedience. Just after the first a rebound comes, a time of dulness, and then obedience is the strain of constant effort. The will battles with the feeling. But we go in the path, and gradually the strain passes, the love dominates the will, and bears it to an obedience that says, "I delight to do thy will, O God."—R. T.

Ver. 36.—*God's work in men's hearts.* "Incline my heart;" "Quicken me in thy ways." There is marked difference between "being made" to go in the way of righteousness, and "wanting" to go in the way of righteousness. And creating and sustaining the *want* is precisely what is here called the "inclinings" and "quickenings" work of God's Spirit in men's hearts. He puts the laws into our hearts, and in our minds he writes them. When a child *wants to obey*, he ceases to need any formal law—he is a "law unto himself." With the *inclined heart* the life of obedience becomes easy, becomes even a delight.

I. THE CONDITION OF MAN'S HEART IN WHICH GOD WORKS. By the heart here is meant the seat of motives and impulses by which the will is moved, and action inspired and directed. The heart is regarded as subject to outside influences, and as actually in the sway of influences both bad and good. It can be moved by the self-spirit to things that are evil. It can be moved by the Divine Spirit to things that are good. It can be *inclined*. If a thing is moving, the least deviation from the straight line involves an ever-widening departure. In man there is always a sort of *centrifugal* tendency to fly away, and the constant need of a *centripetal* tendency to restrain it, and keep it in the right line. "Covetousness" is named as the representative of all the alien inclinations, because the very essence of covetousness is "getting for self." And that is a perpetual enticement to the natural man, which only the grace of God can enable him to overcome. The point of this prayer is that the good man, in the experience of life, will be sure to find the old evil inclinations return upon him as temptations, especially when anything appeals to covetousness. So he finds that he always needs the preventive, and the readjusting, inclinings of God.

II. THE KIND OF WORK WHICH GOD DOES IN MEN'S HEARTS. This is often represented as quickening, the renewing of vitality, strength, right purpose, energy. What is here set forth is a more precise, and more unusually recognized, form of Divine dealing with men. The Spirit is the inward power that sways decisions, inclines to good judgments, by putting force into the good motives, reasons, and considerations. Or, to express it in the mode of the psalmist, he inclines to righteousness by making God's testimonies more attractive and persuasive than our own covetousness.—R. T.

Ver. 45.—*The freedom of righteousness.* "I will walk at liberty: for I have sought

thy precepts." The Apostle Paul earnestly contends that "we are called unto liberty," but he carefully distinguishes liberty from self-willedness. A man can never have his liberty save on the supposition that he knows what to do with it, and is able to do what he knows. And so the godly man is a free man, he is able to do what he likes, but the distinct assumption is that his likes have come into the renewing grace, and are still in the sanctifying grace, of God. He is free because he is right-willed, and can be trusted with his liberty. The phrase is significant, "freedom in righteousness." We get the idea illustrated if we observe our anxiety that our sons should be right-principled ere they go forth to meet life's temptations. We are not afraid for them to have their freedom, if only they are *right-willed*. The psalmist may only mean freedom from special circumstances of constraint and intimidation, but we can use his words in a more comprehensive and more general sense.

I. RIGHT-WILLEDNESS AS A CONDITION TO BE GAINED AND KEPT. Here it is the disposition to seek the guidance and help of God's precepts in every emergency of life. Wrong-willedness is an undue tendency to trust in self for wisdom and guidance. Dependent man never *comes* right until he wants God; and he never *keeps* right unless he leans on God. The very essence of the example of the Lord Jesus lies in his *right-willedness*. No restraint had ever to be put on him, because he always wanted what God wanted for him. We only get our wills set in harmony with God's in the persuasion and power of God's Spirit; but we can set ourselves, and keep ourselves, open to his gracious leadings and inspirings and inworkings.

II. RIGHT-WILLEDNESS AS A CONDITION IN WHICH FREEDOM CAN BE ENJOYED. Where there is that disposition and purpose there is always sensitiveness to evil. It is detected at once. It is disliked. To it there is a natural resistance. It is illustrated in Joseph, who "could not do wickedly;" and in the Hebrew youths, who could not "defile themselves with the king's meat." These young people could be trusted anywhere, because they were set on doing right. The only man in God's world who is really free, and can be safely trusted with freedom, is the man who means to do right, who is resolved to do God's will as he may get to know it.—R. T.

Ver. 47.—*The joy of obedience.* "And I will delight myself in thy commandments." It may be urged, and indeed it is sometimes urged, that "obedience is obedience by whomsoever it is done, in whatsoever circumstances and in whatsoever spirit. If a master or a king issues a command, he gets all he can expect to get if what he wishes to be done *is done*. It cannot matter to him whether it is done with a grumble or with a smile. And it must be the same with God. We may reasonably expect him to be satisfied if what he wishes to have done *is done*." It is easy to answer that formal obedience involves no personal relationship; but as soon as that is recognized, the moral quality of the obedience becomes the true ground of acceptance. What is really accepted is the *man* in the obedience, and not the mere *act* of obedience. The best figures of the Divine relations with men are taken from family life. A master may be satisfied with formal obedience, and so may a king (though the deeper truth is that both want to find willing love-service in the obedience), but a *father* never is. He wants his child to obey; but he never can rest content until his child *loves to obey*, and is manifestly happy in his obedience.

I. AN OBEDIENCE WHICH CAUSES STRAIN. 1. There is the strain which follows upon the feeling that we *must*. A power is compelling us—a power which we fear; a power which can punish, "casting body and soul into hell." Much of the obedience of life has no higher range than this. Men obey, but there is neither credit nor joy in their obedience, for in their hearts they say, "We would not, if we *dared* not." Neither God nor man cares for such obedience as that. 2. There is the strain which follows upon the feeling that we *ought*. This is altogether higher and nobler. Duty is one of the most exalted inspirations. And yet it may keep the strain, and a man may but force himself to meet his duty. If man may be satisfied with that, God cannot. The true obedience is out of the range of strain. God's acceptance waits until heart and hand go well together, and we love what we do.

II. THE OBEDIENCE WHICH KNOWS NO STRAIN. It is no trouble to do what we wish to do. There is no sense of strain when we love and choose and persist in finding

our pleasure in what we do. The soul moves freely in its delights. Make a joy of your obedience, and the result is that obedience becomes your joy.—R. T.

Ver. 49.—*Man's trust a plea for securing God's faithfulness.* "Because thou hast made me to hope." "Those that make God's promises their portion may with humble boldness make them their plea." In ordinary life nothing so surely calls forth the best in a man as to be trusted. No persuasion acts on us more forcibly than this, "I must do it for him *because he trusts me.*" We may in everything that is good, or that works out good, rise from man to God, seeing that in God's image man is made. In another psalm the feeling of God towards the man who trusts him is precisely expressed (Ps. xci. 14), "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him."

I. THE GROUND OF MAN'S TRUST IS GOD'S OWN PROMISES. This needs to be opened up both in a lighter and in a deeper sense. 1. Man's trust rests upon God's spoken promises. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." How God makes spoken words the basis of trust may be illustrated in a very precise way from the promises to Adam (Gen. iii. 15); Abraham (Gen. xii. 2, 3); Moses (Exod. iii. 7—10); Joshua (i. 5, etc.). Later on, such books as Isaiah contain most gracious Divine promises. And the wonderful discovery of advancing religious experience, and of increasing knowledge of God's Word, is that promises in exact adaptation to the ever-varying disposition and circumstance of godly men have been given; so that a man can never be so circumstanced that he need fail to find a written promise on which to ground his trust in God. 2. Man's trust rests on him who gives the promises. And the promises never fulfil their true purpose unless they lead a man to this higher trust. If we seem to hope in God's *Word*, we really hope in him who spoke the Word. When this is seen, it is further seen that if God found it best to change his word to us, that would not affect our trust in *him*.

II. MAN'S TRUST BECOMES AN EFFECTIVE PLEA WITH GOD. Because the honour of God's Name is bound up in response to trust. Illustrate by Joshua's plea (vii. 9). Reminding a man of his promise is the highest plea man can use with man. "You told me to trust you." That is just what God has done—told us to trust him for life, for redemption. He will remember his Word unto his servants.—R. T.

Ver. 51.—*Steadfast goodness may be exposed to misunderstanding.* "The proud have had me greatly in derision." Throughout this psalm there is evidence that the writer was in circumstances of limitation and difficulty. He was evidently trying to live a godly life in depressing surroundings; no one about him seemed to be in sympathy with him; and some even scorned the persistency with which he ordered his life in accordance with God's commandments. The condition may be represented by that of a godly prince in a godless court; but the thing is brought closer home to us if we take the position of a godly young man in a godless house of business. His companions will, as we say, "lead him a life;" will misrepresent his doings and sayings; call him names; point at him the finger of scorn.

I. DERISION IS ONE OF THE MOST POTENT FORCES OF THE TEMPTER. We all want to stand well with others. We all love praise. It is right that we should. Many a man can bear blame, reproach, and denunciation, who is quite mastered by scorn and derision. Let a man "make fun" of him, and his *amour propre* is wounded. In this light, what a sublime triumph our Lord won by his patience on the cross when the scorners were all about it! But the godly man more especially wants to stand well with others, because in that way he testifies to them of the grace of God that is upon him. To be derided then seems to spoil his witness. So derision does two things, and serves the tempter's purpose well. 1. It wounds the good man's sensibilities. 2. It damages, and may even destroy, the good man's witness. Young men have stood strong before open temptation who have bent like reeds before subtle, yet strangely powerful, derision. And they who deride and misunderstand are the *prod*—a term which does not here suggest the "boaster," but rather the "self-confident." The man who relies on himself is ever ready to deride him who relies on God. Such reliance he cannot appreciate.

II. STEADFAST GOODNESS HOPEFULLY RESISTS THIS TEMPTATION. Steadfast goodness is *steadied* goodness; and the *steadying* that is specially in mind in this psalm is that

which comes from familiarity with God's Word, love for it, and practised skill in the use of it. And the supreme instance of this steady power is found in the temptation-scene of the Lord Jesus.—R. T.

Ver. 54.—*A good man's songs.* "Thy statutes have been my songs." "When the Eastern traveller takes shelter from the scorching heat of noon, or basks for the night in some inn or caravansary, which is for the time the house of his pilgrimage, he takes the sackbut or the lyre, and soothes his rest with a song—a song, it may be, of war, romance, or love. But the poet of Israel finds his theme in the statutes of Jehovah. "These have been my pastime, with these I have refreshed my resting hours by the way, and cheered myself onward through the wearisome journey and across the scorching deserts of life. Not songs of old tradition, not ballads of war, or wine, or love, have supported me; but I have sung of God's commandments, and these have been the solace of my weary hours, the comfort of my rest." What is striking in this expression of the psalmist is that he makes his obligations appear as if they were, what he sincerely esteems them to be, *his privilege*. Here is surely an unusual thing; the man is glad to be placed *under restraint*, only it must be clearly seen that it is *Divine* restraint. "Let me fall into the hands of God, and not into the hands of man."

I. A GOOD MAN'S SONGS BEAR THEIR OWN PECULIAR STAMP. Song is the relief of life; but it is one of the most genuine expressions of life. It may be said that a man can be judged by the songs that he loves to sing or to hear sung. 1. The good man always wants to sing. Joy is one of the necessary constituents of goodness. 2. The good man wants the singing to match himself. And since his joy is in God, his singing must be about God. 3. The good man's supreme concern is loyalty and duty, and therefore his songs are about the statutes by which duty is controlled.

II. A GOOD MAN'S SONGS ARE THE EVIDENCE OF HIS GOODNESS. They surprise his fellow-men, who wonder how he can find rest and pleasure in what seems to them so dull. He could not but for that vital change through which he has passed, which we recognize in calling him "a good man."

"I thirst, but not as once I did,
The vain delights of earth to share."

1. The delight in vulgar and comic songs evidences the low, uncultured man. 2. The delight in high-class music evidences the educated taste. 3. The delight in songs whose interest lies in their religious tone and suggestion rather than in their music, evidences the renewed man. The delight in songs that encourage and inspire obedience evidences a noble sense of the Divine obligations and responsibilities that rest on human life.—R. T.

Ver. 59.—*Self-examination.* "I thought on my ways;" "Let a man examine himself;" "I called my own ways to remembrance" (Prayer-book Version). There are two directions in which the important duty of self-examination is abused and made mischievous. 1. It may be turned into introspection, which concerns itself only with moods and feelings. 2. It may be conducted in the light of fictitious human standards of goodness. The first is the error of sentimental religion; the second is the error of ceremonial religion. Both are mischievous in the same way. They nourish untruthfulness. The one forces feeling, the other exaggerates frailties into sins. The true sphere and the true standard of self-examination need to be presented.

I. THE TRUE SPHERE OF SELF-EXAMINATION. It is that of a man's conduct in his relationships; not that of a man's thoughts and feelings. It is that which a man has beyond himself, which, nevertheless, bears the impress of himself, upon which he can look, which he can appraise. A man cannot examine his own thoughts and feelings; but let thought find expression in act, and feeling put tone and character on the act, then the man can exercise judgment. Thought and feeling are too variable ever to be arrested for examination. They are the "secret things which belong only to God." Illust.: what weakness is brought into Christian lives by introspection! It makes a particular type of religious life, and leads in a subtle form of *trusting the self* instead of *trusting God*. True self-examination is "considering our ways." We can estimate

the conduct of others; we can estimate our own. We cannot estimate the feelings of others; we cannot estimate our own.

II. THE TRUE STANDARD OF SELF-EXAMINATION. There are three possible standards that are manifestly unworthy. 1. The priestly standard, provided for the confessional. 2. The sectarian standard, which manufactures an experience through which all must pass. 3. The personal standard, which a man shapes according to his particular disposition and temperament. The true standard is twofold. (1) The revealed idea of right conduct in the relations of life. That was the standard wholly for the psalmist, and in part for us. (2) The revealed model of right conduct in relations—the Lord Jesus. That is the standard especially provided for us; and it was the full obedience of God's will.—R. T.

Ver. 63.—*The good man's friends.* "I am a companion of all them that fear thee." The man who most entirely turns to God as his Helper is the man who most anxiously seeks, and most wisely uses, the help of godly associations and friendships. Men's help to one another in the godly life is brought before us in this verse. "How weak is human nature! Verily there are times when the presence of one so great as the Almighty becomes oppressive, and we feel our need of one like ourselves to sympathize with us. And there have been provided for us, by the way, many kind, sympathizing friends, like Jesus. As we pass on, we get the human supports which the Lord hath provided. We get them for fellowship too" (Jno. Stephen).

I. THE GOOD MAN FINDS FRIENDS. Every living thing looks for something akin to it, and finds that God has always provided the answering thing. This is typified in the fact that God provided for Adam a "help meet for him." If a man is a good man, he will discover that he need not, and must not, live a lonely life. He is not the only good man, and his good life will only grow aright, grow healthily, when it grows in company. The individual and personal relations of converted men to God are often presented in an exaggerated form. The true ideal is presented by Malachi, "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." The ordinary laws of human friendship apply to religious friendship. For close relationship there must be felt kinship; but for ordinary relations the common object and common interest will suffice. All who fear God, and obey him, can be true helpers one of another.

II. THE USE THE GOOD MAN MAKES OF FRIENDS DEPENDS UPON HIMSELF. It depends upon the maintenance and culture of his own godly life. So one of the first signs of flagging Christian life is flagging Christian friendship. Loosen your relations with God, and you will soon hold loose relations with his people. The law of friendship is this, "He that would have friends must show himself friendly;" and the friendliness of the godly man is bound up with the maintenance of his godliness.

III. THE USE A GOOD MAN CAN MAKE OF HIS GODLY FRIENDS DEPENDS UPON THEM. They must maintain their godliness. They can be nothing to him as helpers unless they keep fearing God, and observing his precepts. The good man soon finds his friends cease to help him when they fail from the godly life. Let each be at his best, and then godly friendship becomes one of the truest and best helps in the godly life.—R. T.

Ver. 67.—*The moral service of affliction.* We are constantly dealing with the mission of affliction to the spiritual life. It may come with some freshness to follow the thought of the psalmist here, and see that the experience of affliction tells directly on the *practical* life of duty and relationship. It masters that growing self-willedness which leads the good man to try and take life into his own hands; and brings to him the humility and self-distrust which incline to keep well within the limits of God's Word. "If any of us remember a time in which we had no trouble, we also probably recollect that then grace was low, and temptation was strong." As an illustration in a larger sphere, Bishop Wordsworth's suggestion may be taken, "This was eminently true of the Hebrew nation. Before the Captivity, they had been torn by schisms—Israel against Judah, and Judah against Israel, and corrupted by idolatry; but they were purified from these evils by their afflictions."

I. AFFLICTIONS PROVIDE TIMES OF MEDITATION. They are to the moral life what sabbaths are to the bodily life. They stop the rush; they affirm that there is some-

thing more important than self-interest; they compel quietness; they give opportunity for reviewing. When we can do nothing, we have a chance of *thinking*. Let life go on without changes or trials, and the self must assume exaggerated importance. How can a man keep nobly dependent on God, who finds everything prosper under the hand of his energy? Affliction comes, makes him stop and think, and look back and up.

II. AFFLICTIONS TONE TIMES OF MEDITATION. Distinguish between the tone of meditations in our holiday-times, and in our times of affliction. In the one case we have bodily health; in the other, bodily weakness. It is an element of importance that suffering and pain should give tone to meditation; but it is needful to bear in mind that affliction may make meditation exaggerated, one-sided, or unworthy. The meditation of such times needs Divine guiding and sanctifying.

III. AFFLICTIONS PASS INTO NEW OPPORTUNITY. When a man comes back to life from a sick-bed, it is as if he began life afresh; with this difference—he had to grow into experience, now he has the opportunity to use experience. Habits are broken. He can make a new way, ordered and shaped by the new resolves based on the meditations of his affliction.—R. T.

Ver. 75.—*The faithfulness of the Divine Chastener*. “In faithfulness thou hast afflicted me;” “Thou of very faithfulness hast caused me to be troubled” (Prayer-book Version)—

“Who guideth mortals to wisdom, maketh them grasp lore
Firmly through their pain.”

(Æsch., ‘Agam.,’ 172.)

It was the marked peculiarity of the Israelites that they recognized God in history. It is the marked peculiarity of the renewed man that he recognizes God in personal history. The same events happen alike to all men, and are the outworking of natural laws, but what events are to each man depends on his point of view. There is a moral significance in events when a man can see that God is working in them and through them his purposes of grace.

I. GOD HAS UNDERTAKEN A WORK OF GRACE IN THE RENEWED MAN. He has “begun a good work” in the quickening of a new and Divine life in the man. To begin a work is for God to pledge himself to carry it on to perfection. The work undertaken is to give man full share in the regeneration of the world, and complete personal deliverance from the particular form in which moral evil affects him. The deliverance from physical evils comes after deliverance from moral evils, and is of interest only so far as it is related to and follows on the higher work. Physical evil for man would only be what physical evil is for animals, if man were not a *moral being*. God’s work in man is his deliverance from moral evil, and then from all the physical disasters and disabilities which have come from moral evil, or have followed in its train.

II. THAT WORK OF GRACE CAN ONLY BE CARRIED ON THROUGH AFFLICTION. We see plainly that when man works on character in the child he must use discipline, which involves chastening, correction, limitation, pain. It is, indeed, impossible to conceive of moral training, under human conditions, that does not require the agency of pain and suffering. A father cannot be faithful to his son unless he can be a chastener. Much more may we say that since God is pledged to the culture of the higher moral character, and that must even more certainly require discipline and affliction, it is only being true to himself, and faithful to his pledge, that he becomes in each individual life the Chastener for our profit.—R. T.

Ver. 79.—*Experience can teach*. It is said that “Experience is a dear school, but fools will learn in no other.” The proverb is in a large sense true, but we want it now only to fix the point that experience *is a school*; experience can teach, does teach. In a satirical spirit Froude says, “Experience is like the stern-lights of a ship, it casts its rays over a way that has been taken.” But that is not in any large, or practical sense, true; the actual experience must be a thing of the past, but the lessons learned by experience are available forces for the ordering of the life that we have to live. The distinction between animal and man, instinct and intelligence, is that man can profit by experience, the animal does not.

I. THE EXPERIENCE WHICH TEACHES IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE IS EXPERIENCE RELATIVE TO DIVINE COMMANDMENTS. What the good man wants his past life for is the study of conduct in the light of what was known to be God's will. What has happened in our lives does not much matter, and of themselves events teach very little. How did what happened stand related to what we knew to be right? That is the supreme question; and that alone reveals failures and frailties. That experience alone teaches, and provides forces for the endeavour to live a better life. In measure we have "known God's testimonies;" but how has our actual life been ruled and toned by what we knew?

II. THE ONE THING THAT EXPERIENCE TEACHES IS OUR ABSOLUTE NEED OF DIVINE SUPPORT. The one thing which the past has to show every honest and earnest-minded man is, that he has always failed when he trusted to his own judgment and strength, and ventured to neglect or to go aside of God's revealed will; and that he has always succeeded when, in a spirit of true humility, he persistently endeavoured to know God's will, and shape conduct and meet emergencies in its gracious leadings. Experience when consulted has always the same teaching to give. It may be summed up in this way, "You have always needed God as your Helper and Guide; you need him now as much as ever; you always will need him."—R. T.

Ver. 80.—*What is a perfect heart?* It is necessary to see that the term "perfect" varies its connotation according to the substantive word with which it stands connected. We speak of a perfect *animal*, and mean completely and healthily organized, according to the standard of that particular animal. We speak of a perfect *machine*, and mean one that entirely and efficiently accomplishes everything that it is required to do. We speak of perfect *conduct*, and mean that which in every detail conforms to the rule. We speak of a perfect *statue*, and mean one that in all points realizes and satisfies our ideal. Then what do we mean by a perfect *heart*—using that term as meaning the will inspired by the emotions? Both the will and the emotions are such fluctuating things that it may not be possible to create an ideal, or to find a standard, by which every heart must be judged. Even here we cannot say of the Lord Jesus that he has presented an absolute standard. He has with his particular environment found a model expression for the highest principles; but righteousness for each man must be the expression of the principles of right in his own particular environment, and with his own particular disposition. A perfect heart cannot mean a will always biassed to decision by particular considerations; and getting the bias by a particular condition of the feelings. Perfection when applied to the heart must mean *genuineness, sincerity*. But it means this made even more distinct and precise. It means *unity, absolute agreement*; the whole being brought in and bound together in one purpose. And if taken in its fullest suggestiveness, it further means an *instructed* heart, not one carried into conduct by any accident, but borne to it by a deliberate choice, based on competent knowledge. *Perfect-hearted* may be apprehended as *whole-hearted, true-hearted*, and as opposed to *half-hearted*.—R. T.

Ver. 83.—*The wine-skin in the smoke.* The wine-bottles of the East were *skins*. Rosenmüller tells us that it was a custom of the ancients to hang skins of wine in the smoke of a fire, for very much the same reason that we stand a bottle of claret on the hearth, in order to mellow the wine by a gradual and moderate warmth, and to bring it to an earlier perfection. And in that custom the psalmist finds an illustration of the meaning, and of the mercy, of the afflictions to which he has been exposed. They have been sent to act on him like the warm smoke on the wine—to refine, mellow, and ripen his character; and because, under them all, he has refused to part with his faith in God and duty; because he has been true to God and God's statutes, they have had their intended and proper effect upon him (S. Cox). This explanation gives a fresh suggestion to the text, but it may be doubted whether the mood of the psalmist is fairly represented by it. The older view seems more in harmony with the general tone of the stanza. Though, under the severe pressures of trial and affliction, the good man shrinks and wastes and blackens like a wine-skin hung in the smoke of the chimney, he still remembers the Divine statutes, and holds fast his faith in God and duty. What seems to be in mind is a long *wailing-time*, which was also a time of *suffering* and

strain. The watching for God was prolonged; no response seemed to come; much had to be borne while he was waiting; he seemed to get dry, shrivelled, and blackened, like the wine-skin in the chimney that had waited so long (and seemed to get tired of waiting, even as he did) for the moisture and refreshing of being used, and filled again with wine. But the question of supreme importance was this—What was he doing during this hard waiting-time? He has the joy of this confident assurance—he was holding fast his integrity; he was keeping on his obedience and trust; he was persistently ordering his life according to the Divine statutes.

I. WAITING-TIMES ARE A PART OF THE DIVINE AFFLICTIVE DISPENSATIONS. It sometimes seems as if God would do more for a man by making him wait than by making him suffer.

II. WAITING-TIMES HAVE A PECULIAR INFLUENCE ON A MAN'S SPIRIT. It may be represented by the effect of smoke on an empty wine-skin.

III. WAITING-TIMES SHOULD THROW US UPON THE COMFORTING AND STRENGTHENING OF THE DIVINE WORD. Everything for us depends on the cherished moods of our waiting-times.—R. T.

Vers. 85—87.—*Leaving our enemies with God.* The New Testament teachings concerning the treatment of our enemies is a decided advance upon the Old Testament teachings, but this should not prevent our seeing that the godly men of the Old Testament were in advance of the prevailing sentiments of their day.

I. IF A MAN BELIEVES IN HIMSELF, HE WILL ALWAYS TRY TO AVENGE HIMSELF. Then a man's enemies are entirely in the self-sphere, and must be dealt with in that sphere. This essential idea of unregenerate and self-circumscribed humanity may be efficiently illustrated in the mission of the family blood-avenger. A man was expected to avenge himself upon his enemies. But if he was killed, he could not avenge himself, and so his next of kin had to do this duty for him. Retaliation seems noble and right only so long as a man is self-sphered, and thinks the ordering of life is wholly in his own control. Civil government does but make public this system of dealing with our enemies ourselves. The state protects itself, provides its own sanctions and avengements. And the individual and the state are constantly in peril of acting upon impulse, or in the unreasoning sway of vindictive feeling.

II. IF A MAN BELIEVES IN GOD, HE WILL LEAVE HIS ENEMIES WITH HIM. To believe in God takes a man out of the self-sphere, and consequently gives him another point of view from which to regard his enemies. To believe in God is to apprehend God's personal interest in a man's highest welfare; and this must include concern for the influence which enemies and enmities may have upon a man. To believe in God is to be absolutely assured of his ability to defend from our enemies, and to punish them for their enmity. To believe in God is to be willing to let him undertake dealing with our enemies for us, and upholding us while we have to suffer their power. The godly man prays, "Help thou me."

III. IF A MAN BELIEVES GOD IN CHRIST, HE WILL, WITH THE CHRIST-HELP, WIN HIS ENEMIES. This leads into familiar topics. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him;" "Love your enemies;" "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves." Let God in Christ undertake our enemies, and he will teach us how to save them from their enmity.—R. T.

Ver. 88.—*Divine quickening our supreme need.* "Judged by his own, and, so far as we know, only work, the author of this psalm was a man wholly devoted to God and the Word of God. His confidence in that Word or Law, as the true rule of human life, had been exposed to the severest trials. He had seen the wicked in authority, using and straining their power to oppress and destroy the righteous. He himself had been called to suffer a long agony of anguish and distress, in which his soul fainted within him, simply because he would obey the highest rule he knew. In the time of his tribulation he had besought the Judge of all the earth to do him right, to vindicate the Word in which he put his trust, to deliver him from his afflictions. And, though neither answer nor deliverance came, he held fast his integrity; he refused to forget the statutes for his obedience to which he suffered, or to relinquish his trust in the God who did not save him" (S. Cox). But if such an attitude is to be maintained, the

good man will find he has constant need of one thing—Divine quickening. It may at the first starting of a religious life seem as if our supreme need were the precise Divine help in every detail of life and relation; and so the prayers of young Christians are often exact and minute; they ask for particular things, and expect precise answers. Then they often mistake contingencies for prayer-answers, and are in peril of assuming that they stand in some special Divine favour. As experience enlarges, the one thing most impressed on the renewed man is the tendency of the Divine life in him to flag and fail. It is always dying down. And it always needs requickening. It comes to us gradually that God would rather leave us free in the movements of life, and expect to do the best work for us by “strengthening us with strength in our soul.” And we at last see that this constant quickening and requickening and soul-vitalizing is precisely our supreme need. Even Christian experience can reach no higher prayer than this, “Quicken thou me.” So prayer in the good man’s life gradually loses its detailed character: it becomes simply a heart and life opening to the Divine quickening; and that is found to involve the supply of all our real needs.—R. T.

Ver. 92.—*The supreme strain of affliction.* This verse Luther selected as the motto for his own Bible, which is now in the museum at Berlin. So long as affliction keeps in the sphere of a man’s *circumstances* it is endurable. We make too much of human afflictions when we fix our attention on them, and miss estimating the ways in which men are affected by them. What affliction is to a man, what amount of strain it involves, depend on the man’s emotional nature, the condition and character of his will and affections. We often observe that things are afflictions to one man which are no afflictions at all to another; and that the same afflictions affect men differently at different times. Here the psalmist recognizes that his afflictions would have altogether overwhelmed him, but for the condition of his heart, cheered as it was by the assurances and promises of the Divine Word.

I. THE STRAIN OF AFFLICTION DEPENDS ON ITS RELATIVITY TO A MAN’S INWARD CONDITION. This can be shown by illustrating what affliction is to a man when he is in a normal condition of bodily, mental, and moral health. Then nothing seems to be overwhelming; there is an activity of endurance and resistance which prevents a man’s “perishing in his affliction.” But man is seldom, if ever, found in this normal state. We can conceive it; but it is seldom realized. Man is usually below it, and therefore affliction becomes such a strain. Sometimes below it through untrained natural disposition; through temporary states of bodily health; or through neglect of spiritual life. So man is unfitted, and affliction overwhelms. Man may be above the normal; and this he is by the infusion of Divine life through the Word. Then he is a nobler self. He has a consciousness of power which masters the strain. The power brings a joy and delight which put a man above himself.

II. THE GRACE OF GOD BEARS RELATION TO A MAN’S INWARD CONDITION. Therefore in it is found both the relief and the sanctifying of affliction. God makes and keeps the heart right, fills it with the joy of his Word and promise, and then man becomes master of all circumstances.—R. T.

Ver. 96.—*The disappointment of human hopes.* “I have seen an end of all perfection.” The true relation of the two parts of this verse to each other seems to be that of *contrast*. No other relation brings out so clear and full a meaning. The meaning of the whole, therefore, must be something like this: Here is something called ‘perfection’ existing among men in a great variety of forms. ‘But,’ says the psalmist, ‘according to my experience and observation, these are altogether too superficial, and too precarious, and too short-lived to make men happy, and the very best of them, the idealisms of human life, can never be attained. But thy commandment is exceeding broad,’ and that will do, unless men hinder, what nothing else will do.” The human hopes referred to are a man’s wholly self-centred purposes and ambitions. Let a man fashion something for himself as a supreme aim of life; let it be something which he regards as “perfection;” let it bear no relation to the blessing of his fellow-men, or to the will and honour of God, and there will surely be an end to all such perfection. Let perfection be humanly conceived success and happiness, and ere life closes the man will say with the “preacher,” who had such a varied experience, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

I. ALL AROUND US WE MAY SEE THE END OF PERFECTIONS. The story of the ages is the story of well-conceived ideals in social and national life that were never realized. The story of individual lives that had only self-centred aims is this wail, "My purposes are broken off." It is even a large truth that no life ever was lived that realized its ideal, reached its perfection, or accomplished its purposes. And this must be so because perfection is for the race, not for the individual, who has never more than a piece of the whole entrusted to him. And because, by man's very nature, he cannot rest satisfied with *things*, only with character, which finds expression in things, and is always below a possible attainment, while God is the supreme character.

II. IF WE CANNOT GET PERFECTION, WE MAY WORK TOWARDS IT. To do this we must get out of the human sphere into the Divine sphere. Man fails to reach his own perfection because it is so small. God's Word is large, broad, and towards its perfection man may move through all eternity, and get ennobled as he moves.—R. T.

Ver. 97.—*The inspiration of obedience.* "Oh how love I thy Law!" There are three possible inspirations of the obedient life; the psalmist presents the true and efficient one.

I. WE MAY OBEY BECAUSE WE MUST: THERE IS THE OBEDIENCE OF FEAR. Preachers seek to help men with this inspiration when they declare the "terrors of the Lord," testify of a coming judgment, and cry, "Prepare to meet thy God." And presumably there are persons to whom fear is an effective inspiration. All we need say is that they are not the nobler members of our race. A person amenable to the influence of fear is either uneducated, untrained, or un-self-trained. As science destroys superstition, so knowledge and self-knowledge and Divine knowledge destroy fear. Fear God, and you need fear nothing else. It is not yet worthily seen that Christianity has something with which it intends, absolutely and entirely, to replace fear.

II. WE MAY OBEY BECAUSE WE OUGHT: THERE IS THE OBEDIENCE OF DUTY. This is an altogether higher kind of inspiration. In it we still recognize a power above us; but it is now a power personally related to us and interested in us—a power with which we are in sympathy, and whose authority to rule us we recognize. No man is his true self until he says, "I am not independent. I am under authority. There is something that I ought to be. It is the will of a Personal Divine Being, in whose image I have been made." The sense of duty has been the inspiration of the noblest things in every sphere of human life—in the family, the business, and the nation. Duty has often inspired heroism. Poets have sung its praise so much that it would hardly be unreasonable to regard it as man's highest inspiration. And yet we must see that its power is altogether surpassed.

III. WE MAY OBEY BECAUSE WE WISH TO: THERE IS THE OBEDIENCE OF LOVE. "Oh how love I thy Law!" It is sometimes said that this is the Law "getting into a man," and becoming himself, so that when he obeys he simply *expresses himself*. And this is true. Even duty keeps law outside us; it remains something which we must conform ourselves to. Love brings law in, makes it one with us, and so becomes an actual force of obedience in us. The inspiration of love is our best selves carrying our conduct into righteousness.—R. T.

Ver. 100.—*Human teachers and the Bible itself.* "I understand more than the aged, because I have kept thy precepts." This is no mere boasting, no invidious comparison. It is the recognition of the fact that the man who is taught of God knows what no human teacher can teach. The human teacher has a limited range; the Divine Teacher transcends it. But the Word of God, the Scriptures of the Divine revelations, are the agencies God uses for imparting the higher knowledge. It is necessary to say that what God teaches is not a mere advance on what man teaches. It is other than man teaches. Man deals with the surface of things; God deals with the inmost of things. Man keeps within the agency of limited human language; God can teach through spiritual sensibilities. It is true that he uses the written Word; but it is not true that he confines himself to the formality of the Word. He teaches through the spiritual feeling which the Word excites. There is much made of a comprehensive, all-round education, but it is not enough insisted on that this must include the Divine teaching.

I. THE NECESSARY LIMITS OF HUMAN TEACHINGS. 1. They are limited by the mental capacity of those who teach and those who are taught. 2. They are limited by the imperfection of the vehicle by which human knowledge is conveyed. No human word has the same connotation for every one who uses it, and few words keep the same connotation for one man through a long life. 3. They are limited by the variableness of the material at their command. New facts are continually displacing old ones, and new theories condemning old ones. In science, a book ten years old is comparatively useless. 4. They are limited by the range over which they extend, which is compelled to keep away from all knowledge of God and the things of God. "Who by searching can find out God?" And yet it is in that higher range of knowledge alone that man's true nature can be unfolded. The queen of sciences is theology.

II. THE DIVINE TEACHINGS BEYOND THE HUMAN LIMITS. Is man only a mind? Many seem to think of him as having no more than a mental organization. A man is a spiritual being, kin to God, having for his present agency and use a body and a mind. The Divine range is the soul, which is the man himself.—R. T.

Ver. 101.—*Dealing with hindrances to obedience.* "I have refrained my feet from every evil way." The point here is that the man resolutely dealt with himself; and, being absolutely purposed to obey, he persisted in removing out of the way whatever, in his disposition, inclination, habit, or circumstances, tended to hinder him in his obedience. How much goes along with obedience! How much is involved in it! "Refrained my feet" is a figure. The man recognizes the constant disposition to step over the line, or into the tempting side-walk, and he has again and again, by an effort of will, to pull his feet back, to hold them tight. Compare the figure of setting a watch on the door of the lips. "I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress."

I. THE HINDRANCES TO OBEDIENCE MAY BE EXTERNAL TO A MAN. 1. They may lie in a man's friendships. There are associations of life which a man can arrange for himself, and he can secure that these shall be helpful. But there are associations in life which are made for a man, and these may be hindering to his purposed obedience. Illust.: Joseph, Daniel. 2. They may lie in a man's circumstances. The straitened man is put upon guileful and self-trusting schemes to improve his circumstances, and is thus hindered from obedience. The well-to-do man is in danger of being self-reliant and over-confident, and so made indifferent to obedience. Virtue is man's triumph over external hindrances. Innocence only becomes virtue through its struggle with hindrance and evil.

II. THE HINDRANCES TO OBEDIENCE MAY BE IN THE MAN HIMSELF. These hindrances are in the mind of the psalmist. He found something wrong with his own feet. They did not stand firm; they inclined to slide; they seemed to have a bias outward; if he was not careful, of themselves they carried him over the line. In this way he represented that carnal, self-seeking tendency with which the good man has continually to deal. He may will to obey; but he will find self-interest ever ready to resist good resolve. The hindrances that are in the man himself are never wholly mastered while a man lives, so that he can *feel safe*. Indeed, to "feel safe" is to be in the gravest peril. Through a long life, if a man really means to live for God and obey, he will find that he must always be at work at his own hindrances, "refraining his feet from evil ways."—R. T.

Ver. 105.—*Heavenly light on the earthly path.* The Book of Proverbs has the same figure (Prov. vi. 23). For the "commandment is a lamp, and the law is light." And Wordsworth calls duty "a light to guide." The "lamp" is kindled specially for the hours of darkness; the "light" is the natural light for all time. The need for the lantern on dark nights is well understood by those who live in country districts. A minister without a lantern, one dark night, got over a stile, intending to take a straight line across a most familiar field; but in a little while he found he had wandered round to the stile again. In the East the figure of the text is even more expressive. The streets of the towns are narrow, unlighted, ill-kept, and specially dark at night, because of the high walls of the houses on either side. The causeway often has dangerous holes, and soft muddy places, and great loose stones; and if a man is to pick his way

safely, he must not only have a lantern, but hold it right down to his feet, so that its light may guide his next footstep. That gives point to the text. God's Word is not just a general light for the guidance of our route; it is something to hold close, for the direction of each step in life that we take.

I. LIFE IS TOO FULL OF PERILS FOR A MAN TO TRUST HIS OWN EYESIGHT. What can a man do with his eyesight in a dark Eastern street in the night-time? He may have the best eyesight, but it will not serve him then and there. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Human life is dark relative to human experience. "Ye have not gone this way heretofore." Human life is full of perils. Such as affect everybody, and such as affect particular dispositions. Every man is in danger of being taken at unawares; tripped up by some stone of offence; sore wounded by slipping into some hole of neglect. Some can manage life better than others; but every man is beaten by life in the long run, if he undertakes it himself.

II. LIFE-PERILS CAN BE PASSED SAFELY THROUGH WITH THE HELP OF GOD'S LAMP. The Word of God is relative to all possible human experiences and dangers. Its light acts in two ways. 1. It gives the man general principles and moral strength, so that he is ready prepared for every testing-time. 2. It gives precise counsels guiding actual conduct in every emergency. It is the lantern held down close to the feet, so as to direct the next footfall. The adaptation of the Divine Word to a man's every circumstance and need is the surprise of religious experience.—R. T.

Ver. 106.—*Confirming our pledges by keeping them.* "I have sworn, and am steadfastly purposed" (Prayer-book Version); "have confirmed it" (Revised Version). It is not enough that the light shines on our path; it is necessary that we should steadfastly fix our gaze on that part which the light illumines. The lamp shines in vain unless its holder looks intently on its shining. "Sworn" here only means made solemn resolve with myself and solemn pledges with God. There are times in every good man's life when he makes fresh and solemn resolves—new year times, birthday times, or times of convalescence, or of rescue from sudden peril. But every good man knows that these are often made upon impulse, and need *confirming*. There are two ways of confirming resolves.

I. BY RENEWING THE RESOLVE AFTER "COUNTING THE COST." For illustration of this we have our Lord's teaching. On sudden and untested impulse, a passionate movement of feeling, very many made the resolve to become his disciples, and in great excitement offered themselves to him. How well he knew human nature! The fire that too suddenly blazes up soon fades. Our Lord showed no eagerness to receive them. He even somewhat coldly repressed them, setting them upon quietly thinking over what they were doing. He would have them "sit down and count the cost." He would have nobody upon an exclamation. He would have anybody who had resolved again quietly. This needs to be remembered in view of the exciting *missions* of our day, which work towards an impulsive resolve to become Christ's disciples. That may be good; but it is only good when it is followed up by a second resolve, made quietly in view of thoughtful estimates of all discipleship involves.

II. BY MAKING IMMEDIATE EFFORT TO KEEP THE RESOLVE. It is never safe to allow any gap between the resolve to do a thing and the effort to do it. That gap gives time for the impulse to die down, and for other interests to come in and fill up mind and heart. A man seldom keeps his resolve if he puts off *beginning* to keep it. It is carrying it out that keeps the resolve alive, and enables it to continue a moral force. Heart-rightness and life-rightness go together, and are mutually helpful. Doing what we purpose renews the purpose, and works passing resolve into ever-controlling principle.—R. T.

Ver. 107.—*Soul-life for suffering bodies.* "I am troubled above measure; quicken me, O Lord, according to thy Word" (Prayer-book Version). The point here can best be seen in a contrast. The Apostle Paul had some severe bodily infirmity, which he calls a "thorn in the flesh." He prayed to God about it, and asked that he might lose his trouble; have his circumstances changed; have the "thorn in the flesh removed." The apostle in this was on a lower level than the psalmist. He too had some serious form of bodily trial, or temporal trouble, that almost overwhelmed him; and he too took

the matter to God in prayer. But he did not ask for any change of his circumstances; he asked to be quickened, soul-quickened; to be so filled with Divine life, and made so soul-strong, that he could rise above his circumstances, however distressful they might be. And the apostle had to be taught by God the lesson which the psalmist had learned ages before. God's answer to his prayer was, "My grace is sufficient for thee. My strength is made perfect in weakness." Power to bear is a better Divine blessing than any mere removal of suffering from our bodies. The wonder of our Lord's bearing in the judgment-halls and Calvary is the soul-strength that triumphed over circumstances.

I. SOUL-LIFE IS BETTER THAN BELIEVED SUFFERING. But we find this very hard to believe. We only do believe it as we realize that God's idea for a man's life is not the providing of a pleasant time, but the providing of a scene which shall become a moral discipline, out of which spiritual character may be evolved. The suffering has in view the character; and to remove the suffering may be the worst thing that could happen to the man. The sign of the Divine using of the suffering for the highest ends is found in the imparting of soul-strength. It shows the suffering to be a blessing to us.

II. SOUL-LIFE REALLY MATES AND MASTERS THE SUFFERING. For the real measure of the suffering is the measure of power to bear which the sufferer has. Some can bear nothing; some can bear anything. At one time we can bear what at another overwhelms. Then strength to bear—the soul-life of full trust in God—does actually lift us above our sufferings, and make them feel, as Christ's yoke is, easy and light.—R. T.

Ver. 110.—*God's Word the safety of the tempted.* "The ungodly have laid a snare for me; but yet I swerved not from thy commandments." Temptations are sometimes open and manifest, and we know what we are doing when we resist them. But often they are secret and subtle, and we have nothing evidently to oppose. Then our safety depends on our moral and spiritual health and vigour, which in a natural way resists the encroachment of spiritual disease. The secrecy and trickiness of much of our temptation to evil is indicated by the psalmist's calling it a *snare*. Illustration may be taken from our physical relation to infectious disease. A man may, in the way of his duty, have to go where there is infectious disease. Then he braces up his will to a positive resistance, and so is in great measure guarded. But a man may, in the ordinary course of life, without knowing it, be subject to infection; then his safety absolutely depends on the measure of his vitality. Vital force is resistance of disease. Fungus grows on the parts of trees in which the life is flagging. The psalmist here declares that the resolute will and persistent effort to keep God's commandments, had proved to be a power of moral health and life which had kept him from insidious temptations that were like snares.

I. EVIL CANNOT PUT ITS SNARES IN THE GOOD MAN'S PATH. Not actually in the path. The highway of holiness God keeps, and makes a plain path. It is a well-kept road; he allows no obstructions, and removes all perils. If a man will only keep in the way of righteousness, his path shall be clear right through, his life shall be like the light which "shineth more and more unto the perfect day." It is God's narrow way, and nobody and nothing can put obstacles or snares into it.

II. EVIL CAN PUT ITS SNARES JUST ON ONE SIDE OF THE GOOD MAN'S PATH. There is a line which it may not pass, but it puts its snares as near to the line as it possibly can. They are well in the good man's sight, and always most attractively disguised. But the good man must *swerve* a little from the right, and *step over* the line, before he can possibly fall into the snare. The man *is* in the wrong before he *does* the wrong.

III. THE GOOD MAN'S SAFETY LIES IN GOING STRAIGHT ON. Swerving is the peril; looking about is the mistake. We know God's will; then let us keep on doing it. "Let thine eyes look straight on."—R. T.

Ver. 112.—*Our power over our own hearts.* "I have inclined my heart." "The sinful heart will run any way: upon earthly things, upon evil things, or upon impertinent and unseasonable things; but it will not come to or keep upon that which it should mind; therefore it must be taken as by a strong hand, and set upon spiritual

things, set on musing and meditation of heavenly things. The psalmist took and *bent his heart*, as a thing bending too much to other things; set his mind on musing on it. He found his heart and the Law of God too far asunder, and so would continue, unless he brought them together and made them one. If he had not brought his heart to the Word, he had never meditated; the object cannot apply itself to the mind, but the mind must bring itself to the object. No holy duties will come to us; we must come to them" (Nathanael Ranew, 1670).

I. WE RECOGNIZE OUR POWER OVER OUR OWN LIVES. We say that a man may make of his life what he pleases. He can set before him standards and rules of conduct, and compel his actions to conform to them. His power is indeed within limitations, so that he cannot always do the things that he would. There are limitations arising from (1) natural character, feebleness of will, etc.; (2) imperfect mental and moral training; (3) hindering circumstances; (4) resistance of other wills. And yet every man knows that the dominion given to man in this world includes, and indeed reaches, its higher forms in the dominion of his own conduct and relationships.

II. WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE OUR POWER OVER OUR OWN HEARTS. Because a vague sentiment easily grows on us that our hearts are the sphere only of the Divine operations, and we can do nothing with them, but must leave them wholly to the indwelling Spirit. This, however, is exaggerating and misrepresenting a most vital and precious truth. What we *cannot* do in the inclining and shaping of our hearts or affections should bring to view how much there is that we *can* do. We can put ourselves in the way of nourishing all good affections and emotions. We can keep out of the way of things that would unworthily bias or occupy our hearts. And we may keep ever fresh in our convictions that the power which we have to incline our own hearts is power on which God's power rests, and through which his power works.—R. T.

Ver. 113.—*The offence of the insincere.* "I hate them that are of a double mind"—men who "halt between two opinions" (1 Kings xviii. 2). "Perhaps we are to think of those among the Jews who were for political reasons favourably inclined towards foreign customs and ideas, and who would not throw in their lot frankly and courageously with the national party." Compare St. James's "double-minded man" (i. 8). The good man has a natural repugnance to the "two-faced" man. He revolts from him. He cannot trust him. He shrinks from him as from the serpent, which is the type of subtlety in a bad and perilous sense. When the ideal Man moved to and fro among men, this characteristic of the good man was most marked in him. He was keenly sensitive to insincerity; he most vigorously denounced the hypocrite; the two-faced man was ever an unendurable offence to him.

I. THE INSINCERE ARE AN OFFENCE TO EVERY MAN. Genuineness is the basis of all human trust. The schemer undermines society. We can only deal with our fellow-men on the assumption that they *are* what they seem to be. Home, friendship, business, society, nations, Churches, all are so seriously injured by the influence of the insincere, that they are always on the watch for them. To stand in any relation in this world, a man must be true to himself.

II. THE INSINCERE ARE AN OFFENCE TO THE GOOD MAN. Everything that is characteristic of man is sharpened and polished (furbished) by his becoming a *good* man. And this may especially be observed in relation to *truth* and *truthfulness*. To apprehend and know God is to gain an altogether higher estimate of sincerity; for he "desireth truth in the inward parts." And to endeavour to live a godly life is to establish and confirm truth as the basis of character and relationships; and the man of truth requires truth in others. And he is keen to detect and to renounce that almost unconscious insincerity into which men fall whose lives are not ruled by high and noble principles. Their "permissions" are an offence to him.

III. THE INSINCERE ARE AN OFFENCE TO GOD. This can be illustrated from Old Testament character-studies, from Psalms, Proverbs, and Prophets; but more fully from the relations of the God-Man, the Lord Jesus, with the hypocrite and the insincere (Matt. xxiii.).—R. T.

Ver. 115.—*The mischievous influence of the disobedient.* "Away from me, ye

wicked!" (Prayer-book Version). If we take the psalmist as representing the nation Israel establishing itself again after the Captivity, then the verse expresses its determination to purify itself from the leaven of evil influence; from the power of every one who, and everything which, could be a hindrance to the full and worthy re-establishment of the Jehovah-religion. We may somewhat enlarge on this so as to get a point that will give us practical and helpful applications. Here is a distinct apprehension of the evil influence exerted by the wicked, which rouses indignation, and impels the psalmist to say vigorously, "Away from me, ye wicked!" The wicked man, in the view of the psalmist, is the self-willed man, who refuses to shape his conduct by the rule and Law and will of God. And that sort of man is found in every sphere of human association—in the home, the business, the social circle, the senate. And everywhere that man is, he must be, a mischief-maker. What is the mischievous influence that he exerts?

I. HE PRESENTS AN EVIL EXAMPLE. This is familiar, but point may be gained by showing that in every sphere of life there are the immature, who are specially susceptible to influence, and unable to resist the attractiveness of evil example. For instance, the insidious doubttings and questionings of the evil ones have no power on the matured, but seriously affect the immature.

II. HE BREAKS UP THE UNITY OF ENTERPRISE. He is always the *other one*, the objector, the one who pulls the other way, who wants something else. He is the drag on all good effort. This may be illustrated in relation to *united prayer*. He prays against the prayer, and so prevents the blessing which is promised to unity.

III. HE BRINGS ON THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD WHICH AFFECT OTHERS BESIDE HIMSELF. "The wicked shall not go unpunished," but it is not possible, under the conditions of human existence, to isolate the punishment to the evil-doer. Those in association with him must share in the effects of the judgment (see the cases of Achan, Korah, etc.). The evil-disposed persons in the new Jewish nation might bring judgments on the nation by their wilful doings. Therefore the psalmist is anxious for distinct and entire separation from them.—R. T.

Ver. 116.—*Self-distrust*. "Let me not be ashamed of my hope." "A man would be ashamed of his hope if it turned out that this was not based upon a sure foundation." But here the psalmist evidently expresses a kind of fear of himself. He is afraid lest he should be ashamed of his hope, and so earnestly cries to God to save him from himself.

I. SELF-DISTRUST AS A SECRET OF MORAL POWER. It belongs to the normal condition of man as a dependent creature. He ought to distrust himself; if he does not, he cannot be reliant on a Power beyond himself. A self-confident man is making the attempt to be something that he is not. He is trying to transcend his normal condition; and in the measure of his success he becomes an unnatural being. He is a "law unto himself," and that a created being never can be. Further than this, a self-distrust kept within due limits is an element of moral power, because it leads him (1) never to act without due consideration and care; (2) never to act without outlook-ing and uplooking for grace and help from a higher power. And man is only the moral being that he can be, and was intended to be, when he is man inwardly guided, moved, restrained, inspired, by the indwelling God. Normal man says, "I cannot, but God can through me."

II. SELF-DISTRUST AS A WEAKENING OF MORAL POWER. And this it is when it is only in a small degree intellectual, and in a very large degree emotional. Self-distrust becomes perilous sentimentality in some forms of sectarian religious life. It is exaggeration of sentiment to assume that, in the matter of redemption, or in the ordering of the godly life, God must do everything and man can do nothing. So long as self-distrust holds itself ready to respond to what comes of its reliance on God, it is healthy. When self-distrust is fostered by introspection, by examination of variable feelings, or by attempting to match feeling with impossible human standards, it is unhealthy, and utterly weakening to the moral fibre. Self-distrust that makes a man miserable and idle is, by its influence, stamped as bad. Self-distrust that inspires trust, self-distrust that persists in keeping on doing active duty, is healthy and good, honouring to God, and every way hopeful for man.—R. T.

Vers. 119, 120.—*Confidence in God's judgments blending with fears.* "Thou putttest away all the ungodly of the earth like dross. . . . My flesh trembleth for fear of thee." The good man is variously affected by the judgments of God. He is not always in the mood to view them aright. It is intended that he should be influenced by them. It is well to remember that Divine judgments never exhaust their mission in punishing wickedness, they are designed to warn the unwary, and to assure the perplexed of the living working of the great Vindicator. But good people sometimes misuse Divine judgments. They do when they exaggerate judgment as a feature of the Divine administration. They do when they dwell on the physical suffering that the judgment may involve, and pay little heed to the moral purpose which is at the heart of all Divine judgment. They do when they cherish the fear that the Divine judgments are indiscriminate, at least practically, and sweep away the righteous with the wicked. And when it seems as if, in a bodily and temporal sense, the judgment of the wicked does affect the righteous, the good man is full of fears lest his bodily calamities should destroy his heart-confidence in God. There are human calamities, such as epidemic disease; natural calamities, such as storm and famine; and national calamities, such as war and commercial panic, which the good and evil share together, and everything depends on the good man keeping the right attitude of mind in relation to such things.

I. WHAT THE GOOD MAN SEES. In some moods—as that of Asaph—all he can see is the wicked prospering, and then he is tempted to question the justice of the Divine dealings. In other moods he can see how short is the tether of the wicked, and how certain and overwhelming are the Divine judgments. The difficulty is that the seeing is usually so unqualified; it is exclusive and exaggerated on the one side or on the other.

II. WHAT THE GOOD MAN FEELS. Based on what he sees. He seldom can trust his feelings, because they respond to sense-conditions, and are inefficiently toned by the sanctified will. So he either feels as if God were neglecting him, or as if he would be borne away by circumstances. Then he needs the cheer of God's Word.—R. T.

Ver. 125.—*The cry for spiritual discernment.* "Oh grant me understanding." By this term is often to be understood that particular spiritual discernment which is a special power of the spiritual man; of the man who looketh "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." It is scarcely possible to describe the spiritual man more sharply or more suggestively than is done by the Apostle Paul in these sentences (2 Cor. iv. 18). By "understanding" is said to be meant "a deeper knowledge of God's Law and dispensation," but this keeps us outside, on the surface of things; and what the good man wants is inward discernment of the relativity of Divine counsels, warnings, revealings, and promises, to *himself*. We only understand moral things as we discern their relativity. The immediate connection of the verso may be the delay of God's judgment on the wicked. The good man often finds himself puzzled to explain God's ways with the wicked. "If our heart fail in its longing for speedy retribution, 'it is our own infirmity;' fuller conception of the mind of God would take away perplexity and impatience."

I. SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT AS ONE OF THE POWERS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. The Divine life in man involves two things: 1. A quickening of the powers of the soul that have been dimmed and deadened by the service of self and sin. 2. A bestowment of fresh powers, as trusts (gifts) for the ministry to which the renewed man is called. Spiritual discernment is one of the natural powers that get quickened, freed from entanglements, and exercised. But it is a power whose vigour depends on the general culture of the spiritual life. It fades and revives with the variation of our soul-moods. So its renewal is a subject of prayer.

II. SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT AS THE WORK OF THE INDWELLING SPIRIT. This leads us into the Christian apprehension of the matter. In the renewed man the Holy Ghost abides. He works his work of grace in us through our faculties. These and especially our spiritual discernment, he quickens into power.—R. T.

Ver. 126.—*Making void God's Word.* "For they have made void thy Law." Rendered it ineffective. Put it aside, as if it were some impossible, ineffective thing,

that was all very well as an ornament, but of no real use in this workaday world. There are many who still treat God's Word in this way. They do not take the trouble to deny its claims, to oppose its demands, or to doubt its teachings; they simply "shunt it off on a side line," and along the main track their trains go hurrying to and fro, heedless of the Word of God on the siding. It may remain there for ever for all they care, and at least it is safely out of the way. They "make void God's Law." Can we set out some of the ways in which this is done? First, however, it is necessary to present the claims of God's Word to direct and control man's life. It is no mere storehouse of excellent sentiments; it is an actual chart, guide, adviser, of a good man's conduct. It must come into closest relation to life and conduct. And it is precisely this demand on its behalf which the man who would live unto the "devices and desires of his own heart" resists. It wants to be *effective*, he wants it to be *ineffective*.

I. MEN MAKE VOID GOD'S LAW BY SIMPLY NEGLECTING IT. And this is the most successful way. It gains the end with the least trouble, and involves no conflict with conscience. The Bible on the shelf, only dusted, is void enough. It does nobody either good or harm.

II. MEN MAKE VOID GOD'S LAW BY MISUSING IT. And this they do when they employ it for bolstering up their sectarian opinions; regard it as a storehouse of material for doctrinal conflicts rather than as a guide to practical life.

III. MEN MAKE VOID GOD'S LAW BY THROWING DOUBTS UPON IT. Such doubts have been thrown in every age, and do but take on some new form for each new age. The mischief of the doubts is their plucking away from us the sense of authority in the Word. It is the serpent's perpetual whisper, "Yea, hath God said?" To which the proper answer is, "Yes, he has."

IV. MEN MAKE VOID GOD'S LAW BY FAILING TO DO WHAT IT ENJOINS. The test of right treatment of God's Word is obedience. "Surely in vain made he it, the pen of the scribes is in vain," if men hear and do not; know and obey not. For them the Law is void.—R. T.

Ver. 128.—*The self-willed treatment of God's Word.* "Therefore hold I straight all thy commandments" (Prayer-book Version). "In the word 'therefore' there is a peculiar beauty. The violation of God's Law by the wicked only brings out more intensely in his servants the sense of its preciousness, and the enthusiasm of devotion to it." It is not so much the wickedness of the wicked that is in the psalmist's mind, as the wrong and unworthy ways in which they twist and turn God's Word, so that it shall either excuse their wickedness or seem to have nothing to do with it. He "hates every false way," every way of dealing with God's way which is not genuine and straightforward; and for himself he will persist in "holding straight" all the commandments, dealing honestly and sincerely with them.

I. SELF-WILL SELECTS FROM GOD'S WORD WHAT SUITS IT. It is true that every one does and must select from God's Word what is most helpful; and that all Bible-readers find different parts and portions helpful in different moods and circumstances. The Bible of each individual is a much smaller book than the Bible God has provided for the world. But the good man (1) recognizes the value and authority of all; (2) seeks relativity to his passing spiritual needs; and (3) depends on Divine illumination and guidance for the parts he finds; giving due heed to them, whether he likes them or not. The self-willed man takes out only what he likes or what will serve his ends, and consequently his Bible is *his own*; it is not God's.

II. SELF-WILL DISTORTS EVEN WHAT IT GETS. Only the sincere, God-honouring mind sees in the Word what God put there. If a man brings his own ideas to the Word, looking in it for what he wants to find, the mere language will easily take shape that satisfies him. He will loudly assert what it *says*, in entire indifference to what it *means*. This self-willed distortion of God's Word to support preconceived doctrinal ideas is the treacherous basis on which all sectarianism rests. But it is more important to rebuke the distortion of God's Word which is made to support practical unrighteousness. It has even been made the minister, and the excuser, of man's sin.—R. T.

Ver. 129.—*High estimates of God's Word.* "Thy testimonies are wonderful." Dr.

Barry's outline of this section is suggestive. "The key-note of this meditative section is struck in the first words. God's dispensation is wonderful: 'As the heaven is higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways.' His Word gives light only to simple faith (ver. 130); it satisfies only those who long for it and love it (vers. 131, 132); it saves from oppression only those who rest on his promise, and are willing to be taught (vers. 133—135); for those who will not bow their hearts to it, there is no salvation; over them we can but weep (ver. 136)." S. T. Coleridge says, "All knowledge begins and ends with wonder; the first wonder is the child of ignorance; the last wonder the parent of adoration." The Scriptures are "wonderful," with respect to (1) the matter which they contain; (2) the manner in which they are written; and (3) the effects which they produce. The following outline is from T. Manton: Wonderful (1) in their majesty and composure; which striketh reverence into the hearts of those that consider. (2) They are wonderful for the matter and depth of mystery, which cannot be found elsewhere, concerning God, and Christ, the creation of the world, the souls of men, and their immortal and everlasting condition, the Fall of man, etc. (3) They are wonderful for their purity and perfection. The Decalogue in ten words compriseth the whole duty of man, and reacheth to the very soul, and all the motions of the heart. (4) They are wonderful for the harmony and consent of all the parts. All religion is of a piece, and one part doth not interfere with another, but conspireth to promote the great end of subjection of the creature to God. (5) They are wonderful for the power of them. There is a mighty power which goeth along with the Word of God, and astonisheth the hearts of those that consider it and feel it. Wonderful, as a term, does much more than express admiration and appreciation. It implies unusualness; the thing to which it is applied is other than we expected. And the otherwiseness suggests a higher and Divine source. The wonderful is the supernatural.—R. T.

Ver. 133.—*God practically applying his own Word.* "Order my steps in thy Word." It would seem as if the psalmist were asking God to do what he ought to do for himself. Ordering footsteps, shaping conduct, is a man's own business. But that is to miss the point of the psalmist. He knew well enough that God only works with a man; and that God will order no man's footsteps unless the man is ordering his own. It is not extravagant to see in the psalmist's plea an anticipation of the higher truth of Christianity, that God, as the living God, is actually in his Word, and working its work. God was in Christ, using for the redemption of man his human manifestation. Christ, risen, living, spiritual, is actually in his gospel, as it is proclaimed to men, using it for the carrying out of his redemptive mission. In this we have but the unfolding, the development, of what has been the truth concerning God's Word through all the ages. In whatever form it has come to men, it has been inseparable from God. God has been in it. We are always wrong when we try to make two things—God's Word, and God. The Word is a living thing, and its life is God. Then when the psalmist is most anxiously seeking the counsels of the Word for the guidance of his conduct, with the most resolute intention to shape his conduct by what he discovers to be God's will, he can most sincerely pray the prayer of this text, for God is in the Word, prepared to make all due applications of it, in the life that is freely and fully opened to him. When the genuine man takes God's Word into his mind and heart, *he takes God in*, and he therefore has not knowledge only, but knowledge and *power*. He knows what he *ought* to do; he feels what he *wants* to do; but beyond and above this, he realizes what he *can* do. God is no distant Being communicating a rule for his guidance. God is with him, and in him, prepared to order his footsteps, to help him in ordering his footsteps by the rule.—R. T.

Ver. 134.—*Freedom in order to be righteous.* The tone of this entire psalm is that of a man who is in some kind of bondage to his fellow-man, either material, mental, or moral. It may reflect the feeling of the exile in Babylon; but perhaps it reflects better the feeling of the restored exile, whose endeavours to resuscitate the Israelite nation and religion were so variously opposed by the neighbouring kingdoms, and by political parties. The restored exile, because of his joy in his new-found liberty, felt all the more deeply the way in which he was checked and hindered by fresh forms

of the "oppression of man." And true to the Jewish instincts, he saw the oppression chiefly as a hindrance to his hope of restoring the Jehovah-worship.

I. THE VALUE OF FREEDOM DEPENDS ON THE USE WE MAKE OF IT. A child had better not be free, because he does not know what to do with freedom. He gradually gains the freedom as he gains the control of himself and the control of his circumstances. Some men never can be free. They are not masters of themselves enough to have so serious a trust. Freedom is a passionate desire of humanity everywhere, and in all its stages. It is God's gift to man, and his inalienable right. And yet with this passion for his own freedom there goes another passion to hold his brother in bonds. Man would use his freedom to take away his brother's; or to satisfy his lower animal nature. There is dignity and peril in mental freedom and in moral freedom. They depend on the use we make of the trust.

II. WE USE OUR FREEDOM ARIGHT ONLY WHEN WE PUT OURSELVES IN BONDS. The psalmist wants his liberty in order that he may keep God's precepts. Liberty for man is but licence when it is simple freedom from restraint. It is a noble and intelligent thing only when a man uses it to fix rules for himself, or to put himself into the Divine rule. Men think of freedom as getting rid of the restraints of righteousness, so that they may do what they like. But the true liberty, the only liberty a man can desire who looks aright on life, is getting rid of the restraints of evil, self-will, and self-pleasing, so that he may be free to do what God likes. He wants liberty to be righteous.—R. T.

Ver. 135.—*The shining face.* The expression is clearly a figurative one, and the idea is suggested by life at court. The courtiers watch the expression on the countenance of their king. The sign of his favour and acceptance is given in his bright, smiling, "shining" face. If they are out of favour, they know it by the darkened look upon his face. It is a peculiarity of Eastern life that a master says as little as possible to his servant, and expects that servant to watch his every movement, and to interpret every change in his face, and do everything for him without his speaking a word. And Eastern servants gain a marvellous skill in thus comprehending their masters' wishes.

I. GOD'S SHINING FACE IS THE SIGN OF DIVINE FAVOUR. The face of God is constantly referred to in the Old Testament. To turn the back on a person is to show one's self angry with him. To turn the face towards a person is to show one's self favourable to him. "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled;" "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us;" "No man hath seen God at any time." All man ever has had, or can have, is a spiritually realized presence. And if our spiritual senses are duly cultured, we do not need the help of bodily appearances. Soul-apprehensions become real and satisfying. And it comes to this with us—God gives us the inward feeling, the assurance of his Divine favour and acceptance, and we want to express what we feel, and plain prosaic language does not satisfy us, so we call it "the shining of his face upon us." But what must we be if God's face is to be ever shining on us?

II. GOD'S SHINING FACE IS THE INSPIRATION TO NOBLE ENDEAVOUR. There may be some who can never do right and good things unless they are kept up to duty by threatening and the whip. But the better-natured men respond to approval and encouragement. Their inspiration is their master's smile. Kindly praise, the cheerful word, a loving approval, will draw out a man's best. The good man will do anything for him who treats him kindly and trustingly. Let God's shining face be on us, and it is our joy to do his will.—R. T.

Ver. 137.—*Rests in God's righteousness.* "The soul takes refuge in the sense of the eternity of righteousness, both against all transitory forgetfulness and denial of it, and against all contempt and persecution of those who love it. The Law is 'right for evermore;' its righteousness must shine out in the end." "The initial letter with which every verse (of this section) commences is the Hebrew *tz*, and the key-word is 'purity.'" The expression, "Righteous art thou, O Jehovah," we should express by saying, "Ideal, or standard, or absolute Righteousness art thou."

I. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS CONCEIVABLE. Man is able to create in his mind the idea of

absolute right—the moral straight line. But this suggests a philosophical difficulty. Is that an innate idea, or is it dependent on acquired knowledge? Can man know right without knowing wrong? Can man conceive perfect right without a revealed standard? Man has the mental power of conceiving completion. No matter what he deals with, he can think of it in a perfect state. And this power can be applied to *moral* things; he can conceive complete rightness. But the fact must be noted, that man cannot think without using the materials provided by God's revelation in nature and in his own nature. Man knows nothing of himself, of the world, or of God, save through revelations made to him, which are the necessary materials of his thinking. God helps him to conceive righteousness.

II. **RIGHTEOUSNESS IS CONCEIVED AS PERSONAL.** A philosopher may conceive such a perfection of morals as he can call "righteousness," but his conception is absolutely ineffective to him. It lies wholly outside the man himself. The idea must be associated with a person, and the person must be kin to the person having the idea, or it can be no power. Absolute perfection in morals, or righteousness, associated with a person kin with man, is *God*. "Righteous art thou, O Jehovah."

III. **A RIGHTEOUS PERSON CAN BECOME THE SOUL'S REST.** Because righteousness then ceases to be an abstract thing. It becomes relative. The person may have a personal interest in making us what he is. "The Eternal, who makes for righteousness."—R. T.

Ver. 141.—*Self-estimates*. "I am small, and of no reputation." It is pointed out that these words are very suitable to the struggling Israel of the Return, which was so much despised by the surrounding kingdoms, and had to keep up such a prolonged struggle with the Eastern powers. But we may take it as a remarkable revelation of one of the weaknesses of human nature. Precisely what men never can do wisely and worthily is "estimate themselves," appraise their own moral condition. Imperfection or exaggeration attaches to all self-estimates.

I. **THE SELF-ESTIMATES OF THE WORLDLY MAN.** Except with the hypocrisy of a Pecksniff, or a Uriah Heep, the worldly man never talks like our text. If he feels small, he never tells anybody what he feels. He makes the most of himself, and is only too ready to see a strength and goodness which are not really there. But it is, perhaps, truer to say that a complete self-estimate a man never makes, because he does not take into consideration his moral and spiritual condition. And a man is, first of all, a moral being. And also because he has no adequate standard by which to judge himself. He can but make *himself* a law, judge himself by himself; and he cannot possibly reach any wise or worthy conclusions in that way. "Could an emmet pry into itself, it might marvel at its own anatomy. But let it look on eagles to discern how mean a thing it is" (Tupper).

II. **THE SELF-ESTIMATES OF THE GODLY MAN.** There is always grave danger of his erring on the side of undue depreciation. The good man is usually half afraid of his goodness. His religious life begins with a deep sense of sin and helplessness. He regards himself as a monument of grace. He wants to keep up absolute dependence on God, and so he is gravely afraid of every form of self-confidence. He dare not "think of himself more highly than he ought to think," and so his thinking is incomplete, exaggerated on one side.

And there is a further danger associated with particular sections of religious professions. It is assumed that God is honoured and pleased by man's self-abasement, and even self-debasement; and men think it is pious to "write bitter things against themselves." But God always wants truth and sincerity. And it is neither truth nor sincerity to say that we are "small, and of no reputation," when, in fact, we are not.—R. T.

Ver. 142.—*All-round righteousness*. "Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness." The psalmist uses the word "everlasting" in a figurative way. He would never take the trouble to say so small, and indeed so unnecessary, a thing as that God's righteousness would last for ever. That is a truism. All righteousness, God's and man's, lasts for ever: it can do nothing else. There are no forces that can stop it or kill it. Goodness is in its very nature eternal. And everlastingness is but one of

the qualities or attributes of righteousness; but in view of the limitations of human language, it may be used to represent all the qualities of it; or, as we have expressed it, everlasting righteousness may stand for complete, all-round righteousness.

I. ALL-ROUND RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. This is true not only of that *abstract* idea of righteousness which we connect with God, but also of that *practical* idea of righteousness which concerns his relations with men and dealings with them. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Find God where you may, he is always *doing right*. You never take him at unawares; you never find him below himself. His righteousness is an *always* righteousness, and "always" includes "everlasting," but suggests much more than "everlasting." We think of man as a dual being, having an internal life of thought and feeling, and an external life of action and relation. As man is made in the image of God, we may think of God's righteousness as including himself and his doings. There is no kind of failing harmony, but righteousness all round and quite through. A righteousness that never fails.

II. ALL-ROUND RIGHTEOUSNESS IS TO BE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF MAN. Can man be satisfied with the assurance that the righteousness he may gain will last for ever? Must he not say, "I am quite willing to leave that, if I can only be assured of the *quality* of the righteousness"? The man who wants a present righteousness, and must have an all-round one, alone gains what is worthy to receive the everlasting stamp. All-round righteousness is the sublimest conception a man may form. It includes right thinking, right willing, right feeling, right acting. Righteousness within. Right relations. And a bloom on all—the Christly bloom—wonderful and beautiful as that which lies on autumn fruits.—R. T.

Ver. 147.—*The plea of the prayerful*. So intent was the psalmist on devout meditation and prayer, that he arose before the dawn for that purpose. And in his prayer he pleaded his trust. "I hoped in thy Word." It is as if he had said, "I trusted thee, surely thou wilt respond to my trust." There are two great pleas which man may use when approaching God in prayer—God's promise, his own trust. And both are powerful and prevailing pleas with God.

I. TRUST DRAWS OUT THE BEST OF EVERY MAN. It is perhaps the mightiest of all moral forces. The parent gets the best out of the child by trusting him; and the child gets the best out of the parents by trusting them. In common business relations, the keen man, who trusts nobody, is badly served; the man who trusts his fellows is indeed occasionally deceived, but usually he gets the best attention, the best goods, and the best services. The master who trusts his servants and employees puts them on their mettle, and secures their best of energy and devotion. Show little or no confidence in your fellow-men, and all you can get from them is drudgery. It is often noticed how positions of trust rapidly develop a man's powers. It would be a world full of poor characters but for the ennobling power of mutual trust. Society is built on mutual trust.

II. TRUST DRAWS THE MOST GRACIOUS RESPONSES FROM GOD. "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him." 1. God is to be thought of as a Father, and his relations with us understood through our paternity; and we have suggested what wonders child-trust works in family life. 2. God is to be thought of as a Master; and we have seen what response the workman makes to the trust of the master, and the master to the trust of the workman. 3. God is to be thought of as a King; and we know how he is moved when any one relies upon his gracious Word. It is but using imperfect human language, based on human analogies, if we say, "Would we take God at his best?" Then we must trust him fully, absolutely rely on him, take him at his word, commit ourselves to him. This is our all-prevailing plea, "I have hoped in thy Word."—R. T.

Ver. 148.—*The helpfulness of meditation*. "Mine eyes prevent the night-watches." "Prevent" is here used in the sense of "anticipate." When the night-watches come he is wide awake; he does not let them interrupt his meditations by their demand for sleep. He is not taken at unawares. According to the psalmist's thought, morning is the fitting time for earnest resolves, and evening the time for quiet meditation. Meditation can be understood when contrasted with study. Study deals with something

outside the mind, and presented to it. Meditation deals with the contents of the mind itself, and that which may be suggested by the indwelling Spirit. A panorama of the contents of our mind is continually moving before us. Usually we rapidly select to meet the need of the moment, according to the mental laws of association. In meditation we let the panorama move by more slowly, pay more quiet heed to its varied contents, and so discover and enjoy much that usually escapes attention. Apply this to the panorama of our knowledge of God's Word, and we have *religious* meditation.

I. MEDITATION HELPS US BY MAKING US KNOW MORE. Illustrate by the difference between the tourist who rushes through delightful scenery, getting no more than general impressions, and the tourist who tarries awhile in one place, finding out ever-fresh charms, and seeing everything beautiful in new moods and settings. The man who only read God's Word may know *much*, but the man who quietly meditates therein knows more.

II. MEDITATION HELPS US BY MAKING US KNOW BETTER. Illustrate by the stereoscope. Just look into it, and you can see nothing unusual. Look fixedly, quietly, and everything in the picture seems to get place and relation. You realize vistas and distances, and the full charm is revealed. The Word of God has but little to give in response to a mere look; all its best things come to view when the soul is quiet enough to fix its gaze, and look long and lovingly.—R. T.

Ver. 149.—*The cry for more.* The Revised Version has a marginal note which is suggestive, "Quicken me, O Lord, as thou art wont;" but this is given also in the Prayer-book Version, and for ver. 156. The point suggested is, that when a soul has received spiritual blessing from God, it can never be satisfied unless that blessing is renewed. Or, to put it in another way, the good man can heartily rejoice in the gracious past, but he cannot be satisfied with what has been, or with what he has had—he always wants the past to become the present.

I. A MAN MAY HAVE SINGLE BLESSINGS FROM GOD. We are accustomed to think of "quickenings" as a single Divine act, and to say, "Ye must be born from above." And if by quickening we mean the imparting of new life, that must be a single blessing. But a life existing may need quickening; and in that sense the blessing may be renewed. Life is full of single blessings from God, and these may unduly occupy our attention. They really are the only indications of the blessings that attend us every day in life. They are like the miracles of Jesus, which do but show what the Father God is doing for us, in healing and providing, every day.

II. A MAN MAY HAVE CONTINUOUS BLESSINGS FROM GOD. If we may use language that properly applies only to man, we may say that God gets into the habit of blessing us with his daily quickenings. He blesses us as *he is wont* to do. There is a ground of confidence in this. God in the soul's life is like God in nature. He is in such a way of making his sun rise day by day, that we have come to depend on it. But there is a side of peril in this for *us*. God's regularity in blessing makes us either set up a claim, or miss the recognition of God's hand. He has sometimes to break the continuity in order to arouse our attention.

III. A MAN MAY HAVE PRESENT BLESSINGS FROM GOD. That is, blessings recognized as present; the soul awake to observe that they are present, and so responding aright to them. When the soul wants *more* it is prepared to recognize God's quickening grace actually with it to-day. What God has done, and what God usually does, are not enough. The soul cannot rest unless it knows and feels what God *is doing*.—R. T.

Ver. 153.—*Conditions beyond self-help.* "Oh, consider my adversity, and deliver me." Plainly the adversity is such that the psalmist feels he cannot deliver himself. Therefore he pleads with God to deliver him. Some of the trials and afflictions of life are within the man's own reach and control, if he has the help of God. But there are some forms of adversity which bring to a man an overwhelming sense of self-helplessness. Then, if he be a good man, he makes absolute committal of his case to God, and seeks Divine intervention in his behalf. Illustrate by the helplessness of Israel at the shores of the Red Sea. Then they were bidden "Stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah." Men, however, often seriously mistake if they ask Divine *intervention*,

when what they really need is Divine *help*; not that God should do for them, but should enable them to do. Apply this to the deliverance of the soul from sin. Here man is helpless. "God must save, and God alone." But usually the saved man must unite his labour and his dependence on God in every endeavour to live out the godly life. Only very occasionally has he to put down his tools and absolutely wait while God works for him. Bunyan's pilgrim only once in his journey had to put down his weapons, and betake himself to "All-Prayer." It is weak sectarian feeling that exaggerates self-helplessness, and thinks thus to honour God. Here the psalmist shows his anxiety by two petitions.

I. "CONSIDER MY AFFLICTION." He wants God to consider it, estimate it, see what it really is, involves, and needs, because he feels how easily he might misapprehend it. It might not really be as serious as he thought it was. He might so easily read it through his feeling rather than through his judgment. So he wants God to take it into his consideration, and so find out what could best be done with it. Was not this what St. Paul wanted when he prayed about his "thorn"?

II. "DELIVER ME." If God would give the matter *consideration*, he felt sure he would invent the wisest way of deliverance. He would be well content whichever way of deliverance God thought to be best. "Help me to do it, Lord, or do it altogether thyself."—R. T.

Ver. 155.—*Salvation for the obediently disposed.* "Salvation is far from the wicked." Why cannot God save the wicked man against his will? Because (1) such a salvation would do the wicked man no good; and (2) because when God saves a man, what he saves is his bad *will*. Therefore the absolute first condition of salvation must necessarily be "repentance." And this truth has its further application in the life of the saved man, who is ever needing God's further salvations. He cannot have them if he is self-willed and rebellious. They can only come as he keeps the spirit of sonship, and is "obediently disposed."

I. SALVATION IS FAR FROM THE WILFUL. It is, and it must necessarily be. Illustrate by the paper which is to receive the photographic picture—it must be in a prepared state. The wilful man does not want the salvation. He has no intention of responding to it. God's salvation is always a work in the man himself, not in his circumstances. The father, in the parable of the prodigal son, could do nothing for his boy so long as he kept in his wilful mind. Hope for him dawned when "he came to himself." So penitence is the door of salvation. No man can ever have God's soul-salvation until he feels that he both needs it and wants it. There can be no waste in God's spiritual dealings; and it would be waste to give salvation to a man who did not care for the gift, and would make no return for it.

II. SALVATION IS NEAR TO THE WILLING AND OBEDIENT. These represent the attitude and mood of mind with which God can work. Let a man want to obey, God will help him to obey. Let a man want to get free from sin, and God will deliver and save him from sin. Let a man be in any kind of disability and distress, if he be a son of God, and cherishing the spirit of sonship, he may be sure of the Father's deliverance. So the preservation of right attitudes and moods of soul bears direct relation to the workings of the Divine Deliverer in our lives.—R. T.

Ver. 159.—*Love-inspired obedience.* The psalmist "loved the precepts of God. Many there are who have a warm side towards the promises, but as for the precepts they cannot endure them. The psalmist so loved everything that was good and excellent, that he loved all God had commanded. The precepts are all of them wise and holy, therefore the man of God loved them extremely, loved to know them, to think of them, to proclaim them, and principally to practise them." As a matter of fact, what may, and what actually does, inspire obedience in the relationships of life?

I. PATRIOTISM MAY INSPIRE OBEDIENCE. There is a sentiment which possesses the soldiers of an army, which we call "patriotism," though it but poorly represents that term, and which makes the soldier a model of strict, exact, unquestioning, but, to a great extent, unintelligent, obedience. There are answering *sentiments*, in the religious sphere, which have similar and no higher powers of inspiring obedience. They carry us over into obedience as a big wave carries a boat over the bar.

II. FEAR MAY INSPIRE OBEDIENCE. On this principle animals are, for the most part, trained to obey. And fear is effective on men just in the measure in which the animal in them is trained and the spiritual undeveloped. Fear has its moral influence—at least in its coarser forms—on those who occupy low and servile positions in society. Culture a man, and one thing you do is deliver him from fear.

III. DUTY MAY INSPIRE OBEDIENCE. Relationship involves duty; and obligation creates duty. And man is a higher being as the sense of duty grows in him. But a certain hardness, self-restraint, characterizes all obedience that is inspired only by duty. The man does what he *must*.

IV. LOVE MAY INSPIRE OBEDIENCE. Then the man is in the obedience. His feeling runs with it as well as his will. The whole man is borne into the service. There are no resistances to occasion distress. In obeying the man has the joy of doing just what he wishes to do.—R. T.

Ver. 162.—*Finding spoil*. The contrast suggested is between the possible aims a man may set before him. He may want to gain material success, wealth, fame, position—things which the psalmist satirizes cleverly by calling them “spoil.” He may want to gain that personal culture, that perfecting of character, which is the true end of life, and which God’s Word is the supreme agency for attaining. “The profits made in searching the Scriptures are greater far than the trophies or spoils of war.”

I. THE JOY OF FINDING THIS WORLD’S TREASURE. This is indicated in our Lord’s parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.” Worldly treasure is gained in two ways—by the persistent labour of a life, and by the accident of fortuitous circumstances. But the joy is chiefly felt when the treasure is found, lighted on, unexpectedly gained; as when success suddenly attends a business venture, a vein of precious metal or a spring of mineral oil is struck, or a fortune is left us. Then it is thought that we are to be specially congratulated, and we heartily congratulate ourselves. A higher joy ought to be found in getting treasure as the result of a lifelong labour; but then the capacity for enjoyment too often wears out with the labour. Treasure accidentally gained too often demoralizes. Treasure gained by force of will too often becomes temptation and a snare. Treasure gained worthily fails to satisfy the soul.

II. THE JOY OF FINDING THE TREASURE OF GOD’S WORD. Did we but think rightly, and get free from the enslaving power of the physical and the temporal, we should see that the treasures of character, of the interior life, of the *soul*, which is the self, are the treasures which should bring real joy to us. And the truths, counsels, promises, of God’s Word are the treasures that enrich the soul, that alone satisfy, alone meet the needs of the man, who is essentially a spiritual being, and alone bear relation to that *continuity* of life which is man’s prerogative.—R. T.

Ver. 163.—*Self-serving and time-serving*. By the term “lying” is specially meant “false faiths,” deviations from, or misrepresentations of, the true religion, which is “the truth.” Compare the antichrist of Christianity.

I. FALSEHOOD IN RELIGION REGARDED AS SELF-SERVING. It is necessary to keep in mind that to the Israelite the very essence of falsehood was idolatry. Represent the unseen, spiritual Jehovah by any earthly form or figure, and to him the representation was a *lie*. No form or figure could represent *all* God, or anything about God perfectly. But it was falsehood in another way, for it did but hide the fact that the man who made the image was really worshipping himself, his own idea, and that was acting a lie. In whatever way man constructs his own religion, and creates his own deity, in thought and imagination he is not only false to revelation, but he is false to himself; for he deceives himself with the idea that he is worshipping God, when all the while he is only projecting himself outside himself, in order to worship himself. Both formal and mental idolatry are phases of *self-worship*; and in them both man is false to himself and false to *God*.

II. FALSEHOOD IN RELIGION REGARDED AS TIME-SERVING. The stronger man thinks for himself, and makes his own religion; the weaker man simply is carried along on

the current of his age, and does as his generation does. But he is false to the responsibility under which his manhood lies, for he is bound to decide for himself whom or what he will serve. In the way of agreeing with what exists around him, common opinion and common worship, lie the ease and comfort of life. Resisting the age for the sake of truth means disability. So the man is willing to be false. And time-serving in religion is really the same thing as worshipping *self*. However it is done, it is always being false to God to say we are worshipping him when we, in fact, only bow in the temple of self.—R. T.

Ver. 165.—*The steadying influence of God's Word.* "They are not staggered or perplexed by anything which they meet with, either in Scripture or nature." "When God's Law is loved, instead of being struggled against, the conscience is at peace, and the inward eye is clear; a man sees his duty, and does it, free from those stumbling-blocks which are ever occasion of falling to others." Marginal reading is, "They shall have no stumbling-block." Compare our Lord's denunciation of those who "offend"—"put a stumbling-block in the way of"—"one of his little ones." The point is that those who steady themselves by holding firm to God's Word have a sure support in every time of temptation or danger. There are two ways in which the knowledge and use of God's Word steadies us. It braces us up. It gives us something sure to lean upon.

I. GOD'S WORD STEADIES BY BRACING US UP. This may be illustrated by the careers of two youths, who leave their country homes for business city life, and the peril of "city snares and town traps." The one is braced up with good principles, and is able to resist temptation, and to throw off morally infecting disease. The principles of the other hang all lax and loose about him; and he has no ready resisting force when the enemy "comes in like a flood." Just what familiarity with God's Word does is brace up our principles, brace up our moral nature, hold us together; nourish the vitality in every part of us, so that we are kept in health and energy. Mind braced up with knowledge; heart braced up with right feeling; will braced up with motive. "Let your loins be girded about."

II. GOD'S WORD STEADIES BY GIVING US SOMETHING SURE TO LEAN UPON. Illustrate by the ship-captain who can always fortify his own judgment by appealing to his chart. It is of the utmost importance that we should preserve our sense of the *authority* of God's Word, as an absolute and final appeal; a trusty staff on which we may lean. This form of the steadying power of God's Word was effectively illustrated in the time of our Lord's temptation.—R. T.

Ver. 171.—*Joy in God's response.* The metaphor in the Hebrew is "pour forth a stream of praise." "You have stood at the fountain-head of a stream of water, and admired while it bubbled up and ran down in a clear little rivulet, till at length it swelled into the mighty river. Such is the allusion here. The heart taught of God cannot contain itself, but breaks out in praise and singing. This would be the effect of Divine illumination, and this would be felt to be a privilege, yea, a high duty" (John Stephen).

I. JOY FINDS EXPRESSION IN PRAISE. "Is any merry, let him sing psalms." There are natural expressions, by the body and the bodily faculties, of all the various emotions. Let a man be unsophisticated, and free from external restraints, and his body will respond to his moods. He will tear things if he is vexed. He will drop his head if he is convicted of doing wrong. He will flush if he is taken by surprise; and so on. If a man is glad, he wants to sing. Send a party of young people out for a day of pleasure, and they must *sing*. The genuine religious man, who finds joy in God and in God's Word, must *praise*; he cannot help it. He must become ungentle in order to keep praise in. Our public services have so much of the element of praise, because it is expected that God's people will ever be full of the "joy of the Lord."

II. PRAISE FINDS RENEWAL FOR THE JOY. Many things live and grow through expression, and soul-joy in God is one of them. Silence joy, and it will fade and die down. Let it speak, let it sing, and it will ever grow louder, stronger, worthier. We shall love to sing, delight in singing, and so the joy of our hearts will grow stronger and stronger. Praise has its aspect as a *duty we owe to God*. "Whoso offereth praise

glorifieth me." But we need not miss seeing how much it does for us, in the renewing of our soul's joy in God.—R. T.

Ver. 176.—*The frailties of the sincere.* "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." Perowne says, "According to the accents, the rendering would rather be, 'I have gone astray; seek thy servant as a lost sheep.' In what sense can one who has so repeatedly declared his love of God's Word, who has asserted that he has kept God's precepts, make this confession? The figure cannot be employed here in the same sense, for instance, in which it is employed in our Lord's parable. He who is the lost sheep here is one who does not forget God's commandments. The figure, therefore, seems in this place to denote the helpless condition of the psalmist, without protectors, exposed to enemies, in the midst of whom he wanders, not knowing where to find rest and shelter. But in the 'I have gone astray,' there is doubtless the sense of sin as well as of weakness." The exclamation of the psalmist is at once made clear when we realize the distinction which the good man makes between "frailties" and "sins."

I. SINS, AS ABERRATIONS OF SELF-WILL, DO NOT DISTRESS THE SINCERE MAN. "He cannot sin, because he is born of God." The sincere man of the Old Testament is represented by the new man, the man born of God, the man in whom is the Divine life, of the New Testament. Let that man genuinely express his life, and he will not commit sin. Sin is the act and purpose of a man's will; but his will is regenerate, and set on conformity to the will of God. The good man is "clean every whit;" he does not sin with his will.

II. FRAILTIES, AS ABERRATIONS DUE TO INFIRMITY, DO DISTRESS THE SINCERE MAN. He knows how he needs to "wash his feet." He cannot help getting them soiled. The man with the renewed will has to make that will work through a biassed, enfeebled, physically weak body; and by that body he finds himself led into mistakes, infirmities, negligences, and even into things that look like wilfulnesses. This is the sense in which a sincere man may mourn over himself as "prone to go astray."—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*The praise of God's Law.* "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

I. THE GRANDEST AIM. "That I might not sin against thee." 1. *This is the highest object of man's pursuit.* Intrinsically the greatest object of life, as calling forth the greatest faculties, in the direction of the greatest object, for the grandest achievement. The assimilation of the human to the Divine mind. And we are bound to it by the greatest obligation. 2. *Yet it is a practicable object.* This proved from three considerations. (1) *That we are responsible for it.* That is, we can attain the fundamental principles of all obedience. Faith and love. And we are capable of continued effort and attainment in connection with it. (2) *And that God's love furnishes sufficient and adequate motives to it.* These motives are the strongest spiritual forces which can act on man's soul. (3) *And that God helps man in his efforts by his Spirit.* 3. *It is the most profitable object of human pursuit.* In two ways. In the pure and ever-growing delight which the pursuit of it affords. And in the present and future rewards of every kind which are graciously connected with it.

II. THE MEANS OF ITS ATTAINMENT. The hiding of God's Word in the heart. 1. *God's Word is to be the light and guide of our lives.* In opposition to all conventional standards of conduct, and to the casuistic reasonings of our own minds. 2. *That a sacred passion is to be cherished towards the Divine Law.* God's Word is to be enthroned on the seat of the affections. "Oh, how I love thy Law!" He would hide it in his heart as the most valued treasure. 3. *God's Word is the nourishment of our spiritual nature.* He would hide it in his heart as the vivifying principle of his nature, on account of its enlightening, strengthening, hope-giving properties. "I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end."—S.

Ver. 18.—*"Wondrous things."* "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy Law." "Law" is the will of God expressed in man, in nature, and in history.

I. THE WILL OF GOD IS THE LAW OF MAN'S LIFE. 1. *A law that reaches to every part of man's nature.* To the inward and outward life. A law that claims to rule

over reason and affection and conscience. 2. *A law that guides by aiming at the renewal of our nature.* In this respect how different from all human law! "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." This Law not merely bids us obey, but urges us by grand arguments of love and obligation. And helps us by the energy of the Holy Spirit, which it promises and gives.

II. THIS "LAW" CONTAINS WONDROUS THINGS. 1. *Wonders of doctrine.* Forgiveness through Christ. Demands the perfection of our nature. An immortal and blessed life. 2. *Wonders of precept.* Supreme love to God and man. No one can love God with all his soul and mind and strength without loving his neighbour as himself, any more than the earth can gravitate towards the sun without attracting toward itself the moon by the same force of gravity. 3. *Wonders of promise.* In personal union with Christ we find the fulfilment of all Divine promise.

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT MUST GIVE US TO DISCERN THESE WONDERS. The best Christians feel that our perceptions of spiritual truth are infirm and obscure; but things are greater than we see them—more wonderful than they now appear. Hence this prayer, for the opening the eyes of the heart and soul. To be a philosopher, or artist, or orator, there must be two things—some genius for it, or natural capacity; and training, or instruction and discipline. To be a Christian there must be *spiritual eyesight*—the gift of God's Spirit. "Open thou mine eyes." And *trained and disciplined insight*—the work also of the Spirit, our Teacher.—S.

Ver. 32.—*Liberty.* The utterance of a man conscious of imperfect obedience to the will of God; and one who deplores his weakness. Also the expression of *hope* and *confidence*. A time will come when God will enlarge his heart. Also the hungering of joyful purpose: "I will run," etc. Two main thoughts.

I. SPIRITUAL LIBERTY IS NECESSARY TO DOING THE WILL OF GOD. 1. *It is freedom from the bondage of worldly passions and appetites.* There can be no spiritual active obedience to the will of God as long as we are under the dominion of worldly principles and affections. 2. *Spiritual liberty is freedom from the fear that springs from a sense of guilt.* We must be free from the terror of guilt before we can serve God with joy and freedom. Remove Jesus Christ and his doctrine from between God and ourselves, and we stand in the presence of terrifying law; and have the feeling of helpless weakness. *Faith* is the instrument of our freedom: *What we can perceive and trust in Christ by the faculties of the mind.* 3. *The highest liberty is found in love.* Love to God and love to man. Here we ascend beyond faith to the loftiest pitch we are capable of—to the development of the most perfect freedom, and we *run* in the ways of God. The profoundest aphorism of Scripture is that "*love is the fulfilling of the Law.*"

II. THE PRODUCTION OF THIS LIBERTY IS A DIVINE WORK. "When thou shalt enlarge," etc. If God has laid upon us laws which his power must enable us to obey, how is our duty to be explained, and where lies our sin, if we fail in obedience? 1. *God is the First Cause of all life; but man is a second cause.* He "worketh in us to will and to do according to his good pleasure." It is his will and work that our will should coincide with his, and work towards the same holy ends. 2. *But he does this by methods which impose duty and responsibility upon us.* The principle on which God enriches men with increasing gifts of power and grace is—the *use we make of them.* The Divine teaching attributes to us the power of increasing the talents entrusted to us, so that future bestowments are made to depend upon our appropriation of those that have gone before.—S.

Ver. 59.—*Religion under two aspects.* I. AS A MENTAL EXERCISE. "I thought on my ways." Religion revives the past, rouses the moral memory. 1. *The supreme interest of the past is, of a religious nature.* What we have been intellectually or socially is of great interest. But what have been our convictions and conduct religiously? We thrill with joy or shiver with misery according to the answer we give to this question—What are our "ways"? what are we? 2. *But to think upon our "ways" is difficult and repulsive.* To think of good fortune in worldly speculation, success in business, formation of esteemed connections and friendships, fills us with complacent delight. But to think of a youth wasted in thoughtless frivolity

or in impure pleasures, of manhood hardening itself against all religious impression, of a past whose track has been fouled with the slime of the serpent,—we turn away from this as from folly, loss, guilt, shame, and misery. 3. *To think upon our “ways” is necessary and salutary.* Necessary to realize our sin, to a change of life, and renewal of the soul. *The connection there is between thought and practice.*

II. RELIGION AS A PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE. “And turned my feet unto thy testimonies.” 1. *Practical resolves should be the result of earnest thought.* Fits and impulses too often precede our resolutions and efforts. But thought, deliberate and earnest, summons up the grand motives, surveys the difficulties to be conquered, counts the cost, and prays for Divine help, and should go before every effort after a change of life. 2. *The great end of religion is active obedience to the will of God.* True understanding of our ways brings the grand conclusion—that man’s “way” ought to be God’s “way.” We are forgiven in order to this. 3. *If we are not led to this, we miss the end for which Divine intelligence was given.* Reason is under an eclipse if it does not light us to this end. Conscience is a corrupted judge, bribed to betray us, if it does not pronounce this verdict. The whole nature of man suffers loss and ruin if we fail to turn our feet to the Divine testimonies.—S.

Ver. 60.—“*The whole duty of man.*” “I made haste, and delayed not to observe thy commandments.”

I. A GREAT PART OF MAN’S IRRELIGION IS IN THE DELAY OF PRESENT DUTY. 1. Most men purpose turning to Christ *some time.* 2. This purpose is one of man’s greatest deceivers. It is the excuse for neglecting the present duty. 3. This purpose not fulfilled, progressively increases the difficulty of turning to Christ.

II. OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST IS OUR IMMEDIATE IMPERATIVE DUTY. 1. The wickedness of trifling with our convictions is very great. 2. The claims of Christ upon us are before all others, both in time and in importance. 3. God sometimes sends special influences to turn us to Christ. To neglect these is the quenching of the Spirit.—S.

Ver. 75.—*The use of adversity.* “I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.”

I. A RECOGNITION OF AFFLICTION AS ONE OF GOD’S JUDGMENTS. God’s judgments are: 1. *Remarkable punishments which God inflicts for sins.* “Judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of fools” (Prov. xix. 29). 2. *The chastisement which God brings upon his children for their trial and instruction.* In a modified, but true and deep, sense health and riches are judgments—tests and trials of our faith and character.

II. AN ASSURANCE OF GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS IN HIS JUDGMENTS. His judgments are a great deep, and his righteousness like the great mountains. 1. *Just.* Though we cannot comprehend them. 2. *Beneficent.* Though they inflict suffering. He does not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men.

III. AN ASSURANCE OF GOD’S FAITHFULNESS IN HIS JUDGMENTS. Faithfulness here means: 1. *That he always purposes our good.* 2. *That he always keeps his promises.*

IV. THE GROUND OF THIS ASSURANCE. 1. *Our past experience.* Personal history. 2. *Our knowledge of what he has done for us in Christ.*—S.

Ver. 96.—*The breadth of God’s Law.* I. CAUSES THAT WARRANT OUR THOUGHTS OF THE DIVINE LAW. 1. *Indulgence of sinful habits.* 2. *Tendency to justify ourselves in what we do—or self-love.* 3. *Deference to worldly maxims.* 4. *False views of its relation to our salvation.*

II. ILLUSTRATIONS OF ITS BREADTH. 1. *It applies to every relation we bear to God and man.* 2. *It has to do with omitted duties as well as positive transgressions.* 3. *It is spiritual—widening to our view the higher we rise.*

III. LESSONS SUGGESTED. 1. *It rebukes self-complacency.* 2. *It shows how impossible it is that we can be justified by it.*—S.

Ver. 116.—“*My hope.*” The prayer here may have its highest reference to our religious hopes.

I. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE GREATEST HOPE WHICH GOOD MEN CHERISH? 1. PSALMS—III.

That which relates to our everlasting state. 2. That which is based upon the revelation of God in Christ.

II. HOW MAY SUCH A HOPE TURN TO SHAME? What brings disgrace upon men in relation to their hopes is that they cherish unreal objects; that they expect too much; that they fail in the attainment through want of rational calculation, indolence, self-indulgence, etc. It is not from the *nature of the objects* that our disappointment can come, if we are building upon the hopes of the gospel. We cannot expect too much, or draw too largely upon our imagination, as to the good that is to come. But we may fail—and there is the shame—and fail from various causes. 1. We may fail in perceiving the essential things, confounding the *ritual* with the *spiritual*, the *cereemonial* with the *substantial*. 2. Through careless contentment with our spiritual state. Not being assured that devotion to Christ, activity, and self-denial are indispensable.

III. SOME REASONS FOR EVERY ONE TO BE APPREHENSIVE AS TO THE FATE OF HIS HOPE. 1. Present things may be absorbing so as to endanger the issue. 2. Tendency of our nature to flattering views of ourselves.

IV. WHAT MEASURES NECESSARY TO ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF OUR HOPE? 1. The maintenance of constant interest in it. 2. Fidelity towards ourselves in demanding the practical influence of piety. 3. Habitual reliance upon God for help and direction.—S.

Ver. 136.—*A great sorrow.* “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy Law.”

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS SORROW. 1. *It is the sorrow of only good men.* (Phil. iii. 18, “Many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you,” etc.) It can be felt only by those who have wept over sin in their own hearts. Three ways of feeling towards the sins of others by men of the world—apathy, pride, mockery. 2. *It is an unselfish sorrow.* Most of our griefs are personal and selfish. When they are so they often weaken and debase the mind. But this is a disinterested sorrow, akin to Christ’s sorrow over Jerusalem; it comes from the noblest sympathies, and braces the mind for the highest exertion. 3. *It is inexpressible sorrow.*

II. THE REASON OF IT. The transgression of God’s Law is a subject of grief under two aspects. 1. *As that transgression has reference to God.* Sins of the Church and the sins of the world. 2. *As it has reference to man.* A reasonable sorrow. This sorrow should lead to exertion. Sinners should weep for themselves.—S.

EXPOSITION.

THE SONGS OF ASCENTS.

THE next fifteen psalms have a common heading, which is translated “Songs of Degrees,” “Songs of Ascents,” or “Songs of Steps.” They constitute together “a Little Psalter,” which contains indications of a formal arrangement. The central psalm—the only one ascribed to Solomon—has on either side of it a group of seven; each such group formed of two psalms ascribed to David, and five anonymous ones. The ascribed psalms are separated one from another by the anonymous ones, in such sort that no two of the former ever come together. This is evidently not the result of chance.

Of the title itself different explanations are given. Some regard the degrees (*ma’alôth*) as “steps,” and accept a rabbi-

nical explanation, that the psalms were written for chanting upon fifteen steps, which led from the Court of the Women in the temple to the Court of the Men. But there is no sufficient evidence of the existence of these steps. Others, translating *ma’alôth* by “ascents,” suggest that they are psalms composed for the Jews to chant on their ascent from Babylon to Jerusalem at the return from the Captivity. But the plural form is thus unaccounted for, while the ascription of five of the fifteen to David and Solomon is contradicted. Under these circumstances, recent critics mostly acquiesce in the view that the psalms were written for the pilgrims, who annually went up to Jerusalem at the three great feasts, to chant upon their journeys. (So Ewald, Thénius, Hengstenberg, Dean Johnson, and Professor Alexander.)

PSALM CXX.

Ver. 1.—In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me. The particular "distress" intended can only be conjectured. Some suppose it to be the Captivity itself, others the opposition offered by the Samaritans, Ammonites, and others to the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra iv., v.) and restoration of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. ii. 19, 20; iv. 1—23; vi. 2—14). But these guesses are scarcely of much value.

Ver. 2.—Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips. Such as Sanballat's (Neh. vi. 6—8). And from a deceitful tongue; literally, *a tongue that is fraud*—a mere variant of the expression in the preceding clause.

Ver. 3.—What shall be given unto thee? rather, *what shall he* (i.e. God) *give to thee*? Or, in other words—What punishment will God inflict on thee for thy false speaking? Or what shall be done unto thee? literally, *or what shall he add to thee*? Compare the common phrase, "God do so unto me, and more also" (1 Sam. iii. 17; xiv. 44). Thou false tongue. The "false tongue" is apostrophized, as if it were a living person.

Ver. 4.—Sharp arrows of the mighty. The psalmist answers his own questions. Sharp-pointed arrows of a Mighty One shall be given thee, and added to them shall be coals of juniper. God, i.e., shall punish thee with extreme severity.

Ver. 5.—Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech. This is scarcely to be understood literally. Israel never "sojourned in Mesech," i.e. among the Moschi, who dwelt in Cappadocia, nor dwelt among the tents of Kedar, a people of Northern Arabia. The writer means that he dwells among hostile and barbarous people, who are to him as Kedar and Mesech. Possibly the Samaritans and Ammonites are intended. That I dwell in the tents of Kedar; rather, *among the tents* (see the Revised Version).

Ver. 6.—My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace; i.e. with the tribes symbolized in the preceding verse by the names "Mesech" and "Kedar," the tribes bordering upon Judæa. These were from first to last almost always at war with Israel.

Ver. 7.—I am for peace; literally, *I am peace*; but the meaning is as given in the Authorized Version. But when I speak (i.e. when I speak to them of peace), they are for war; i.e. they are utterly averse to peace, and are bent on continual hostility. The general history bears out this statement. There is only one apparent exception. When the Jews returned from the Captivity and began to build the temple, the Samaritans offered to join with them (Ezra iv. 2). But the Samaritan offer was, perhaps, insincere. At any rate, when it was refused, they became the most bitter opponents of the Jews.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*The perversion of power, etc.* This psalm, though "a difference of opinion exists respecting the interpretation of almost every verse and word of it," may suggest valuable thoughts upon—

I. THE PERVERSION OF POWER. It speaks of "lying lips," a "deceitful tongue," and of the "false tongue" (vers. 2, 3). We may say that sin is perversion; it is the misdirection and abuse of our various faculties and organs; turning to a bad account all our opportunities of good. The Apostle James gives at some length the perversion of the power of speech (iii. 2—13). Our words may be reverent, true, kind, instructive, considerate, helpful, wise; or they may be profane, false, cruel, communicative of evil, injurious. There is hardly a limit to the possible service we may render our Lord and our kind if we avail ourselves of every opportunity of speaking the wise and gracious word; but it is impossible to estimate the evil which a man may do in a long life by a bitter, a false, an impure, a sceptical tongue. It becomes us to think that the power of speech is a great gift from the hand of God; that it is a talent entrusted to us by our Divine Father for his glory and for the good of men. Whenever, therefore, we speak that which is hurtful to others or unworthy of ourselves we are guiltily abusing our power; we are turning that which was meant to be, and might constantly be made, a fountain of blessing into a stream of sorrow or even of sin. The same thought (respecting perversion) applies, in less degree, to the hands, the eyes, the feet; it is also, of course, very markedly true of the capacities of the mind.

II. A CHARACTERISTIC OF DIVINE PUNISHMENT. "What shall be given unto thee . . . thou false tongue?" "Sharp arrows of the mighty, burning coals," is the reply. The punishment is suited to the offence. The tongue which itself is "a sharp sword" (Ps. lviii. 4) is to be transfixed by the sharp arrows shot by a strong arm; the

tongue which is itself "a fire" (Jas. iii. 6) is to be consumed with burning coals. As is the sin, so is the sorrow and the shame. The king that had done grievous domestic wrong was to suffer in his own family (2 Sam. xii. 11). The traitor who betrayed his Master was to be deserted and thrown over by his own companions. The pitiless man goes unpitied in the hour of his own desolation. The miser who keeps back the blessings he might confer on others withholds all comforts and delights from his own heart and his own home. He who does not regard the sacredness of his body will live to suffer in the body; he who neglects his mind will pay the penalty in intellectual poverty and feebleness. "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap"—loss, suffering, death, according to the nature of his sin.

III. THE MISERY OF UNCONGENIAL SURROUNDINGS. (Vers. 5—7.) The psalmist bewails his ill fortune in that he has to dwell in places remote from the civilization and the privileges of his home; he is surrounded by ungenial associates whose spirit is hostile, with whom he cannot live on terms of amity and good will. This "Mesech" of his is found in every latitude and longitude. It is the experience of a very large proportion of men and women, especially in the earlier period of life, to find themselves living or labouring with the unsympathetic, and even with the unfriendly; with those whose views on serious and even sacred subjects are dissimilar or opposite. We may have much to do with those whose spirit and whose attitude are positively provocative, who invite and almost compel us to dispute. It is trying in the last degree. But: 1. It is a recognized and accepted part of our earthly lot, and it will not last very long; it will give place, in time, to the holy friendships and blissful intercourse of the heavenly world. 2. It is a necessary part of the discipline through which we pass, attempering and strengthening our character. 3. It provides daily opportunity for self-mastery, for submission to the will of God, for honouring the Name of Christ.

IV. OUR REFUGE IN GOD. (Vers. 1, 2.) Assailed by unjust or ungenerous attack, surrounded by uncongenial companions, we can always realize the near presence of one sympathizing Friend, of the all-powerful God, who can extricate us from the worst situation, or sustain us in it, so that our souls will be at rest.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7.—*In Mesech and Kedar.* This psalm is a piteous declaration of the unhappy lot of him who is surrounded by the false, the treacherous, and the cruel. They of Mesech—the Moschi of Herodotus (see Exposition)—dwelt where now the horribly bloodthirsty Kurds have their habitation, who of late years have horrified all Christendom by their barbarous atrocities inflicted on the Christian Armenians. Amid men of such sort the psalmist is complaining that he has to dwell (ver. 5). It is a tale of treachery and cruelty that he portrays or rather suggests to us in this psalm. Concerning all such men of lying lips, we learn—

I. THEY ARE THE DISTRESS OF THE GODLY. How many a faithful missionary, amid similar hordes, has felt his heart die down in hopeless despair as he witnesses their horrid cruelty and deceit! We at home forget too much this special trial of the missionary. Nothing but the abundant supply of the Spirit of all grace can possibly sustain him amid such sad and revolting circumstances. If he gets used to them, and so indifferent to them, he can no longer be a true missionary; nor either if he fears them or yields to despair about them. And in less unusual form, God's servants may yet have to say, "My soul is among lions" (Ps. lvii. 4). Many a God-fearing working man amid a crowd of godless mates, many a Christian servant-girl amid companions who have no love for God, many a young disciple of Christ in school or office,—these and others like them know by sad experience the treachery and cruelty of the ungodly.

II. THE AWFUL AND OVERWHELMING WRATH OF GOD AWAITS THESE PERSECUTORS. (Vers. 3, 4; see Exposition for meaning.) The false and lying tongue is often likened to fire, fire of hell, to sword and sharp arrow, and now here it is declared that what such tongue hath sown, that shall it also reap (cf. Ps. lvii. 4; lxiv. 3; lv. 21; lix. 7; Jas. iii. 6; and especially Ps. cxl. 9, 10). Sometimes even in this world we see the Divine vengeance poured out on those who have played the part of bloody and

deceitful men towards the people of God: In the persecuting ages it was not unusual nor unnatural for the persecuted ones to point out, as proofs of the Divine wrath, the fearful deaths which overtook many of their persecutors. True it is to-day that he who blesses the servants of God is blessed, and he who curses them is cursed.

III. IT MAY NEVERTHELESS BE APPOINTED FOR GOD'S PEOPLE TO DWELL AMID SUCH SURROUNDINGS. The great missionary command involved the possibility of such sojourn. If we are to go into all the world, we must expect to meet with what the world has to offer. And, in God's providence, we often have to go and dwell amid, not the friends but the foes of God. The soldier in the field, the sailor, the boy at school. It may be God's will for us. But—

IV. THEIR ENMITY MAY OFTEN SEEM TO BE EXCITED BY THAT WHICH SHOULD MAKE IT ASHAMED. (Ver. 7.) Not all at once will the Spirit of peace prevail.

V. BUT NOTHING CAN ROB THE BELIEVING SOUL OF ITS BLESSED RELIEF AND REFUGE IN GOD. (Ver. 1.) The first verse relates what really follows on the facts told of in the other verses. Call upon, cry unto the Lord, and he will ever help.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*A dark fact explained and illuminated.* The dark fact is human distress; the explanation is the prayer it leads to; the illumination, the answer it brings. We have here—

I. A TOO BARE PERSONAGE. "In my distress, I," etc. It is by no means every one who does this. 1. *Some blaspheme*—curse God in their hearts. 2. *Others cast off all faith*—say, "There is no God." Many have done this. 3. *Others harden their hearts*, as Pharaoh did. 4. *Others plunge deeper into sin.* (Isa. 1. 5.) In the distraction which for a while they gain, they drown the sense of their misery. 5. *Others turn to human aid* for deliverance and solace. 6. *Yet others bestir themselves to get by their own effort what help they may.* The psalmist's resource does not condemn, but will often include, these two last methods, and will further their usefulness. But to turn to God in distress is as wise as it is too seldom adopted.

II. A REAL REASON FOR DISTRESS. God sends it, or lets it come, that it may lead men to turn to him: that is ever his intent. But for such distress we should scarce turn to him at all.

III. A RIGHT MANNER OF PRAYER. "I cried." It tells of earnestness, of humility, of believing trust, of self-distress. It has all those elements which go to make up acceptable and prevailing prayer. How little of our prayer is a crying unto God! It is decorous, reverent, formal, correct, and seeks true and worthy objects, but it lacks fervour, force, and the faith which will not let the Lord go unless he bless. No man ever yet "cried unto the Lord" and failed to find response.

IV. A READY AND REALIZED RESPONSE. "He heard me." How promptly this confession comes after the statement, "I cried"! (Cf. Cæsar's "Veni, vidi, vici.") It is like that. And the psalmist knew that he was heard. The outward circumstances may not have much changed, but in his heart the light had risen, the Lord had come.

CONCLUSION. Distress of one kind or another we all must know. Let us adopt this manner of prayer, and we shall surely find the ready response.—S. C.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The misery made by the untruthful.* This is the first of fifteen psalms that are called "Songs of Degrees;" Revised Version, "Songs of Ascent;" literally, "Songs of Going up." The association of them with the journeying of country pilgrims to the feasts at Jerusalem is somewhat fanciful. These psalms are naturally explained as "Songs of Heart- uplifting." The key-note of them all is looking up out of some present distress, and seeking the help of God. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills;" "Unto thee lift I up mine eyes;" "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." Two things are necessary to a "song of ascent:" some special form of present distress; a looking to God for help out of that distress. It is possible effectively to illustrate these psalms from the experiences of the returned exiles.

I. THE PSALMIST'S DISTRESS. It may be regarded as personal, and then we notice that it is a mental anxiety rather than a set of difficult circumstances. And though mental anxieties may seem to be unreal, and often are, they are our most serious and overwhelming distresses; the ones we can least effectively deal with ourselves; the ones in which God's help is most especially needed, and least frequently sought. Or the

psalmist may be regarded as personifying the nation, and speaking in its name. The restored exiles were much distressed by the malicious slanders of the surrounding nationalities, whom the psalmist likens to the barbarous tribes of the Moschi, and the nomad hordes of Kedar. Here also the distress is mental; it was not outward injury, but worry caused by the slanders spread abroad concerning them. We love to be thought well of, and are distressed when reputation is damaged.

II. THE CAUSE OF THE PSALMIST'S DISTRUST. Men did not speak the truth about him. Slander has a mysterious power of growth and enlargement; and no man's reputation is safe when the gossip, the tale-bearer, and the slanderer attempt to deal with it. A man may never be afraid of the truth, nor need he fear the final triumph of his slanderers, but for a time the "lying lips" may cause him infinite misery.

III. THE BELIEF OF THE PSALMIST'S DISTRESS. He can turn to God, sure that he knows of his trouble—knows the untruthfulness of the accusations made; is more jealous of his reputation than he can be of his own; could stop the lying lips at once, if he thought it best to do so; and permits them to keep on only because thus he can work out some higher good.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Sins of the tongue.* "Thou deceitful tongue." Describing this tongue, the psalmist adds, "It is as the sharp arrows of the mighty man, as coals of broom." The sin specially in the view of the psalmist is that of the slanderer. What shall be done to him? "The law of retaliation can hardly meet the case, since none can slander the slanderer, he is too black to be blackened; neither would any of us blacken him if we could. Wretched being! He fights with weapons which true men cannot touch. Like the cuttlefish, he surrounds himself with an inky blackness into which honest men cannot penetrate. Like the foul skunk, he emits an odour of falsehood which cannot be endured by the true; and therefore he often escapes unchastised by those whom he has most injured. His crime, in a certain sense, becomes his shield; men do not care to encounter so base a foe. But what will God do with lying tongues? He has uttered his most terrible threats against them, and he will terribly execute them in due time" (Spurgeon). "From gossips, tale-bearers, writers of anonymous letters, forgers of newspaper paragraphs, and all liemongers, good Lord, deliver us!" (1) A man may sin with his tongue against *himself*, and seriously injure his own success in life. (2) A man may sin with his tongue against *God*, misrepresenting him, his truth, his working, or his people. Or (3) a man may sin with his tongue against his *neighbour*. Then his wrong doings and sayings may be classed under the term *slander*, the peculiarity of which is that it has enough truth in it to carry it, and enough lie in it to make it mischievous.

I. THE GENESIS OF SLANDER. As a fixed disposition. It comes out of failing to teach the child always strictly to match statement with fact. It comes out of failing to gain full self-control. It comes from letting feeling rule language. It comes from the disposition which finds pleasure in the suffering of others (see cruelty of children to animals). It comes from envy at the success of others.

II. THE OCCASIONS OF SLANDER. These are often merely times of idle gossip. They may be times of jealousy or revenge. They may be only the delight a man has in mischief-making.

III. THE PUNISHMENT OF SLANDER. It comes in the deterioration of the slanderer's own character; in the lost confidence and love of his neighbour; and in the just judgment of God.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The deceitful tongue.* "Lips are soft; but when they are lying lips they suck away the life of character, and are as murderous as razors. Lips should never be red with the blood of honest men's reputes, nor salved with malicious falsehoods. Some seem to lie for lying's sake, it is their sport and spirit. The faculty of speech becomes a curse when it is degraded into a mean weapon for smiting men behind their backs. Those who fawn and flatter, and all the while have enmity in their hearts, are wicked beings; they are the seed of the devil, and he worketh in them after his own deceptive nature." "Ungodly men will do mischief to other men purely for mischief's sake; yet when once mischief is done it proves most mischievous to the doers of it; and while they hold their brethren's heaviness a profit, though they are never

the better, they shall feel and find themselves in a short time much the worse" (Caryl).

I. THE TONGUE IS SHARPER THAN AN ARROW. 1. It is shot in private. 2. It is tipped with poison. 3. It is polished with seeming kindness. 4. It is aimed at the tenderest part.

II. THE TONGUE IS MORE DESTRUCTIVE THAN FIRE. 1. Its scandals spread with greater rapidity. 2. They consume that which other fires cannot touch. 3. They are less easily quenched. "The tongue," says an apostle, "is a fire . . . and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." A fiery dart of the wicked one. (Outline by George Rogers.)—R. T.

Ver. 4.—"*Coals of juniper.*" This verse, and its connection with the preceding one, may be explained in two ways. Ver. 4 may describe the "deceitful tongue," likening it to the sharp arrow of a mighty man, or to the fierce coals of the broom, which long keep their heat. Or it may indicate the swift and sure and overwhelming judgments of God, which are sharp and piercing as an arrow, fierce and burning as a fire. "Wickedness shall be returned on the head of the wicked; for the lying tongue is itself a sword or arrow (Pss. lii. 3; lvii. 5), and burns like a fire (see Ps. cxl. 10, 11)." Burckhardt found the Bedouin of Sinai burning the roots of the juniper (desert broom, rithm, ritem, or genista) into coal; and says that they make the best charcoal, and throw out the most intense heat, and hold the heat for an almost indefinite time.

I. THE DECEITFUL TONGUE IS LIKE ARROWS AND COALS. This explanation falls in with the general idea of the psalm. The writer complains that, loving peace himself, he meets with nothing but hostility and treachery (see Pss. lxiv. 3; lv. 21; lix. 7). Both sharpened arrows are used, which pierce deeply; and envenomed arrows, which leave a sting behind. Unkind words both pierce and sting. Similar ideas attach to the other figure. Coals of fire burn at once, and give smarting pain at once, but they also leave misery and suffering behind; and so does slanderous speech.

II. THE PUNISHMENT OF THE DECEITFUL TONGUE IS LIKE ARROWS AND COALS. On the whole, this idea is to be preferred. It is in the manner of the psalms to burst forth with an imprecation of God's judgments on the head of such treacherous and slanderous neighbours. Swift, sure, and sharp shall be the judgment of slanderers. Their punishment is comparable to an arrow keen in itself, and driven home with all the force with which a mighty man shoots it from his bow of steel. The woes that come on the slanderer shall be like "coals of juniper," which are "quick in flaming, fierce in blazing, and long in burning." "It is better to be the victim of slander than to be the author of it. The shafts of calumny will miss the mark, but not so the arrows of God; the coals of malice will cool, but not the fire of justice."—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*Our uncomfortable surroundings.* "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech!" These names *Mesech* and *Kedar* are not to be regarded as literally descriptive. They poetically represent the very trying circumstances and associations in which at the time the psalmist was placed. The *Mesech* are only known as a half-barbarous people living towards the north, on the mountains south of Caucasus (Ezek. xxxviii. 9, 15, 16). *Kedar* is a term representing the warrior-tribes of Arabia far to the south-east (Gen. xxv. 13; Isa. xxi. 17; Ezek. xxvii. 21). There can be little question that the names are here used typically, because it was not wise to fix in a poem or psalm the actual names of the uncomfortable neighbours.

I. WE CANNOT HELP HAVING UNCOMFORTABLE SURROUNDINGS. It is only in a very small sense that a man can be said to choose his own lot. He cannot choose his parents, brothers and sisters, early home, schooling, and many other things. We speak of his making his way in life, but Providence is always overruling things, and putting men in unexpected places. Most men have to say, in looking back over life, "I never could have dreamed of being where I have been, or of doing what I have done." Our culture largely comes through our life-associations, and we cannot help their sometimes being not at all "according to our mind."

II. WE CANNOT HELP FEELING OUR UNCOMFORTABLE SURROUNDINGS. It is indeed essential to discipline through them that we *should* feel them. The misery of trying, unlovely, mischievous neighbours is but like the pain of the surgeon who would heal.

God wants us to feel, because he wants to use the feeling. Indeed, keenness to feel may *help him* to do his gracious work.

III. WE CAN HELP BEING MASTERED BY UNCOMFORTABLE SURROUNDINGS. They cannot hurt us unless we allow them to. If feeling is allowed to rule the will, they are sure to master us. If the will be made to rule feeling, they cannot. Just what God's grace does for us is so to strengthen the will that nothing can unduly or unworthily influence us.

IV. WE CAN WIN THE TRIUMPH OF THE GODLY LIFE EVEN AMIDST UNCOMFORTABLE SURROUNDINGS. We can, on the principle of the psalmist, who, out of his distress, persisted in "looking up," crying unto God for help, singing "songs of ascent."—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*The misery of the war-spirit to peace-lovers.* "I am for peace," is literally, "I am peace." This is my very nature; so I instinctively revolt from all this slander and quarrelling and contention. Associating the passage with the restored exiles, it may be noticed that the one thing absolutely essential to their well-being was a state of quietness and peace. They had plenty to do. Jerusalem, its houses, walls, and temple, to rebuild. Civil and ecclesiastical order to re-establish, and a national character to gain. External peace, as well as internal peace, were absolutely essential to the complete reoccupation of their land. So we too often think that peace is the one condition on which our spiritual culture depends, and God shows us, as he showed the restored exiles, that, spite of the misery it may bring us, it is better for us to be in the midst of contentions, conflicts, and perils. But, like the psalmist, we may freely speak to God about this our trouble, and we need not change our spirit of peace-loving and peace-seeking under any external pressure. Distinguish between *war* and the *war-spirit*. It is the latter which the peace-loving man finds so trying. He can deal with actual war upon its merits, and he may be able to recognize its necessity and its beneficent mission; but the litigious, contentious, quarrelsome spirit, that is always inventing or manufacturing some occasion of difficulty, always disturbing the peace, is a painful distress to all peace-lovers.

I. MISERY COMES FROM EFFORTS TO KEEP THE PEACE BEING MISAPPREHENDED. The Prayer-book Version has, "I labour for peace, but when I speak unto them thereof, they make ready to battle." Thinking he meant to start a fight.

II. MISERY COMES FROM EFFORTS TO KEEP THE PEACE BEING DEFEATED. We never like to fail in things we set our hearts upon.

III. MISERY COMES FROM THE MORAL ATMOSPHERE WHICH THE WAR-SPIRIT ENGENDERS. Nothing morally beautiful can flourish in that atmosphere.

IV. MISERY COMES FROM THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF DOING THE THINGS WHICH REQUIRE PEACEFUL SURROUNDINGS. This is illustrated in the case of the restored exiles, who wanted to get on with their national reconstruction work.—R. T.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXI.

THE preceding psalm is one of complaint; the present, one of comfort and consolation. The pilgrim lifts up his eyes to the hills, and is satisfied that help is coming to him. He then proceeds to cheer himself with assurances of God's sleepless care and protection. Metrically, the psalm falls into four stanzas of four lines each.

Ver. 1.—I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. The "holy hills," that stand round about Jerusalem, are intended (Psa. lxxvii. 1; cxxv. 2). There God had "promised his

blessing, even life for evermore" (Ps. cxxxlii. 3). From whence cometh my help. Most modern critics regard this clause as interrogative, and translate, "Whence is it that my help shall come?" But "the question is only asked to give more effect to the answer" (Cheyne).

Ver. 2.—My help cometh from the Lord; literally, *my help is from the Lord*. He alone has both the power and the will to assist me. Which made heaven and earth; i.e. "which is omnipotent."

Ver. 3.—He will not suffer thy foot to be moved. The psalmist addresses himself with consolatory assurances. God will not allow any evil to approach him, so as to do

him hurt. He that keepeth thee will not slumber. God does not sleep—his vigilance is unceasing (comp. Isa. xxvii. 3).

Ver. 4.—Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The assurance rises from the particular to the general. It is not one Israelite alone over whom God will watch unceasingly, but the whole people of Israel.

Ver. 5.—The Lord is thy Keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. "Thy shade" means "thy protection." "thy defence." Protection was especially needed on the right hand, as the side which no shield guarded. Latin writers call the right side "*latus apertum*."

Ver. 6.—The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. These were the chief dangers of travellers, whether pilgrims or others. *Coup de soleil* was feared by day, and the deleterious influence

of the moon's rays by night. This last has sometimes been doubted, but the observation of modern travellers seems to show that bad effects actually follow on sleeping in the moonlight in hot countries (see Curzon's 'Travels,' p. 36; Leopolt, 'India Missions,' p. 7).

Ver. 7.—The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil; or, "keep thee." The same verb is used throughout. He shall preserve thy soul; or, *keep thy soul*.

Ver. 8.—The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in (comp. Dent. xxviii. 6; 1 Sam. xxix. 6; 2 Sam. iii. 25; 1 Kings iii. 7; 2 Kings xix. 27). The phrase is an equivalent of "The Lord shall preserve thee in all thy ways" (Ps. xci. 11). From this time forth, and even for evermore; i.e. so long as thou hast "goings out" and "comings in." But the phrase used rather implies that these will never cease.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*God our Guide: a New Year's psalm.* In whatever special circumstances, or for whatever particular occasion, this psalm may have been written, it is certain that it is admirably suited to suggest New Year's thoughts to our minds. We shall best appreciate it if we consider—

I. THE GREATNESS OF OUR NEED. We have sometimes to face the future, and then we confront: 1. *Certainties*; duties, difficulties, vexations, trials, temptations, opportunities. 2. *Uncertainties*; possibly some very great joy, or some overwhelming sorrow, or some very sore perplexity, or even the last experience of death.

II. THE INSUFFICIENCY OF HUMAN HELP. We naturally and rightly look to our kindred and to our friends for sympathy and succour. But: 1. They do not remain with us; parents die; brothers and sisters are scattered far and wide; friends become estranged. 2. They cannot render us all the help we need. Our wants go so far, and strike so deep, that human sympathy does not avail; it falls short; we need more than it can bring. We must not only look around, but above, must "lift up our eyes to the hills, from whence cometh our help," for our "help cometh from the Lord" (vers. 1, 2).

III. OUR HELP IN GOD. 1. With him is *all power*. He who "made heaven and earth" (ver. 2) can do anything, everything, for us. There can come no difficulty, no entanglement, from which he cannot deliver us; there can come no sorrow in which he will not be able to support us. 2. We can count on *the constancy* of his care. He "will not slumber," etc. (vers. 3, 4). Not for one small moment will he forget us; day and night we shall be the objects of his watchful love. 3. He will be *present* to defend us everywhere. He will be our Keeper, our Shade upon our right hand (ver. 5). His gracious power will overshadow us at every step we take. We cannot think of any place, however remote, or obscure, or humble, where he will not be with his defending, delivering hand. 4. He will guard us from *all forms of evil*. Evil takes many forms; it comes to us in every guise. Now it is prosperity, and now adversity; it may be an intoxicating approval and adulation, or it may be a crushing depreciation and desertion; it may be a strong and sudden assault on our integrity, or it may be the more perilous approach of that which very gradually undermines or disintegrates. But whatever be its form, our God can "keep" us true, pure, holy. The sun shall not smite by day, nor the moon by night; "the Lord will preserve us from *all evil*" (vers. 6, 7). 5. He will preserve us, ourselves; not only our home, our fortune, our credit, our reputation, but *ourselves*: "He shall preserve thy soul." He will "not suffer thy foot to be moved" (ver. 3); he will uphold us in the path of righteousness;

and if we *have* to walk "in slippery places," yet his right hand will hold us, and our soul will not be stained with the sin which injures and defiles. 6. He will attend us to the close of life (ver. 8). "This God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death" (Ps. xlviii. 14).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—Kept from all evil. This is what the writer of this precious psalm looks for from God (see the first two verses), and this is what the psalm promises, and that with the utmost particularity. There shall not be even a slip of the foot, a thing so common in mountainous lands, and often so perilous, and the keeping shall be night and day alike, and close at hand (ver. 5). The Lord himself shall see to it, whether during the heat of the day or the chill of the night, it matters not. The Lord shall keep thee inwardly and outwardly soul and body alike, from all evil and in all thy ways. "But"—so ask not a few—"is all that true? Are we so kept as this psalm promises—not the mere godless crowd, but the company of God's faithful ones: *does* the Lord keep them, as is here said, 'from all evil'?" And then there are brought forward the long array of facts which seem to make against the truth of this word. Disease, accident, death, the overwhelming by earthquakes, lightning, flood, storm; by the ferocity or the folly of men, and by any of the ten thousand ills which flesh is heir to. As we contemplate the awful number of victims to such causes as we have named, and the yet worse ruin which comes from moral causes, it is not to be wondered at that some regard this psalm as rather a pious imagination than the declaration of actual fact. What are we to say? are we to give up our faith in the blessed guardianship of God, and to consign to the category of credulity the trust which this psalm encourages? We will not do that, but we will reply—

I. THE PROMISE IS NOT FOR EVERY COMMUNITY, BUT FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD. The band of pilgrims who set out from Babylon to return to their native land and to re-establish the worship of God were a special and a holy company, and God did keep them as they journeyed on along the weary wilderness-ways. We must come within the circle of the covenanted people of God ere we can lay claim to the fulfilment of a psalm like this. It is not for the godless, but for the regenerated people of God. For them—

II. THE GENERAL RULE OF GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL CARE IS AS HERE SET FORTH. Not the universal, but the general rule. There have been and there are exceptions, but taking the history of God's people in all ages, and looking at their average experience, may we not cry—It is well with the righteous; the Lord is their Keeper? God's people are, after all, the happiest people under the sun.

III. OUR IDEA OF BEING KEPT AND GOD'S IDEA MAY BE VERY DIFFERENT. 1. *We think so much of the keeping of the body, and of a man's outward circumstances.* But in comparison with the soul's well-being, God counts these things as of no importance. Hence God may preserve a man's soul when he lets his outward affairs go all to ruin; for the sake of his soul this may be needed. But if his soul has been kept, has not God been true to his word? 2. *God takes eternity into view; we think only of the present.* If, then, a man be eternally saved, does the fact that during a period unspeakably short in comparison with eternity the man's outward life was full of trouble invalidate the promise of this psalm and prove it false? 3. *Further, we see only the surface of things; God looks at the reality.* If, then, what we call disaster, and think to be so, be really amongst "all things which work together for [not merely precede, but produce the] man's good," as is so often the case (see 2 Cor. iv. 17), then is God's permission or sending of that disaster a falsifying of the promise of this psalm?

IV. THE PROMISE MAY BE TRUE TO THE HEART WHEN ITS FULFILMENT IS NOT APPARENT TO THE EYE. What is the value of all God's providential mercies, his blessed keeping of us in health and external well-being—what is the value of it except for the effect it has upon our minds? It is the inward happiness and peace and joy which these things impart which gives them their value. Otherwise they are of no good at all, any more than the strains of sweetest music are to the deaf, or the most

beautiful scenery to the blind. But if God be able—as he is—to impart that same and even greater inward happiness, peace, and joy *by other means*, and does so, as, blessed be his Name! he so often does, then again we ask—Has not God been true to his word? is not this psalm actual fact? Therefore we rest assured that the Lord will keep us from all evil, he will keep our soul.—S. C.

Ver. 8.—*The sure keeping of God.* It has been remarked by a learned Bible scholar that part of the common complaints which are often brought against our English Bible is really owing to the likes and dislikes as to the usage of words in which we English people allow ourselves. It is constantly complained of that where, in the original Scriptures, the sacred writers employ only one word, our translators have put for that one word, two, three, four, five, or even several more different English words, thus conveying to our minds several ideas, where it was the intention of the Scriptures to convey only one. No doubt our translators did their best to find synonyms—words, that is, which though, different in sound, have the same sense—still the senses so given are only similar, and may not be seen by ordinary readers to be so similar as it was thought they were. Hence such difference of rendering is often misleading, and rather a hiding than a setting forth of the Scripture's true meaning. Now, in this beautiful psalm we have a notable instance of such different rendering. We do not see that the sense is obscured in this instance, but we think the emphasis and force are lessened. The one prominent word in the psalm is “keep:” the whole psalm is about the Lord God's sure keeping of his people, and that this might be impressed on the mind, the writer six times over in the last five verses of the psalm repeats this word “keep.” Now in the three former verses out of these five our version adheres to the word “keep,” but in the last two it changes over to the less forcible word “preserve.” Our English dislike of using the same word repeatedly accounts for this change, and causes the loss of impressiveness which the repeated reverberations of the one emphatic word “keep” were intended to produce. But to pass on to what is of more importance, the truth itself of God's sure keeping, let us—

I. TAKE THE PROMISE LITERALLY. 1. *It referred to Israel's journeyings* from Babylon to Judah, or from wherever their abode might be, up to the great festivals. Now, even in this literal sense, the promise was no mean one. For those olden days were not days of settled law and order, in which life and property were secure, and evil-doers could scarce hope to escape punishment. But the very reverse was the truth. Might stood for right, and hence the “going out and coming in” of Israel in those days was ever attended with much peril. 2. *And for ourselves the promise holds good.* God has made our journeyings safe by means of what we call the inventions of science and the resources of civilization. They are but God's instruments for our good. And when some terrible catastrophe occurs, as from time to time is the case, still, if we be of God's Israel, we are kept: “He shall preserve thy soul.” Our real self is not harmed, the Lord is our Keeper, as he said.

II. AS APPLYING TO THE WHOLE OF OUR ACTIVE LIFE. Such is a frequent meaning of the expression, “going out and coming in” (see Deut. xxviii. 6, 19; xxiii. 20; Josh. i. 7; 1 Sam. xxix. 6). The general conduct and occupation of a man in his varied affairs are what is meant in all these passages. And how we need to be kept amid our daily work and business! How “the cares of this world” need to be guarded against, and “the deceitfulness of riches” also! How business life tends to absorb all time, all thought, all energy, so that scarce any are left for God! Hence blessed are they who are in God's holy keeping in all the goings out and comings in of daily life!

III. TO OUR EXPERIENCES OF SORROW AND OF GLADNESS. “Going out” was a synonym for sorrow; “coming in,” for gladness and joy. For Israel was a people that had known what it was to go out to drear and dreadful exile, and that more than once. Hence whilst the idea of “going out” suggested only what was sad, that of “coming in,” the return from exile, was full of joy. “The redeemed of the Lord shall come with joy and singing,” etc. And in the New Jerusalem, one of its sweetest promises was that its people should “go no more out for ever.” Sorrow has its snares, and so has joy. We need to be kept of God.

IV. TO THE MORNING AND EVENING OF LIFE. “Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening;” then he cometh in for rest. And if we truly desire

it, the Lord will keep our going out and our coming in in this sense also. "Our help cometh from the Lord."—S. C.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Looking up*. "Shall I lift up mine eyes unto the hills? Whence should my help come?" The precise associations of the psalm cannot be fixed with any certainty. Perhaps it is best regarded as a psalm of the Exile. It might have been written by a Daniel, as he sat at his open window, and looked away over the broad, flat plains of Babylon toward the distant mountain-land of Israel. The writer is oppressed with the burdens and sorrows of exile; he remembers Zion, and he sings his soul to quietness and peace by looking away from present cares to the high hills of God, and cheers his drooping spirit by remembering how, amid all the earth-changes, the everlasting hills abide. What a holy power upon us the mountains have! The grand, calm, strong, high things—they seem to be so near God; they seem to be so full of God; they bring us so near him, and fill us so full of him. One thing about them is suggested by our text—they make us *look up*. And is not that just what we need? Oh, to lose the downward look which has so grown upon us by the pressure of life-cares! The voice calls continually, "Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh!"

I. **WORLD-DRAWN, WE LOOK DOWN, AND SO ARE WEAK.** We are in the world—in a thousand subtle ways we are kin with the world, subject to its influences, caught by its whirl of excitement, absorbed by its pressing claims, and easily we become *of* the world as well as *in* it. But everything the world presents to us is below us, beneath us; and it so keeps us looking down that the habit of down-looking grows upon us, and we are almost unable to look up. How powerfully we are all drawn by world-interests! Business man is world-absorbed. Domestic woman is world-absorbed. The influence of the world begets a downward look, a sort of set of the eyes and heart downwards. The world-thoughts abide with us, and even when the sabbath day brings God and heaven near, we find it very hard to get our eyes lifted up. Even in the sanctuary they drop on bills and stock and trade. To succeed in earthly things we must engage the whole heart and powers in them. It seems to be the one universal power that this sin-smitten world possesses over its creatures—it bends their shoulders, it bows their heads, it gives, it keeps, the downward look. And what do we see when we look down? Much of self, of man, and of things. The hurry and bustle of thousands who are hasting to be rich. And the shadow of God's curse on sin resting everywhere. It is this down-looking that makes us so weak.

II. **GOD-DRAWN, WE LOOK UP, AND SO GROW STRONG.** For to men in this world God's voice is ever calling. It sounds from the bright bands of the morning, from the high silver-tinted clouds of noonday, from the splendour and glory of the far-off sunset, from the lofty trees and the hill-tops, and the soaring birds of song, and the winds that roam free, and the "jewel-powdered skies" of night. Would we but stop and hush awhile, we might hear it always near us, saying, "Look up! look up!" God has often refreshed his fainting servants with the sight of his everlasting hills. Moses was sent to feel the inspirations of Sinai. Elijah was calmed, and made himself again, by the soothing influences of Horeb, the mount of God. Our Lord sought seclusion among the hills of Eastern Galilee, and entered into the Divine glory on a spur of Hermon. And the mountains still soothe and calm God's people. They teach us to *look up*. 1. Looking up, you find nothing of man's—it is all of God up above. 2. Looking up, you feel how pure God's snow is, and think how much is in the promise, "They shall walk with me in white." 3. Looking up, you see how earth-clouds are glorified. 4. Looking up, listen; you may hear the voices of the hills saying, "Be still! Hush the life-fever! Wait! In silence God doth speak." 5. Look up and listen, and again the voices of the hills will say, "The mists and the storms are all outside us; they are not us." Look up, and grow strong. Look up; you will feel the heaven-breath upon your face. Look up; your brow will soon lose those wreathings of anxiety and care. Look up, and you shall prove how God "wipes away all tears from our eyes."—R. T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Not mountains, but God*. "From whence shall my help come?" This psalm is best taken as expressing the pious confidence of an individual believer, who

addresses his inner self in words of comfort which are framed as if proceeding from another person. The psalmist is, as it were, holding a colloquy with himself. It is not that he expects help from the mountains—his hope is fixed on him who made the mountains. This comes out plainly in Perowne's rendering, "Whence should my help come? My help (cometh) from Jehovah, the Maker of heaven and earth."

I. THE MOUNTAINS CANNOT GIVE US HELP AND SAFETY. Illustrate from the times of Lot. He fled to the mountains; but God preserved him, not the mountain. From the times of David's persecution, he fled to the mountain country of Judæa and the south; but God preserved him, not the hills. Covenanters and others found safety in the rocks and mountains in days of religious persecution; but their God was their real defence. So let mountains stand for the supreme self-efforts a man may make in his times of distress; he must be brought to the assured conviction that they cannot bring him safety. Beyond them he must look. Only when he looks beyond them do they become his security; for then God makes them such. "Some trust in horses, and some in chariots," and some in mountains; "but we will trust in the Name of the Lord."

II. THE MOUNTAINS CAN DIRECT US WHERE TO FIND HELP AND SAFETY. They appeal to both poetic and religious feeling. Buchanan, writing with the Cuchullin hills all about him, says—

"Lord, art thou here? far from the busy crowd,
Brooding in melancholy solitude?"

Moses was helped to realize the power of Jehovah by the daily impressions of the huge, craggy, awful mountain forms of Sinai. In quite an instinctive way men in all ages and in every land have inclined to build their altars on high hills, as if thus they did get nearer God. And it is the fact for most thoughtfully disposed persons, that more help is gained for pious meditation from mountain districts than from the changeableness of the sea, or the varying but ever-gentle beauty of the landscapes. Mountains have a peculiar power to solemnize and to impress us all; and precisely what they bring to us is that *sense of God* which assures of his love, and help, and lead.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The ever-watchful Watchman.* "Shall neither slumber nor sleep." The words "slumber" and "sleep" are not climactic. Indeed, the Hebrew word for "slumber" is the stronger term of the two. There is no more in the setting of the two terms than poetical repetition. The one peril of the night-watchman is that he might be overcome with sleep. The one duty of the watchman is to keep ever, through his watching-time, awake and alert. Yet at the best no absolute security can be placed in any human watchman. A man may be overpowered with sleep, and be physically unable to resist its advances. Absolute security of defence lies in God, and we may fully trust in him. It is inconceivable that we can be placed in any circumstances or conditions which are unknown to him. Illustrations may be taken from the wilderness-journey of Israel. The pillar-cloud of the Divine presence was always there, night and day; and never anything could happen to Israel that was not divinely permitted. Or illustrate from the sick-bed of the sufferer. Worn out, the nurse may fall asleep, but the eye of the God of all consolation is never dimmed (see Ps. cxxxix.).

I. THE EVER-WATCHFUL WATCHMAN SEES. This is more necessary in a watchman than keeping awake; he must be quick to observe, attentive, noticing everything. "All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." God's seeing includes what is by man seeable and by man unseeable; it includes what is and what is to be. "In every place, beholding the evil and the good."

II. THE EVER-WATCHFUL WATCHMAN UNDERSTANDS. He not only sees things, but sees the significance of things. Estimates the importance of what he sees. Recognizes the relation of what he sees to his people. Makes what he sees the ground of his prompt and gracious action in their behalf.

III. THE EVER-WATCHFUL WATCHMAN HELPS. By his merciful defendings: "No plague shall come nigh thy dwelling." By his wise upholdings: "Will not suffer thy foot to be moved." By his wonderful overrulings, which constantly turn seeming evil into real and permanent good. If our life is thus within the constant Divine inspection, we may put away all fears, and simply "seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness."—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Types of peril by day and by night.* The sun and the moon. To understand these figures, it is necessary to keep in mind, not only what the sun and moon actually are in Eastern countries, but also the sentiments which have gathered about them in those lands.

I. THE SUN IS THE TYPE OF THE OPEN PERILS OF THE GODLY LIFE. The sun strikes openly, and is specially perilous when it strikes on the lower part of the back of the head. Men know this, and are duly warned to take all precautions. And so in life there are various temptations and dangers, which we all know about, which every man knows *may* come into his personal experience, and concerning which we all, in various ways and degrees, take precautions. Yet even in respect of these we need the assurance of an outside and Divine protection. So strange is the frailty of human nature, that men are over-mastered by the very things they know well, are warned against, and even think themselves strong to resist. It needs to be always kept in mind that the power of temptation depends on the physical, mental, or spiritual condition in which we are found when it assails us. And we need the assurance of God's defence even against *open* and well-known evils, because he only can know the particular peril which lies in their *relativity to us* at any given time. Illustrate by the fact that the sunstroke is only an occasional peril. The sun strikes the man who is in a physical condition to receive the stroke. But the man does not know the peril of his physical condition. God knows, and can help him to defend himself from the peril.

II. THE MOON IS THE TYPE OF THE SECRET PERILS OF THE GODLY LIFE. In the cloudless skies of the East, where the moon shines with such exceeding clearness, its effects upon the human frame have been found most injurious. It has been proved, beyond a doubt, that the moon smites as well as the sun, causing blindness for a time, and even the distortion of the features. The Arabs universally believe that the beams of the moon are noxious to the human body; and therefore they carefully cover over their heads when they sleep in the open air. Meat, when exposed to the moonbeams, becomes quickly tainted. Mr. Martin says, "Of the effects of the moon on animal life very many instances could be cited. I have seen in Africa the newly littered young perish in a few hours, if exposed to the rays of the full moon. Fish become rapidly putrid, and meat, if left exposed, incurable or un preservable by salt. The mariner, heedlessly sleeping on deck, becomes afflicted with *nyctolopia*, or night-blindness; at times the face is hideously swollen, if exposed during sleep to the moon's rays; the maniac's paroxysms are renewed with fearful vigour at the full and change, and the cold, damp chill of the ague supervenes on the ascendancy of this apparently mild yet powerful luminary. Let her influence over this earth be studied; it is more powerful than is generally known." The moon may very well be taken as the type of the secret, subtle, insidious perils of the godly life; and these are chiefly to be dreaded. As there are poison-germs in the natural atmosphere, which generate disease in us when our vitality and resisting power are low, so there are poison-germs in the moral atmosphere of our everyday associations, which only cultured spiritual life can enable us to resist. There are enervating influences, suggestive examples. Little slips into inexactness or untruthfulness. A thousand things in common life, that seem to have no more power of mischief in them than have the moonbeams. What, then, would be any man's hope of preserving moral health and safety, if we might not cherish the assurance of the psalmist, that God understands all secret perils that gather about us, and will not let the moon smite us by night? "The darkness and the light are both alike to him."—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Evil as God sees it.* "All evil." All kinds of evil. We may not think that God estimates evil precisely as we do. In this "God's thoughts are not as our thoughts." One important distinction may be pointed out here. We think evil to be that which injuriously affects our circumstances; God sees evil as that which injuriously affects us. Consequently, some of the things which we call evil God does not so call, because their influence on *us* is *good*. And if this be so, the mere change of our circumstances is not the thing for us chiefly to desire; we should rather seek the Divine overruling, which includes defence from what God sees to be evil, and involves making "all things work together for good."

I. GOD MISSES WHAT MAN SEES. For man evil is calamity. This is true in the

physical sphere. Disaster, disease, disappointment, defeat, occupy man's thoughts, and are, properly enough, from his point of view, classed as evils. But it is true also in the moral sphere. It is the calamity side of evil which absorbs man's attention. Drunkenness ruining a life is evil. Dishonesty found out is evil. Quarrelsomeness breaking friendship is evil. It is only as man's spiritual nature is quickened that moral evil, as distinct from moral calamity, is apprehended. But God does not call calamity evil. It has, indeed, no moral quality that he can recognize. It is only an agency for securing evil or good. It is a revelation to us to discover that God's supreme interest is not in *events*, as ours is. He is supremely concerned about *us*.

II. GOD SEES WHAT MAN MISSES. The moral possibilities that are in all events. Man is profoundly interested in what happens, and is wont to stop there, and miss the meaning of what happens. God always sees in events that happen *persons acting*; and in their motives and moods and wills he sees evil or good. The spiritually awakened man sees evil as God sees it; and, therefore, when he prays to be kept from all evil, he means kept from himself—from the evil that is in him. If he were but free from the answering of his moral evil, nothing that could happen would be a real calamity.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*The safety of our life*. "He shall keep thy soul." The term "soul" stands often in the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments for the animal life; but we use it for that spiritual being which man *is*, as distinguished from that bodily form which man *has*. Taking the first idea, it may be shown that God's care of our natural life involves and includes all due provision for the thousandfold needs of that life. The greater includes the less. The daily renewed gift of life carries with it the gift of all the life will need day by day. This may be applied to the national life of Israel. The restored exiles may well gain and keep full confidence in God, seeing that he had kept their national life through such anxious and imperilling times. He *had* kept it; they might be sure that he *would* keep it. And this assurance carried with it the confidence that God's defence and blessing were still upon the restored nation. If God keeps us in being, and gives us new days, then we may confidently hold him to his promise, "As thy day so shall thy strength be." He is able and willing to make "all grace abound" unto "all-sufficiency." Taking the second idea, we come upon God's continued interest in, and care for, the new life he has quickened in our souls. His concern for the material life does but illustrate his care for the spiritual life ("This is the will of God, even our sanctification"). "Soul-keeping is the soul of keeping. If the soul be kept, all is kept. The preservation of the greater includes that of the less, so far as it is essential to the main design; the kernel shall be preserved, and in order thereto the shell shall be preserved also. Our soul is kept from the dominion of sin, the infection of error, the crush of despondency, the puffing up of pride—kept from the world, the flesh, and the devil; kept for holier and greater things, kept in the love of God, kept unto the eternal kingdom and glory." But we need not miss the important fact that God's soul-keeping runs along with, and works through, our own soul-keeping. "Keep thy heart with all keepings, for out of it are the issues of life."—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The safety of our days*. "The Lord shall keep thy going out and thy coming in." This expression is evidently borrowed from the blessing on obedience given in Deut. xxviii. 6, "Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out." Clearly it is but a poetical way of saying, that the defence and guidance and benediction of Jehovah shall rest on the godly man in all the actions and relations of his everyday life. The protection vouchsafed extends to all a man is and all a man does. It might seem as if the salvation of the soul from spiritual death were all we need be anxious about; but God never urges this point upon us. His salvation is not so limited. He saves the whole man, and bears as real a relation to man's temporal as to his spiritual needs. "With his dear Son he freely gives us all things." The true saving of a man for the life that now is involves the saving of the man for the life that is to come.

I. THE "GOING OUT" OF LIFE MAY INDICATE ITS ACTIVITIES AND ENTERPRISES. We go out in the morning refreshed, vigorous, full of conscious power, and in some peril of

self-reliance. "The Lord shall preserve thy going out." Keeping thee from whatever form of temptation and moral evil may come through the putting forth of human energy in the daily duties of life. Man's enterprise may bring him into situations of bodily danger. God will keep him then. But the very force he puts into life may unduly magnify self; and it is much more to say that God will keep him from ensnaring self.

II. THE "COMING IN" OF LIFE MAY INDICATE ITS PASSIVITIES AND QUIET RELATIONSHIPS. We come in tired. We come in to rest, enjoy; we come in to home relationships and quiet occupations; and we seldom suspect that there is a possible exaggerating of self in our times of passivity, as truly as in our times of activity. There are luxuries, listlessnesses, selfishnesses, of our very resting-times; and we need God for our *coming in*, lest the self or self-indulgence should gain undue power over us.—R. T.

Vers. 1—8.—*The Source of help.* "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills," etc.

I. A STRONG, DEEP SENSE OF DEPENDENCE ON GOD IMPLANTED IN US.

II. WE MUST LIFT OURSELVES UP IN THE WHOLE POWER OF OUR BEING TO REALIZE GOD'S NEARNESS TO HELP US. He dwelt in the mountain-group of Zion at Jerusalem, and in the other mountains of Israel. We have been taught to realize that God is Spirit, and dwells near us, as well as in the far-off mountains and in distant worlds. But we can see him only from the heights of the soul.

III. THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE IS THE PROVIDENCE OF THIS WORLD. (Ver. 2.) The Being who framed man's wonderful nature would naturally provide for its great wants—the wants he had himself created. "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

IV. THE CREATOR WOULD NOT ONLY HAVE THE POWER, BUT THE DESIRE, THE DISPOSITION, TO HELP THE CHILD OF HIS LOVE. (Vers. 3—6.) "He that keepeth thee will not slumber." God's care for us will not suffer him to sleep or become indifferent to us.

V. GOD'S ETERNAL CARE IS TO KEEP THE SOUL FROM EVIL—FROM ALL REAL EVIL. Many calamitous, or what appear calamitous, events to us are not evils in the sight of God, but, under his control, issue in our eternal good.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXII.

THE "title" assigns this psalm to David; and there seems to be no sufficient reason why his authorship should not be accepted. The description of Jerusalem exactly suits his day (vers. 3—7). The "thrones of judgment, thrones of the house of David" (ver. 5) would be his own throne and that of his son Solomon, whom he associated. The "house of the Lord" (ver. 1) would be the tabernacle which David set up (2 Sam. vi. 17). The "tribes of the Lord," which were all united under David (2 Sam. v. 5), probably began to "go up" to Jerusalem as soon as David removed the ark thither. The strong love for Jerusalem and for the Lord's house, which animates the writer, is also very characteristic of David.

Ver. 1.—I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord (comp. Ps. v. 7; xxviii. 2; cxxxviii. 2).

Ver. 2.—Our feet shall stand; rather, *stand*, or *are standing*. The pilgrim-band has entered the city, and is on its way to God's house. Within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem has its "walls" (ver. 7) and its "gates" set up, which suits the time of David, not that of Ezra or Zerubbabel.

Ver. 3.—Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together; rather, *Jerusalem that art builded*. The primary reference is probably to the compact shape and look of the ancient city, which, as Josephus says, was "one and entire," with no straggling suburbs, shut in on the north by a wall, and on the three other sides both by walls and by deep, rocky valleys. But the material "compactness" was perhaps taken to symbolize the close internal union of the inhabitants one with another, whereby they were all knit together into one Church and people.

Ver. 4.—Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord. This points to a time before the dispersion of "the tribes," which rendered such regular "going up" impossible. Unto the testimony of Israel; rather, *as a testimony unto Israel*—a witness to the

whole nation that all Israelites had covenant privileges at Jerusalem. To give thanks unto the Name of the Lord. The three great feasts whereto Israel was bound to "go up" were all of them seasons of thanksgiving.

Ver. 5.—For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Jerusalem was the civil, no less than the religious, centre. There David judged controversies, and Absalom when he usurped the throne, and Solomon when David associated him. But the plural may be "a plural of dignity."

Ver. 6.—Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Let all true Israelites "pray for the peace of Jerusalem," i.e. for her tranquillity and for her prosperity. They shall prosper that love thee. A covert threat, as well as a promise. "Such as love Jerusalem, and pray for her peace, shall prosper; such as do not love her shall lack prosperity."

Ver. 7.—Peace be within thy walls, and

prosperity within thy palaces. The prayer, which he would have others offer, the psalmist now offers himself. The prayer embraces, first, the whole community; then, especially those who have the direction and government of it.

Ver. 8.—For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. The inhabitants of Jerusalem are the writer's "brethren and companions." He is not a mere pilgrim on a visit to the holy city.

Ver. 9.—Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good. The tabernacle set up by David in Jerusalem is called "the house of the Lord" in Ps. v. 7; xxvii. 4; lii. 8; and lv. 14. God "dwelt there," as he dwelt in the tabernacle of Moses in the wilderness (Exod. xl. 34, 35) and in the temple of Solomon subsequently (2 Chron. v. 13, 14). The good of Jerusalem was to be sought for two reasons: (1) because God's people were there; and (2) because God's house was there (see Calvin, *ad loc.*).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—9.—*The house of God and the Church of Jesus Christ.* The "house of God" (vers. 1 and 9) may stand for the Christian sanctuary, and the "Jerusalem," of which this psalm is full, may stand for the Church of Jesus Christ. Thus regarded, we have—

I. THE HOUSE OF GOD. 1. *The Divine Presence.* God's house is the place where he dwells; where, in the fullest sense, he *is*. And though the Omnipresent cannot be said to be in one place more *truly* than in another, yet is there a sense in which he is especially present in his own "house." (1) Going there expressly to meet and to worship him, we are *more conscious* of his nearness to us than we are elsewhere. (2) He will and he does manifest himself in his revealing *truth* and in his gracious *influences* as he does not elsewhere. 2. *United worship.* "Let us go into the house of the Lord." It is not enough for a man to say that he can pray and sing and read at home. Nothing will compensate for united worship. There is a fervour in prayer, and a heartiness in praise when many souls are outpoured in the one, and many voices are united in the other, which solitary worship does not know; there is an influence in uttered truth, spoken in the sympathetic hearing of a hundred hearts, which no book can communicate in the silent chamber. There is a sacred joy which gladdens the pure heart (ver. 1) in the anticipation and in the act of public worship, of which it is a serious mistake to deprive ourselves. 3. *The duty of encouragement.* "Let us go;" "Let him that heareth say, Come." Those who are not able to enforce Divine claims or human obligations can graciously and effectually invite their neighbours to go where these great spiritual realities will be enforced by others. Andrew rendered his brother Simon, and the Church of Christ, an invaluable service when "he brought him to Jesus" to hear his word and to become his disciple.

II. THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST. Jerusalem was "the city of God." The "New Jerusalem" will be composed of the glorified spirits of men of every age and from every land. The spiritual Jerusalem to-day is the multitude of unrecognized men, but beloved of Christ, that, under every sky, are loving and serving him. 1. We must not be satisfied till we have been enrolled in this company; till we can say, "Our feet *are* standing within thy walls." 2. To belong to this Church is our most sacred duty; it was "a testimony" or ordinance "in Israel" to go up to Jerusalem (ver. 4). It is the clear, decisive will of Christ—and that is *our* "testimony" that constitutes our obligation—that we should become members of his Church on earth. 3. The strength of the Church is in the close association of its members; it must be "compact together"

(ver. 3); its forces not scattered, dissipated, lost, but united, well-ordered for defence and for aggression. Where there is unity of *spirit, aim, and action*, there is strength to withstand and to achieve. 4. A wise regard for our own welfare and a true concern for others' good will make us love and serve the Church of Christ. (1) They will prosper that love it (ver. 6). Association with Christ and with his people is, if not a guarantee, a strong assurance of present and temporal well-being; sufficiency, if not wealth; all that is needful, if not all that is pleasant. (2) As we love our brethren and our companions, we shall wish well to the Church; for as its holy influences extend and reach their hearts, and cover their lives, they also will be shielded from evil and enriched with good. 5. Christ calls for believing prayer and faithful labour. Pray for the peace, and for the prosperity, of Jerusalem (vers. 6, 7). It is a poor thing to pray for it if we do not strive for it, if we do not contribute to it: "I will seek thy good;" and it is a very imperfect method of seeking good if we do not bring our personal contribution to it. To do that for the peace and prosperity of the Church, we must command ourselves, be gracious and genial in word as well as in spirit, take our part in earnest work, labour till the Master himself takes the weapon from our hands.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—9.—*Jerusalem a type of the Church.* That which is said or implied here of Jerusalem is appropriate in a symbolic sense to the New Jerusalem, the Church of the living God.

I. FOR THE CHURCH IS AS A CITY. 1. *Built.* The result of thought and toil and care. 2. *As Jerusalem, a captured city.* It was once the home of all heathen abomination, but by David it was won for God. So the Church is a captured city, a trophy of God's omnipotent grace. 3. *Has walls and bulwarks.* Jerusalem had (ver. 7). So the Church (Isa. xxvi. 1). The Spirit, the Word, and the work of God in human hearts,—these are her defences. 4. *And palaces.* There were many of these in Jerusalem. The palaces of the Church are those spiritual privileges which those who are high in the favour of God are permitted to enjoy.

II. HER PEOPLE. Those who love God's worship, who love to be asked to go to the house of the Lord, and also to ask others. These are they in whom the Spirit of God dwells, and who are the people of the city of God.

III. SHE IS CHARACTERIZED BY UNITY, ORDER, STRENGTH. (Ver. 3, "compact together.") For Jerusalem this was inevitably so by reason of the site on which she stood, which allowed no room for indefinite enlargement (see Exposition; and Stanley's 'Sinai and Palestine'). And so when the Church of God has attained to its perfect form, the divisions and discords, the disorder and consequent weakness, which too much characterize the Church now, shall all have disappeared. And even now there are Christian Churches which, by reason of their peace and unity and order, are strong—are as a city compact together.

IV. SHE IS THE CENTRE OF UNITY FOR OTHERS. (Ver. 4.) Jerusalem and the temple were, in Israel's best days, the rallying-point of all her tribes. The strength which this gave them excited the jealousy of Jeroboam, and caused him to set up the rival worship of Samaria. And to-day the Church is the real bond of nations, and is becoming increasingly so.

V. THIS UNITY OF THOSE WHO GATHER TO HER IS A WITNESS FOR GOD, AND RENDERS HIM PRAISE. The gathering of the tribes of the Lord (ver. 4) at the great annual festivals bore testimony to all men that Israel was the covenant people of God, and that they rejoiced therein; thus they rendered praise to the Name of the Lord. And the united companies of believers bear a like testimony and render like praise.

VI. JUDGMENT JUST AND RIGHTEOUS GOES FORTH FROM HER. (Ver. 5.) From the judgment-thrones of the princes of the royal house went forth the decisions which the people obeyed in all matters on which judgment had been given. So to-day, from the real Church of God goes forth that law which binds or looses the consciences of men. This is "the power of the keys" which Christ has given to his Church. What she says to-day all peoples will sooner or later accept as right and true. They may resist, but ere long they will yield. God wills it so,

VII. SHE IS TO BE DEVOTEDLY LOVED AND PRAYED FOR. (Vers. 6—9.) For God the Lord dwells within her (ver. 9). All her excellence, authority, and strength are because of this, and only this. Do *our* feet stand within her gates?—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Glad to go to the house of the Lord.* The feeling expressed here is noteworthy, to say the least of it; for—

I. SUCH GLADNESS IS RARE. The proof of that is seen in the multitudes that never go at all. And of those who do, how many go as seldom as possible!—an hour and a half a week is considered ample for church-going. And of those who are more regular and frequent, can it be said that they are glad to go? Is it not the sense of duty, the necessity of upholding a religious reputation, desire to please friends, force of habit, wish to set good example, fear of a condemning conscience, or some other motive such as these? But how seldom is there much gladness about it, except when it is all over! What a contrast to the exuberant delight which is evident throughout this psalm! We often sing it, but how often do we mean it?

II. BUT RIGHT. Ought we not to be “glad when,” etc.? Surely yes. For: 1. *It is “Divine service.”* But how should we like a child of ours to grudge rendering us service, to get out of it whenever he could, and, when he could not, to render it in as half-hearted a way as possible? But this is just how we treat God in this service which he enjoins upon us. 2. *And it is God’s chosen place of meeting with us.* Ought we to be loth to meet him, or to avoid such meeting whenever we can find any sort of excuse to do so? We do not so deal with earthly parents or benefactors. 3. *And it is the place where he blesses those who come.* Mere gratitude should make us glad to “go into the house,” etc.

III. AND MOST REASONABLE. What led the psalmist to thus feel and speak? He does so oftentimes. 1. *The remembrance of the revelations of God he had received there.* (Cf. Ps. lxxiii. 3, “To see thy power and thy glory, so as,” etc.) His soul had been filled with holy rapture and joy in God. 2. *The confident expectation of similar blessing.* He went desiring God, which is ever the condition of blessing from God. 3. *His whole spiritual life had been so quickened and strengthened there.* There the chains of sin had fallen off, the burden of guilt removed, the sorrows of his life soothed, and he had been filled with the Spirit of God. 4. *The worship itself was beautiful,* and the throng of worshippers, and all the associations and memories of the place, enhanced the joy of worship. 5. *And like reasons are in force still.* The age, place, forms, are all different; but the spiritual realities which the psalmist knew, the true worshipper knows still. He too has met with God, and God with him, as the holy Word has been preached, the fervent prayer offered, the hymn of praise sung, and the holy bread and wine of the Communion partaken of. Often and often has it been the ante-chamber of heaven.

IV. AND RESULTFUL. They who are glad to join in worship, to whom it is a real delight, are a very favoured people. And the results of their worship will be many. 1. *For themselves.* It is a witness of the reality of their faith and love and acceptance with God. It is full of inspiration; such glad worship will not evaporate in mere feeling, but will become embodied in holy word and deed and life. It gives them heaven before they get there, and it is a mighty means, through the Holy Spirit, of their sanctification. 2. *For the Church:* they are the conservators and the promoters of its best life. 3. *For the world:* they are witnesses for the love of God and the joy of his service. 4. *For God:* he is glorified in them.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Joy in God’s service.* “I was glad,” etc. It is well agreed among Bible writers that this cannot be a psalm of David’s; it must belong to the time immediately before, or the time subsequent to, the Exile, but very different opinions are entertained concerning its immediate associations. Liddon says, “The pilgrim who composed the psalm would have belonged to one of the ten separated tribes, but he had remained, after the general defection, true to the divinely ordered worship at Jerusalem, and this psalm may well have been composed on the occasion of his first visit. We observe in it his delight at the mere prospect of the journey; his ecstasy at finding himself, or at the very thought of finding himself, within the sacred gates; his wonder at the aspect of the city lying before him as he stood, probably, on the Mount

of Olivea; his sense of its past glories and of its present titles to honour—the thrones of David and of Solomon, the sacred temple. But there are presages of coming trouble in the air, and as the psalmist thinks of his brethren in the faith who live within its walls, and of the house of God, which was its prominent and its most precious feature, he offers a prayer for the peace of the holy city which has so large a place in his heart." Perowne says, "The poet is living in the country. As the time of the feast draws near, his friends and neighbours come to him, inviting him to join them in their visit to Jerusalem. It is with this picture that he begins his psalm. He tells us how his heart filled with joy as they bade him come with them to the house of Jehovah." We see the procession starting; we see beaming eyes and happy faces, and hear the music of gladness with which the pilgrims beguile the tediousness of the journey. The next verse transports us at once to the holy city itself. "Our feet have stood within thy gates;" the few words are enough. They have reached their journey's end; they are in the city which they love. Then the poet tells us, first, the impression made upon his mind by her stateliness and her beauty; and next, how there comes crowding upon his memory the scenes of her earlier grandeur, the thought of all she had been as the gathering-place of the tribes of Jehovah, the royal seat of David and of his house. Filled with these thoughts, inspired by these memories, he bursts forth into hearty, fervent prayer—the prayer of one who loved his country as he loved his God, with no common devotion—for the welfare of that city so glorious in her past history, and with which all hopes for the future were so intimately bound up." The "Four Friends" support the suggestion of Ewald, who thinks the psalm may be a blessing on a party of pilgrims, uttered by an old man returned from the Exile, himself unequal to the journey. "The departure of his friends reminds him of the alacrity with which he, too, had once obeyed a similar summons; his spirit is fired by sympathy with their enthusiasm, and he pours forth the praises of that city which from the earliest times had been recognized as the key-stone of the national unity, the civil and religious metropolis of the tribes." We fix attention on the personal pleasure in the public worship of God which the psalmist expresses. For him the sacred *duty* had come to be a sacred *joy*. And we never worship with full acceptance until we have entered into a similar experience. The attitudes of worshippers towards worship may be compared and illustrated.

I. **THERE IS COMPARATIVE NEGLIGENCE.** Presence at Divine service occasionally. Attendance interrupted on the slightest occasions. No evident heart in the service. A duty got through.

II. **THERE IS COMPARATIVE INDIFFERENCE.** There may be fair regularity of attendance, but the "heart divided." The man there, but the heart elsewhere; so the service but a routine, instinct with no mental attention, and no pious feeling. For such Divine service is as though it had not been.

III. **THERE IS COMPARATIVE INTEREST.** That of the intellect and that of the æsthetic faculties, not that of the heart. Sermons may be intellectual treats, and services artistic gratifications, they are not what they should be unless the *whole* man is interested.

IV. **THERE IS SPIRITUAL DELIGHT.** But this must depend on the man's being spiritually quickened, and on having his spiritual tastes cultured. Then he finds his supreme joy in God, and therefore in acts of worship that bring near the sense of God.
—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Religious attachment to places.* "One thing that would have struck a pilgrim to Jerusalem who should approach the city from its north-eastern side was its beauty. The stately buildings erected by Solomon on the south side of the temple area—Solomon's own house of judgment, the house of the Forest of Lebanon, the palaces of the kings of Zion, the palaces of the princes of Judah around it, the circuit of the walls, above all, the temple, with its courts, with its burnished roof, with its lofty gates, with its tower, surrounded as all this was on three sides by deep ravines and olive-clad hills. Possibly the pilgrim had seen Damascus, straggling out amid the beautiful oasis which surrounds it in the plain of the Abana; or he had seen Memphis, a long string of buildings, thickly populated, extending for some twelve or fourteen miles along the west bank of the Nile. Compared with these, Jerusalem had the

compact beauty of a highland fortress, its buildings as seen from below standing out against the clear Syrian sky, and conveying an impression of grace and strength that would long linger in the memory" (Liddon). The attachment of Mohammedans to the sacred city of Mecca is well known, and almost every religion has its special centre, and every god his shrine. The realistic presentation of a divinity in some image involves the localization of his worship to some place. An unfamiliar instance of special interest in sacred places was given by Professor Minas Tcheraz to the "World's Parliament." Speaking of the Armenian Church, he said, "One result of the manifold persecutions has been to strengthen the attachment of the Armenians to the Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator. *Etchmiadzin* has become a word of enchantment, graven in the soul of every Armenian. The Armenians of the mother country bow down with love before this sanctuary, which has already seen 1591 summers. And as regards those who have left their native land, if it is far from their eyes, it is not far from their hearts. A Persian monarch, Shah Abbas, had forcibly transported into his dominion fourteen thousand Armenian families. Like the captive Israelites at the remembrance of Jerusalem, these Armenians always sighed at the recollection of Etchmiadzin. In order to keep them in their new country, Shah Abbas conceived the project of destroying Etchmiadzin, of transporting the stones to Djoulfa (Ispahan), and there constructing a similar convent. He actually transported the central stone of the chief altar, the baptismal fonts, and other important pieces, but the emotion of the Armenians was so great that he was forced to give up his project of vandalism." The sentiment of Christians in relation to the Holy Sepulchre may be compared with the sentiment of the Jews in relation to the holy city and temple. And a subject which may be suggested for consideration is the value and the peril of this association of religion with *places and buildings*.

I. THE VALUE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF RELIGION WITH PLACES. That value lies in the help which material things can be to the spiritual life of beings who have material forms. The wholly spiritual is at present unattainable by us. We are compelled to shape the spiritual in formal words, and to present the spiritual in material images. The sacraments are based on this value of sensible helps to spiritual feeling. And so historic and beautiful church-buildings cultivate reverence; familiar services nourish the spirit of worship; the church we have attended since childhood, or in which we have felt the power of Divine things, readily quickens emotion and renews faith. The hermit who retires even from hallowing associations, does but make new ones for himself, for none of us can afford to neglect the help that sacred places and things may be to us.

II. THE PERIL THAT MAY LIE IN THE ASSOCIATION OF RELIGION WITH PLACES. It is the peril that always lies in the connection of the material with the spiritual. The material is always trying to encroach. In exaggeration we see this in the ignorant heathen who thinks of his image as a god, instead of as a help to the apprehension of God. This subtle peril lies in services, sacred buildings, sacraments, and even formal doctrines. They become absorbing in themselves, not agencies of the spiritual. —R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The emblem of spiritual unity.* "Compact together." Stanley thinks this term indicates the impression made on country visitors by the conformation of the ground on which the city of Jerusalem stood. "Those deep ravines which separate Jerusalem from the rocky plateau of which it forms a part, and acted as its natural defence, must also have determined its natural boundaries. The city, wherever else it spread, could never overleap the valley of the Kedron or of Hinnom. The expression of *compactness* was still more appropriate to the original city, if, as seems probable, the valley of Tyropæon formed in earlier times a fosse within a fosse, shutting in Zion and Moriah into one compact mass, not more than half a mile in breadth." This compactness is taken as a type of the higher national unity. The nation restored from the Captivity was regarded as a *whole* nation, the distinction between Judah and Israel being no longer recognized. The sign of unity was the gathering from all the tribes of worshippers at the Jerusalem feasts. The crowds of worshippers pressed into the area of the temple seemed to be represented by the *compactness* of the city.

I. SPIRITUAL UNITY IS THE UNITY OF A COMMON LIFE. And the real sign of life

is love. Those multitudes of Jews in the temple had one common love, and so one common life. They loved Jerusalem, they loved the God who glorified Jerusalem by his presence. And so the Christian unity is the unity of a common life, whose sign is a common love to the Lord Jesus Christ. Every Christian will join in saying, "Grace be with all them who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth."

II. SPIRITUAL UNITY IS THE UNITY OF A COMMON INTEREST. And that interest for Jews was the honour of Jehovah, the nation's God; it is for Christians the honour of Jehovah-Jesus, the manifested God. How a common interest blends men together is seen in societies, clubs, conferences, etc. It is the secret of the unity of Churches.

III. SPIRITUAL UNITY IS THE HARMONY OF VARIED FORMS. Different-shaped hills made up the unity of Jerusalem. Different-coloured flowers make up the unity of the garden. Different moods in worshippers make up the unity of a religious service. Different mental apprehensions of truth make up the unity of the Christian doctrine. Reunion of mere samenesses is not a pleasing thing either to God or man. We do not care for things cut to an exact pattern, or pressed into one mould. In variety lies charm; and variety is not only consistent with unity, it is a condition of unity if the unity is to go deeper than mere appearances. "That vast society in whose ample bosom the souls of Christian men from generation to generation find shelter and warmth and nourishment, is the reality of which the old Syrian city was a material type. This is the Jerusalem of the Christian Creed, 'I believe in one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.' There may be controversies among Christians as to the exact extent and direction of its walls, just as there are controversies among antiquarians as to the extent and direction of the walls of its material prototype, but as to its place in the thoughts and affections of the true Christian man there should be no room for controversy. No other association of men can have such claims on the heart of a Christian as the Church of God." "The true remedy for disappointment and sorrow on the score of shortcomings and differences within the sacred city is to be found in such prayers as we offer in our holiest service to the Divine Majesty, beseeching him to inspire continually the universal Church with the spirit of truth, unity, and concord."—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The mission of the great feasts.* "The pre-Mosaic festivals were pure nature-festivals. In the changes of the seasons, and of the phenomena of heaven, nature always displays a gracious adaptation to the needs of man, giving him special opportunities and intervals when he may rest for a considerable while from his ordinary toil, and devote himself unreservedly to higher thoughts." The work of Moses in developing, and adapting to a purpose, these nature-festivals needs to be carefully studied. He gave them precisely historical and religious relations and suggestions. The "tribes of Israel" is a phrase belonging to the old times of Israel's glory. (For the three assemblies, see Exod. xxiii. 17; xxxiv. 23; Deut. xvi. 16.) These annual pilgrimages are spoken of as the subject of a Divine testimony or precept to Israel. Without attempting to discuss elaborately the mission of these feasts, there are four things to which attention may be directed.

I. THEY WERE DESIGNED TO PRESERVE THE NATIONAL UNITY. It should be kept in mind that Israel was not so much a tribe as a *set of tribes*, and there was always the danger of jealousies producing divisions. The times of the judges reveal how easily the national life could be broken up. Something in which the unity of the nation could be publicly recognized was absolutely necessary. This something must be in the nature of a command from the central authority; and it must take a regular and systematic form. Compare pilgrimages to Mecca, and even the country fairs and national holidays, which have their distinctly national uses. Show the moral influence of such blendings of people from different parts of the country; and explain that the preservation of the unity of Israel as a nation bore direct relation to the testimony it made for Jehovah among the nations. Statesmen still make it their supreme aim to secure the essential unity of the composite sections that make up the nations they govern. Their mottoes always are, "United we conquer; divided we fall." "Union is strength." A constantly repeated united national act is an important help to preserving national unity.

II. THEY WERE DESIGNED TO PRESERVE THE RELIGIOUS UNITY. Unity is the

key-note of the Jewish religion. It expresses the conception of God. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." So unity must be the idea everywhere and in everything. The primary idea of the religion must get representation in every conceivable form. A multiplicity of conceptions of God is condemned. A variety of altars is regarded as distinctly mischievous. And even an extension of sacrifice and service beyond Jerusalem was not permissible. The whole nation was required to join in the most solemn acts of worship—the Passover, Day of Atonement, etc. Subject to all kinds of disintegrating influences in their tribal associations, the nation was recalled to what may be termed its doctrinal and ecclesiastical unity three times a year. The formal religious unity so jealously preserved for the Jews should not be thought of as requiring our formal imitation. It was the outward and pictorial illustration of that spiritual unity which is the true religious unity, the family unity of those who have one Father.

III. THEY WERE DESIGNED TO CONSERVE THE GREAT NATIONAL TRUST. Israel, or the Abrahamic race, was called out from other nations to be the depositories of those primary truths concerning God which were imperilled by man's being left to his self-development. "To them were committed the oracles of God," which include the threefold conception of God as *one, spiritual, holy*; and only to be served by *righteousness*. This was the national trust; and it must be kept ever before the minds of the people. In the most solemn way they were reminded of it at the great feasts.

IV. THEY WERE DESIGNED TO SANCTIFY THE NATIONAL HOLIDAY-TIMES. The feasts of heathen religions are times of moral licence, only suggested by the drunkenness and immorality of country fairs. Israel must realize that all life and relations are consecrated to God. They must see that the true relations and pleasures of life must be sanctified, must be kept within the holy restraints of religion. Their feast-times were their great holiday-times, and in them joy must blend with self-restraint, and freedom with purity.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*The blending of the civil and religious.* This subject need not be treated controversially. All are agreed that a vital union of the civil and religious, of Church and State, is desirable, and even necessary. There may be differences of opinion as to the formal ways in which such union may be represented. If we look for its realization in the ancient Jewish nation, we must bear in mind that it was based on the theocratic notion. The unseen Jehovah was as truly the Head of the State as he was Head of the Church. Modern difficulty arises from the apparent necessity for making an ordinary human being at once the head of both State and Church. What was possible when men could look past all delegated authorities to one unseen, spiritual, and supreme Being, in whom absolute authority rested, may not be possible under modern conditions. We must fully recover the theocratic sentiment before we can safely blend the civil and religious. Jerusalem was first the civil metropolis before it became the "city of God." It became the religious capital of the nation because it was already the civil capital (Deut. xvii. 8, 9). Israel, as the people of the revelation, was at once a civil society and a Church—the two were not then essentially distinct, as has been and is the case in Christendom.

I. THE CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS ARE THE TWO SIDES OF MAN'S RELATIONS. There is no conceivable antagonism between them *ideally*, whatever there may be *actually*. Man is a being who is set in relations with God and with his fellow-man. And one set of relations is as *right* and as *necessary* as the other. A man's relations with God are the concern of religion. A man's relations with his fellow-man are the business of civil governments. No man can meet his natural obligations by exaggerating the importance of either one of those relations and neglecting the other. No man can be truly religious and neglect his civil duties. And this the apostles clearly taught the early Christians.

II. THE CIVIL AND THE RELIGIOUS CAN BE HARMONIOUSLY BLENDED. They always have been in the most manly and most Christian man. They have been in the representative nation of Israel. They have been in the healthiest and best periods of modern nations. They can be when the sense of God dominates both.—R. T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Peace, prosperity, and prayer.* Emphatically a pilgrim-song, and by

a poet who usually lived in the country. Describes the pleasure felt at invitation to join a party who were going up to one of the feasts. We have the joy and music of the journey; then the impressions on arrival, the first passionate delight of being in the holy city—a city beautifully built, well compacted, adorned with palaces, and strongly fortified. Observe the intense feeling with which Jerusalem was regarded by Jews. Beautifully situated, it was the centre of national and religious interest. Relics of the national feeling remain in the desire of modern Jews to die within its walls, and in the scenes at the “Place of Wailing.” Many of us can understand this. We have a Jerusalem round which our thoughts entwine—the church of our fathers and of our childhood. What associations we have with it! Three words are here connected—Peace, prosperity, and prayer.

I. PEACE VERY LARGELY DEPENDS UPON PROSPERITY. “Peace” is a word with an extensive, beautiful, and suggestive connotation. We, perhaps, cannot fully realize it by any aid of memory; we can only enter into it with the help of the familiar engravings of ‘War’ and ‘Peace.’ It is not possible to overrate the value of peace for nations, or for Churches, or for families. But it largely depends on prosperity. This may be illustrated by the *inward life of the religious man*. Devotion and work are allowed to flag, soul-prosperity fails, and at once doubts and fears come to spoil the soul’s peace. It may be illustrated in the *life of the Church*. When work and zeal and spiritual life—the signs of Church prosperity—fail, then differences are sure to come, roots of bitterness spring up.

II. PROSPERITY VERY LARGELY DEPENDS UPON PRAYER. Show the natural influence of prayer. It lifts into strength the better nature. Show the supernatural influence of prayer in bringing to us spiritual power. Plead for renewal of interest in private and individual prayer; and for more frequent and earnest united prayer. Secret forces are the mighty ones. Men take little count of the atmosphere, but it holds up the clouds. Who is it, then, upholds the prosperity of the Churches? Who are the peace-makers and the peace-keepers? Look below the surface, and you will be sure to see the men and women of faith and *prayer*. They gain for us prosperity, which leads in peace.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The religious value of the patriotic spirit*. “For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will wish thee prosperity.” This may be the expression of a pilgrim on leaving Jerusalem to return to his home. The love of the psalmist for his country was *patriotism*. Perowne says, “The last four verses of the psalm breathe a spirit of the noblest, most unselfish, patriotism. Not for his own sake, but for the sake of his brethren—the people at large—and for the sake of his God, his temple, and his service, he wishes peace to Jerusalem, and calls upon others to wish her peace. With love to Israel and love to Jehovah there is naturally united a warm affection for Jerusalem, a hearty interest in her welfare.

I. THE PATRIOTIC SPIRIT IS KIN WITH THE RELIGIOUS. The moral value of both is the same, and it lies in taking a man out beyond himself, and interesting him in something other than himself. The patriotic spirit interests him in *other* people, the religious spirit interests him in God. They are also alike in their power to arouse and culture emotion, and to inspire self-denying acts.

II. THE PATRIOTIC SPIRIT NOURISHES THE RELIGIOUS. According to the principle laid down by St. John, “If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” It is a delusion that religion claims isolation; it is both expressed and nourished through the temporal. Religion separated from life and its common claims and obligations is but weak and deluding sentiment. Patriotic Moses is pious Moses. The separation of Christian men from political, civil, and social interests is entirely a sectarian delusion. The noblest and the healthiest Christian lives have always been, and are always sure to be, in the truest sense patriotic.

III. THE PATRIOTIC SPIRIT QUALIFIES THE RELIGIOUS. For while it is quite true that man is not all body and human relations, it is also quite true that he is not all soul and soul-relations. The religious side of man’s nature can be exaggerated, and often is. The *unworldly* may become a snare as well as the *worldly*. It is helpful to qualify the heavenly by the duties of the earthly.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*Piety blessing national life.* “Yea, because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek to do thee good” (Prayer-book Version). Piety is seen in the tender, almost pathetic, interest the man has in the temple, where the worship of God is conducted; the temple which is so rich with hallowed associations. That interest fills the psalmist with admiration for the city, and concern for the well-being of those who dwell in it, and the nation of which they all form parts. There is a possible injurious selfishness of piety, which all sectarianism tends to nourish. It localizes and narrows the interest; encourages a kind of tribal jealousy. The sect should never be permitted to take our concern from the nation, whose moral and spiritual well-being should ever be the subject of our prayer and our service. The psalmist “prays for Jerusalem because of Zion. How the Church salts and savours all around it! The presence of Jehovah our God endears to us every place wherein he reveals his glory.”

I. PIETY GOES WITH GOOD CITIZENSHIP, AND THAT BLESSES NATIONAL LIFE. Character is power in city and in national life, and even the higher possibilities of human character belong to the religious life. The peace-loving and peace-seeking citizens are the truly religious. Those who plead for righteousness in business relations, and charity in human relations, are the truly religious. The examples of good citizenship—not of noisy citizenship—are the truly pious. Of old the blessing of a nation was conceived to be its *numbers*; we know better than that now. “Righteousness exalteth a nation,” and righteousness depends on righteous men, and righteous men are they who have the fear and love of God before their eyes. The heavenly citizens are the best earthly ones.

II. PIETY GOES WITH SACRIFICING MINISTRY, AND THAT BLESSES NATIONAL LIFE. It should never be lost sight of that the two key-notes of Christianity are righteousness and service. A Christian cannot be content without doing good. And so the Christian citizen is an *active force for good*. Wherever he is, he is doing some good, lifting some burden, helping some struggler, and his ministry therefore becomes a national benediction.—R. T.

Vers. 1—9.—*Worship.* “I was glad when they said unto me,” etc. This beautiful ode is supposed to have been by one dwelling in the country, who had been invited to join, and had joined, a company of pilgrims on their way to one of the feasts at Jerusalem; on his return, this ode embodied the sentiments that had been inspired.

I. THE JOY OF WORSHIP. *The delight of anticipation.* (Ver. 1.) The brooding gladness which dwells on some anticipated great occasion. His imagination would draw pictures of Jerusalem and the temple on the way thither, and all their sacred historical and religious associations; as we try to think of heaven and of the scenes in which our nature shall be perfected.

II. THE JOY OF RETROSPECTION. (Vers. 2—5.) 1. *He remembers with what awe and delight he was spell-bound within the gates of the city and temple.* Think how a Mohammedan would feel at Mecca, or a Roman Catholic at St. Peter's in Rome, or a modern Christian in visiting Calvary, or Bethlehem, or the sepulchre where Christ lay. But the awe and delight of spiritual worship transcend all the emotions inspired by hallowed places—“in spirit and in truth.” 2. *He was greatly moved by the sight of the stateliness and beauty of the city, which had been rebuilt after the Exile.* (Ver. 3.) The restoration of a national structure, or of the nation itself after forfeiting its glory, or of a human life and character after loss and shame, greatly moves all sympathetic minds. The transition from darkness into light is very great. 3. *The tribes gathered on such occasions, came up in obedience to the Divine law, to worship God with a national thanksgiving.* (Ver. 4.) The author of the psalm was a grateful participant in the worship. The law of grateful worship is the law of all reasonable spiritual beings, the very necessity of their nature, and therefore full of delights. 4. *The “thrones of judgment” for the civil law were under the shadow of the throne of mercy, or “the mercy-seat.”* The supreme tribunal was to be in the same place as the sanctuary (Deut. xvii. 8, 9). *Law and mercy*, both in God and in the best man, are always closely related. 5. *The highest result of true worship is to produce the spirit of peace.* (Vers. 6—9.) Between God and man, among nations and Churches, and between man and man.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXIII.

Ver. 1.—*Unto thee lift I up mine eyes* (comp. Ps. cxxi. 1, where the psalmist “lifted up his eyes” to God’s dwelling-place). Now the expression is bolder. The eyes are lifted up to God himself. *Oh thou that dwellest in the heavens* (comp. Ps. ii. 4; xi. 4; Isa. lviii. 15; lvi. 1).

Ver. 2.—*Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters. Watch, i.e., for the slightest sign that he may give of his will.* Such signs were usually given by some movement of the “hand.” And as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress. Masters were waited on by male slaves; their wives by handmaids—both equally anxious to do their will, and therefore equally watchful of all the signs that indicated it. *So our eyes wait upon the*

Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us. We wait for the least sign that he is about to help and deliver us.

Ver. 3.—*Have mercy upon us, O Lord; have mercy upon us.* The cry is repeated for greater emphasis. *For we are exceedingly filled with contempt.* This expression can scarcely be said to fix the date of the psalm, since hatred and contempt were the usual feelings wherewith the Jews were regarded by their neighbours. But the time of Nehemiah would certainly be no unsuitable date (see Neh. iv. 4).

Ver. 4.—*Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease; i.e. the careless and irreligious* (comp. Isa. xxxii. 9, 11; Amos vi. 1). And with the contempt of the proud. This clause is exegetical of the last, not additional. Translate, *the scorning of those that are at ease—the contempt of the proud.*

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Our refuge in trouble.* Beside and beyond the ordinary cares and vexations of this present time, there are—

I. TIMES OF PECULIAR TRIAL. It may be (1) the nation that has to pass through this period; e.g. Israel in Egypt, and again the Jews in Babylon; or, in modern times, Poland or the Italian Duchies, or the kingdom of the Two Sicilies; or it may be (2) the Church of Christ, understanding by this either the large aggregate community, or the body of believing men and women meeting in one place (e.g. the Church at Philippi, the Church at Thessalonica); or it may be (3) the individual man as he goes on his way through mortal life. Hard and bitter trial may come in one or more of many ways; but the text points to that of oppression, the cruel treatment of the weaker by the stronger. This may come in the form of positive ill treatment—of imprisonment, of “despoiling of goods,” of exile, of physical violence. But that which was in the psalmist’s mind, and that which is most likely to be included in our experience, is contemptuous disregard, an arrogant assumption of superiority. We may find ourselves placed under those of whom we feel that they have missed their way, and are in the darkness of error, while they are denouncing us as heretics; or those of whom we feel that they are a very long way from wisdom and worth, while they are treating us with disdain as if we were the enemies of Christ; or of those who are superciliously ridiculing our most sacred convictions, though they have no other or better proof of the rightness of their own creed than that it is the faith of a majority. And if we have to bear this “contempt of the proud” from day to day, if it is as the dropping of water upon the stone, which wears out the hardest substance, we may find it to be all but intolerable; we may not only wince, but writhe under it; our soul may be “exceedingly filled” with the scorning of those that are at ease. Whither, then, shall we turn? If there be no escape from it, as there often is not, we must find—

II. OUR REFUGE IN GOD. (Vers. 1, 2.) When we have vainly looked around for help from man, “we lift up our eyes” to God—to him that “dwelleth in the heavens.” 1. We recognize the fact that he has power to deliver us. 2. We believe that, in his Divine wisdom, he can interpose on our behalf without any disturbance of his system of Divine government. 3. We are sure that our suffering is not a matter of indifference to his heart, and that our cry enters his ear. 4. We must not be impatient or distrustful if the time or method of our choice should not prove to be his chosen time or way of deliverance. 5. We do well to continue our prayer for relief “until he have pity upon

us" and rescue us. 6. Meantime we should (1) let our trouble draw us nearer to our Divine Friend in all hallowed fellowship; (2) loosen our tie to this present world; (3) enable us to give to all that witness our course another illustration that the upholding grace of God can triumph over the enmity and cruelty of man.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1-4.—"*Unto thee lift I up mine eyes.*" These psalms are called "Songs of Degrees." For some thought that they were sung on the steps that led from one court to another in the temple of the Lord, and so they were called the songs of degrees, or steps. But though this explanation has been long abandoned, nevertheless, in these psalms, thus far, there has been an ascent as from step to step. See the sadness of the first of them (Ps. cxx.). That rises to trust in the blessed keeping of God. That to joy and delight in drawing near to the house of God. Now this rises higher still, and lifts up its eyes unto God himself. The psalm reveals to us much concerning the writer.

I. HE IS A MAN WHO BELIEVES IN GOD. God is as real to him as, and more than, any fellow-man could be. The atheistic doubts or the polytheistic imaginations come not near him: he is so sure that God is, that he turns his eyes to the heavens where he dwelt, as when he was speaking to a fellow-man he would turn his eyes to him. Strong faith in God is the only power which will cause any of us to lift up our eyes as does the psalmist here.

II. A MAN WHO LONGED AFTER GOD. For in this uplifted eye the longing look is clearly traceable. It is not merely that he believes that God is, but also that he is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Jas. i.), and therefore he will diligently seek him.

III. HE IS A MAN OF HUMBLE HEART. He likens himself to a slave watching for the beckoning of his master's hand, to know what he would have done. Orientals do not speak to their attendant servants, as we do, but by beckoning and gesture they make known their will. The servants humbly watch and wait, continuously, patiently, and attentively, that they may miss no movement of the master's or mistress's hand which will signify their will. So does the psalmist wait, thus humbly, patiently, attentively, and in this case, it should seem, beseechingly, for the help needed.

IV. HIS REFUGE UNDER DEEPEST DISTRESS IS IN GOD. (Ver. 3.) His lot was hard to bear, almost unbearable; but he could and did turn to God. May we not see Christ in this psalm? Let it tell of ourselves.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Our uplook to God.* This is the characteristic possibility for humanity. The cattle have no uplooking eyes, and no yearning hearts to find expression by uplooking eyes. Man can look up, pierce the veil of sense, and see the unseen, and realize relations with the Divine. Indeed, he is not himself until he does. But to get the fixed uplook often is, and may well be, the issue of a lifelong moral discipline. The need for turning to God comes out of distressed earthly conditions. The restored exiles in Jerusalem were full of anxieties and perplexities; they could get no heart-rest by the worrying, which is represented by "looking down." They found it by looking up and away to the steadfast heavens—to him "that sitteth in the heavens." "The uplifted eyes naturally and instinctively represent the state of heart which fixes desire, hope, confidence, and expectation upon the Lord." Manton says, "The lifting up the eyes implies faith and confident persuasion that God is ready and willing to help us. The very lifting up of the bodily eyes towards heaven is an expression of this inward trust." R. Holdsworth gives the following outline: There are many testimonies in the lifting up of the eyes to heaven. 1. It is the testimony of a believing, humble heart. Neither infidelity nor pride ever carries a man above the earth. 2. It is the testimony of an obedient heart. A man that lifts his eye up to God acknowledgeth this much, "Lord, I am thy servant." 3. It is the testimony of a thankful heart; acknowledging that every good blessing, every perfect gift, is from the hand of God. 4. The testimony of a heavenly heart. He that lifts up his eyes to heaven acknowledgeth that he is weary of the earth; his heart is not there; his hope and desire are above.

5. It is the testimony of a devout heart. There is no part of the body besides the tongue that is so great an agent in prayer as the eye.

I. THE UPLOOK TO GOD MAY BE BUT OCCASIONAL. And that is so far well. Man must be busy with earthly things; but his heart should be as a metal spring *tied down*. It flies upward at every instant of release.

II. THE UPLOOK TO GOD MAY BE FIXED AND PERMANENT. A set of the eyes, because there is a set of the heart. The fixed level of human eyes, and of soul-eyes, varies most remarkably.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Watching for Divine favour and direction.* In the East orders are rarely given to an attendant in words, but commonly by signs. These are often so slight as to escape notice unless the eyes of the servants are kept fixed on the master or mistress. When waiting upon his master, the servant stands upon the farthest edge of the raised platform, having left his shoes at the door; his hands are folded, and rest upon the centre of his girdle; and he watches closely every movement of his master, prompt to attend to all his wants, which are expressed by a nod or a sign. He fills his pipe and hands him his coffee; he sets his food before him, and it is his special duty to “pour water on his hands” to wash. Should he happen to be missing when wanted, his master will summon him by clapping his hands so effectually that the sound is heard throughout the house, especially as the doors and windows generally stand open (Lennep). Kimchi suggests that the cry for mercy intimates that the slave is regarded as out of the master's favour, and anxiously watching for signs of returning acceptance. The simile suggests that there should be a threefold spirit in our watching for and waiting upon God.

I. THE SPIRIT OF ATTENTION. There is a servant-work which is merely a listless and careless doing of what we are told to do. But that kind of service brings no credit to master or servant. There is a servant-work which involves the union of all our powers, and the active energy and interest of our minds. That service honours both master and servant. The man is alive. Vitality and vigour show themselves in attention.

II. THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE. The point of obedience which may gain special illustration is its taking the servant beyond himself, and filling him with concern for the will and well-being of another, even his master. True service therefore becomes our finest training in unselfishness. It is constant help toward losing ourselves in the interest of another. And this at the call of high principle and the sense of duty. Unselfishness is a main foundation of noble character.

III. THE SPIRIT OF HUMILITY. A man may *have* to take a servant's place; and may keep his *self-confidence* while in it. A man may *love* to take a servant's place; then he expresses humility and dependence in it, and nourishes humility and dependence by it. This is sublimely true of our service to Christ.—R. T.

Vers. 3, 4.—*Contempt a sore trial.* The returned exiles found the contemptuous treatment of their neighbours the hardest thing to bear. Contempt is always hard to bear; but it is hardest to bear when we have an inward and painful conviction that we are so weak and poor that the contempt is in no way unreasonable. Those are just the times when we want a kindly word and a sign of confidence and hope, and then we feel most deeply if, instead, we are scorned, made a laughing-stock, and disheartened. That was the case with our Divine Lord. On the cross he needed the sign of love and word of sympathy; instead he had to bear the scorn and contempt which the psalmist so suggestively anticipated for him (Ps. xxii. 6—8). The returned exiles had a similar experience. In their time of frailty a little neighbourly help would have been so much to them. It would have given them quietness, security, and the cheer of sympathy. Instead of this, contempt humbled them, made them anxious, plucked out hopefulness, and filled them with fear. Contempt is a moral atmosphere in which nothing good or beautiful ever grew yet, or ever will grow. Hope the best of men, and you help them. Despise them and expect failure for them, and you crush them.

I. CONTEMPT, WHEN IT IS UNREASONABLE, CAN BE BORNE. It is sometimes a mere product of malice and envy. There is no real ground for it, and we may know that there is no ground. We may properly cherish the consciousness of our power and

worth; and then we can appraise the contempt of the envious at its true value. It cannot hurt us. The *contempt* is weak, it is not *we* who are weak. And the contempt will fail, not we. "What can harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?" The world despises the godly. It is no matter; the *future* is with the godly.

II. CONTEMPT, WHEN IT IS REASONABLE, IS PAINFULLY DEPRESSING. Because it exaggerates our own sense of weakness, and so still further weakens us. Our sense of disability and insufficiency is oftentimes a great distress to us, and makes the struggle of life too hard for us. Precisely what we need is some sign of confidence, some kindly encouraging word, the cheer of some one who can see things more hopefully than we can. Consequently, we feel all the more deeply when our weakness is only despised; we hear loud and confident prophecies of our speedy failure, and men raise the laugh which crushes hearts more than open scorn. Then what can we do but turn from man to God?—R. T.

Vers. 1—4.—*The ultimate Refuge.* "Unto thee lift I up mine eyes," etc. "This psalm," says J. J. S. Perowne, "is either the sigh of the exile towards the close of the Captivity, looking in faith and patience for the deliverance which he hoped was now at hand; or the sigh of those who, having returned, were still exposed to the scorn and contempt of the Samaritans and others who harassed and insulted the Jews." God was their Refuge from such men, as *he is the ultimate Refuge* from all the ills and evils of this life.

I. THE PSALMIST FINDS HOPE IN GOD'S SUPREMACY. Enthroned in the heavens—the Judge of all controversies among his creatures, who will vindicate the righteous cause. Greatest power of service to humanity under his control.

II. THE GRACIOUS MERCY OF GOD IS HIS ALL-SUFFICIENT REFUGE FROM THE CONTEMPT AND PERSECUTION OF MAN.

III. SENSE OF DEPENDENCE UPON GOD NECESSARY TO REALIZE HIS HELP. As the lower must always depend on the higher.

IV. THE VISION AND CONTEMPLATION OF GOD NECESSARY TO THE SENSE OF DEPENDENCE. Looking away from man up to God, as the servant studies the face of his master in order to read his duty.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXIV.

"A FRESH, bright lyric" (Oheyne), composed of two stanzas—the first part (vers. 1—5) recounting a danger and a deliverance; the second (vers. 6—8), praising God for the latter. This is another of the psalms in this "Little Psalter," ascribed by its title to David. There is nothing in the style, or in the contents, that is inconsistent with the ascription.

Ver. 1.—If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Israel say; rather, *now let Israel say* (Kay, Cheyne, Revised Version).

Ver. 2.—If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us. The "rising" intended may have been that of Saul and his aiders and abettors, or that of the Ammonites and Syrians (2 Sam. x. 6—8), or that of Absalom and his partisans (2 Sam. xv. 2—13).

Ver. 3.—Then they had swallowed us up quick; or, "alive." A common expression

for sudden and complete destruction (comp. Ps. lvi. 2; lvii. 3; Prov. i. 12; Lam. ii. 2, 5, 8, etc.). When their wrath was kindled against us; or, "blazed out against us." The comparison of anger to fire is an almost universal commonplace.

Ver. 4.—Then the waters had overwhelmed us. A sudden and startling change of metaphor. In the quick transition of Oriental thought, the fire becomes a flood—an irresistible torrent-stream, carrying all before it (comp. Ps. xviii. 4; cxliv. 7). The stream had gone over our soul; i.e. "had mounted up over our heads, and stifled our breath of life."

Ver. 5.—Then the proud waters had gone over our soul. "Proud" of effecting our destruction.

Ver. 6.—Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. We are not devoured—we are not "swallowed up"—thanks to the interposition of the merciful and gracious Lord, to whom therefore praise and blessing are due.

Ver. 7.—Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers (comp. Ps. xci.

3; cxi. 5; cxli. 10). Another metaphor. We have been like birds taken in the "snare," or net, of a fowler. But now we are escaped—not, however, of our own strength or of our own cleverness. The snare is broken for us by God's providence, and so we are escaped.

Ver. 8.—Our help is in the Name of the Lord. "Our help is," and has always been, "in the Name"—i.e. in the manifested might—"of the Lord." It is he that has been "on our side," that has "helped" us, saved us, and delivered us. Who made heaven and earth (comp. Ps. cxxi. 2; cxxxiv. 3).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Divine deliverance.* The spirit which breathes in this psalm is one of keen thankfulness. Nothing calls out so deep and strong a sense of indebtedness to God (or to man) as a consciousness that we owe to him an escape from a great calamity. We bless the Lord with the most fervent gratitude as we realize that he has healed our disease and redeemed our life from destruction (Ps. ciii. 1—4). We ought to be mindful of all his benefits, and accept them as they come, one after another, as gifts from his gracious hand. We should cherish a still stronger and profounder sense of his mercy to us in the one supreme kindness shown us in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, in which we have our share. But that which most vividly impresses us is the deliverance which, in different ways and at various times, he has wrought for us—saving our life, preserving our character, restoring our freedom.

I. TWO GREAT EVILS FROM WHICH WE MAY NEED, AND MAY HAVE, DELIVERANCE.

1. *Oppression.* Such as Israel endured under Pharaoh; such as Judah was threatened with when Sennacherib came up against Jerusalem; such as the Jews suffered under Antiochus; such as England faced and feared when the Armada left the shores of Spain; such as, in our own individual life, we may experience at the hand of some one who has us at his mercy and is disposed to play the tyrant. A human spirit is sometimes exposed to a veritable storm of cruelty; there are "overwhelming waters" of suffering to pass under; the stream goes over the soul (ver. 4). Then nothing but Divine succour avails to save from complete collapse; except the Lord show himself to be on our side by manifestations of his power, by the exercise of his goodness and his grace, we must break down utterly. But God is on our side. He will not forsake his children in the time of their distress. (1) He will rescue us, in his own time, from the power that oppresses us, and set us free, placing "our feet in a large room;" or, (2) he will so effectually sustain us that we shall hold up our head in the midst of all our afflictions (see Isa. xlii. 2). 2. *Temptation.* The psalmist speaks of snares (ver. 7) and of escaping from the fowler's hand. As we pass through life there are many of these that have to be avoided; and it may be that in our unwisdom we permit ourselves to be partially ensnared; we may allow our foot to be taken in the toils of unbelief, or of intemperance, or of impurity, or of covetousness, or of pride, or of vanity, or of extravagance and dishonesty. We may be in very serious danger of losing everything that is most precious—of parting, not only with our reputation, but with the very life of our life, with our moral and spiritual integrity. But God, in his abounding grace, interposes on our behalf. Directly or indirectly, by the immediate action of his Spirit on our spirit, or through some instrumentality, he arouses us, shows us the peril in which we stand, breaks the snare in which our foot is taken, and sets us free. Then comes—

II. *DEEP THANKFULNESS OF HEART.* For, however great was the first gift of life, and however great the gift of the new life in Christ Jesus, this Divine deliverance is a mercy that may well be compared with these, and may well fill our mouth with song and our life with praise. Then, too, must come—

III. *WATCHFULNESS UNTO PRAYER,* constantly and carefully maintained.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*But for the Lord.* The psalm is a contemplation of the distress that must have come upon God's people but for the Lord's timely help.

1. *IT IS THE LANGUAGE OF ISRAEL'S GRATITUDE.* We cannot tell what were the

exact circumstances which are referred to; but many times in Israel's history had there been the threatening of overwhelming calamity. In the old times, in Egypt, in the wilderness, in Judah and Jerusalem, as during the invasion of Sennacherib, when they were carried off to captivity, and during that captivity (see the Book of Esther), Israel had abundant cause for such grateful acknowledgments as we find here. But the special circumstances we do not and cannot know; and this is well, for now we are left free to make application of them to any out of the many like circumstances which from time to time recur in the histories of nations, Churches, and individual souls.

II. IT IS THAT OF REDEEMED HUMANITY. Mankind everywhere, as well as the redeemed in heaven, might well render praise like this. For the whole human race was in dire peril. When men turned out so ill, as they did and still do, so that the Lord repented that he had made man, wherefore should God have preserved any of them alive? Their guilt, their wickedness, their subjection to the spirit of evil,—these were ready to swallow the race of man up quick. The might and malice of the devil were eager for the work. Why should it not have been? And the alone answer is—the love of God (John iii. 16). And still to-day we often all but despair of humanity; the whole world, save a minute fraction, yet lieth in wickedness, dead in trespasses and sins, rushing ruinwards with headlong speed. But yet the race is spared, for the Lord is on our side. This is the gospel of man. God would not have created us had it not been true.

III. IT MAY WELL BE THAT OF THE CHURCH OF GOD. For often and often in her history has it seemed as if there were but a step betwixt her and death. See that boat on the Lake of Galilee in the midnight storm: it contains the whole of the disciples and Jesus, and he asleep. One wave more, and they would all go to the bottom, swallowed up quick, the proud waters had gone over their soul (ver. 3). But that wave never came. And so has it been again and again with the Church of God. Persecution for three long centuries did its worst; false doctrine has many times, from the earlier centuries down to the present, threatened to submerge the faith we held; worse still, corruption, vile and loathsome, has fastened on the life of the Church, so that religion has been hateful in men's esteem, as it was in the pre-Reformation ages. But the heart of the Church has remained sound amid all; the Lord was on her side, and so she has escaped as a bird, etc. (ver. 7).

IV. NATIONS, TOO, MAY ADOPT THIS LANGUAGE. See the times of the Armada: how fearful the peril seemed then! And so in the days of the French Revolution, when the colossal power of Napoleon threatened the life of every independent nation.

V. AND HOW OFTEN INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS HAVE HAD CAUSE THUS TO SPEAK! In regard to the power of temptation, they have been all but gone, their feet well-nigh slipped. But the Lord was on their side. So in regard to the malice of enemies, and the cruel power of disaster and distress.

CONCLUSION. If the Lord has been thus on our side—as he has—we will, by his grace, be evermore on his.—S. C.

Ver. 7.—*The soul's birdlike experiences.* We have a number of objects presented to us in this verse.

I. THE SOUL AS A BIRD. We are often bidden consider the birds who, "without barn or storehouse, are fed," so that from them we may learn the lesson of trust. Even the ravens may teach us that. But the psalmist here bids us think of birds in perpetual peril of ensnarement, and actually taken, but, by rare good fortune, finding escape. That is the image of the soul which he here pictures. How true it is perpetual peril is our lot!

II. THE SNARES FOR THE SOUL. 1. *How many there are!* And they are everywhere, and especially where we least expect them. Temptations to sin, to misbelief, to unbelief, to compromise with the world, to doubt, to pride, and to many other such things. 2. *And the end and aim of them all is the same*—to separate the soul from God, and so to destroy it. 3. *And these snares are of various kinds.* Sometimes the soul is captured by means of another that seems to be at liberty. A man who has a religious reputation, is much thought of by many—he is used to tempt, to decoy, others astray. Sometimes, indeed always, there is some attraction the force of which we cannot help feeling. And these baits are varied according to the character of each soul.

What will attract one will not another. Satan knows when to have us—where and how we are most open to his assaults. What need we have to obey our Lord's words, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation"!

III. THE FOWLER THAT SEEKS TO ENTRAP THE SOUL. It is he whom the Bible calls Satan. We dare not ignore his existence or his power. Our Lord had just come from fierce encounter with him, and bids us pray, "Deliver us from the evil one." Remember Christ has destroyed the works of the devil.

IV. THE CAPTURE OF SOULS. The soul of the psalmist knew this bitter experience, as have thousands more. Some subtle lure, some crafty bait, has wrought the harm. How many such ensnared souls we meet with every day!

V. BUT THE SNARE MAY BE BROKEN. This too has often occurred. Some powerful word, some startling providence, some gracious working of the Spirit of God, has led to it.

VI. THE JOY OF ESCAPE. Are we free? From the condemnation of the Law, the power of sin, the fear of sorrow and death, are we free? Then praise God, and seek to get others free. "I would say again to you netted ones—you that are really caught in the trap and held fast, 'Oh, that the Lord would come at once and set you free!' I think he will—yea, I am sure that he will if you cry to him to do so. I have heard of a sailor who had been in prison, that, after his release, he had money in his pocket, and going over London Bridge he saw a man selling birds—thrushes, larks, and so on. 'What do you want for that lot?' said Jack. I forget how much it was, but Jack found the money; and as soon as the birds were his he opened the door and let them all fly away. The man called out, 'Whatever did you buy those birds for, and then let them all fly away?' 'Oh,' said the sailor, 'if you had been in prison, as I have, you would be sure to set everything free you could get a-hold of.' You and I ought to display the same kind of feeling towards all bonded souls. I am sure that the Lord Jesus Christ is more tender-hearted than we are; and therefore he will certainly come and set free all prisoners who beg him to open their cage-doors. He is the great Emancipator; show him your bonds, and beg for liberty, and he will grant it you" (C. H. Spurgeon).—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Jehovah* for us. "The Lord who was on our side." It is well to bear in mind that, usually, in the Old Testament, the term "the Lord" would be better rendered "*Jehovah*," the covenant name for God. Many passages in which the term occurs gain new force when distinctly associated with the Israelite covenant. The tone of this psalm is altogether different from that of the preceding one. The historical association is uncertain. Taking the psalm as a whole, it would seem to be a rejoicing of the exiles in Babylon when the proclamation of Cyrus permitted them to return to their native land. But this association does not easily explain the precise figure of the *snare* in ver. 7. It is better to keep the psalms of degrees associated with the life of the returned exiles in Jerusalem, and to find the suggestion of the figures in *their* particular experiences.

I. THE KEY-NOTE OF THE ISRAELITE HISTORY. "The Lord is on our side." Another psalmist gives it thus: "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our Refuge." The names of God imply the appropriation of God to themselves by Israel, "*Jehovah-Jireh*," "*Jehovah* of hosts," "*Jehovah Tsidkenu*," etc. (compare *Ebenezer*). Note the one supreme lesson learned by the successes and failures of their wilderness-experiences. They were strong when God was *with* them. Failure came when God hid his face from them; woe came when they hid their faces from God. The symbol of the presence was the *Shechinah*-glory in the holy of holies; but we should not fail to see that the tabernacle and temple did but represent *the people*; and God's glory in them did but represent his abiding presence with *his people*. But it should further be noticed that throughout the Israelite history it is *Jehovah*, the covenant God, who is with them; and that his keeping with them must be seen as his faithfulness to his covenant-pledge. It is a faithfulness which should *inspire* faithfulness.

II. THE KEY-NOTE OF THE ISRAELITE HOPE. The national life had always been in the special Divine care, and it always would. The one holy God, who could only be served in righteousness, whose uniqueness is gathered up into the term "*Jehovah*," had

chosen this people for his inheritance. Would, then, the nation abide even through what seemed an overwhelming discipline? Was there a certain future for the nation, though now it lay low under the shadows? The answer is this—"The Lord is on its side."—R. T.

Vers. 2—4.—*Jehovah's effective resistance.* Perowne thinks that the figures of these verses remind of the earlier deliverance from Egypt. "The Egyptians did 'rise up' against them. Pharaoh and his chariots and his horsemen followed hard after them, and did seem as if about to swallow them up, when they were entangled in the wilderness. The waves of the Red Sea overwhelming their enemies might have suggested naturally the figure by which the might of those enemies was itself compared to swelling waters." An estimate of the *tone* of the psalm, however, leads us to recognize *suddenness* as the characteristic of the calamity indicated. The waters suggested are rather those of a sudden mountain flood raging down one of the dried wadies, carrying all before it, but passing as swiftly as it came—the "spate" or "scath" of mountain districts. If the sea is to be thought of, it is as suddenly swept up by high tide and strong wind, and lunging furiously against the rocks, so long as the strength of the tide continues. We may therefore more hopefully look at the experiences of the returned exiles, and find that the calamity in the mind of the psalmist was the sudden, fanatical, and desperate outburst of enmity on the part of Sanballat and his associates. That was a temporary trouble, but it was very intense, and almost overbearing and overwhelming while it lasted.

I. JEHOVAH'S RESISTANCE MAY BE A PERMISSION. It need not be confounded with a prevention. God does not always save men by taking their enemies, or the schemes of their enemies, away. He does not turn back the floods. He lets them flow on just the same. He may not even remove the feeling and the fear which the floods produce. We should never lose the confidence that, if our enemies are in the floods, God is much more in the floods. They may seem to work our enemy's purpose; they really do work out God's purpose. Divine permissions are the signs of Divine wisdom and love. And this St. Paul had to learn.

II. JEHOVAH'S RESISTANCE MAY BE A PRESERVATION. Only the shakable, ill-founded things are swept down by the mountain spate. The house founded on the rock makes effective resistance. And that is what God did for the returned exiles—held them safe through that time of strain and storm. God in our circumstances we often find it very difficult to trace; God *for us* we may always see clearly; and that guarantees preservation.—R. T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*God's delivering ways.* "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler." The enmity of Sanballat and his party found expression in secret schemes, which may well be likened to the "snare of the fowler." The account of the peril is given in Neh. vi. The violence of the wild beast is illustrated by the threatenings of Neh. iv.; the scheming of the hunter by Neh. vi. Speaking of Tobiah, Stanley says, "He it was who had constant intrigues with the disaffected party within the walls." Possibly Sanballat may represent the more open and violent ways of the wild beast, and Tobiah the more secretly scheming ways of the hunter. The "bird" here is a "little bird," such as a sparrow. McMichael vividly presents this figure. "The fowler has prepared his net in a skilful manner. The bird enters it, unconscious of danger; the net is thrown over it, and in an instant its liberty is lost. There it lies, the poor bird, its little heart throbbing wildly, and its little wings beating vainly against the net. It is completely at the mercy of the fowler, and escape is impossible. But again the Lord appears, and his presence is safety. He goes up to the net, lifts it from the ground; the bird flies out, lights on a neighbouring tree, and sings among the branches. 'Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler.' God rescues his people from the craft and subtlety of their enemies, as he does from their open violence." The point which is set forth prominently by the figure of the snare is, that God often delivers his people by removing obstacles out of their way, and giving them the *opportunity* of delivering themselves.

I. GOD DELIVERING BY PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES. The figure does not show a hand taking the bird from under the net, but breaking the net, making a hole in it, of

which the bird can take advantage. The rescue from Egypt is the type of God's deliverances. God removed the obstacle of the sea; but Israel had to take advantage of this, and show promptitude and energy in crossing. It may sometimes be best for God to do the whole redemptive work, but usually he does so much only as sets us free to do. In our deliverances we have to be "co-workers together with God." God saves man without humiliating or enfeebling him.

II. OUR WORK IS RESPONDING TO THE OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED. As the ensnared bird does. The great deliverance from sin is no rescue without our wills. It is the lifting off us our bonds, and so leaving us free to live the life of righteousness. We must respond to the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*What God has done, God can do.* The stamp of "impossible" cannot rest upon anything if we are able to say concerning it, "It has been done." And that we are able to say concerning every kind of strain or calamity that "turns up" in a religious experience. "There is no temptation ever overtakes us but such as is common to man," and God has had to deal with just such things—and even with just such things in relation to just such people—before now.

I. WHAT GOD HAS DONE. 1. Compassed all the features and forms of the *common-place* of life. It is necessary to dwell on this, because of the frail human disposition to separate the thought of God from the *little*, and associate him only with the *great*. But life is in the main commonplace, ordinary, little. And we need to realize that God has had direct association with absolutely everything that can come into the common-place of life. In dealing with the first race of men, it may reverently be observed that God had no *experience* of what men would be and do, to guide his ways with them. Experience was in the making. It is made now. Enough generations of men in diversified relations have passed to cover the whole circle of human possibilities. Man can only repeat himself; he never surprises God. And God has adjusted his gracious help and guidance to every kind of ordinary human circumstance and need. Therefore is the Bible given to us so largely in the biographical form. We are to trace the working of God in lives that are essentially like our own. 2. *Efficiently adapted his grace to the unusual of life.* There is perhaps, strictly speaking, no *unusual* in life. From the Divine point of view there are no exigencies, no surprises. "The thing which is bath already been." But for instructive purposes we may point out that the unusual, though it may not be in *things*, may be in the *relation of things to persons*. God has to deal with the disposition of each one, and with the effect of events on each disposition. But here again we may see that his experience of adjustments is so extensive that a new and bewildering set of complications *for him* is inconceivable.

II. WHAT GOD CAN DO. Be to us the Help which he has always been to his people. Do for us what he has always done for his people. What *has* he done in *our* lives? That he can still do. What has he done in the lives of *others*? That he can do in our lives if need be. What has he done in the vicissitudes of the ages? That he can do for our age and for us. We are "not straitened in God," seeing that he can "supply all our need."—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The help of the Divine Name.* It is important to keep in view the condition and anxieties of the returned exiles. The previous psalm brought before us their distresses through the irritating conduct of neighbour enemies. It presented to us their attitude while the trouble was on—they were patiently waiting on God. This psalm is a joy-song, sung when they are safely through the time of strain. They joy in God who has so safely brought them through; and this leads to the expression of confidence in God concerning whatever may have to be in the future. As a rule, poetical figures avoid minute descriptions of trouble. They are satisfied with suggesting them. The figures of this psalm recall to mind the Egyptian deliverance. The exiles were fond of referring to it, and comparing their experience with it. Note (1) a sudden and overwhelming peril; (2) the figure of the swollen stream; (3) the figure of the beast of prey; (4) the figure of the spread snare. Indicate what of the historical conditions of the exiles is suggested by these figures. The point of the psalm is given in the sentence, "The Lord was on our side." That alone could account to them for their enemies' failure, and their triumph. And that conviction fixes for them the

resolve, that in the Name of Jehovah they will ever trust. Help in a *name*! Why not say, help in *God*? Explain that the Jews had a special name for God, of which they were profoundly jealous. And they were in a covenant which was sealed with that special name. In Scripture it is usual to find a person's attributes or characteristics gathered up into and expressed by a *name* (see names of Adam's sons, Jacob, etc.). Notice some of the names for God. 1. *Creator*; general relation to everything. 2. *El Shaddai*; the Almighty One. 3. *Jehovah*; the self-existent One. He *is*; that is all you can say about him. 4. God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; known in actual daily relationships. 5. *Jehovah Tsidkenu*; the Lord our Righteousness, or the Ideal for us of moral perfection. 6. *The Faithful Promiser*; the trustworthy One, as proved by human experience. It is manifest what confidence of help we may have as we dwell on any of these names of God. Started on this line of thought, we inquire whether we should not show a fuller confidence in the help of God, who is revealed to us, in *his Father-name*, through the infinite winsomeness of the Divine Sonship of Jesus.—R. T.

Vers. 1—8.—*The believer's safeguard.* "If Jehovah had not been on our side," etc. The last psalm was the sigh of an exile in Babylon waiting upon God for deliverance. This psalm is the joyful acknowledgment that the deliverance has been accomplished. The next (cxxxv.) describes the safety of the exiles restored to their native land, and girt round by the protection of Jehovah.

I. GOD IS ON OUR SIDE WHEN HE SEEMS MOST AGAINST US. As he was on the side of the Israelites both in delivering them over to the Captivity and in breaking their bonds. Punishment and pardon have the same end in view—the *redemption* of the sinner.

II. GOD IS ON OUR SIDE WHEN MEN ARE MOST AGAINST US. When the angry and destructive passions of men most threaten to overwhelm us (vers. 2—5). He takes our side always inwardly, if not always outwardly. God is always on the side of the weakest, to help them to become strong.

III. GOD HELPS US TO ESCAPE FROM THE SUBTLEST SNARES WHICH CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE WOVEN AROUND US—if we are the victims and not the constructors of those snares. God will have no deceit in saint or sinner.

IV. BUT THOUGH GOD IS THE CREATOR OF ALL THINGS, HE IS THE HELP, AND NOT THE SUBSTITUTE, OF MEN. (Ver. 8.) The psalmists and prophets saw the Divine side of the moral work done in the world, but saw the human side also.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXV.

THIS is a psalm, mainly, of comfort; but with comfort, prayer (ver. 4) and threatening (ver. 5) are blended. God's people are always under God's protection. He will always "be good" to them. But the double-minded he will infallibly cast out.

Ver. 1.—They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion; rather, *are as Mount Zion*; i.e. are as firmly fixed and established as "the mount of God," which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever (comp. Isa. xxviii. 16).

Ver. 2.—As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people. This is the true *cause* of his people's stability, which is *like* that of his

holy mountain. The ubiquitous God stands round about his people, and protects them on every side. The mountains that are "round about Jerusalem" are, on the east, the Mount of Olives; on the south, the Hill of Evil Counsel; on the west, the ridge beyond the valley of Jehoshaphat; and on the north, the high ground about Scopus. All these are higher than the platform upon which the city is built. From henceforth *even for ever*. Always round about his *true* people, though he may have to forsake those who have first forsaken him.

Ver. 3.—For the rod of the wicked; literally, *the sceptre of wickedness*. Shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous. The possession, or inheritance, of the righteous, i.e. the land in which they dwell. This may fall for a time under the dominion of the wicked, but shall not "rest"—i.e. continue—under such dominion. Lest the

righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity; *i.e.* lest their patience be worn out, and they fall from grace. God will not try men beyond that they are able (1 Cor. x. 13).

Ver. 4.—Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good. Give them their deservings. For their “goodness” repay them with “goodness.” And to them that are upright in their hearts. Exegetical of the preceding clause. Only the “upright in heart” are really “good.”

Ver. 5.—As for such as turn aside unto

their crooked ways. The word translated “crooked ways” occurs only here and in Judg. v. 6. It means properly “by-paths,” deviations from the straight path of right. The Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity. God shall give them no better portion than he assigns to the open evil-doers, since their heart is not really whole with him. But peace shall be upon Israel; rather, *but peace be upon Israel*. The psalmist winds up with a prayer, not a prophecy.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Divine providence.* Does righteousness answer? Is piety rewarded? Is the good man much the better for his goodness? That is the question, both old and new, suggested by the psalm. The reply is in the affirmative; but the fourth verse indicates that the writer's mind is not altogether untroubled by what he has seen. Nor is ours. There is much that, at first sight, perplexes us. We may see the usurper break his oath, cut down his countrymen with the sword, seize the reins of office, and reign for many years upheld by military power; we may see the statesman climbing by unscrupulousness and stratagem to the highest post in the kingdom, and maintaining himself there by the same devices; we may see the fraudulent merchant or director, the charlatan, the unprincipled adventurer, making himself rich at the expense of his dupes. Iniquity, impiety, roguery, triumphs. On the other hand, we sometimes see the good man brought down from the place of honour and of influence, the devout man struggling hard with financial difficulties or domestic trials, the whole company of afflictions gathering at the door and saddening the heart of the holy. And we say—Does *not* the rod which belongs to the wicked rest on the lot of the righteous? Does God do good to those that are good? The answer is found in such truths as these. We find when we look on and in, that—

I. SIN, WRONG-DOING, IS REWARDED AS IT DESERVES TO BE. It is not only that: 1. *High-handed wrong is usually punished in the end*; that the guilty empire goes out in defeat and disaster; that the unscrupulous statesman falls from power and is dishonoured; that the fraudulent merchant and scheming adventurer come to exposure and ruin. That is very frequently, perhaps ordinarily, the case; for “the sword of Heaven is not in haste to smite, nor yet doth linger.” But it is true that: 2. *Sin is always tending downward*. Vice, sloth, cruelty, fraud, falsity,—these lead down, step by step, to poverty and want, to sickness and suffering, to dishonour and disgrace, to early death. And: 3. *Sin means misery*. Unhappiness, arising not only from reduced circumstances, but from the condemnation and abandonment of the good, and from the stings and smarts of conscience. Moreover—and this is too often overlooked: 4. *Sin means inward and spiritual ruin*. Even if the human judge passes no sentence, and the guilty man enters no prison-door, is there no penalty paid? There is—in moral and spiritual degradation; in the sinking of the soul into a condition in which all is lost that makes manhood a noble thing, in which the spirit bears nothing of the image of its Maker, in which nothing is left of a character but what is mean and base and ugly in the sight of heaven. The rod that belongs to the wicked rests on the wicked. Guilt bears its penalty; the soul that sinneth dies.

II. GOODNESS, WORTH, IS REWARDED AS IT DESERVES TO BE. It is true that the good man is not always fortunate or successful, has not always abundance of gold and silver. Should we wish that he had? Should we wish that piety and purity, that unselfishness and nobility of spirit, that mercy and patience, were always paid in cash, or even in human honour or in high position? Should we like holiness to have its price in the market? No. Our God is too wise and kind to place it at that level. To do that would be to dishonour it and to injure us. What he does for his own is, nevertheless, very much and very great. Consider: 1. *The evils from which he saves them*. The good man looks back and thanks God with fervent spirit for saving him from the worst

evils into which he might have fallen; not only from suffering and sorrow, but from remorse and shame, from darkness and degradation, from the wreck and ruin into which he has seen many of his fellows fall. He has trusted in the Lord, and he has been as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed; he has been preserved in his integrity. God's upholding power has been beneath him, his Divine protection has been around him, even as the mountains are round about Jerusalem. 2. *The positive good which he does them.* (1) He ensures the necessities of human life. He promises that his people shall "not want any good thing" (Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10). Jesus Christ assures us that to those who seek first the kingdom of God "all these [needful] things shall be added" (Matt. vi. 33). (2) He gives us great spiritual blessings. *Peace* is upon the Israel of God (ver. 5); *joy* is the inheritance of the holy (Rom. v. 11; Phil. iv. 4); *hope* is in their hearts, an uplifting power that sustains under every burden, and sends the pilgrim on his way with cheerful heart and elastic step. (3) He gives us *himself*. The Lord himself is round about his people; his presence is with us everywhere. God is with us, guiding, guarding, befriending, enlarging, enriching us. We are glad in him. He is to us, as to Abraham, our "exceeding great Reward." It is well with the righteous now: what will it be when the glories of the future are revealed?

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Such as cannot be moved.* There can be little doubt, so it seems to me, that these psalms, from one of which our text is taken, were all of them songs of the exiles returning from their captivity in Babylon. Their very name—"Songs of Degrees"—denotes that they were sung as the people went up towards their land, their city, and the sanctuary of the Lord. But the frequent allusions to the Exile, to its degradation and sorrow, to the almost complete destruction which had there all but overtaken them, and then to their preservation and restoration, all show that in these fifteen psalms we have the devout utterances of those whom God had once suffered to be in exile, but whom he had not only graciously preserved therein, but now had wonderfully restored. So that we may picture the long line of the returning captives as they journeyed on over the weary waste of rock and sand which stretched between the place of their exile and their beloved home. We listen to them refreshing and cheering their hearts from time to time by singing one or other of these holy psalms. After their return, these psalms appear to have been collected together, and to have formed part of their national liturgy, and were sung, as they well deserved to be, when their city and temple were again built and dedicated to the Lord. There is a beautiful progression in them—an advance in thought and expression, harmonizing with the commencement, progress, and completion of the return from Babylon to the city of God. The *first* tells how, in their distress, the exiles cried unto the Lord, and utters their lament over their long sojourn in the strange land. The *next*—the hundred and twenty-first—is one which, it is probable, formed the evening psalm, as the tents were pitched, and the whole encampment lay down to rest. Then did they lift up their eyes to the Lord—the Lord that kept Israel and who neither slumbered nor slept. The *next* is a song of gladness in view of their once more standing in the house of the Lord—the gladness of those who had long been hindered in the enjoyment of any such privilege. The *next* recalls their prayer—their earnest, pleading prayer, which they offered up because of the contempt of the proud and the scouring of their luxurious stranger-lords. And the *next* celebrates with joyous rapture the great deliverance which God gave them: "Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as a prey to their teeth." Such is the spirit of the whole. And then comes the devout conclusion from all their experience—the blessedness of trusting in the Lord. Perhaps it was sung as the exiles drew near to Jerusalem and Mount Zion, and saw the mountains round about her, and the Mount Zion which abideth for ever. As those beloved heights, on which their fathers had gazed with delight, reared themselves on high, unchanged amid all the storm and tumult which had surged around and upon them, they seemed to the devout Israelites a type, not only of the Divine guard over Israel, encompassing his people even as these mountains "were round about Jerusalem," but a type also of the stability, the permanence, the immovability of all those who trust in the Lord.

"They who trust in the Lord shall be," etc. No object was more familiar to the devout Jew than Mount Zion and the mountains round about Jerusalem. As often as they went up to the house of the Lord, and day by day, all those who dwelt in or near Jerusalem, as did most of those who came back from the Exile, Zion and the surrounding heights were conspicuous before them. And good was the use they made of them. They beheld in them a symbol of their God, and a promise of what they themselves should be if they put their trust in him. Thus did this familiar everyday scene speak to them. Happy are they who, from the common surroundings of their everyday life, the many gifts of God's love which daily they enjoy, hear and listen to a voice which speaketh to them such holy truths as these! As one has well said, "Believing Englishmen, you may specially bless God that your country gives you an admirable picture of your own security, by dwelling alone, separated by the floods from all other nations. This is the security of our beloved isle."

"He bade the ocean round thee flow;
Not bars of brass could guard thee so."

They that trust in the Lord shall be as these happy islands, which shall not know the rod of the oppressor, for the Lord has guarded them with a better defence than walls or bulwarks. Hebrew comparisons were most fit for Hebrew believers, but those nearer home should serve us as theirs served them. But now to turn to this blessed truth itself which our text declares—the ever-abiding, the immovable stability of them that trust in the Lord.

I. CONSIDER THE BLESSING HERE PROMISED. To "be as Mount Zion, which cannot," etc. From the days of Melchizedek, in the early patriarchal ages, right on and down to our own, Jerusalem has been an historic place. It has never been moved. Other great cities, like that of Nineveh, Babylon, and the cities of Asia, we can now but faintly trace where they stood. But Jerusalem has not only preceded, but has long survived them all. But in what sense can God's people be said to be as Mount Zion? 1. *Of the Church of God it is historically true.* If by violent persecution or other calamity she has been driven from one region—as from all North Africa—it has only been to settle more immovably in other and wider lands. There is no more reassuring argument to the mind anxious for the welfare of the Church of God than her history in the past. This psalm is truer of her than it was of Israel. 2. *Of the individual believer it is also true;* for he cannot be moved. His feelings may be. He may, as did the psalmists oftentimes, imagine that "the Lord has cast him off for ever, and hath in anger shut up his tender mercies." But it is not so really. Read the triumphant challenge of St. Paul at the close of Rom. viii. That tells the real truth, as doth this psalm here. For the city of Divine grace lieth foursquare, like the city of God told of in the Apocalypse, and is defended with all those within it—as God's people are—by the mighty walls of God's omnipotence, righteousness, love, and grace—even the grace of the Holy Spirit working within us. Therefore is this psalm true.

II. THOSE FOR WHOM THIS BLESSING IS DESIGNED. "They that trust in the Lord." Now, this trust is: 1. *A very simple thing.* Anybody can trust—old and young, rich and poor. It requires no long study, no store of learning. 2. *And it may be a very imperfect thing.* Not mature, not strong and mighty at all; but yet it is trust, like him who cried, "Lord I believe: help thou mine unbelief." 3. *It does not matter how or where we may have been brought to it.* Blessed be God!

III. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THIS TRUST AND SO GREAT BLESSING. 1. Because God so delights in our trust. 2. It is the transforming grace. 3. It identifies us with Christ in his life. 4. It devitalizes our connection with the first Adam, and grafts us into Christ.—S. C.

Vers. 3—5.—"The lot of the righteous." The previous verses have told how secure it is; these add other facts concerning it.

I. THE ROD OF THE WICKED SHALL NOT REST UPON IT. 1. *It may come upon the righteous.* Often had done so; but it should not continue. It has been thought that reference is made here to the troubles of the righteous Nehemiah, by reason of the opposition and treachery he had to meet with (see Neh. ii. 16; vi. 10—14, 17). It may be so; but the truth is ever applicable. 2. *If it continue outwardly, it will no*

inwardly. With the wicked, when suffering comes, there is no alleviation, no blessed peace of God, no communion with him, no bright hope, no sustaining Holy Spirit. But these are all in the lot of the righteous. God's saints have ever enjoyed them. Hence it matters but little, if the inward grace be given, whether the outward rod be removed or no. 3. *But it generally is removed both outwardly and inwardly.* It is not suffered to be permanent. The troubles of the righteous are but as going through a tunnel; it may be very long and very dark and very drear, but it is only a tunnel, and ere long the light is reached again.

II. GOD WILL NOT SUFFER THEM TO BE TEMPTED ABOVE THAT THEY ARE ABLE TO BEAR. This is the reason given why "the rod of the wicked shall not rest," etc. 1. *There are other reasons.* God's love for his people. He has no pleasure in their pain. No, but in their affliction he is afflicted. Hence "he will not always chide," etc. (Ps. ciii.). Then, because they are in Christ (cf. Rom. viii. 1). 2. *But there is this reason also.* It would defeat the very end God has in view. He desires his people to be perfected in righteousness. But if the "rod of the wicked" *always* "rested," etc.—that unmitigated, unalleviated rod—it would be more than our poor frail humanity could bear. The righteous would be discouraged, and this would be fatal to them, as it ever is. The condition of fidelity is to be strong and of a good courage.

III. THEIR LOT WILL BECOME BRIGHTER AND BRIGHTER. (Ver. 4.) The prayer simply states what is God's perpetual way. He is good to them that are good, adding ever to his grace (Prov. iv. 18).

IV. BUT MUST NEVER BE DEPARTED FROM. To turn aside from it is certain misery (ver. 5). The most wretched souls on the face of the earth are those that have turned aside from God to wicked ways, such as are all the ways of sin.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Stability out of trust.* The key-note of this psalm is a fear lest the restored Israel should again prove faithless and backsliding, as in the older time. "The pious psalmist trembles lest the blasts of foreign tyranny, which have swept upon the sacred nation with such protracted severity, should uproot it from its basis of true religion. The long domination of a heathen power during the recent Exile, and the present molestations of the semi-idoltrous Samaritans, must doubtless have had their effects on the weak-hearted among the psalmist's countrymen. In the present poem, therefore, words of consolation and of threatening are naturally blended. The faithful, says the psalmist, need not be terrified, for calamity shall not endure; they have a firm foundation, which cannot totter, and Jehovah is to them a bulwark, deterring the oppressive foe who would pervert them from their holy faith." Mount Zion should not be confused with Mount Moriah. It represents the people as a whole, the nation as a nation, not exclusively regarded in its religious obligations and relations. The poetical conception of a mountain is firmness, because resting on broad and deep foundations. The earthquake is thought of as the most awful of forces, because it can even shake the mountains. The rootage of the mountains at the very centre of the earth is a figure of the rootage a nation or a soul has by its trust in God. Or as the cedar on the hillside, it is free to wave in the storm-winds, because it clasps and twines about the rock of God.

I. STABILITY CANNOT COME OUT OF CIRCUMSTANCES. They do but shake us to and fro, and make us stagger up and down. Illustrate from the various experiences of the Israelite nation. No kind of restfulness can possibly be gained while we wait on circumstances.

II. STABILITY CANNOT COME OUT OF KNOWLEDGE. "For knowledge is of things we see," and these all lie in the range of the circumstantial. It is curious that men should have such confidence in the *certainty* of knowledge, when there is nothing in the world so fluctuating. What men stoutly affirm they *know* to-day they relegate to the list of exploded theories to-morrow. Being a creature, man's secret of rest must be the dependence of faith, and not the certitude of knowledge. A very striking illustration of the instability of the results of even advanced learning is given by Mr. H. L. Hastings. The following is a list of the discordant hypotheses of the so-called "Higher Criticism," published since 1850, on the origin and authorship of the Old and New Testament books: "For Genesis there have been 16 theories, Exodus 13, Leviticus 22, Numbers 8, Deuteronomy 17; total for Pentateuch, 76 theories. For Joshua

10, Judges 7, Ruth 4, Samuel 20, Kings 24, Chronicles 17, Esdras 14, Nehemiah 11, Esther 6; total for historical books, 113. For Job 26, Psalms 19, Proverbs 24, Ecclesiastes 21, Canticles 18; total for poetical books, 108. For Isaiah 27, Jeremiah 24, Lamentations 10, Ezekiel 15, Daniel 22; total for great prophets, 98. For all the minor prophets, 144. Total for the Old Testament, 639. For Matthew 10, Luke 9, Mark 7, John 15; total for Gospels, 41. Acts 12, Paul's Epistles 111, other Epistles 44; total for New Testament, 208. Grand total of theories for the entire Bible, 747. Of these 603 have already gone into oblivion, and there is no reason to fear that many of the remaining 144 may not soon follow them to the shelves of the libraries, to be dusted no more." Or illustration may be taken from scientific knowledge. So incomplete and uncertain is even such knowledge, that a scientific book more than ten years old is now regarded as out of date and untrustworthy. We can never find security in our own particular knowledge, seeing that we are ever growing out of our own past of imperfection.

III. STABILITY CAN ONLY COME OUT OF TRUST. It may seem strange to say, but the most reliable thing is the human heart. "Many waters cannot quench love." Let it once get its grip, it holds tight, and will die rather than loosen that grip. But when we speak of trust, two things are in mind: (1) the stability which comes out of trust as an exercise of the whole force of a man's being; and (2) the stability which comes by the trustworthiness of him on whom we rely. The grip may be strong, but that which is gripped may be uncertain and shakable. Our stability is guaranteed only when he in whom we trust is absolutely reliable, and the trust that we repose in him is wholly undivided and entire. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The encircling of Divine defence.* "The Lord is round about his people." Robinson says, "The sacred city lies upon the broad and high mountain range which is shut in by the two valleys Jehoshaphat and Hinnom. *All the surrounding hills are higher.* On the east, the Mount of Olives; on the south, the so-called Hill of Evil Counsel, which ascends from the Valley of Hinnom; on the west the ground rises gently to the border of the great wady; while on the north the bend of a ridge which adjoins the Mount of Olives limits the view to the distance of about a mile and a half" (comp. Zech. ii. 4, 5, "wall of fire round about her"). Delitzsch says, "The holy city has a natural circumvallation of mountains, and the holy nation that dwells and worships therein has a still infinitely higher defence in Jahve, who encompasses it round." Thomson says that "none of the surrounding hills, not even Olivet, has any relative elevation above the north-western corner of the city itself. But Jerusalem is situated in the centre of a mountainous region, whose valleys have drawn around it in all directions a perfect network of deep ravines, the perpendicular walls of which constitute a very efficient system of defence."

I. DEFENCE "ROUND ABOUT" PUTS LIMITS TO ATTACK. Illustrate by the fear of Elisha's servant of the Syrian attack upon them. When he saw the encircling host of God, he knew that their power to attack was in actual Divine restraint. That defence frustrates plans. Or illustration may be taken from the raising of a siege by an army which covers the retreat of the invaders. All their schemes of attack fail, and it is as much as they can do to attend to their own security. So the good man may always have this confidence. He can never be subjected to an unawares attack. His enemies must always take count of the defence that is round about him. They must deal with our God, not only with us; and our God will surely say, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further."

II. DEFENCE "ROUND ABOUT" GIVES COMPLETENESS TO OUR SAFETY. What Elisha's servant saw was an absolute unbroken circle. The distinction between human and Divine protections lies in just this completeness. The best circle human love draws round us is *incomplete* somewhere; so it never can be wholly trustworthy. There is always some undefended place which makes us vulnerable. God's circle is drawn completely round. The foe cannot come in, and we cannot go out. Illustrate by encircling walls of ancient cities.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Delivered in order to be righteous.* "The power of the oppressors, the

enemies of God's people, shall not abide upon the land. The trial is to prove faith, not to endanger it by a too sharp pressure; lest, overcome by this, even the faithful put forth a hand (as in Gen. iii. 22) to forbidden pleasure, or (as in Exod. xxii. 8) to contamination; through force of custom gradually persuading to sinful compliance, or through despair of good, as the psalmist (Ps. lxxiii. 13, 14; see, too, Ps. xxxvii.; Numb. xiii. 30) describes some in his day who witnessed the prosperity of wicked men." Observe what is the supreme anxiety of the psalmist: "That the righteous put not forth their hands unto iniquity." Israel had been redeemed from the Captivity, that it might be a "righteous nation," and its supreme anxiety ought to be *keeping* righteous.

I. THE PURPOSE OF DIVINE REDEMPTION IS NOT REMOVAL OF PERIL. Not entirely. This is not the main purpose. It is incidental. It is necessary as preparation. The great redemption has been much misapprehended, because its relation to the removal of penalty has been exaggerated. Save for its moral influence upon him, to lie under a penalty is not one of the worst things that can happen to a man.

II. THE PURPOSE OF DIVINE REDEMPTION IS NOT SAFETY. It involves and secures safety, but this again is only incidental. It is not only a mistake, but an enfeebling mistake, to be resting in an assurance that we "are saved, and safe." That, after all, is no more than a comfortable circumstance, which only too readily nourishes self-confidence and pride.

III. THE PURPOSE OF DIVINE REDEMPTION IS RIGHTEOUSNESS. That is the absolute purpose, within which all others are embraced. Israel was redeemed from Egypt, to be a people *holy unto the Lord*. Israel was restored from Babylon, to be a *righteous nation*. God's thought, in undertaking a redemptive work in any man, is the witness that man will make by his righteousness. No profession, and no works, can ever take the place of this one thing. If called, we are called to be "saints."

IV. WHAT GOD'S REDEMPTION MAKES US WE OUGHT TO KEEP. It is the fear of Israel's falling from its high ideal that distresses the psalmist. He dreads "the righteous putting forth his hand unto iniquity." "He that is righteous must be righteous still."—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The claim of the upright*. "Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts." The upright man has a right to plead on the ground of his uprightness. But observe that the right to plead is quite different from the right to demand; and that the claim of the upright is based on the Divine mercy, consideration, and promise. The man is what God would have him be. The man may claim God's promises of blessing to those who are what he would have them be.

I. THE CLAIM OF THE UPRIGHT IS BASED ON HIS RECEPTIVITY. The man wants God's blessing, is ready for it, and is open to receive it. But this is something new for self-satisfied, self-serving man. It indicates another spirit. This man will be prepared to make the best of God's blessings when they come. The hindrances of self-will, divided interests, and insincerity are taken out of the way. It is as if the photographic plate were now made sensitive to the Divine blessing. The real reason for the holding off of Divine blessing is usually our unfitness to receive. Therefore is the cultum of our inward moods of such first and supreme importance. God is to us *as we are*.

II. THE CLAIM OF THE UPRIGHT IS BASED ON THE NATURE OF THINGS. Like ever comes to like. Like is kin with like. Just as friends and true lovers come together by a kind of natural affinity, so do *things*. Clean things come to clean. Intelligent things come to intelligent persons. Sincere things come to sincere persons. Truth comes to men of truth. God's goodness comes to men of goodness. This is embodied in familiar sayings, such as this, "Virtue is its own reward." True, here are disturbances which break into the natural order; but we do well to keep in mind that the working of the natural order continues, nevertheless. "Righteousness tendeth unto life."

III. THE CLAIM OF THE UPRIGHT IS BASED ON THE DIVINE PROMISES. Here we may think of the special, but conditional, promises given to the restored Israelite nation. But the special thought, running in the line of the previous suggestions, is (1) that the Divine promises assure to us the continued working of the natural order; and (2) that the Divine promises assure the intervention of Divine wisdom and love in those things which disturb, and tend to break up, the natural order. "To the upright thou wilt show thyself upright."—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*God is against the wilful.* The Targum reads, "And those that turn after their depravity, he shall bring them into Gehenna as their portion, with the workers of falsehood." Literally, the first sentence of the verse reads, "bend their crooked paths," i.e. so turn their paths aside as to make them crooked (Judg. v. 6). "The expression does not necessarily denote a going over to heathenism; it would describe the conduct of those who, in the time of Jeremiah, made common cause with the enemies of Israel." "The emphasis is on truth of heart and steadfastness, as against the turning back to the old wickedness of idolatry, which had drawn down God's righteous anger. The backslider has desired to cast in his lot with the ungodly; that desire shall be fulfilled to his ruin." "The lukewarm and sly, false, and equivocal ones, are in no way inferior to the open, manifest sinner, as a source of danger to the Church." Carefully notice that it is *incipient*, not *pronounced*, wilfulness which is here in consideration. The fixedly wilful are called the "workers of iniquity." The persons here are those who are wilful, but do not realize that they are. The figure is of persons who bend about, from this side to that, of the *right* road, though they do not step over into by-paths. They do not walk straight on, and steadily. "The wavering, unsteadfast, half-hearted disciple shall be as the hypocrite and rebellious." Illustrate from the warnings of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

I. THE SPIRIT OF WILFULNESS NEEDS DEALING WITH IN ITS BEGINNINGS. Illustrate by the kindly warnings sent to King Saul, when the spirit of self-will began to be encouraged, and by the reproofs of the living Christ to the seven Churches of Asia. Dealing with it is difficult, because (1) its first germs in the character are not easily detected; (2) its process of growth is secret and insidious. And yet it is in pulling up the *first blades* of the weeds that the hope of the garden lies.

II. THE DIVINE AID IS READY FOR JUST THAT STAGE OF OUR WORK. It comes: 1. As the discovery of the beginnings of the evil in our hearts. Saul would have gone on self-deluded, but for the Divine arrest and revelation. 2. As the warning of the real character of the evil. At first the blades of the *tare* are very like the blades of the *wheat*. We need a Divine discrimination. 3. As the offer of help for immediately dealing with the evil. When the cancer has threaded the tissue with its fibres the case is hopeless.—R. T.

Vers. 1—5.—*The safety of those who trust in God: a lesson from experience.* "They that trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever," etc. (ver. 1).

I. THEY REST ON AN IMMOVABLE FOUNDATION. "Cannot be moved, but abideth for ever."

II. ARE SURROUNDED AND PROTECTED AS BY A WALL OF MOUNTAINS. The distant mountains of Moab most probably alluded to, as Jerusalem was surrounded by no great mountains. God's protecting presence interposes immense insurmountable difficulties between us and our dangers. And this will be for ever so. "I will be unto her as a wall of fire round about."

III. GOD PROTECTS THEM AGAINST THE EVIL CONSEQUENCE OF PROLONGED SUFFERINGS AT THE HANDS OF OTHERS. (Ver. 3.) From despair of God's succour, and being drawn away from a steadfast following of righteous courses.

IV. THE SENSE OF GOD'S PROTECTING STRENGTH AND GOODNESS CREATES THE PRAYER FOR STILL GREATER GOOD. "Do good to them that are good . . . to the upright in heart." The Christian will omit the fifth verse from his prayers. Prayer for *good* we can all feel warranted in using, but prayer for *evil* we dare not utter before God.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXVI.

THIS psalm seems to be a joint thanksgiving and complaint, composed soon after the return from the Captivity. It has been said to

present an "enigmatical contrast" (Cheyne) in its two portions. But as the "complaint" is first subdued, and then merges into a joy-song (vers. 5, 6), there is really no want of harmony in the composition. The double

aspect of the Return—its “bitter-sweetness”—impressed itself upon the nation from an early date (see Ezra iii. 9—14).

Ver. 1.—When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion; literally, *when the Lord turned again the returning of Zion*; i.e. “brought back those who returned from the Captivity.” We were like them that dream. We could scarce credit our senses; we seemed to be in a happy “dream” (comp. Acts xii. 9).

Ver. 2.—Then was our mouth filled with laughter. The Orientals weep when they are disappointed, and, when they are pleased, laugh (Gen. xxi. 6; Job viii. 21) and shout for joy (Herod., viii. 99). And our tongue with singing; rather, *with a cry of joy*. Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them; literally, *hath magnified to do with them*. The heathen, among whom the Israelites had dwelt, marvelled at their deliverance. It was an event without a parallel.

Ver. 3.—The Lord hath done great things for us. “What the heathen said was true—the Lord hath indeed done great things for us.” Whereof we are glad. For these great things we rejoice and give thanks. The first part of the psalm—the absolutely

pure joy-song—here ends; and the second part—the mixed joy and sorrow—begins.

Ver. 4.—Turn again our captivity, O Lord. The work is not half done—not half the nation has returned. We, who occupy the land, are but “a remnant” (Ezra ix. 8; Neh. i. 3). Bring back, we pray thee, the rest of the captives. As the streams in the south. As thou bringest back, after the autumn rains, ample streams to the dry water-courses of the Negeb, or south country.

Ver. 5.—They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Then we, who are now “sowing in tears” (Ezra iii. 12, 13; Neh. i. 4), re-establishing Israel in its own land amid grief and pain and distress, shall “reap in joy,” see the fruit of our exertions, and rejoice thereat.

Ver. 6.—He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed; literally, *going he goes and weeping*; i.e. weeping every step as he goes—“bearing the draught of seed,” i.e. the seed which he has drawn forth from his bag, and is about to scatter on the earth. Thus it is that he “goes forth.” How differently does he return! He shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him; literally, *coming he comes with a cry of joy, bearing with him his sheaves*. He obtains in the end an ample return for all his labours.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Spiritual bondage*. In the Divine deliverance from spiritual captivity, of which the return from Babylon may be regarded as a type, we have a crowning kindness from his gracious hand. It is said that there is no sensation so exquisitely delightful as that we experience when there is a sudden cessation of acute pain. Similarly, we may say that there is no spiritual joy which is quite equal to that of finding ourselves freed from an intolerable evil. Perhaps there is no moment of such surpassing pleasure as that when one who has long lain in captivity comes out of his prison door and breathes once more the air of freedom. When the Jews found themselves outside Babylon, actually on their way home to Jerusalem, they “were like them that dream;” they were lifted up to such ecstasy that they could not believe it was a solid fact; they would not have been surprised if they had awoke to find themselves again in the hands of the heathen. It was too good to be believed, too great a blessing to be realized; it was the surpassing mercy of God, his crowning work of pity and of love. We have, therefore—

1. THE SUPREME VALUE OF SPIRITUAL DELIVERANCE. 1. We can see what it is for a man to be saved from some one enslaving vice. To what depths of misery and shame does the drunkard go down! in what hateful toils he is held by that cruel craving! There is no object on earth so utterly pitiable as is a man who is bound in the hard bondage of any guilty and degrading habit. The man who is paralyzed at home, or he who is immured within four narrow walls, is a free man in comparison with such a slave. And when that Divine Redeemer, who came “to preach deliverance to the captives,” breaks the bonds which hold him, sets him at large, gives him the victory over his evil passion, so that he is no longer “held in the cords of his own sins,” then there is a brightness brought to the life, and a joy given to the heart, that cannot be told in words. “The Lord *hath* done great things for him,” he feels to the depth of his spirit. “The Lord *hath* done great things for him,” his kindred, his neighbours, his true friends, affirm. He will never have occasion for such profound gratitude again.

2. We may all experience what it is to be saved from the bondage of sin itself. Though we may never have known the bitter bondage of any one particular iniquity, yet we have known what it is to be under the power and pressure of *sin itself*. And sin itself, in its essence, is enslaving. It holds us back from being what we would be, and from doing what we would do in the service of Christ. It fetters the energies and hampers the activities of the human soul. When God, by the power of his Spirit, in the gospel of his Son, gives us spiritual freedom (see 2 Cor. iii. 17; John viii. 36), we enter in, and we enjoy a precious and noble heritage. God has done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Our own souls rejoice in it. Our neighbours bear witness to it; for our freedom reacts on them; they are the better for it in many ways.

II. ONE INVARIABLE ACCOMPANIMENT. The fourth verse of the psalm naturally, if not necessarily, follows the third. How could the returning (or returned) exiles fail to remember those whom they had left behind in the land of bondage? It was not a singular, perhaps not an uncommon, thing for a slave who had escaped from the Southern States, when he had experienced the joys of liberty, to go back again into the country where he might have been captured and held in bondage, running that terrible risk in order to help mother, or sister, or brother, to escape, and to share the blessings which his own soul had tasted. 1. With what holy yearning should we regard our relatives and friends who are still in the bondage of sin! 2. What should we not be prepared to suffer, what toil should we not be willing to undertake on their behalf! 3. How fervently should we pray the prayer of these returning exiles!

Vers. 5, 6.—*Spiritual farming*. Our Lord told the apostles that he would make them "fishers of men." We may hear him telling us that he will make us *farmers* of men; for there is much to be done in the way of sowing and reaping in spiritual husbandry.

I. THE SOIL OF THE HUMAN SOUL. That in which the sacred seed must be cast is the soul of man: not any one special part of it. Our appeal must be made to the entire nature—to the *understanding*, with all its powers of spiritual discernment, of reasoning, of memory, of anticipation; to the *affections*, which have gathered round objects that are unworthy of them, and that may be directed to the highest, even to God himself; to the *will*, which has, in the last resort, to determine whether or not we will choose Christ for our Saviour, and his service for our portion. We fail as Christian husbandmen unless we direct our efforts to mind, heart, and will, when we work under our Master in these sacred fields.

II. THE SEED OF DIVINE TRUTH. The "precious seed" we have to sow is that truth which is distinctively Christian. We have to teach what Christ has taught us; we have to present him, himself, to the minds and hearts of men. The surpassing value of every human spirit in the sight of God; the yearning of the Divine Father over his absent children, and his longing to welcome them to his heart and to his home; the truth that Jesus Christ died for the sins of men, and now offers himself to all penitent souls as their Saviour and Lord; the great fact that every one who humbles himself before God, and heartily accepts Jesus Christ for all he offers to be, is immediately and absolutely forgiven, and taken up into the loving and abiding favour of God; the promise of eternal life to those who are faithful unto death;—these are the great truths which we are charged to deliver, to implant into the soil of the human soul.

III. THE SERVICE OF SOWING. 1. The spirit in which we should sow the seed is that of our Master himself—the spirit of tender interest, of brotherly affection, of an inexhaustible faith, of patient hope. 2. The methods we adopt are various; we may converse, or we may write the friendly letter, or we may print the elaborate treatise, or we may teach the small group of boys or girls, or we may address the great congregation. 3. The conditions may be favourable or unfavourable. We may go forth hopefully, expecting great things; for we may know that the spirit of inquiry and receptiveness is prevailing. Or we may "go forth weeping;" we may "sow in tears;" we may be discouraged and disheartened, for we may feel that the hearts are hard, and the minds are dull, and the purpose is set against the truth and the claims of God.

IV. THE CERTAINTY AND THE JOY OF REAPING. 1. We have the definite promise of God: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy," etc. (see Isa. lv. 10—13; 1 Cor.

xv. 58). 2. We know that the truth of Jesus Christ is perfectly adapted to the needs and cravings of the human soul, and that the Divine Spirit has power to break the stoniest heart and to bow the most stubborn will, as well as to enlighten the darkest understanding. 3. We remember that the seed of truth may slumber in the soul for many years, and may yet prove to be fruitful of life. 4. We look forward to the hour, beyond the horizon of time, when we shall know that our labour was not in vain in the Lord. The farmer sows his seed, looking for rain and wind and sunshine, hoping for the harvest in the autumn: but he may be disappointed; there may come the blight, or the drought, or the flood, and his waggons may never "come again" laden with the golden grain. But we who labour earnestly and prayerfully in sacred fields of usefulness, shall *not* be disappointed. The Divine promise will certainly be fulfilled; "our work shall be rewarded;" "He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall *doubtless* come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1-6.—"*Like them that dream.*" I. THE DREAM. It was a delightful one.

1. *There are many of quite another kind*—dreams full of trouble, terror, and distress. Many such are recorded in Scripture (Gen. xl.; Dan. ii.; Job vii. 14; Matt. xxvii. 19). 2. *But this was full of joy and rapture.* So unexpected, so wonderful, was Israel's redemption from exile. They could hardly realize how blessed they were. For it was a reality, not a dream. More often the daylight destroys our dreams; but this joy remained. 3. *And their joy was irrepressible.* (Ver. 2.) How sadly little of such joy do we see in the redeemed people of the Lord to-day! If they had not been redeemed at all, they could scarcely be more sad. 4. *Their joy compelled the confession of God's goodness to them on the part of heathen nations.* A glad Church is ever a conquering Church. A realized redemption will be rejoiced in by the redeemed themselves, and recognized by others yet waiting to be redeemed. The world wants still to see a joyful witness-bearing Church. When such Church is seen, then, perhaps, the millennium will have come. But let each consciously redeemed soul bear its testimony here and now, not waiting for others. It is what ought to be.

II. THE DREAM MODIFIED BY THE DAYLIGHT. (Ver. 4.) For: 1. *The company of exiles who had come back were but as a handful, as a tiny rill*, the wonder of which was that it did not dry up, there was so little of it. Such rills generally did dry up, as the bare water-courses proved. And the company of those returned from Babylon, they were, oh, so few; the great majority were in exile still, and they themselves were threatened with all manner of opposition (Ezra iv. 11-24). 2. *Hence there rose up the prayer*, "Turn again our captivity," etc.; that is, "Bring back our exiles, O Lord, in such strength and numbers, that it shall be with us as with the slender stream when, by the melting of the mountain snows, its waters are swollen into a full, rapid, mighty torrent, bearing all before it; let there be such an increase for us, thy people." And is not this the very prayer the Church needs to-day? for the company of God's faithful people, are not they in this desert world but as a handful, a "little flock," a tiny rill? Let us each say our "Amen."

III. BUT REALIZED AGAIN BY FAITH IN THE PROMISES OF GOD. (Vers. 5, 6.) It might be amid drenching rains the sower went forth to cast into the ground his handful of seed, but the promises of God to such as he never failed, and in due time the glad harvest was given. So the devout psalmist looked now on himself and his little company of fellow-exiles, no longer as a tiny rill ready to be dried up and perish, but as the sower's handful of seed which amid much toil he sowed; but sustained by the sure confidence that the harvest would make amends for all. And for the Christian worker to-day, the lonely missionary in China, India, Central Africa, and elsewhere; ah! with what tears these servants of God often go forth! But they bear the precious seed, precious in itself, precious in their own experience of its power; and they, too, are sustained, as all true workers for God must be, by the faith that "doubtless," without any possibility of failure, they shall come again to God who sent them forth, bringing with joy the rich results of their present toil and prayer. Let us pray for such sowers. Let us be such ourselves.—S. C.

Vers. 1—6.—*The history of a soul.* That which was written of and for the returned exiles of Judah lends itself so accurately and beautifully to describe the history of a redeemed soul, that it seems as if that larger and higher history were meant as well as that of Judah. The same words tell of both.

I. THE SOUL WAS ONCE A CAPTIVE. Not alone the people of Zion, but every redeemed soul. It was captive once: 1. *To the Law of God.* That Law which was holy, just, and good, the Law of God's household, and which for the good of all his children *must* be maintained; but to that Law the soul was liable, for it had transgressed again and again. Unless, therefore, something was done, the sentence of the Law must be carried out. 2. *To sin.* The soul was carnal, sold under sin. It yielded itself as a bondsman to serve sin (Rom. vi. 16). And this lust makes him captive; yet further: 3. *To death.* Not merely the death of the body, but, what is far worse, the death of the soul.

II. ITS CAPTIVITY WAS BROKEN. From being a captive, he became one of the redeemed of God. Consider: 1. *What was done.* Sin was forgiven, all the guilt of the past put away. The soul became regenerate, a new heart was given; old things passed away, all things became new; the soul passed from death to life, from the power of Satan unto God. 2. *Who did this?* It was the Lord's doing. True, as with Judah, there was co-operation on man's part. As Judah, so had we to avail ourselves of what God had done. The soul must repent and believe, and turn from dead works to serve the living God. Unless we do this, God's mercy is in vain for us. But all this does not make it the less true that it was the Lord who turned our captivity; it was his Spirit who prompted all that was done by us; without him it had never been done at all, no part of it. 3. *How was it done?* Perhaps in no two instances have the same instrumentalities been employed. God has many ways of bringing men to himself. He uses now his providence, now his Word, now his Spirit, and sometimes all of them together. Only the work is done.

III. NOTABLE RESULTS FOLLOWED. 1. *Surprise.* "We were like them that dream" (cf. Luke xxiv. 41). It seemed too good to be true. This a blessed experience, the rapture and delight of the soul when it realizes what God has done for it. 2. *Exuberant joy.* (Ver. 2, "laughter," "singing.") How reasonable this, whether we think of whence we have been saved, from what terrible depths of woe; or whither, to what heights of blessedness; or by what means, the infinite love of God in Christ! 3. *Confession on the part of the unsaved world.* (Ver. 2.) "Then said they among the heathen," etc. Yes, the world will take note, godless men will see that a great change has come.

IV. BUT A MORE FULL SALVATION IS YET YEARNED FOR. (Ver. 4.) What has been gained is blessedness, but the soul comes soon to see how much more yet is needed. The river of the water of life in him is such a slender stream; he would have it full, flowing, in force and volume like the streams of the south when the mountain snows have melted. Hence the prayer for a second blessing, "Turn again our captivity" (Ver. 4). The soul craves a complete salvation, a full deliverance. He would be cleansed from all sin, made pure in heart.

V. AND HE IS ENCOURAGED TO SEEK THIS BY THE CONSTANT EXPERIENCE OF THOSE THAT SOW IN TEARS. The pitiless rain and cold may render the toil of the sower hard, but his reward surely comes. So they who with real earnestness of heart seek the fulness of God's salvation shall surely obtain it.—S. C.

Ver. 6.—*The rejoicing reaper.* Consider—

I. WHAT HE WAS FORMERLY. That is told us in the first half of the text. 1. *He was one who went forth to sow.* He went forth, he was an active worker. In spiritual husbandry this is what is needed. There are many who will talk, some who will pray, but not all these really go to the work. If only the much talk and many prayers could be as they ought to be, and will be if they are sincere, translated into work, active, strenuous work, what a change would come over the Church and the world also! But would we be rejoicing reapers, we must be really workers. 2. *The burden of the Lord is upon him.* This is the meaning of the word "and weepeth." How perpetually in the prophetic Scriptures we meet with this expression, "the burden"! It tells of some message which the Lord had given the prophet to declare concerning some place, some person, some nation. It was a burden to the prophet; he felt its solemn

weight and responsibility. And he who shall be a rejoicing reaper in the Lord's harvest-field is one to whom his sacred toil has been the burden of the Lord to him. This burden is made up of a deep sense (1) of his own insufficiency for the work; (2) of the urgent need for the work to be done; (3) of the shortness of time which remains for this work to be done; and (4) of the heavy responsibility resting upon him to be faithful in the work (2 Cor. v. 11). There may or may not be tears upon his face, but there certainly will be in his heart. Often will he weep there. These are the men who do the Lord's work, and win men in throngs for him. 3. *He bears precious seed.* The seed is the Word of God: that is settled for us by our Lord himself (Luke viii. 5, 11; 1 Pet. i. 23). And it is as seed, because it has transforming power. The corn of wheat, when sown, lays hold on the elements of the soil around it, and transmutes them into its own substance, changes them into its own image and likeness. So does the Word of God in the heart of man. And it is "precious seed" because of what it is in itself. Who can calculate its value? And because he who sows it has found its value for himself; he has had experimental knowledge of its preciousness. Now, this seed he scatters in the furrows, as he has been bidden of the Lord to do; and he does it in the confident belief that God will bless his work, and the harvest shall follow. Such is he who becomes the rejoicing reaper.

II. *WHAT HE NOW IS.* We see him coming "again with rejoicing," etc. 1. *Coming again.* That is, coming back from the field homewards. So shall the faithful servant of God, as he wends his homeward way, be seen, not with downcast, disappointed look, but with rejoicing, because of the good success of his toil. Such men, ere they reach home, find their way lit up with the sunset glow, the eventide light, which the harvest joy brings to them. 2. *"With rejoicing."* How many are the springs of that joy!—that he has been himself saved; that he has been allowed to engage in the work; that he has been kept faithful and persevering in the work; that he has been made successful in the work; that he is now going home to his Lord to enter into his joy for ever. Oh, joy unspeakable and full of glory! 3. *"Bringing his sheaves with him."* (Cf. Rev. xiv. 13, "Their works do follow them.") Some of the corn has got home before the reaper, but there is much he brings with him, and yet more that will follow.

III. *THE SURE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE TWO.* "Doubtless." There is no contingency, no mere "perhaps;" his "labour is *not* in vain in the Lord." Faithful toil shall not fail of reward. God will see to this; he ever has, he ever will.—S. O.

Ver. 1.—*Turning captivity into liberty.* Is that always, altogether, and necessarily, a good thing? "When the edict of Cyrus went forth allowing the captives to return, it was so unexpected, it was so miraculous, that we deemed the accomplishment of ancient prophecy a dream." "To turn again captivity" is to bring back God's redeemed ones. Perowne skilfully presents the points of thought and feeling in this psalm. "The first colony of exiles had returned to Palestine. But, after all, what was that little band of settlers which formed the first caravan? It was but as the trickling of a tiny rill in some desert waste. Hence the prayer bursts from the lips of the psalmist, 'Bring back our captives like mighty streams, which, swollen by the wintry rains, descend to fertilize the parched and desolate wilderness.' Then comes the thought of the many discouragements and oppositions which the first settlers had to encounter; it was a time of sowing in tears. Still, faith could expect a joyful harvest. He who had restored them to the land would assuredly crown his work with blessing."

I. *CAPTIVITY IS BEST WHILE WE CHERISH SELF-DEPENDENCE.* Because it means that we are under the Divine discipline. So long as we are wrong-minded—and to be self-trusting is to be wrong-minded—the saddest thing that could happen to us is for God to let us alone. That he is smiting us is the all-satisfactory proof that he is intimately concerned for our truest well-being. Until Israel had lost that self-reliance which had wrought such mischief for the nation, it was altogether best in captivity, heavy strain though that was to them. The time our captivity continues is always the Divine measurement of the time necessary for doing the work of our captivity. If true-hearted, we should not desire relief from affliction one moment before God's time has come. Far better to keep the humiliation and affliction than to keep the self-dependence.

II. LIBERTY IS BEST WHEN WE HAVE LEARNED TO DEPEND ON GOD. And that is the lesson to be learned in all captivities and afflictions. Liberty is then best, because the man or the nation knows what to do with it. The victim of the French Revolution, apostrophizing liberty, said, "O Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!" Liberty is but captivity of another kind, when man has no principle and rule for his use of it. Restored Israel could have its liberty, because it had learned to lean on God.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Signs of joy.* Polybius, in describing the joy of the Greeks when unexpectedly rescued from the Macedonians, says, "Most of the men could scarcely believe the news, but imagined themselves in a dream as they listened to what was said, so extraordinary and miraculous it seemed to them."

I. JOY AND GLADNESS MAY BE FITTING RESPONSE TO CIRCUMSTANCES. There is a natural and proper response to every set of conditions in which we are placed. We need never restrain those responses. Religion tones them, but does not arrest or crush them. Joy and gladness were befitting to the restored captives. Laughter is the expression of joy; and "Is any merry, let him sing psalms." Some phases of Christian life are too decorous, too restrained, too cold. True religion only flourishes in a warm atmosphere of feeling. And we should find abundant cause for joy and song, if we did but read our lives aright, and recognize the loving-kindness of the Lord. "The redeemed shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads."

II. JOY AND GLADNESS MAY BE EXAGGERATED, AND BECOME A PERIL. There was a degree of extravagance in the joy of these returned exiles. They were over-excited. In their excitement they imagined a future which could never be realized; and were tempted to play with their new-found liberty as with a toy, instead of being solemnized by its obligations, and urged thereby to high and noble endeavour. 1. Times of over-joy make the prosaic work of everyday life very trying and hard. The beginnings of religious life are often a skipping and dancing and singing of the soul, and it is almost overwhelming to discover that it must pass into a persistent, humdrum walking the pilgrim-path of righteousness. We cannot be always in ecstasy and song, either here or in heaven. Israel found the actual life in restored Palestine soon changed excited song for the quiet strain of daily service. 2. Times of over-excitement are followed by times of undue depression. Israel bravely sang on the shores of the Red Sea, and murmured, ere three days were passed, at what redemption involved. Overstrain of religious feeling in times of revivals and missions, is oftentimes a most serious peril to young souls, because it suggests a false idea of Christian life. And, to some dispositions, it is no less than absolute ruin.—R. T.

Vers. 2, 3.—*Our joy in God a witness for God.* "Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them." The estimate which surrounding nations would form of them and of their circumstances was always a matter of interest and importance to Israel. From the first it was understood that the honour of Jehovah was bound up with the prosperity of this people. It is possible to fix our thoughts too entirely on the exclusiveness and the isolation of Israel, and on its mission as the treasury, for the world, of the primary truths of revealed religion. Its second mission was its witness to Jehovah, by its trust in him; devotion to his service; and safety and enrichment through his presence and blessing. Israel was, as it were, locked up in that little central land, away from the nations; but it was so isolated that it might make its testimony, and be a beacon-light for God. We try to see what witness it rendered by one of its moods.

I. ISRAEL'S JOY IN GOD WITNESSED TO THE DIVINE PITY. We are dealing now with the joy of the restored exiles. They were largely the immediate descendants of men who had provoked Jehovah by their iniquity and rebellion, and had for years been enduring his righteous judgments. Looking at, and thinking only of, their calamity, other nations might easily come to think of their God as one who never forgives. But, in view of the joy of their restoration, such an idea could not be entertained. It is proved now that God pities even while he punishes; and is glad when his pity is free to work its gracious, restoring work.

II. ISRAEL'S JOY IN GOD WITNESSED TO THE DIVINE PRESERVATION. It declared

that the "good hand" had been on the nation all through its time of captivity. It had been in the purifying fires, but the silver had been kept safe through all the testings. And the brightness and joy of a Christian life always makes this witness for God. It says—

"I have been upheld till now :
Who could hold me up but thou?"

III. ISRAEL'S JOY IN GOD WITNESSED TO THE DIVINE PURPOSES. God restored Israel because he had something for Israel yet to do in the world. And Israel's joy seemed to say, "It is plain that God needs me." God's goodness always unveils God's purpose.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*A plea for renewed joyous experiences.* In renewing prayer for the "turning again of captivity," the psalmist may but put into a figure his desire that God's full work of redemption may be completed, and some form of present limitation or peril may be likened to the old captivity, and even seem to be a sort of relic of it. There is a sense in which we may always be praying, "Turn again our captivity." But the figure may be one giving force to prayer for an immediate and unexpected Divine deliverance, such as the return from captivity had been. "O Jehovah, relieve our misery suddenly, and, as it may well be said, miraculously; as streams in the wilderness, which one moment are dead and dry, and then suddenly become flowing rivers." It may be that in the mind of the psalmist was the fact that only a small portion of the nation had responded to the edict of Cyrus. And his prayer may be that the rest of Israel might be induced to flood the still desolate land. "Restore our captive compatriots, just as water is restored by heavy rains to the water-courses of the parched district south of Palestine, to the delight of the inhabitants" (comp. Isa. xlix. 18, where the land, like a bereaved mother, waits for her children, whose return will fill her heart with joy).

I. THE PAST OF GOD'S BLESSING MAY BE JOYFULLY RECOGNIZED. It should be. Israel loved to hear the story of God's ways with the fathers told over and over. We should never tire of going over our early experiences of delivering and redeeming mercy.

II. THE PAST OF GOD'S BLESSING OUGHT NEVER TO SATISFY US. It is past and gone; it is but a memory. "Things won are done." We continue, and we cannot rest without the assurance that God is *doing* for us what he has done. The restored exiles cannot rest with God's turning their captivity, and restoring a few of their number; they must ask for a renewal of the blessing. "Turn *again* our captivity." From God's grace in the past we "draw a plea, to ask him still for more." We cannot be satisfied save with *renewals* of joyful experiences.

III. THE PAST OF GOD'S BLESSING IS THE PLEDGE OF GREATER BLESSING. God never exhausts himself in any good he does. Instead, by a present blessing, he opens the way for, and prepares us to receive, a *larger* blessing. Giving, he does but make possible his giving still more.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*Sad sowing-times.* Thomson says, "I never saw people sowing in tears exactly, but I have often known them to do it in fear and distress sufficient to draw them from any eye. In seasons of great scarcity, the poor peasants part in sorrow with every measure of precious seed cast into the ground. It is like taking bread out of the mouths of their children, and in such times many bitter tears are actually shed over it." Compare the tears at the laying of the foundation of the second temple (Ezra iii. 12), and the joy when it was complete (Ezra vi. 16, 22). And keep in mind the strain and anxiety through which the first returned company of exiles had to pass.

I. SAD SOWING-TIMES OF SCARCITY. Such always followed on famine years, when the old corn stores were used up, and the harvest of the year allowed no proportion to be reserved for seed, and, if reserve was made, the *quality* guaranteed no good coming harvest. Then the spring seed-sowing was an anxious time. It involved a serious loss of what was immediately needed. And experience of past famine made the harvest from *this* seed-sowing seem unusually uncertain. It is thus in Christian work. "We have toiled all night, and taken nothing," and it is hard to put down the net again. When the Church is cold and dead, even preaching the gospel comes to be sad and

heartless work. Yet it must not be given up. Weep we *may*, but sow we *must*. We never know where God's showers of blessing fall.

II. SAD SOWING-TIMES OF INSECURITY. Travellers tell of seeing sowers in the East sowing with one hand, and holding a musket in the other, for the Bedouin will steal the *seed-corn*, as well as rush in and sweep away the harvest. How anxious the farmer will be until his precious seed is safely *in the soil*! This may suggest those *circumstances* which so often hinder the success of our Christian work; things beyond our control which render our work fruitless. Spite of them, we must persist in sowing, if it must be sowing in tears.

III. SOWING-TIMES OF ATMOSPHERIC PERIL. The weather is but seldom just to the farmer's mind, and in some seasons the sowing seems hopeless: what can the seed do but rot in the ground? This may suggest the *dispositions* both of the Christian workers, and of those among whom they work. These often make a sort of atmosphere, in which the seed-sowing seems hopeless. Nevertheless, we must go on sowing, even if it must be *in tears*.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The law of giving in order to gain.* "Though he goeth on his way weeping, bearing forth the seed, he shall come again with joy, bringing the sheaves with him." Our Lord declared the same principle when he said, "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall save it unto life eternal." You can never secure any kind of harvest of anything, save by giving your seed-corn away. The miser keeps his gold, and he has what he keeps, and no more. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty."

I. GIVING IN ORDER TO GAIN IS THE LAW OF ENTERPRISE. Here we treat it on its purely human and business side. Nothing could be done in trade and commerce if men were not willing to "risk," as we say—to give away what they have. The man with the one talent would not give it away in some business enterprise, and so he had no harvest for his master, when he returned. Human enterprise is closely kin to faith; or, we may say, has in it a strong element of faith; business would be paralyzed if men could not give themselves, and what they have, away to each other in mutual trust. But there is always the inspiration of anticipation. It is always giving in order to get, based upon the natural order of things as established by prolonged experience.

II. GIVING IN ORDER TO GAIN IS THE LAW OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE. Here we treat the law in its higher and Divine relations. And we observe: 1. That it is a law divinely established. It is no accident; it is no resultant of experiences; it is no mere possibility. It is definitely fixed by God, who requires the seed-sowing, and promises the harvest. Because it is the Divine law, the harvest is assured. 2. That it is a law experimentally proved. Not experimentally based. Surrender for Christ's sake always is a seed-sowing that is followed by a harvest. Those who give up all for Christ's sake have a hundredfold more in this life, and in the time to come, life eternal. 3. That it is a law sublimely illustrated in God himself, who gave his Son in view of the harvest of humanity. Give away your seed, even with tears, you will come some day from the harvest-field, carrying your sheaves.—R. T.

Vers. 1—6.—*Alternations and contrasts in the experiences of life.* "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream."

I. SOME CHANGES SEEM MORE LIKE DREAMS THAN REALITIES. Seem too good or too bad to be true. 1. *When they come suddenly.* It takes time to adjust ourselves to them as facts and not fictions. And to realize the consequences they bring with them. 2. *When they bring or promise more than we ever expected.* We sing and laugh as those who have come into an immense fortune. If the change be spiritual, we rejoice like an emancipated slave, and can understand the experience of a Zacchæus, a Magdalene, or the Philippian jailor. 3. *When we are able to trace the change to God.* The sense of the presence of God with us always fills us with wonder. "The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad." When strangers see the Divine hand in our history, there is a strengthening of our faith in God. "The heathen said, The Lord hath done great things for them."

II. BUT NO CHANGE, HOWEVER GREAT, EXEMPTS US FROM TOIL AND TEARS. (Ver. 4.) Begins another strain. 1. *It is always incomplete.* It does not put an end entirely to the past order of things, nor introduce a completely new order. A terrible war to be fought between the old and the new. The return from Babylon at this time was only partial. 2. *Every change for the better or the worse exacts new endurances and trials.* We have to go forth bearing precious seed and weeping—to sow the seed of a near future, and to pass through the hopes and fears of the anxious husbandman. 3. *But all anxious and faithful labour now shall be rewarded with an abundant recompense when God and man shall gather the harvest of the world.* (Ver. 6.) “Blessed are those who mourn: for they shall be comforted.”—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM OXXVII.

A DIDACTIC psalm, preaching a contented trust in God as more conducive to the prosperity of a man, or a state, than any amount of fussy activity. The ascription to Solomon is borne out (1) by the use of Solomonic words; e.g. *'atsab, ne'urim, yedido*; and (2) by the agreement of the general sentiment with Prov. x. 22.

Ver. 1.—Except the Lord build the house; rather, *a house*; i.e. any house whatsoever. They labour in vain that build it. They will effect nothing—no house will be built. Except the Lord keep the city; rather, *a city*. The watchman waketh but in vain. Human watching is of no use unless accompanied by Divine watching.

Ver. 2.—It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late (comp. Isa. v. 11); i.e. to be “careful and troubled” about your work in the world, whatever it is. To eat the bread of sorrows. To feed, as it were, on sorrow—and trouble and care—to make your lives a burden to yourselves through your carefulness. For so he giveth his beloved sleep; rather, *surely he giveth to his beloved in sleep*; i.e. in their sleep. The teaching is similar to that of Exod. xiv. 14; Isa. xxx. 7, 15; Matt. vi. 25—34. God

gives to men that which he knows they have need of, if they have only the faith to “sit still” and “wait.”

Ver. 3.—Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord. The teaching is enforced by an example. The prosperity, alike of states and of individuals, depends on nothing so much as on an abundant progeny of children. But children are manifestly the free gift of God. And the fruit of the womb is his reward. One of the ways in which he rewards his faithful ones (see Dent. xxviii. 4, 11).

Ver. 4.—As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth; rather, *the children of youth*; i.e. children born to a man in his youth. Such children protect their aged parents as effectually as arrows in the hand of a warrior.

Ver. 5.—Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them. Happy the man whose quiver contains many such arrows, and who is thus sure of abundant protection. They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate; rather, *when they shall speak* (Hengstenberg, Kay, Choyne, Revised Version). “The gate” was the place where judgment was given, and where consequently adversaries were apt to meet, as they pushed their respective causes. There might be collisions on such occasions; and, in any case, a man with several lusty sons to take his part would have an advantage.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The blessing of God.* The psalm is in keeping with that prevalent piety which led the devout Israelite to trace God's hand in everything, and ascribe both good and evil, both joy and sorrow, to his directing power.

I. UNBLESSED LABOUR. 1. We can do nothing at all without the Divine co-operation. We constantly depend on the presence of his material, on the action of his laws, on the activity of the forces he keeps in play. We all recognize this in agriculture; that it is vain for the husbandman to sow his seed, unless God sends his rain and wind and sunshine, etc. It is also true of our other occupations. The sailor and the builder depend on the constancy and regularity of Divine laws and forces. We are always assuming their existence, though we may think nothing of their Author. 2. We can effect nothing without the Divine permission. If God means that the guilty city shall

fall, the watchman will wake and the soldier will fight in vain. If God intends to humble a man whose pride needs to be brought down, his utmost exertions in his trade or in his profession will not bring success. Many a man has found, as he at first thought to his *cost*, but as he afterwards knew to his *great advantage*, that when God's wise and faithful providence is against his prosperity, he wakes early and works hard in vain. But how much more blessed is he in a corrective adversity, than he would be in a hardening prosperity! We do well to ask that God's blessing may wait upon and crown all our activities; we do well, also, to remember that it may happen that, for our own sake, God will not grant us our desire in the form of temporal success. 3. We find no blessedness in a prosperity which is not hallowed by devotion. It is a vain thing for a man to strive hard and to attain the immediate object of his pursuit, if he is not making his life a life of holy service. Even if the bread he eats is not "bread of sorrows" in the sense that it is scanty, yet it will be such in the sense that it yields no abiding joy; for it is abundantly clear that a life of even prosperous labour, apart from the service and without the friendship of God, selfish and earthbound, is a life of dissatisfaction and practical defeat. The springs of pure and lasting joy do not rise on that lower ground.

II. NEEDLESS ANXIETY. "It is vain that ye rise up early," etc.; "for he giveth to his beloved in sleep and without labour, 'so,' i.e. just as, even as to those who vainly harass themselves with labour and think not of him" ('Speaker's Commentary'). To those who serve God and are beloved of him he will grant sufficiency, though they do not turn labour into hard toil, but take the rest they need. It is not godless struggle, but reverent activity, that attains the goal and receives the prize of happy life. The two elements of success are (1) a moderate and rational activity with needful and appropriate rest; and (2) the enjoyment of God's favour bringing down his blessing on our work. Be diligent at your post, give to muscle and to brain the relaxation they demand, spend your days and powers in the fear of God,—then you may commit yourself to his promise and await its fulfilment. There is no need for anxiety if you are honestly and wisely laborious, and also prayerful and obedient (see Phil. iv. 5—7).

III. THE FULNESS AND OVERFLOW OF DIVINE BLESSING. "So he giveth to his beloved in sleep." 1. What great things God does for our *bodily well-being* in sleep! Every night he lays his restoring hand upon us, refreshes us, renews our muscular and mental powers, gives back to us the vitality and strength which had been exhausted. Every morning we owe to him a "new song" of praise. 2. What great things God does for us in the *outside world* during our unconsciousness! Our Lord reminds us that, while we are otherwise occupied, "night and day," the seed we have sown springs and grows, we "know not how." Many things God does for us when we are as unconscious of his action as if we were "in sleep." It is an unseen hand, working with such silence that no ear hears the sound, that is carrying on those wonderful operations by which he "satisfies the wants of every living thing." 3. What great things he does for us in the *human world* in which we take no part! His hand was working and overruling in all the toil and strife of the nations of the earth, leading the world up to, and making it ready for, the great advent of the Redeemer. Unknown to us, while we are practically "in sleep," he is directing all our strife and all our labour to a beneficent result. 4. We are hoping that God will make our past life effective for good in many hearts and through many generations when we "fall on sleep." When our body rests in the grave, the influences he enabled us to exert in life will, under his gracious guidance, be telling and bearing fruit. To those who love and serve him now he will give the blessing of the workman whose labour is producing and reproducing long after he has left the field.

IV. THE BLESSING OF PARENTAGE. (See next psalm.)

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The builder's psalm.* Our ignorance of the exact reference of this psalm enables us to apply it, as perhaps otherwise we might not be able, to all builders whatsoever. Four such seem to be pointed at here.

I. THE TEMPLE-BUILDERS. 1. *We know that this was one of the solicitudes of the returned exiles—to uprear again the temple of the Lord.* And in the books written after the return from Babylon we read about this and the difficulties they had to encounter, and the success they at length achieved. Continually they needed to remember that “except the Lord build,” etc. 2. *And in the gathering together the living stones which are to form the Church of God,* how we need to remember this same truth! Her builders are perpetually tempted, and some are all too prone, to try other methods in this work than those the Lord employs. We are apt to rely on wealth, eloquence, learning, talent, and all other such things, and to forget that it is the Lord alone can really make our work successful.

II. THOSE OF THE CITY. (Ver. 1.) Jerusalem is doubtless meant, and, surrounded as she was by relentless and ever-watchful foes, the sentinels and guards needed ever to be on the alert. But again the same reminder comes in. And it does so still. This is the age of great towns and cities, of municipal corporations who naturally and properly take pride in the cities over which they are placed. They cannot but know how much depends upon wise administration and rule, on the sagacity and wisdom which the citizens can supply. And they who know the history of municipalities know how eager corruption and vice are to assert their power. And often it seems that to pander to them would help on the city's prosperity. But the city-builders need to recollect the truth of this psalm. What is all man's wisdom apart from God?

III. THE BUSINESS. (Ver. 2.) “Our house,” “our firm,”—these are well-known expressions for business associations—how many are hard at work to build such houses! And in the keen competition of the day, how difficult this often is! what temptations are on every hand, by tricks of trade, by what is called smartness, to get on, it matters not much by what means. How many succumb to such temptations, and try to keep one conscience for Sundays and quite another for weekdays! They have little faith in what this psalm says, “Except the Lord,” etc. Their faith is in strenuous hard work, rising early, sitting up late, eating the bread of toil, and so to win rest and repose for themselves. But it is not so, the psalmist declares; for all that toiling and moiling is “vain;” the Lord giveth to his beloved that which they need without all that restlessness and anxiety; their souls repose in him; he keeps them in perfect peace (cf. Prov. x. 22, Revised Version margin). Let the Lord, then, be the predominant partner in every firm; so shall the house be built.

IV. THE HOME. (Vers. 3—5.) People marry, and then begins the upbuilding of the family. What strenuous exertion does many a father put forth for the sake of his family! If the children be numerous, the parents are often very slow to appreciate the congratulations of these verses (3—5). The reason is that they are counting most precious for their children what the Lord scarcely counts precious at all. Of course, only a fool would despise secular advantages for his children, if they may be had; but infinitely more important for them is the grace of God possessing their hearts. Then no real ill can come to them, but eternal good shall be their portion.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—The sleep God gives. This psalm is, by its title in our Bible, ascribed to Solomon; in the Septuagint it is left without a title; in the Syriac Version it is ascribed to David. In structure it is like all the rest of these “Psalms of Degrees.” Hence we are very much in the dark as to its date and authorship, and are shut up, as it is well we should be, to its religious teachings. What these are it is not difficult to see; for its plain lesson is that all our defence and security are in the Lord alone. Hence reminder of this is given to the builders of the city, its watchmen and its toilers; and of its greatest earthly defence, the numerous children that should be born, it is declared that the blessed gift of children is from the Lord alone. So that if we are to know the real sense of security without which men cannot sleep, the Lord must give it.

I. NOW, THIS IS TRUE OF OUR LITERAL, NATURAL LIFE. Strong walls and vigilant guards are not enough; the Lord must give one sleep. And he does so. 1. *Think of the physical conditions of sleep.* They are part of that wonderful organization which God endued us with, and which is so constructed that at due times sweet refreshing sleep shall steal over our senses, and our tired bodies shall have rest. 2. *Think of the terrestrial conditions.* How this earth of ours swings itself round out of the light into the darkness. “Thou makest darkness, and it is night” (Ps. civ.). The sounds and

stir of the day are hushed, and the glare of light is gone for a while, and thus provision for sleep is made. 3. *Of the social conditions.* Strong governments, wise laws, skillful administration, security for life and property, all that which we call civilization, which God has been teaching men generation after generation,—all this, which gives that sense of security without which we could not rest, is part of God's methods whereby he bestows on us the blessed boon of sleep.

II. IT IS YET MORE TRUE OF THAT CALM AND SERENITY OF SOUL WHICH WE ALL WISH TO ENJOY. It is the Lord who giveth that. The psalm is a reminder to many who were seeking this "in vain" ways (see former homily). It is he who *giveth*, etc. It is not they who gain it for themselves or in any way earn it; nor is it given to all, but only to the beloved of the Lord. To them he giveth *sleep*, not the partial and unreal rest of soul which some seem to enjoy. To the builders, the watchmen, the toilers, the word is sent that apart from the Lord all is in vain. "Come unto me, all ye," etc.

III. AND TRUE, ALSO, OF THE SLEEP OF DEATH. To those who die in the Lord, death is but a sleep prior to a glorious awakening: hence it is so often spoken of as a sleep. But the Lord alone can give this. 1. *For it there is needed forgiveness of sin.* But this can only come to those who bring the sacrifice of the contrite heart. Even God cannot forgive an impenitent man; for he who will not give up his sin cannot escape the suffering which ever goes along with it. 2. *And the new heart.* The regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. "Without holiness shall no man see the Lord." He that is not meet for heaven cannot enter there. 3. *And a continual and utter trust in the love of God in Christ.* But all these are his gifts. For them "Christ is all and in all." Seek them, and so will rest of soul be ours now, and when life is done we shall sleep in him.—S. C.

Ver. 4.—*Children as arrows.* The psalmist takes far other than that pessimistic view, so common in our day, as to God's gift of children. Men now too often look upon them as so many misfortunes and incumbrances, and as compelling poverty and privation where else these evils had not been, and as so many channels through which trouble may come to the home in which they have been born. How beautifully and blessedly different is the teaching of this and the following psalm on this matter! Of course, where social conditions are such that, let a man be ever so willing to work, no work can be found for him, and toil as he will he cannot make a living, then the fact of a large family is, at any rate for a time, but an increase of sorrow. But then, such social conditions ought not to be, and the fact that by them what God designed to be so great a blessing is made to be only a terrible calamity, is reason enough why men should strive for a better condition of things. And there can be no doubt that many of man's laws and, yet more, man's sins do turn God's blessings into a curse. But children, it is never to be forgotten, were designed to be God's blessings, and in myriads of homes they are so. The special blessing the psalmist has in his mind, as coming through our children, is that they are as arrows in the hand of a mighty man. The similitude is a suggestive one.

I. THEY ARE SO FOR PROTECTION. Those children that are born when their parents are young will be of age to help and maintain their parents when these need such help. They defend their home from the attack of poverty and want. Long ere these have reached their home, these arrows have made them turn back.

II. FOR HELP IN THE BATTLE OF LIFE. The spur and stimulus which children impart to their parents, the pleasure they give, the love they awaken, the aspirations after good they arouse,—all these things are of vast help in life's battle, even "as arrows are," etc.

III. NEED TO BE CAREFULLY PREPARED. Arrows do not grow of themselves: they have to be wrought out with much thought and care. So our children.

IV. AND TO BE WELL AIMED. What is our aim for our children? The arrows will go where they are sent. How many parents there are who have no worthy aim for their children! They will be glad for them to "get on," to become rich, and to take good positions in society. If they have aim, it is no higher one than that. And those who profess the higher aim, that their children should be the Lord's, how badly, clumsily, carelessly, they seek that aim!

V. SENT FORTH WITH ALL POWER. See the "mighty man," how "he bends his bow and makes ready his arrow upon the string," and then draws it back to its full length, that it may speed with the more force on the way he would have it go; that is a picture of the strenuous, careful endeavour we should make to urge our arrows, our children, in the right way. But what all too little strenuousness there is in this matter!

VI. THEY ARE SURE TO WOUND, IF NOT KILL, SOMEWHERE. The foes of the home—want, godlessness, evil reputation and character, strife and ill will, hopelessness and despair, the malice of men, and much else, the children should slay, and not suffer them to come near us; and good children do this. But if we have not so trained them to thus serve the home, then they will turn and wound and pierce their parents to the heart. Bad children do this. Yes, always, they are "as arrows."—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The God of the family life.* "These pictures are mild and bright; humanizing are they in the best sense: they retain certain elements of Paradise, and yet more the elements of the patriarchal era, with the addition of that patriotism and of that concentration in which the patriarchal life was wanting. The happy religious man, after the Hebrew pattern, possessed those feelings and habitudes which, if they greatly prevail in a community, impart to it the strength of a combination which is stronger than any other; uniting the force of domestic virtue, of rural, yeomanlike, agricultural occupations, of unaggressive, defensive valour; and of a religious animation which is *national* as well as authentic and true" (Isaac Taylor). It is well to note that the very first associations of human beings over which God presided took the form of family life. Of Adam it is said, "which was the *son* of God," so the first relation of humanity was a family relation. When Adam and Eve had a child, earth held its model relationship—it had a family group. The patriarchs were but heads of families. The nation of Israel was Jehovah's family. And Christ came to restore for humanity its Divine family relationships. Man organized for himself fictitious social and citizen relations. Man made towns, governments, kings. All who are concerned in the welfare of humanity realize that everything depends on the healthy maintenance of family life. Napoleon was asked what could be done to restore the prestige of France. At once he replied, "Give us better mothers."

I. GOD INTERESTED IN FAMILY LIFE. The "God of the families of his people," he is called. The interest belongs to his own paternity; and we can partly realize it as we think of our interest in our children's children. It is possible to exaggerate in presenting God's interest in the *individual*. The plea for a family religion and a family altar is based on God's *family* care and blessing.

II. GOD WORKING IN FAMILY LIFE. Using its associations, cares, and mutual services for his work of character-culture. The commonplaces of family life only gain their dignity when God is seen to be using them; and the anxieties of family life become endurable when we feel sure that God is overruling. The Divine training of character for the life that is coming, by sanctifying family experiences, needs to be much more fully considered than it is.

III. GOD WORKING THROUGH FAMILY LIFE. That is, working his great work for humanity through the witness of family life. There is no mightier force used by God for securing the redemption of the race.—R. T.

Ver. 1.—*The true city watchman.* "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." This would come home very forcibly to the restored exiles if, as we may well assume, the psalm was written before Nehemiah restored the walls of the holy city. Then the only protection of the city must have been the vigilance of the night-watchmen, which never could be depended on. And yet the city containing God's people was absolutely secure; and would have been as secure if no watchmen had ever paced their ordered rounds. Their God was their defence. In older days, foes gathered round, but they never broke in, unless God gave them a commission of discipline or judgment. The restored exiles were surrounded by active enemies, and exposed on every side. But it did not matter. The fiat of Divine love and power held them in strictest restraint. Scheme they might, but they could not overpass Jehovah's limits, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further." The truth may be illustrated in

all those human arrangements for mutual safety which have for their type the city watchman, and which we call national and local government. So elaborate is man's device for securing the liberty of the person, the safety of property, and the health of the family, that there is grave danger of losing all sense of needing God. Indeed, God in city life is but a sentiment. And yet we remove his direct relation from the various forms of human association at our peril. Be it government, or socialistic self-government, "unless the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Very remarkable is the way in which man's civilization brings mischief as well as good; and his seemingly perfect schemes leave loop-holes for the entrance of desolating evils. This may be illustrated from city sanitary schemes, and from the prevalence of particular types of diseases, and from the masterful spread of epidemics such as influenza. It may be shown that the true preservation of a city is an *immaterial* matter as well as a *material*; it is as closely related to morals and religion as to safety for property, healthy houses, and pure water. And if it could be so—which it cannot—that we succeed in separating God from the material, no one can delude himself with the idea that God is not concerned with the moral and religious. So, after all, it must be God who "keeps the city."—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The limited value of self-exertion.* The great lesson of this psalm is "that without God's blessing all human efforts and human precautions are in vain; that man can never command success; that God gives and man receives." It is suggested that the psalm was written to check self-congratulation and self-reliance on the part of those who were rejoicing in their national restoration. The sentence, "so he giveth his beloved sleep," may mean—so much as others gain by hardest toil and pains God gives to his beloved even while they sleep and can do nothing. While they are slumbering he is giving. "The pious, God-fearing man attains the same end without exertion of his own." Delitzsch well summarizes the points of the psalm: "The rearing of the house which affords us protection, and the stability of the city in which we securely and peaceably dwell, the acquisition of possessions that maintain and adorn life, the begetting and rearing of sons that may contribute substantial support to the father as he grows old,—all these are things which depend upon the blessing of God, without natural preliminary conditions being able to guarantee them, well-devised arrangements to ensure them, unwearied labours to obtain them by force, or impatient care and murmuring to get them by defiance."

I. SELF-EXERTION SHOULD BE ESTIMATED. It has its value. It is not necessarily wrong. Human enterprise and energy, the impress of a man's self on his work, is required in every department of life. Human labour and watchfulness are never superfluous in their right spheres. It is no true piety to under-value self-exertion. Man must everywhere be his best possible.

II. SELF-EXERTION SHOULD BE RIGHTLY ESTIMATED. It has no right to claim the first place in a man's confidence. That he must keep for dependence on God. A man may work in dependence on himself, and he may work in dependence on God. Self-exertion is only rightly estimated when it is seen as loyalty and service to God (comp. Phil. ii. 12, 13, and illustrate by the prophet's putting his hand on the king's hand when the king drew the bow).

III. SELF-EXERTION SHOULD BE DIVINELY ESTIMATED. The question is not what men think of our energy and enterprise. It is—What does God think of it? Does he see it as a trying to push beyond him, and to be independent of him? or does he see it to be loyal and loving working with him? If the latter, then his blessing is upon the righteous.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Children a man's reward.* The picture presented is of the Hebrew man in mid-life, at rest in his country home, with his sturdy sons about him; his wife is still young; her fair daughters are like cornices sculptured as decorations for a palace" (Isaac Taylor). The Jews at all times of their history esteemed a large family one of the chief of blessings. "The Oriental view interweaves itself with the religious creed of the Brahmins, according to which a son, by offering the funeral libation, is said to procure rest for the departed spirit of his father." By "reward" we may understand "sign of Divine favour." The reward of a whole life's goodness cannot come until the

life is completed. Signs of Divine favour cheer and encourage as life progresses. Some married people do not have families, but we have no right to regard the withholding as a judgment. We need only say that, when children are sent, they are a sign of Divine favour. And this is not saying that *all* children who come into the world come as a Divine reward. We are exclusively dealing with the families of God's people, and all we have said is strictly true of *them*. There is a great compensation for persons who have no children, in the fact that they often have an unusual love for *other people's* children, and skill in ministering to them. This is illustrated in Sunday schools, ministers, orphan and outcast institutions, etc.

I. CHILDREN REWARD A MAN IN WHAT THEY THEMSELVES ARE. A man has no pleasure in life that can equal his joy in his children, who bear his image, and in miniature reproduce himself. Their ways, their talk, their crudities, their innocence, their unfolding, their very frailties, are a perpetual interest, relief, and pleasure. The child-ministry of childhood is seldom sufficiently estimated. Illustration may be taken from McLeod's 'Wee Davie;' or the more recent story of 'Bootle's Baby.'

II. CHILDREN REWARD A MAN IN WHAT THEY BECOME. For a man lives over again in the success of his children. He is proud of their well-grown healthy bodies; of their developed and cultured minds; of their honourable and useful positions. A man never feels to have lived in vain when he leaves a respectable and well-ordered family behind him.

III. CHILDREN REWARD A MAN IN WHAT THEY DO FOR HIM. This is especially in the psalmist's mind. The good man who has good children has a fortune laid up against old age and infirmity safer far than shares in joint-stock companies. His every need will be safely met by the response child-love will make to all his sacrifices in days gone by.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Children a man's power.* "As arrows are in the band of a mighty man; so are children of the youth." They are his effective agents in the battle of life. This is illustrated in many a business. The man is greatly helped as difficulties develop, and responsibilities increase, who has his own sons to share his burdens. The service of hirelings, however devoted and faithful, can never equal that of sons. A man gradually outgrows the toiling part of life. He may think and plan better than ever; but the executive power fails; and it is well if sons arise to be not only arrows, but even arms, for him. In the entire active sphere of life a man's sons may come to take his place.

I. CHILDREN ARE A MAN'S POWER WHEN RIGHT RELATIONS ARE MAINTAINED. The assumption of the psalm is that they are maintained. The godly man's God-fearing children alone are in thought. When children grow up wilful, wayward, unsonlike, they are a man's weakness. They are arrows bent from the straight, which may do more mischief than good. So on children the Word of God presses the duty of maintaining the family relation, and "honouring the father and the mother." And the relation must be preserved right up to the close of life. For long a son stands *with* his father; the time comes when he may have to stand *for* his father. Neglect of, and cruelty to, aged parents belong to heathenism, not to the religion of the eternal Father.

II. CHILDREN ARE A MAN'S POWER WHEN RIGHT CHARACTER IS CULTURED. What children are to their parents will of necessity depend much on natural disposition. Even an affectionate disposition finds expression in various forms. But it depends very much more on home-training. Parents may make themselves too independent, and, seeking little help from their children, get but little when they sorely need it. True home-culture nourishes mutual service. Only out of the practice of a common service can the special ministries of times of strain be found to grow.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*Children a man's security.* The sons of a man's youth-time are specially mentioned, because they would naturally grow up to be a support and protection to their father in his old age, when he would most need their support. If he should be involved in a lawsuit, his stalwart sons would not suffer might to prevail against right. Some think the reference is to a battle fought with besiegers at the gates. But the peaceful association is better. "Unjust judges, malicious accusers, and false witnesses were shy and faint-hearted before a family so capable of defending itself."

I. CHILDREN A SECURITY AGAINST POVERTY. How this comes round to the aged is sadly illustrated by the number of old people who end their days in a workhouse; and by the number of cases in which business men keep too long in business, and fail to adjust their methods to new times. Many an old man has wrecked a good business simply by keeping it on too long. If there are children, they arrest the decaying process, bring in new life, and so keep away the poverty which would otherwise enter as an armed man.

II. CHILDREN A SECURITY AGAINST AFFLICTION. There is nothing sadder than the aged man, in invalid condition, tended only by strangers. No matter what may be the form which the decay of nature takes, there is relief—the best relief—if the aged parent is tended and cared for by his own children. And there are annals of heroism, which relate the self-denying devotion of children, who have taken away well-nigh all the bitterness and strain of last months of affliction.

III. CHILDREN ARE A SECURITY AGAINST ENEMIES. For a man may suffer, worthily or unworthily, through his own weaknesses, or through persistent malice, right up to the close of his life. It makes one sad to think of David, not only groaning about enemies in his old age, but speaking bitterly about them. But they rage in vain, and must leave the old man in peace, if his sons are round him, and defending him. To him they may be “sons of peace.”—R. T.

Ver. 1.—*The Divine Builder.* (For the opening or reopening of a church.) “Except the Lord build the house,” etc.

I. OUR DEPENDENCE UPON GOD FOR ALL REAL PROSPERITY. 1. *Consider the material of the house we are building.* “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” “Ye also as *living stones*, are built up a spiritual house,” etc. The spiritual temple dwarfs the most magnificent material cathedrals. 2. *The Divine implements employed on the building.* Spiritual men working with Divine truths—the gospel—to build up a spiritual edifice. But some conditions to be remembered. (1) That the qualifications for such work are God-given, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” (2) Even then we are still dependent upon the co-operative blessing of God’s Spirit. “So then neither is he that planteth anything [alone], neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.” The soul like an organ. The keys give no musical response to the touch of the most skilful player till the wind is passed to the pipes.

II. HOW DEPENDENCE UPON GOD MAY BEST BE PROMOTED. 1. *By the most strenuous spiritual effort on our part.* This no paradox; for the more we aim to do for God, the more shall we feel the need of God to give us true success. 2. *By constantly thinking of the greatness of his work, and the littleness of our faculties in relation to it.* Men succeed in grand material enterprises and intellectual achievements—construct mighty bridges and steam-engines—and write magnificent books and poems; but to win men to Christ a good life is the most arduous work in life, demanding the highest inspirations of the mind. 3. *We must realize the spirit of dependence by the constant help of prayer.* To know the value of work we must put ourselves forth in constantly renewed endeavour; but our highest work can be sustained only by the help of the devoutest prayer.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXVIII.

It is not quite easy to see why this psalm occurs among the “Songs of Ascents.” The sentiment of it is that true religion never loses its reward; or, in other words, that whoever fears God shall be blessed. Five points of blessedness are enumerated (vers. 2, 3, 5, 6); but no one of them seems

to attach especially to pilgrims visiting Jerusalem. The picture of domestic life is pleasing, and one scarcely touched by any other psalmist.

Ver. 1.—Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord (comp. Ps. cxii. 1; cxv. 13); that walketh in his ways. The psalmist assumes that true religious fear of God, and a good and holy life, will necessarily go together.

The point on which he wishes to insist is that on every such case will rest God's blessing.

Ver. 2.—For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands. This is the first point of the "blessedness." God's faithful servant shall enjoy the fruits of his own industry, and not have them devoured by strangers (comp. Deut. xxviii. 33; Lev. xxvi. 16; Ps. cix. 11). Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee; rather, *happy thou, and well is it with thee* (comp. Deut. xxxiii. 29).

Ver. 3.—Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides (rather, *in the inner chambers*) of thine house. The second point of blessedness is a fruitful wife, content to dwell in the female apartments of the house, to keep at home (Titus ii. 5) and guide the household. Thy children like olive plants; or, "olive shoots"—the vigorous offsets from an aged olive tree, which spring up around it, ready to take its place. Round about thy table. Clustering around thy board, at once a source of cheerfulness and strength (see Ps. cxxvii. 5). This is the third point of blessedness.

Ver. 4.—Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord. The promise must not be regarded as universal and absolute, but as general and admitting exceptions. Still, even under the new covenant, "Godliness has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. iv. 8).

Ver. 5.—The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion. To the Israelite all blessings came out of Zion, which he regarded as God's earthly dwelling-place. And thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. The "good of Jerusalem" seems to mean here the "good fortune," or "prosperity," of Jerusalem. To see this would add still further to the blessedness of God's faithful servant.

Ver. 6.—Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children. This is mentioned as the crowning blessing granted to Job in his second period of happiness (Job xlii. 16). It is here promised to the faithful generally. And peace upon Israel. This is best taken as a detached clause, like the concluding clause of Ps. cxxv., and rendered, "Peace be upon Israel."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1-6.—*Present recompense.* It is quite certain that the true and loyal servant of God will be abundantly rewarded; it is not certain *when* or *how* he will receive his recompense. There are three spheres in which that reward may lie. It may be largely, almost wholly, *in the future*. Bitter and protracted persecution may make the present life nearly worthless, so far as happiness is concerned (see 1 Cor. xv. 19). Or it may be largely in the sphere of the *spiritual*—in the cleansed and pure heart; in elevation of character; in fellowship with God. Or it may be partly in the *present* and the temporal. Commonly, God rewards his children in all these ways. Our text deals with the last and least of these. If a man fears God and keeps his commandments, he will, under ordinary conditions, have, as the token of Divine favour—

I. THE REAPING OF THE FRUIT OF HIS LABOUR. He "eats the labour of his hands." The builder rejoices in the house which he has erected, the farmer in the fields he has made productive, the florist in the garden he has planted, the author in the book he has written, the statesman in the measures he has passed into law, etc. Apart from the physical comfort it may bring us, we have a pure pleasure in the effect of honest and faithful work. And if a man cherishes a humble and grateful spirit, it is permissible that he enjoys the success which he has achieved, and the honour or the pleasure he has earned by patient industry.

II. DOMESTIC DELIGHTS. 1. *Conjugal.* (Ver. 3.) The wife to her husband, the husband to his wife, is a "goodly heritage"—a joy and a treasure which no prince can confer, no money will buy. True conjugal affection, the outgrowth of mutual esteem, is a source of lasting and elevating gladness of heart, for which all who have possessed it should give heartiest thanks to the Giver of all good. And with a sense of reciprocity should be associated a sense of duty; it becomes husband and wife to maintain through life the sweetness and excellency of this attachment; to do this by mutual courtesy, self-sacrifice, concession, tender ministry in health and in sickness, united effort on behalf of others. 2. *Parental.* (1) Children should be welcomed as precious gifts from the kind hand of God (see Ps. cxxvii. 3-5; Gen. xxxiii. 5). They "bring love with them," we say, but they do more than that—they open our nature

and call forth its best affections; they unseal fountains of purest feeling which otherwise would not have flowed forth; they immeasurably enrich our souls and our lives by the love they evoke and by the love they return. They to whom children are not given will render themselves a most valuable service and give themselves the best opportunity of doing good, by adopting the fatherless and the motherless, and making them their own. Children, if ordinarily affectionate, will soon excite tender feeling in the breast; and many are they who have learnt to love the child of their adoption with a warmth and with a depth of love that went far beyond their anticipation, and that greatly enlarged their heart and enhanced the value of their life. (2) Children should be treated as the most sacred charge placed in the hand of man by the hand of God. No one can tell the capacities and possibilities that are folded in the form and hidden in the heart of a little child. (3) Children should realize how much they owe to those who have expended on them the wealth of a parent's love. It becomes them to be a constant source of joy at home, and to be a defence and protection against all that would invade its peace (see Ps. cxxvii. 5).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS

Vers. 1—6.—*The secret of the happy home.* I. THE FEAR OF THE LORD. 1. *This is not a slavish fear*, but that reverent and loving regard to the Lord's will, in all things, which will make a man shrink from transgression. 2. *He has this blessed fear who himself has known the loving-kindness of the Lord*, and whose love has been awakened up thereby. This fear of the Lord is the essential foundation of the truly happy home. 3. *It must be in the head of the household*, and should be in the wife and children too. Indeed, if husband and wife are not of one mind in this respect, it is difficult to see how their home can be happy.

II. WHERE THIS IS, THE FATHER WILL HIMSELF BE BLESSED. Every verse in this psalm declares this, and constant experience endorses it. 1. *The man shall be blessed in himself*. "Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee." The fear of God preserves him; the Spirit of God rules him; the love of God has redeemed him: he is happy in God. 2. *He is blessed in his business*. (Ver. 2.) He shall not live by begging, by knavery, by any unworthy means, but by God's blessing upon his honest toil. This is the happiest way of living, and it shall be to the man who feareth the Lord. 3. *In his home*. Dear wife and children shall make him glad; no solitary, loveless abode shall his be, but a home in all the blessed meaning of that word. And, thank God, there are myriads such—affectionate, well-ordered, healthful, pure, bright. 4. *He shall be blessed through the Church's ministry and fellowship*. (Ver. 5.) The blessing of the Lord in his Church was sought on the union of his wife and himself; their children, one by one, were brought and presented to the Lord in baptism, and the Lord's blessing sought upon and won for them; and in the holy services of the Church his household is trained to take part. And the influence of all this on the home happiness is great indeed. 5. *He is blessed in the guarantees that such homes as his give for the peace and prosperity of his country*. (Vers. 5, 6.) Such homes are a nation's bulwarks, and do more for the good of the nation and her peace and preservation than all the munitions of war. Where such homes are, the aged are cheered by seeing their children's children enjoy the blessings they have helped to secure, and by the prospect that when they are gone their descendants will enjoy like peace. Such are the blessings of him that feareth the Lord.

III. AND THE WIFE. (Ver. 2.) *She shall be as the beautiful fragrant vine*, and not alone in its fruitfulness. There will be that; she will be the joyful mother of many bright, happy, and healthful children, who cling to her as the clusters do to the vine; but also, like the vine, she will be for the comfort and adornment of the home, imparting gracious shade and shelter from the heat (cf. Micah iv. 4). It is not said, but it is implied all through, that the same blessed fear of the Lord that dwells in her husband dwells also in her.

IV. AND THE CHILDREN. "Like olive plants." It is a common sight, in the lands where the olive grows, to see the parent tree surrounded, and, as it were, sustained, by the young olive shoots that have sprung from its roots. As they have sprung from

the parent root, so they are like their parent, and they gather round, as the children do round the table at home. Yes, the children are as the parent. The godly man will be blessed in his children: their father's God will their God; they will be as their father, and will hand on the fear of the Lord which they first learnt from him. May our children be as these olive plants!—S. C.

Vers. 3—6. —“*Home, sweet home!*” Apart from the plain teachings of Holy Scripture—

I. THE MIND OF GOD IS EVIDENT IN REGARD TO FAMILY LIFE FROM THE NUMERICAL EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN. It is not alone that God, in the beginning, gave one woman to be the wife of one man; but his will is still expressed by the equality which seems perpetual and universal in the numbers of each sex that are born. The histories of patriarchs and kings who departed from this monogamic law are recorded, not for imitation, but for warning. No blessing ever resulted from it, but everywhere and always misery, discord, and strife. So it always has been, and so it ever must be. Family life, in the true sense of the term, was impossible in the crowded harems of men like David, Solomon, and so many more. It is possible only where God's primal law is obeyed.

II. FROM THE FACT OF PARENTAL LOVE, ESPECIALLY THE DEEP SELF-SACRIFICING MOTHER-LOVE, into which it is God's will that children should be born. This is to be the beautiful and wholesome atmosphere of the home as it generally is. The children bring the love for them along with them.

III. THE PRESERVATION OF THE FAMILY INSTITUTION. What other institution, civil, ecclesiastical, political, has not had its day and disappeared? But not this.

IV. THE TREMENDOUS INFLUENCE OF THE HOME UPON THE CHILDREN. It is not alone their physical existence that they owe to their parents; but their mental, moral, and spiritual characteristics are, though not absolutely, yet almost entirely, dependent upon their parents. No child can escape the influence of its home.

V. HOW BLESSED ARE, AS A RULE, THE RESULTS OF THIS DIVINE ARRANGEMENT! What a vast proportion of the whole sum of human happiness springs from it! The very word “home” has a magic power in the hearts of most men. It summons up memories of delight. Our Lord himself portrays heaven itself to us as “my Father's house”—his home.

VI. ITS SUPREME PURPOSE. (Mal. ii. 15.) Can any one conceive of a more effectual and more beneficent and gracious method whereby the kingdom of God should be set up in the world? The Divine wisdom and love are conspicuous therein.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Practical fear.* “Feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways.” “Let us cultivate that holy filial fear of Jehovah, which is the essence of all true religion; the fear of reverence, of dread to offend, of anxiety to please, and of entire submission and obedience. This fear of the Lord is the fit fountain of holy living; we look in vain for holiness apart from it: none but those who fear the Lord will ever walk in his ways” (Spurgeon). The rabbis explain the sentence in this way: “Abstains from breaches of the prohibitory commandments of the Decalogue, and performs the positive ones.” True fear is linked with obedience and righteousness.

I. THE FEAR THAT PARALYZES EFFORT. This is the fear that takes form as *fright*. Sudden alarm often renders persons absolutely helpless. There is a moral fear of persons which has a similar effect. We cannot be our true selves in their presence. Because of overstrained nervous condition, Elijah felt this fear when he received the threatening message of Jezebel. But, in its bad form, this paralyzing fear is best illustrated by the one-talent man of our Lord's parable, who excused neglect of duty with the plea, “I knew thee, that thou art an austere man. And I feared.” The true fear of God makes such unworthy fear of any one, or anything, else impossible.

II. THE FEAR THAT WASTES ITSELF IN SENTIMENT. There is a fear which belongs only to the emotions, and is but a matter of feeling. One of the great perils of modern religious life is making sentiment stand in place of righteousness. The answer of the modern religious man to every inquiry respecting his standing and his hope, is this, “I have *felt*.” The fear of sentiment has in it more awe than love, and it is only too likely to grow into demoralizing superstition, that covers and excuses self-indulgence.

Sentiment and superstition are always satisfied with themselves; make a centre of self; and feel relieved of all claims of duty and righteousness.

III. THE FEAR THAT INSPIRES ENDEAVOUR. He who fears aright finds the fear inspire *walking* in ways of obedience. This is indeed the test of all forms of fear. The true fear of God draws us nearer to him, and puts us upon a holy anxiety to please him. The fear of God excites to a threefold endeavour; we want (1) to obey him; (2) to honour him; (3) to serve him. And such practical fear is blessed.

—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The link between labour and reward.* Labour is not a part of the judgment on man's fall; the conditions under which he has to labour may be. Labour is presupposed in the nature of man, and in his relations to the material world in which he is placed. There is a fixed, natural, and necessary connection between labour and reward; but man's frailties and sins, with their consequences, make contingent what should be necessary. And so the reaping of reward for toil comes properly to be regarded as a sign of Divine working; an intervention and overruling of Divine providence. A very curious instance of the way in which nature illustrates even human wrongdoing is seen in the fish-eating bird, that will not fish for himself, but watches for and snatches away the prey for which another bird has laboured, thus coming in between labour and reward, as evil men so often do.

I. THE NATURAL LINK. God has fixed, in the order of nature, that profit, increase, shall universally attend labour. The model is found in the harvest-field. Plant a seed in the prepared ground, and that labour shall be rewarded with thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold. There is always something wrong when no reward follows labour. This law is as fixed as the law of the sunrising, and therefore the confidence of reward is always acting as an incentive to labour.

II. THE INTERRUPTIONS OF THE NATURAL LINK. For interruptions of the natural order there are in this as in every other sphere of nature. It is said, "There is no law without exceptions." It would be better to say, "without limitations and qualifications." Some are (1) *natural*. Lack of rain, locust-plague, etc., may prevent reward following labour in the harvest-field. Some are (2) *artificial*. They arise out of men's enmities or wrong-doings, as when Bedouins sweep away the harvest of the farmer's toil.

III. THE RESTORATION OF THE NATURAL LINK. In this way the work of Divine grace in godly lives may be presented. Even while recognizing Divine permissions of calamity, we may dwell restfully on the assurance of Divine overruling. Just what God is doing in every individual and every family life of which he approves is, removing or restraining the artificial, and restoring the natural.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Family joys.* This psalm is the picture of a God-fearing father, blessed with wealth and offspring, and with long life to see God's blessing upon Jerusalem. Dr. Barry renders this verse, "Thy wife, in the inner chamber, is like the fruitful vine." Vines in the East are not usually trained over houses, or on walls. The vine is an emblem chiefly of fruitfulness, but perhaps also of dependence, as needing support; the olive of vigorous, healthy, joyous life. "We see the father of the family, working hard no doubt, but recompensed for all his pains by an honourable competence, and the mother, instead of seeking distraction outside her home, finding all her pleasures in the happiness of her numerous children, who, fresh and healthy as young saplings, gather round the simple but ample board." "Olive plants" are illustrated thus: "This aged and decayed tree is surrounded, as you see, by several young and thrifty shoots, which spring from the root of the venerable parent. They seem to uphold, protect, and embrace it. We may even fancy that they now bear that load of fruit which would otherwise be demanded of the feeble parent."

I. FAMILY JOYS COME OUT OF FAMILY TOIL. One idler in a family spoils the family joy. Each member must have his or her sphere, and love work. The self-indulgent member, the ne'er-do-well, the spendthrift, is the household anxiety. In common and united labour is found the family satisfaction.

II. FAMILY JOYS COME OUT OF RELATIVITY. Each member is an individual with marked individuality. A puzzle-shaped piece. There is trouble when the pieces do

not fit to one another. The secret of family joy is each one getting shaped to the other, so that individuality is perfected in relationship.

III. FAMILY JOYS COME OUT OF AFFECTION. There is a peculiar feeling toward each other cherished by members of one family. We call it family affection. Illustrate by the joy of times of family reunion; and show how that affection helps family relations and sanctifies family fellowship.

IV. FAMILY JOYS COME OUT OF PIETY. Which is the recognition of another and all-hallowing family life. For piety is no other than a realization of our family life with God. And the more worthily we respond to that, the more skilfully and successfully we meet the obligations of the family life on earth.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The present blessings of the pious.* Dr. Binney, in his day, made some commotion by his book on 'Making the Best of Both Worlds.' And yet he did but write in the line of all Old Testament teaching; in accordance with the teaching of our Divine Lord, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;" and after the firm declaration of St. Paul, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." We ought to have outlived all possibility of misapprehending such teaching; and yet there are still among us those who see in religion only a safety for the world to come, which permits indifference to the interests of the present. "Living on high" is too often confused with "living on yonder." And it is too readily forgotten that *this* world is just as truly, and just as much, God's world as any other world can be. The devil talked about giving the world to Jesus; but a good many people besides the devil have offered to give what never was and never will be theirs. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the round world, and they that dwell therein."

I. THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF DEFERRED BLESSING. It must be distinctly recognized that the immediate connection between happiness and piety is never guaranteed. The connection is, but the immediacy is not. If man was beyond the need of moral training, happiness and piety might have no break between them. But man has to *learn to trust*. It is a lesson that is only learned in the school of deferred hope.

II. THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF BESTOWED BLESSINGS. For, as a rule, the good man is happy in his goodness, and happy through his goodness. And that sign of Divine favour tends to nourish and culture humility and thankfulness. In true-minded persons to *win* may be a peril by nourishing pride; but to *receive* never is a peril, for it nourishes humility. The wonder of the grateful man is the blessing of which he is the recipient. So God works his work of grace by his benedictions.

III. THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF PROMISED BLESSINGS. If the present is bright, we look *up* rather than *on*. If the present is dark, we look *on* rather than *up*. We do not always want the future; it is sufficiently guaranteed by God's grace in the present. But there are times of bodily frailty and trying circumstance, when *hope* dies down in the soul. Then it is we need the cheer of visions of the city of everlasting good, and love, and life.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Length of life a recognition of family goodness.* Notice that the welfare of the family and the welfare of the state are indissolubly connected. The expression, "children's children" is literally, "and see thou sons to thy sons." "Long life crowns all temporal favours." Solomon says that "children's children are the crown of old men." "The good man is glad that a pious stock is likely to be continued; he rejoices in the belief that other homes as happy as his own will be built up, wherein altars to the glory of God shall smoke with the morning and evening sacrifice. This promise implies long life, and that life rendered happy by its being continued in our offspring. It is one token of the immortality of man that he derives joy from extending his life in the lives of his descendants."

I. LENGTH OF LIFE IS BUT A WEARIENESS UNDER SOME CONDITIONS. In itself there is no special good in long life. When a man has done his work, he is ready for his work under the next set of conditions. Bunyan may picture a "Land of Beulah," but the years of retirement, after business life is over, are seldom an unmixed and unqualified joy. The "Preacher's" description of painful, wearying old age is often realized.

Godless old age, with its crushing burden of youthful sins, is a miserable business; and even the godly man finds the waiting years wearily weighted with pain and suffering. And prolonged life is especially weary when a man outlives all his family and friends; and, after having been wrapped about, all his life, with family love, is dependent on strangers. It is one joy of family life that this seldom happens when a man has his quiver full of children.

II. LENGTH OF LIFE IS BUT A BLESSING UNDER SOME CONDITIONS. There is nothing more beautiful in social life than reverent, honoured, upright old age. The value of old men's influence on us is suggested by that pathetic interest we have in their lovely white hair. Let a man but keep healthy, and quick-minded to the changing interests of the passing age, and prolonged life can be nothing but a joy to him. Under the same conditions, his continuance is nothing but a joy and blessing to his family, who make him the centre which holds them all in a loving and mutually helpful unity. And under the same conditions, old men are nothing but a blessing to the state, which is kept steady by the conservative goodness of its aged members.—R. T.

Vers. 1—6.—*A sunny picture of the life of a good man.* “Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord,” etc.

I. THE GREATEST, MOST INFLUENTIAL, RELIGION IS COMPOUNDED OF “THE FEAR” OF THE CONSCIENCE AND THE TRUST AND LOVE OF THE HEART. “The fear” is the elevating fear of offending against the highest law, and the strongest, tenderest love—one of the holiest feelings that Christ has generated in the new life.

II. SUCH A CONTINUATION RESULTS IN THE BEST, MOST OBEDIENT, LIFE. “That walketh in his ways.” The “walking” in the ways of God is the habitual life of God-like ways—not any occasional outburst of righteous impulses or endeavours. The walk of a man in his settled character.

III. SUCH A LIFE GIVES HIM A LOFTY INDEPENDENCE. “He eats of the labour of his hands.” He enjoys the satisfaction of living upon his own labour, and not upon what others have done for him. This entails *health, competence, and the highest prosperity.* “Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.”

IV. AND PRODUCES ALSO THE HAPPINESS OF THE HOME LIFE. The wife is the image of rich abundance; the children, of vigorous health. This is supposed principally to spring from the life and influence of the good man—his life is reproduced in the life of the wife and children; and they depend upon him, as the vine depends upon that to which it clings. The whole passage is richer in what it suggests than in what it pictures.

V. SUCH A MAN STANDS IN USEFUL AND HAPPY RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH AND THE CITY. (Ver. 5.) He is blessed out of Zion, and sees the good of Jerusalem. Individual character is the centre of all life, both in Church and State; and when each is filled with the power of Christ in his personal life, he helps to flood the life of the Church and of the State with the only enduring elements of the highest prosperity.

VI. HE REJOICES IN A HAPPY OLD AGE, AND IN THE COMPANIONSHIP OF HIS CHILDREN'S CHILDREN. The good man, whose affections and sympathies remain pure down to old age, takes great delight in children and grandchildren, and sees in them the pledges of future peace to the Church and the country.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXIX.

THIS psalm consists of a retrospect (vers. 1—4) and an anticipation (vers. 5—8). The retrospect shows Israel oppressed by enemies for a long term of years, but finally vindicated and delivered (ver. 4). The anticipation shows her enemies afflicted in their turn,

and suffering the just reward for their misdeeds.

Ver. 1.—*Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth.* Israel's recollection is one of frequent, almost constant, “affliction.” She has been dwelt upon beneath the feet of Egyptians, Moabites, Mesopotamians, Canaanites, Ammonites, Philistines, Syrians,

Assyrians, Babylonians. Her sufferings began in her extreme youth, as soon as she was a nation (Exod. i. 11—22). *May Israel now say; rather, let Israel now say.* The psalmist directs his countrymen to look back upon their past history.

Ver. 2.—*Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth.* The repetition emphasizes the fact of Israel's long and bitter suffering. Yet they have not prevailed against me. Israel has not been given as a prey to the heathen's teeth (Ps. cxxiv. 6). She is still a nation, unsubdued; she holds her own; the struggle is not ended.

Ver. 3.—*The plowers plowed upon my back.* A strong metaphor, which does not elsewhere occur. The idea is perhaps taken from the cruel treatment of captives in those days, who, in certain cases, were "put under saws and harrows of iron" (2 Sam. xii. 31), or, as it is elsewhere expressed, "threshed with threshing instruments of iron" (Amos i. 3). *They made long their furrows; i.e. "lengthened out their tortures."*

Ver. 4.—*The Lord is righteous. Still, God is just.* He allowed these sufferings to be inflicted on us because we deserved them; and he interposed on our behalf when we had been sufficiently punished, and cut asunder the cords of the wicked. Out, i.e., the cords wherewith they had bound us. The "retrospect" here ends, and in the next verse the "anticipation" begins.

Ver. 5.—*Let them all be confounded; or,*

"they shall all be confounded," or "put to shame." And turned back. Made to turn their backs upon their foes. That hate Zion. That have shown themselves enemies to Israel. The main verbs are in the future tense, but may be taken as expressive either of a wish or of a confident expectation.

Ver. 6.—*Let them be as the grass upon the house-tops; literally, they shall be as the grass of house-tops.* The flat roofs of Oriental houses are usually covered in early spring with a crop of bright-green grass. But the scorching rays of the sun soon burn this up, and it becomes dry and withered (see 'The Land and the Book,' p. 682; and comp. Isa. xxxvii. 27). Which withereth afore it groweth up; literally, *before it is unsheathed*; i.e. before the blossom has left the sheath in which it is formed.

Ver. 7.—*Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand.* Which is so worthless that no one takes the trouble to mow it. Nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom. Much less does any one bind it into sheaves and store it away.

Ver. 8.—*Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you; we bless you in the name of the Lord.* Harvesters were thus greeted (Ruth ii. 4), and still are to this day. "These expressions," says Dr. Thomson, "are most refreshingly Arabic. Nothing is more natural than for Arabs, when passing by a fruit-tree or corn-field loaded with a rich crop, to exclaim, *Barak Allah! 'God bless you!'*" ('The Land and the Book,' p. 682).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Sin a failure.* Neither the violence of sin against others nor its effort on its own behalf is successful.

I. THE FAILURE OF ITS VIOLENCE. The enemies of Israel are regarded as the enemies of the Lord; their attempts to despoil and destroy Israel were sins against God. They consequently proved to be utter failures. They were mercilessly cruel; they "ploughed upon the back, and made long their furrows;" they strove to enslave with their strong cords (ver. 4), but "they did not prevail" (ver. 2); their cords were cut asunder (ver. 4). Israel survived the hardships of Egypt and the captivity of Babylon. Many nations and communities have passed through similar afflictions and oppressions, but they have borne them bravely; they may even have been the purer, the stronger, the more united, for all they have suffered. Many a man can speak in the same strain; his history has been one of struggle and hardship in youth, of toil in mid-life, of deliverance and gratitude in later years. He has lived to see his oppressors humbled, to find that they who offend God by ill treating his servants come to shame and sorrow. The most striking lesson of the psalm is—

II. THE DEGENERACY OF SIN. The psalmist prays (or states) that those who "hate Zion" may be like the grass which has no depth of earth, which withers before it attains maturity, which falls short of the blessing which the well-planted corn enjoys (vers. 6—8). Here are two evils which the unholy have to face. 1. *Early withering.* (1) Sin often leads down to some form of vice, some evil habit which is at variance with the laws of our nature and the will of God. We know what that means. It

means the drying up of the distinctively human resources; it means loss of physical vitality; it means the fading of mental power; it means the degeneracy of the soul. The end is not far off; before it has fully "grown up," before the zenith of life is reached, the constitution is wrecked, the darkness of death has fallen. (2) Sin is selfishness, very often worldliness and vanity. And either of these ends in a sad spiritual withering. The heart closes up; there is no expansion, no ripening, no fruit-bearing under the gracious influences of Divine love and human pity and holy fellowship. Long before bodily death arrives, spiritual destruction has come. 2. *The loss of the higher good.* The man who is living under the dominion of sin and selfishness misses all that is worthiest and best. In his life is no such scenery as that so beautifully sketched in the psalm. He has to go without the blessing of God and the benediction of his kind.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The Divine life.* This psalm is capable of a threefold application. It tells of the Divine life—

I. IN ISRAEL. 1. *The existence of the chosen people was a lifelong struggle.* The sounds of battle and war are never, save but for short intervals, absent from their history. From the oppression they had to endure in Egypt right down to the time when this psalm was composed, they never lacked enemies who "fought against" them, and did them all the harm they could. 2. *But their enemies never altogether prevailed.* (Ver. 2.) Sooner or later deliverance came. Such a deliverance had just now come, and hence this psalm. And the complete deliverance which is still needed for Israel we may well believe, from the records of the past, will, in God's good time, be forthcoming. 3. *The sufferings which they caused them were very great.* (Ver. 3.) As the ploughshare tears up the soil, so the lacerating scourge tore their flesh. In these psalms we yet hear the wail of their lamentations and their exceeding bitter cry (see Pss. cxxiv., cxxxvii., and many more; comp. Isa. i. 6; li. 23). 4. *The Lord, true to his covenant, put an end to their sufferings.* As when the cords, the traces that fasten the oxen to the plough, are cut, the plough comes to a standstill, so the dread plough of suffering, which ploughed such agonizing furrows in their souls, was brought to a standstill; for the Lord cut asunder the cords. 5. *But the bitter memory begot bitter prayers.* (Vers. 6—8.) That those who so dealt with them may be ashamed, defeated, despised as worthless, like the grass that springs up and at once withers, because on the house-top there can be no depth of earth, and hence such grass is of no value at all (cf. Isa. xxxvii. 27), and that they may be such as no blessing of the Lord can rest upon (ver. 8). Before we condemn such prayers, we should put ourselves in the place of those who offered them. They may not be Christian any more than war is always Christian, but they are very natural. They are not the utterances of personal revenge, but prayers for the overthrow of those who hated Zion, and who were the enemies of God as well as of Zion. Nevertheless, in spite of all, Israel was preserved of God.

II. IN THE CHURCH. Verse by verse the words of the psalm tell of her experience. Cradled in conflict, oppressed with suffering, "fought against" by enemies one after another, varied in kind, but all terrible, yet never really defeated—"they have not prevailed against me;" so may the Church say. And long ago the Lord has cut asunder, for the most part, the cords whereby the cruel ploughshare of persecution was dragged over the bleeding flesh of the people of God. Our freedom should kindle and keep glowing our sympathy with those Christians who, in the dominions of the "unspeakable Turk," are yet subjected to horrible atrocities. Oh that the Lord may soon cut asunder those cords, and set his people free! Nor are the prayers against the perpetrators of such atrocities with which this psalm closes improper for us, and still less for those who endure such wrongs. But God's Church ever lives.

III. IN THE INDIVIDUAL SOUL. Again is this psalm the transcript of the history of the life of God, but now as existing in the soul of the individual Christian. The enemies now are not of flesh and blood, but spiritual, and, therefore, yet more terrible.

For they who hurt the body soon have no more that they can do; but these can eternally torment us—they can destroy both soul and body in hell. Therefore we may well, as Christ bids us, fear them. Nor are the most terrible of the prayers in these imprecatory psalms out of place when we think of these foes. We are bound to hate them and pray against them, and by God's help we will.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Our seven sorrows.* "Many a time have they afflicted me;" so many times that it seemed useless to try and count them up. It is enough to represent them by one number, and that the representative of completeness, *seven times*. Israel may be said, as a nation, to have had an *all-round* experience of affliction and discipline. Eliphaz the Temanite speaks rightly to Job for God when he says, "He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven there shall be no evil touch thee" (Job v. 19).

I. A FACT OF THE NATIONAL HISTORY. So far as the record reveals that history, it appears to be a series of calamities and distresses; some brought about by characteristic national frailties, some by individuals forcing their wilfulnesses, some by untoward circumstances, and some by the active schemes of enemies. It would even seem that national sorrows are so well represented in this history that we may speak of its "seven sorrows;" and we may find the mission of all forms of human trial illustrated in the moral influence of these calamities and woes of Israel. But we need not assume that its experiences were unique. Every nation is born of, and moulded by, similar troubles. The peculiarity of Israel does not lie in its experiences, but in the *reading* of its experiences. The Bible reads them in the light of *Jehovah's relation to them*. This is the only true reading of human history, and all history needs to be read in this light. God is in the sorrows of a nation.

II. A FACT OF THE INDIVIDUAL HISTORY. It does not matter where, or under what circumstances, or in what relations, a man's life is lived. A man is "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." No man can escape it. It would be his curse if he could. A man can, as a moral being, become righteous; but there is no school in which he can be trained for righteousness save the school of affliction. It is no ground of boasting to any man that his life has been free from trials. If a man may boast at all, he should boast over his "seven sorrows," because he may indulge the hope that God's grace has been mighty in him, and he has come into much sanctifying discipline.
—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The figure of the torn land.* The expression, "They made long their furrows," can only be understood through the peculiar conditions of Eastern ploughing. The word "furrow" (*maanah*) signifies a strip of arable land which the ploughman takes in hand at one time, at both ends of which, consequently, the ploughing team always comes to a stand, turns round, and begins a new furrow. Since the ordinary ox of Palestine is smaller and weaker than ours, and easily becomes tired under the yoke, which presses heavily on its neck and confines its neck, they are obliged to give it time to recover its strength by frequent resting. This always takes place at the termination of a furrow, when the peasant raises the unwieldy plough out of the earth, and turns it over, clearing off the moist earth with the small shovel at the lower end of the goad, and hammering the loosened edges and rings tight again, during which time the team is able to recover itself by resting. They do not, therefore, make the furrows of great length. The figure of this verse is explained by the over-exhaustion of the oxen, if the furrows through which they had to drag the plough were made overlong. The suggestion of the 'Speaker's Commentary' is less natural. It takes the verse as a figure of scourging. (Improving on this, Dr. Wordsworth finds anticipation of the scourging of Christ.) "The lashes inflicted upon the back of the writhing slave by a cruel master are compared to the long furrows pierced in the passive earth by the share of the plougher." The figure must be explained in the light of the memories cherished by the psalmist, as representing the nation just returned from captivity. And the nation is symbolized by the land in which the nation dwelt.

I. ISRAEL'S SORROWS HAD BEEN LIKE THE WORK OF A PLOUGH IN THE LAND. Attention is indeed fixed only on the tearing open and turning over of the land; but we need not miss seeing that this stern dealing was the necessary preliminary to seed-

sowing and fruitage. (Compare "No trial for the present seemeth to be joyous," etc.) Better be torn land than harvestless land.

II. THE AGENTS OF ISRAEL'S SORROWS HAD OVERDONE THEIR WORK. They had gone beyond their commission, had increased the length of the furrow. So we often think of our sorrows when we try to estimate their moral value. But that is what we can never do wisely. They never do go beyond God-arranged limits.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Righteousness may involve judgment.* The cutting asunder of cords figuratively presents the liberating of Israel from the Babylonian captivity, and also the yet earlier experience of the nation, when Jehovah cut the cords of Egypt, and set his people free. This is the consideration which relieves the psalmist's strain in thinking how many Israel's trials had been, and how greatly her enemies had enjoyed inflicting them. "Jehovah is righteous." There is always security and rest in that conviction. "He will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear." Men or circumstances may put cords about us. Whenever he sees it right to do so, our God can "cut the cords asunder." Men may "hate Zion," and gladly do her a mischief; but this we may always rely on—God can "confound them and turn them back," as he did the Syrians in the days of Elisha. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Righteousness is a many-sided and many-related thing.

I. **RIGHTEOUSNESS BEARS RELATION TO THE WORLD AS A WHOLE.** It must be such as every one sooner or later can recognize. It must have in view the well-being of the whole; and this involves that it must not let evil go unpunished; it must bring judgment on the wicked. For the world's sake the righteous God must be active against all unrighteousness.

II. **RIGHTEOUSNESS BEARS RELATION TO THE INDIVIDUAL.** And in a life very various moral moods and conditions are represented. God must answer to all the moods if he is righteous; and this involves trial for reproof, and judgment for correction. God smiting his people is not only God acting in love, it is God acting in righteousness. "I know that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me."

III. **RIGHTEOUSNESS BEARS RELATION TO THE AGENTS OF NATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL AFFLICTION.** This is symbolically taught in God's prophecy concerning Egypt, as the oppressor of his people, "And also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge." And so Babylon, the agent of the Captivity, was to be judged. It needs to be seen that the fact of God's using Balaam, or Egypt, for his purposes does not relieve them from the responsibility of their conduct. Hating Zion may lead to action which works out God's purposes; but hating Zion surely brings a man or a nation into the judgment-vindication of the righteous God.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*A new figure of the grass.* Jowett says, "At Anata, the Anathoth of Scripture, I observed that the roofs of some of the houses were partially covered with grass—a circumstance which I noticed also in several other places. As the roofs of the common dwellings are flat, and, instead of being built of stone or wood, are coated with plaster or hardened earth, a slight crop of grass frequently springs up in that situation. Such vegetation, however, having no soil into which it can strike its roots, and being exposed to a scorching sun, rarely attains to any great height or continues long. It is a feeble, stunted product, and soon withers away. Hence the sacred writers sometimes allude to the grass of the house-top as an emblem of weakness, frailty, and certain destruction" (Isa. xxxvii. 27). The meaning of vers. 7, 8 is this—There will be no reapers of such worthless grass as this; there will be nothing to elicit the utterance of those common formulas of benediction with which passers-by were wont to greet harvesters. It is better to associate these verses with the short-lived enmity of the Samaritans to the returned exiles, than with the more systematic dealing of an empire like Babylon.

I. **THE ENMITY OF THE SAMARITANS WAS SHOWY.** After rain, the grass on the house-top springs up in a very showy and boastful way, as if it were going to do great things. And so the Samaritans vaunted much and taunted much, and at first seemed to accomplish much; for they put cords on the restoring work of the exiles, and stopped the building of the temple, and prevented the building of the wall.

II. **THE ENMITY OF THE SAMARITANS WAS SHORT-LIVED.** It was met with patience,

Presently the energy of an Ezra and a Nehemiah, like an east wind or a scorching sun, hopelessly cut down the blades. Persecutors of God's people are never given a "long tether." God's people may always pray, "Come quickly."

III. THE ENMITY OF THE SAMARITANS BROUGHT THEM NO GOOD. It only spoiled permanently their relations with Israel, and put them out of favour with Persia. The mower never filled his hand with any harvest of the grass that grew on that house-top. The harvest of all enmities to God's people is never anything else than "a heap in a time of desperate sorrow." Goodness is a harvest reaped from good.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*Politeness in the harvest-field ; or, right relations of employer and employed.* Dr. S. Cox writes, "It is a graphic picture of an ancient harvest scene. The field is thick with waving barley. The reapers cut their way into it with sickles, grasping the ears till their arms are full. The overseer is busy urging on the reapers. Vessels filled probably with the rough local wine are at hand, that the heated and thirsty labourers may refresh themselves at need. As the day advances, the master of the estate comes to see how the work goes on. With grave, pious courtesy he salutes his 'young men' with the words, 'Jehovah be with you!' and they reply, 'Jehovah bless thee!' It is true that this was oftentimes a mere formality; but, even if not altogether realized, it shows what the social relations should be."

I. EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYED SERVE EACH OTHER. So much mistake is made, and so much confusion is caused, by the sentiment that only the employed *serve* the employer. Things would right themselves if it was fully apprehended that the service is mutual. We think the rewards of service ought to come to the employed; but if the employers also serve, the rewards of service ought to come also to the employer. If they come to either the one or the other in undue measures, there must be something wrong in the social system, which needs readjusting.

II. EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYED NEED TO TRUST EACH OTHER. The complications of modern labour problems arise from the mischievous work of demagogues, who set class against class. The spirit of Christianity encourages mutual trust, and tends to bring classes together, and helps each class to consider the claims and needs of other classes. The dream of a universal equality has delighted and amused humanity in all ages, and it will to the end of the age. But it will never be more than a dream. Nature makes classes, and will go on making them; and Paradise can never be gained otherwise than by the labourer and his master realizing the Christly spirit of mutual service. The master must trust the servant to render his best of service; and the labourer must trust his master to give a fair and relatively proportionate reward.—R. T.

Vers. 1-8.—*Suffering and victory.* "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth," etc. The connection is shown thus—

I. THE PSALMIST SAW THE REDEPTIVE RIGHTeousNESS OF GOD AS SUPREME. (Ver. 4.) God's strength and justice surely prevail against all the devices of evil men.

II. GOOD MEN PREVAIL WHEN THEY USE THEIR SUFFERING AS CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE. Some of the greatest lessons of life are learned from our severest sufferings. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy," etc.; "Our light affliction *worketh* out . . . while we look not at the things which are seen," etc.

III. THE OPPOSITION OF ENEMIES CALLS FORTH THEIR GREATEST ENERGIES. This is a law that operates in the physical, the intellectual, and the moral life. Stem a torrent, and you increase its force. An intellectual difficulty rouses us to the greatest endeavour, and moral obstacles call forth our most triumphant strength.

IV. THE UNRIGHTEOUS ARE ULTIMATELY DEFEATED IN THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE GOOD CAUSE. (Vers. 5, 6.) They are driven back, and made ashamed of their efforts and designs upon the righteous cause. The psalmist is not doubtful of the final issue of the conflict between good and evil. The evil will wither like grass on the house-tops.

V. THE RIGHTEOUS WILL GATHER THE HARVEST OF THEIR LABOURS AMID THE BENEDICTIONS OF GOD AND MAN. (Ver. 8.) No good seed that has been sown will fail of a harvest more or less abundant. God and man rejoice in all good work done, whatever the extent of its consequences. "Well done, good and faithful servant;" "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the way of the wicked," whose "delight is in the Law of the Lord."—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXX.

THE cry of Israel in extreme distress—apparently a Captivity song. Israel has sinned and been punished; it now acknowledges its sins, and prays for mercy and forgiveness. Towards the end (vers. 7, 8) the prayer rises into confident hope.

Metrically, the psalm consists of four stanzas, each of two verses.

Ver. 1.—Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord (comp. Ps. lxi. 2, 14; Isa. li. 10; Ezek. xxvii. 34). “The depths” are the lowest abysses of calamity. They have not, however, separated Israel from God, but have rather brought him to God.

Ver. 2.—Lord, hear my voice; *i.e.* “hear and grant my request;” or, as explained in the next clause, let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

Ver. 3.—If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities. The Prayer-book paraphrase gives the true sense, “If thou, Lord, shouldst be extreme to mark what is done miss.” If thou didst not “hide our transgressions,” and “cover up” half our sins—then, O Lord, who shall stand? (comp. Ps. lxxvi. 7, “Who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?”).

Ver. 4.—But there is forgiveness with thee (comp. Exod. xxxiv. 7; 1 Kings viii. 30, 34, 36, 39, etc.; Ps. xxv. 13; xxxii. 1, etc.; Dan. ix. 9; 1 John i. 9, etc.). That

thou mayest be feared. Milton makes his Satan say, “Then farewell hope, and, with hope, farewell fear!” (‘Paradise Lost,’ canto i.). And certainly the true fear of God, which Scripture requires in us—a reverential, loving fear—could not exist, unless we had a confident hope in God’s mercy and willingness to forgive us our trespasses, if we turn to him.

Ver. 5.—I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait. “Waiting for the Lord” is patiently bearing our affliction, whatever it may be, and confidently looking forward to deliverance from it in God’s good time. The expression, “my soul doth wait,” is stronger than “I wait;” it implies heart-felt trust and confidence. And in his word do I hope; *i.e.* his word of promise.

Ver. 6.—My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning; *i.e.* more eagerly, more anxiously, than even the night watchman, tired with his long vigil. Again the repetition adds force.

Ver. 7.—Let Israel hope in the Lord; or, “O Israel, hope in the Lord;” *i.e.* continue to hope, even though in the “depths” of calamity (see ver. 1). For with the Lord there is mercy (see above, ver. 4, and the comment *ad loc.*). And with him is plenteous redemption (comp. Ps. cxi. 9). Enough and to spare for all (see Isa. lv. 1).

Ver. 8.—And he shall redeem Israel from all his sins (comp. Ps. xxv. 22; ciii. 3, 4).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Penitence and hope.* We have the psalmist here in—

I. THE DEPTH OF SOME GREAT DISTRESS. It may be some severe loss he has sustained, and consequent loneliness of soul; or it may be some great disappointment of his hopes or defeat by the enemy; or it may be the persecution of those who reproach him for serious inconsistency; or it may be peril in which his cause or his life is threatened; or it may be a sad sense of personal unworthiness. But, whatever it may have been, it calls forth—

II. AN APPEAL TO GOD. When we are in any great distress, we look up to heaven; our appeal is instinctive; even the unbelieving and the profane cry to God “out of the depths.” It may be inarticulate, with little or no foundation of intelligence; it may be nothing more than the outburst of a suffering spirit, making its appeal to Divine power and pity. But it is a relief even to the undevout. It usually and naturally takes the form of—

III. A HUMBLE CONFESSION OF SIN. 1. Sometimes the trouble is the direct and palpable consequence of sin, as when vice ends in sickness, or extravagance in straits, or crime in conviction. 2. Sometimes the sorrow is the painful and piercing conviction of moral guilt, of transgression against God, and condemnation by him—it may be the publican in the temple bowed down with a sense of sin. 3. Sometimes it is the deep and general conviction that all sorrow is ultimately due to sin, and that when we are in a very pitiful condition it is both proof and reminder that we have sinned against

the Lord, and that we deserve whatever kind of distress we may be experiencing. Sorrow proceeds from sin and points to it.

IV. THE HOPE OF THE PENITENT. This is not in God's justice, but in his mercy. If God were to "mark iniquities," i.e. to mark them for immediate punishment, according to their desert, no man could "stand in his sight" (Ps. lxxvi. 7). There must be withdrawal from his presence, banishment from his hand. But our God is a God of patience, of forgiveness; he gives opportunity to the penitent. While unqualified severity would drive us into abject terror and hopeless exile, Divine mercy draws us near in true and manly confession, in hope of restoration, in return to his service. There is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared, that he may be approached, and that we may be restored. 1. With God, as he is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, there is "plenteous redemption." No guilty man, however deep his stain, need remain in the distance; he may draw nigh with a strong assurance of forgiveness and restoration. 2. The hope of the penitent rests on the sure basis of God's inviolable Word (ver. 5). Heaven and earth may pass away, but not the word of Christ's promise. "Come unto me, all ye that labour . . . I will give you rest;" "Him that cometh . . . I will in no wise cast out;"—these assurances constitute an immovable rock on which the troubled soul may build. 3. The true attitude of the penitent and believing spirit is that of confident expectation. As surely as the morning comes after the night, so surely will God's delivering grace follow the earnest prayer of the penitent. Let there be the earnestness of the watching sentinel, or of the shipwrecked sailor as he longs for the light of the morning, and there may be perfect confidence that he will not seek or wait in vain.

V. THE BLESSED ISSUE. Not merely recovery from sickness, or removal of trouble, but "redemption from all iniquity" (ver. 8; Titus ii. 14).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*De profundis*. This psalm, whose date, authorship, and special reference no one certainly knows, nevertheless presents to us three marked stages in the experience of the writer of the psalm.

I. IN THE DEPTHS. (Vers. 1—3.) Undoubtedly he knew what these were; and very deep depths they appear to have been. 1. *His sad condition seems to have been brought about, not so much by any outward circumstances of his life, as by some inward spiritual distress.* His soul was consciously separated from God; some great gulf, into which he had fallen, had opened between him and the God who had once been his delight and exceeding joy. It may have been that the sense of guilt and condemnation lay heavily on him, or that he was in dread of some approaching calamity, or that he was plunged in grief and shame by the might and mastery of some sin. Sin had undoubtedly to do with it, as it has to do with like distressing experiences in our own lives. 2. *And it is a matter for deep thankfulness when sin does cast us into such depths.* Too many people regard sin as a mere trifle; it never troubles them seriously at all. And the cause of the vapid, feeble, and ineffectual Christian life which so many professed Christians lead is that they have never had any real conviction of sin; they have never been in any "depths" about it. Would to God all had! for there seems no hope of a real, earnest, and devoted Christian life without it. But the psalmist was in the depths, and this explains the heights to which he afterwards rose. 3. *He cries unto the Lord.* It is an earnest, self-abasing, yet passionate, appeal. He implores the Lord to be attentive to his supplication. It is only people in such depths that thus cry unto the Lord. Others may say prayers; but these men "cry." 4. *He is filled with fear, lest the Lord should mark his iniquities.* If the Lord did that, there could be no hope for him; and, remembering this, he seems to sink down deeper than ever. It is a vivid instance of the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin.

II. RISING OUT OF THEM. (Vers. 4—6.) 1. *The upward ascent begins by his laying hold of the truth that there is forgiveness with God.* Faith has come; and as he believes, he sees that God's forgiveness can alone ensure that state of heart in him, that fear, which God desires to see in us all. He feels that he will never get right,

save as he believes in God's forgiveness. And this is undoubtedly true. 2. *Then he proceeds to put that faith in practice*, and to wait on the Lord. And this he does in no half-hearted way. He says, "I wait;" then, "My soul waiteth;" then he stays himself on God's word of forgiveness, and hopes therein; then he likens his faith to the eager expectation of those who are anxiously, but believingly, watching for the morning—yea, with more than their desire and confidence does he wait! Of course, there can be but one response to faith like this—the man rises out of the depths, as such men ever will.

III. CLEAR ABOVE THEM. (Vers. 7, 8.) 1. *He has got what he desires*—the assurance of God's forgiveness. 2. *In the joy of it he turns to others*, and exhorts them to hope in the Lord, and testifies that "with the Lord there is," etc. (ver. 7). 3. And then, in the conviction that the love which has so blessed him cannot fail for Israel, he confidently predicts that the Lord "will redeem," etc. (ver. 8). All this earnest witnessing for God is the sure sign that he is now clear up above, and right out of those depths in which he at first was. In the depths we cannot thus witness, but out of them we must and shall.—S. C.

Ver. 4.—*The assurance of God's forgiveness.* The psalmist had this, and his history is recorded for our help—for the help of all those who desire this assurance.

I. NOTE TO WHOM THIS BLESSED ASSURANCE IS GIVEN. 1. *Not to every one.* For many do not care for it—they think there is no need; they persuade themselves that God is easy, and will readily forgive. But this presumption is not God's assurance, for it gives them no settled rest; they have awful misgivings at times. It lasts only so long as their light notions of sin last. When they wake up to the reality of sin, then they are in despair. It awakes no love to God (cf. Luke vii. 47); it produces no hatred of sin; if it did, it would lead to that which St. John says, "He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure." Others there are who will not believe. How hard it is to persuade distressed souls that God does forgive! 2. *But this assurance is given to such as are described in this psalm.* (1) They have had a very deep sense of sin—have been in "the depths." (2) They have cried earnestly unto the Lord. (3) They confess that God's judgment on sin is righteous, and that their condemnation would be just. (4) They have come to believe that the love of God is deeper than his displeasure with the sinner. And (5) they have cast themselves in utter faith on that love. These are they to whom God's assurance comes.

II. THE EVIDENCE ON WHICH IT RESTS. 1. *It needs evidence*; for conscience is against it; God's love is against it; the testimony of nature and science is against it; earthly governments do not forgive; we ourselves do not thus forgive. Therefore evidence for it is needed. 2. *Such evidence is furnished by many facts.* (1) God has spared us thus far—that we are able and at times are willing to forgive those who have wronged us. But if we, then yet more God. (2) Chiefly the plain declarations of God's Word; the sacrifice of Christ; the experience of those that are forgiven,—they feel it in their hearts; they enjoy the peace of God; its influence is all-sanctifying on their own soul,—it binds them over to God. Such is the evidence for, etc.

III. THE RESULTS THAT FOLLOW. God will be feared, that is, with the fear which love begets in a dear child. Such fear springs from no other source, but ever from this.—S. C.

Ver. 7.—*"Plenteous redemption."* The text declares that with the Lord there is this, and we observe—

I. IT IS UNDOUBTEDLY TRUE. 1. *The Scriptures affirm it.* It is not alone the declaration of this Scripture, but of many more besides. 2. *And experience*, that of myriads of believers in all ages, attests the same truth. They will tell us with one accord that they have found it so. 3. *And it is plenteous because it is redemption from all evil.* (1) From the guilt and condemnation of sin. Utter and complete forgiveness is ours through the death of Christ our Lord. (2) From the power and tyranny of sin. The blood of Christ keeps cleansing the soul of the man who walks in the light, and is ever trusting in Christ, from all sin (1 John i. 7). (3) From sorrow's crushing power; for Christ is revealed to us as knowing all our sorrows, sympathizing with us, helping us in them, and for us turning their evil into good. "All things

work together for good," etc. (Rom. viii. 28). (4) From the fret and worry of life; the believer is taught the lesson of continued trust, and so to be anxious for nothing (Phil. iv. 6, 7). (5) From the power of death; for the believer does not die in the sense in which of old time death was understood, for he who believes enters no Hades, no intermediate state, but, as Jesus said, he never dies—his body may—but he himself departs, and is at once with Christ, which is far better. Thus is there plenteous redemption. 4. *And it is accessible to all.* (Isa. lv. 1.) It is the free gift of God.

II. BUT MANY DO NOT CARE FOR IT. They would like a redemption from pain and distress; but they do not care for a redemption from sin,—they love and hold on to it too much; holiness excites no desire in their hearts; they love sin.

III. AND MANY OF THOSE WHO DO CARE CAN HARDLY BE GOT TO BELIEVE IN IT. They cannot realize that it is a free gift. For: 1. *They keep thinking that they must do something* in the way of righteousness and holiness if they are to be saved. They want to bring something of their own to God, in return for which they shall be saved. 2. *And there is much to foster this unbelief.* (1) Free gifts out of pure good will are not the way of the world. You must bring your money and pay the price. (2) And all other religions demand the due tale of good works and meritorious deeds. (3) For all excellence—physical, artistic, intellectual, moral—we have to toil and do the needful work. (4) And our pride protests against an eleemosynary salvation. 3. *But such unbelief cannot be true.* (1) For think first of him with whom this redemption is. It is the Lord. But can we imagine him bargaining, haggling, coming to terms, over our salvation, as if he were a seller, and not a giver? (2) And of ourselves. What have we got that could by any imagination be supposed adequate for the purchase? What is all our righteousness? (3) Of the gift itself. It is so great that it can only be ours by gift; in no other way could we have it.

IV. BUT THIS GRACE OF GOD, IN BESTOWING ON US FREELY THIS PLENTEOUS REDEMPTION, IS JUSTIFIED BY ITS RESULTS. 1. *It wakes up in the recipient an overwhelming gratitude.* But this is a mighty incentive to all holy obedience. 2. *It enables us to go to the vilest of men and proclaim God's mercy waiting for them.* We could not do this were it not all of grace. 3. *It forbids alike both boasting and despair.* 4. *It shows a clear path to the fullest salvation the world can know.* I can be holy as he is holy, because of this free gift received through faith. 5. *It redounds to the glory of God.*—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The cry of the humbled.* The psalm belongs to the age of true national contrition, when nothing would satisfy but deliverance from sin, as well as from its punishment (comp. Lam. iii. 55; Jonah ii. 2). When men are disheartened and depressed, overwhelmed with anxieties and troubles, we familiarly speak of them as "down in the depths." It is a natural and universal figure. "On the hills" represents excitement and joy; "in the depths" represents depression and anxiety. "This psalm is distinctly a song of ascent, in that it starts from the very lowest point of self-abasement and consciousness of evil, and rises steadily, and, though it may be slowly, yet surely, up to the tranquil summit, led by a consciousness of the Divine presence and grace." "The psalmist thinks of himself as of a man at the bottom of a pit, sending up to the surface a faint call, which may easily be unheard. He does not merely mean to express his sense of human insignificance, nor even his sorrows, nor his despondency. There are deeper depths than these. They are the depths into which the spirit feels itself going down, sick and giddy, when there comes the thought, 'I am a sinful man, O Lord, in the presence of thy great purity.' Out of these depths does he cry to God."

I. THE DEPTHS ARE THE PLACE FOR US ALL. Every man amongst us has to go down there, if we take the place that belongs to us.

II. UNLESS YOU HAVE CRIED TO GOD OUT OF THOSE DEPTHS, YOU HAVE NEVER CRIED TO HIM AT ALL. Unless you come to him as a penitent, sinful man, with the consciousness of transgression awakened within you, your prayers are shallow. The beginning of all true personal religion lies in the sense of my own sin and my lost condition. Whenever you find men and women with a Christianity that sits very lightly upon them, that does not impel them to any acts of service and devotion, and never rises into the heights of communion with God, depend upon it the man has never been

down into the abyss, and never sent his voice up from it. "Out of the depths" he has not cried unto God.

III. YOU WANT NOTHING MORE THAN A CRY TO DRAW YOU FROM THE PIT. It is not that your crying will lift you out; it is that your crying will bring you help. The "infant crying in the night" does nothing for itself by its crying; but the cry brings its mother. And the cry means that hope of self-help is altogether abandoned, the soul having to say, "Myself I cannot save," cries after Christ, saying, "Jesu, have mercy on me!" (part Maclaren).—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The fears of conscience.* In pleading for her father's life before the first Napoleon, a poor girl said, "Sire, I do not ask for justice; I implore pardon." The inward sense of our sin will never permit us to make a claim for anything before God. His love of forgiving, and triumph over all hindrances in the way of forgiving, are our only pleas, and our only grounds of hope. The searching character of the Divine inspection is indicated in Ps. cxxxix. and in Heb. iv. 12, 13. Conscience freely admits that the Divine examination of the life cannot be endured. "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" There need be no difficulty in understanding what conscience is. Some, indeed, regard it as a separate and independent power, which acts in a man as a sort of sentinel, giving notice of the approach or presence of evil. But it is altogether simpler to regard it as the ordinary faculty of judgment exercised by a man concerning the quality of his own actions. That self-judgment inevitably brings a man into *fears*.

I. CONSCIENCE TESTIFIES BOTH THE GOOD AND THE BAD. This is often missed from view. Usually conscience is thought of as concerned only with the *evil*; and so its power and witness are only dreaded. Conscience ought to be the *cheer* of life. A man knows when he has done right. Appraising his life, he can sometimes approve. "Conscience makes cowards of us all;" but it is equally true that "Conscience can make brave men of us all."

II. CONSCIENCE TESTIFIES TO THE BAD IN THE GOOD. And that is the real ground of our fear. Self-esteem may see only good; conscience never does. It finds the sinister mark everywhere, and always has to qualify its approval and praise. "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee." A "bar sinister" on every escutcheon.

III. CONSCIENCE TESTIFIES TO THE GOOD IN THE BAD. And this keeps fear from becoming hopeless and despairing. The irretrievably bad is a conception that can only be associated with devils, not with man. And it is not a genuine conscience that judges in a blind, sectarian way, and makes a man accuse himself as hopelessly bad.

IV. CONSCIENCE PUTS BOTH BAD AND GOOD OUT OF THE SELF-LIGHT INTO THE DIVINE LIGHT. According to the sense a man has of God will be his conscience-judgment of his own conduct. Right sense of God will make conscience-estimates induce fear. The conscience of good will bring a reverent and humble fear; the conscience of evil will bring an humiliating and anxious fear. The self-estimate of iniquities is painful enough, but what shall we say of the Divine estimate of those same iniquities?—B. T.

Ver. 4.—*Forgiveness generating fear.* God's mercy is, with striking truth to nature, made a ground for godly fear. "In the sense of his mercy we know best the exceeding 'sinfulness of sin;' so far as we feel that sin is still clinging to us, we must fear with godly fear; so far as we feel its chains are broken, 'fear is cast out by love.' Thus the cross is to us at once the secret of penitence and of faith." These three points may be opened, illustrated, and enforced.

I. GOD'S FORGIVENESS REVEALS OUR SIN. Here a distinction can be made. God's denunciations, punishments, and judgments, which we may hear about or observe, bring us what may be called, and what are primarily, intellectual apprehensions of the evil of sin. Very many, indeed, only know sin through the teaching of its consequences. But it is certain that sin cannot be really or worthily known in that way. Its root is not in the intelligence, but in the will; and the atmosphere in which it thrives is not knowledge, but feeling. It is a moral matter, and it is revealed in moral actions. God's forgiveness touches feeling, and feeling throws its own special light on that which is forgiven. The *wrong* of it comes to feeling; the peril of it comes to intelli-

gence. No man knows the hatefulnes of his sin until he realizes that it is divinely forgiven.

II. GOD'S FORGIVENESS PRODUCES A WORTHY FEAR. That kind of fear which makes us anxiously watchful lest we should prove unworthy of such forgiveness, and even need that forgiveness again. The sense of forgiveness binds us to God in such thankfulness and love that we fear to grieve him. And the forgiveness makes us so sensible of our own infirmities that we can but walk watchfully, as those who fear to fall. And we can never be quite sure that the sin forgiven was not rooted in a weakness which we still retain, and which is still to us a source of peril. So we fear for ourselves.

III. GOD'S FORGIVENESS REMOVES OUR FEAR. Because a forgiveness declares and guarantees an *interest* in us. God's forgiveness pledges continuous help and blessing. It reveals God to us so that we are able to cherish an absolute confidence in him. And while it puts us upon every endeavour *not* to sin, it keeps us from all despairing fear by assuring us that, even if we should be overcome by our frailties, "there is forgiveness with him." His forgivings do not exhaust his mercy, but pledge it for days to come.—R. T.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Our waiting is a watching.* "In the year 1830, on the night preceding the first of August, the day the slaves in our West Indian colonies were to come into possession of the freedom promised them, many of them, we are told, never went to bed at all. Thousands and tens of thousands of them assembled in their places of worship, engaging in devotional duties and singing praises to God, waiting for the first streak of the light of the morning of that day on which they were to be made free. Some of their number were sent to the hills, from which they might obtain the first view of the coming day, and by a signal intimate to their brethren down in the valley the very first moment of breaking dawn." They "watched for the morning." The kind of watching that comes home to us is the anxious watching by the sick-beds of loved friends. Night-work is especially trying. Sentinel-watching may be also in mind.

I. A WAITING THAT IS A WEARY COMPULSION. We do not want to wait. We are made to wait. And the watching for the end of the waiting-time is simply a prolonged agony. Man often deals with his fellow-man thus; and God sometimes finds it needful to put his people into this hard discipline. Whether we like it or not, we *must wait*. Active man who would *do* something—must do nothing. Illust. : waiting for openings in life.

II. A WAITING THAT IS A HOPELESS ENDURANCE. The kind of waiting that belongs to times of uncertainty. We watch vainly, at last almost hopelessly, for the daily post. Tennyson pictures this condition in his 'Mariana'—

"She only said, 'My life is dreary:
He cometh not,' she said;
She said, 'I'm weary, weary;
I would that I were dead!'"

Even at such times the hopelessness would pass, though the enduring had to remain, if only the watching had its *uplook* as well as its *onlook*. Its calm resting in the infinite wisdom and love that permits, as well as its peering away into the distant east for the first glimpse of morning.

III. A WAITING THAT IS A LOVING EXPECTANCY. And that our waiting may always be if we see it to be *our Father-God's call to wait*. There is his thought in it, his purpose in it. We may be sure of the "end of the Lord." It is well altogether to dismiss from our minds all such ideas of Divine sovereignty as even suggest that he ever "afflicts willingly." We seem to be waiting for some change in our earthly circumstances, but we are really waiting for God to change our circumstances; and we may wait with the calm, and even joyous, expectancy that he will.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*The final Object of hope.* Luther says the redemption is called "plenteous" because such is the straitness of our heart, the slenderness of our hopes, the weakness of our faith, that it far exceeds all our capacity, all our petitions and desires. Lord Bacon says, "Generous and magnanimous minds are readiest to forgive; and it is a

weakness and impotency of mind to be unable to forgive." The point on which we now dwell is the strong demand that Israel shall hope in *Jehovah himself*. The sense of personality in God is to be most jealously treasured. In India it is conceived that the personality of god is but a step towards the higher realization of him, or it, as an impersonal, uncaused, unrelated, absolute being. But this is an unreal dreamland. No fitting idea of God can fail to include an active, ever-working *will*, that is influenced by surroundings and swayed by feeling. But that is the characteristic of a *person*. The Word of God, while refusing to permit any representation of God as a Person, nevertheless insists that we shall always deal with him as a *Person*.

I. GOD HIMSELF IS THE OBJECT OF A SINNER'S HOPE. There is a distinction of the utmost importance, which is often missed, and often very imperfectly apprehended. A man can never have absolute confidence based on anything that God *has ever done*. His confidence must rest in God, who did those things, and has revealed himself as wholly trustworthy in doing them. For the nation to rely on what God did, in delivering it from Egyptian bondage, would be wholly unworthy. For it to rely on God, who then delivered, and so proved himself to be the Deliverer, was worthy and ennobling. So still, the work of Divine redemption is not the proper object of a sinner's hope, but *God*, who in such a glorious and Divine way has redeemed. The hope is in no *thing*, though it may have the Divine stamp on it. The hope is in the *Person* who is revealed in and by the thing done. The apprehension of this involves the reformation of very much of the imperfect theology that now prevails.

II. CHRIST HIMSELF IS THE AGENCY FOR REALIZING HIM WHO IS THE OBJECT OF THE SINNER'S HOPE. St. Peter states this with admirable precision, "Who, *by him*, do believe in God." Our faith is demanded, not for Christ's work, but for Christ himself. And not for Christ other than as a mediary. Our hope as sinners is only rightly fixed on Christ when we apprehend that "*God was in Christ*, reconciling the world unto himself."—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*Redemption only complete in sanctification*. "Plenteous redemption" is here described. It is a redeeming of Israel from all his iniquities. It is not a delivering of Israel out of all his *disasters*. That might be important enough in its way; but no kind of material redemption can ever be of supreme interest to God. To deliver Israel from his iniquities is the Divine thought. To deliver Israel from *all* his iniquities is the supreme Divine thought. When is a man saved? The answer depends upon a right idea of what the salvation or redemption of a man is. To save a drowning man and to save a city waif are not the same thing. You have done saving the drowned man when you have brought him ashore alive. You have not saved the waif when you have got him inside the doors of the Boys' Home. It needs to be set in the strongest and clearest light possible that the object of God's redemption is the *man*—not the man's circumstances, nor the man's perils. It is a fiction of man's theology that God's salvation is satisfied with removing penalty. When the penalty is gone, we hear the Divine voice saying, "And now what about the *man*?"

I. REDEMPTION GETS ALL HINDRANCES OUT OF THE WAY OF ITS WORK. Never confuse the preliminary with the real work. Getting hindrances out of the way may be quite necessary; and it may be vigorous and prolonged work, calling for much energy and self-denial; but it is God's pioneer work. It is God getting his sphere, clearing for himself the sphere in which he may do his true redemptive work. If this had been worthily apprehended, we should never have been worried by being called to believe in a *work*, in a plan of salvation, in a removing of our penalty. Our faith is demanded for a Redeemer who, having done such and such things, is able to do what he now wants to do in our minds and hearts and lives; *i.e.* redeem *us* from our iniquities.

II. REDEMPTION WORKS FREELY IN THE SPACE IT HAS CLEARED. And a plentiful and most glorious work it has in view—deliverance from the power, fascination, and snare of sin; redemption from all iniquities. Work like getting the threading weed-roots out of the soul, and making a lovely, clean lawn. Work like getting out every tiny fibre of the spreading cancer, and giving a clean and hopeful bill of health. No man is saved as God would save him until he is "clean every whit."—R. T.

Vers. 1—8.—*A cry to God for the forgiveness of sin.* I. THE PROFOUND MISERY WHICH THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF SIN PRODUCES. (Vers. 1—3.) “Out of the depths. . . If thou shouldest mark iniquities,” etc. Other “depths” than the depths of poverty or bodily affliction.

II. THE STRONGEST MOTIVE TO THE REVERENT FEAR OF GOD. (Ver. 4.) “God freely forgives sin—not that men may think lightly of sin, but that they may magnify his grace and mercy in its forgiveness. ‘For thy Name’s sake pardon mine iniquity.’ This a more powerful motive than any other to call forth holy fear and love and self-sacrifice.”

III. HIS FAITH WAITS IN THE EXPECTATION OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS. (Vers. 5, 6.) 1. *His faith is full of hope*—is expectant, opposed to unbelieving despondency. Hope supposes difficulties and uncertainties melting away or triumphed over. 2. *But it is patient and anxious at the same time.* More than those who watch for the morning in the sick-room—whether the sick or those who watch with them. The faith, therefore, is connected with anxious exercises of mind *battling with the delay.*

IV. HE WHO IS CONSCIOUS OF FORGIVENESS CAN INSPIRE OTHERS WITH HOPE AND TRUST. (Vers. 7, 8.) “Hope”—“plenteous redemption”—“will redeem Israel”—not this or that favoured man, but Israel, the nation—“from *all* his iniquities.” Not merely from the punishment, but from the iniquities themselves.—S.

Ver. 7.—*Full redemption.* “And with him is plenteous redemption.”

I. THE ORIGIN OF REDEMPTION. “With him”—with God. The gospel bears the stamp of its Divine origin: 1. *In what it reveals.* 2. *In what it proposes.* It is not man’s appeal to God, but God’s proposal to man.

II. THE NATURE OF REDEMPTION. 1. *The slavery from which we are redeemed.* 2. *The price of our redemption.* 3. *The liberty bestowed.*

III. THE FULLNESS OF THIS REDEMPTION. 1. *It is full for each.* 2. *It is full for all.*—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXXI.

THIS psalm has been said to be “like a string of a Christian ‘*Lyra Innocentium*’” (Bishop Alexander). It breathes the profoundest humility and submission to God’s will (vers. 1, 2). At the same time, it encourages the faithful to maintain a lively “hope” in God’s sustaining grace (ver. 3).

The ascription of the psalm to David is quite in accordance, both with the language and the contents.

Ver. 1.—Lord, my heart is not haughty; or, “not *lifted up*” (comp. 2 Chron. xxvi. 16; xxxii. 25). Not unduly elated by the prosperity that thou hast bestowed on me. Nor mine eyes lofty (comp. Ps. ci. 5), “Pride,” as Hengstenberg says, “has its seat in the heart, and betrays itself especially in the eyes.” Neither do I exercise my-

self in great matters, or in things too high for me; literally, *too wonderful* (comp. Ps. cxxxix. 6, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high: I cannot attain unto it”). The speculative debates of so-called “wise men” concerning the deep things of God’s moral government are probably glanced at (see Job xlii. 3).

Ver. 2.—Surely I have behaved and quieted myself; rather, *I have stilled and quieted my soul.* I have brought my soul into a state of peacefulness and content. As a child that is weaned of his mother. The weaned child is quiet and content; the suckling always impatient and restless. My soul is even as a weaned child. Another repetition for the sake of emphasis (see Ps. cxxx. 5, 6).

Ver. 3.—Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and for ever (comp. Ps. cxxx. 7). Israel is exhorted to have like confidence and trust in God as the psalmist.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Lowliness of mind.* This psalm may have been written by David so far as its subject-matter is concerned. For that lowliness of mind of which it treats is quite as compatible with a high as with a humble position in life. Royalty may ho-

very meek, and obscurity may be very proud. All moral qualities are independent of situations; they are a question of character, not of circumstance. Of the greatest One that ever bore our likeness it is said, "Thy King cometh . . . meek" (Matt. xxi. 5). But we have here—

I. A COMMON TEMPTATION. There are souls that do not aspire to be or do what is beyond them in any direction; but they are probably the exception rather than the rule. In all departments of activity men and women long for that which is out of their reach. The sailor is looking forward eagerly to a captaincy, or to be commodore or admiral. The soldier will not be satisfied until he is gazetted colonel of his regiment. The politician hungers for an office which is much higher up than the one he holds. And thus it is in every sphere. It is right, indeed, that every one should seek and strive to put out all his powers, instead of allowing them to slumber in silence and inactivity. We are bound to be our best and do our utmost in a world that is crying for help and for redemption. But our temptation is to long and to labour for that which is beyond our capacity, for which we were not created and endowed, which would exalt us, but which we should not adorn. The student wants to master that which is "too wonderful for him," actually "unattainable" (Ps. cxxxix. 6). The servant of Christ wants to fill a post in the Church for which he is not mentally and morally qualified. The traveller thirsts to reach a latitude which is outside the range of practicable pursuit. Everywhere, in all classes and conditions, men are sighing and striving for that which they will never reach, or will only reach when they have exhausted their strength and cannot enjoy what they have gained.

II. THE LESSON OF EXPERIENCE. Experience is continually teaching us the folly of seeking to move in a sphere which is beyond us. It is constantly resulting in defeat, in disappointment, in mortification. The position sought is not won, and there is the deep discontentment of having toiled in vain; or it is gained, and is found to be full of difficulty that was not anticipated, and, instead of yielding the expected pleasure, it is productive of dissatisfaction and complaint, and it ends in serious, perhaps disastrous, failure. They are wise men who, witnessing this in other people, or beginning to discover it in their own case, reach the psalmist's conclusion; this is—

III. THE PRACTICAL CONCLUSION OF THE WISE. To be contented with the sphere which God has assigned us, and to do our best therein. The psalmist has learnt the lesson. He has had to compose a disquieted spirit, and he has done so; he was restless and passionate, like an unweaned child clamouring for its mother's breast. But he has "quieted himself," he has calmed his spirit; he has withdrawn from a false position; he has settled down permanently to the only true one. His heart is not lifted up; his eyes do not look enviously and hungrily to the heights beyond him; he does not dwell in anxious, wearisome thought on matters which are best left alone; he concentrates his sympathies and his energies on that which demands his attention, and which is productive of good to himself and those around him; he is perfectly contented to be just what God has made him, to go where his Master sends him, to do what is placed in his hands to do. He is so far from thinking himself essential to the prosperity of the Church and the redemption of the world, that he hopefully, and even confidently, leaves that in the care of the Supreme (ver. 3).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The soul's most blessed condition.* That which the psalmist here affirms of himself is undoubtedly the spiritual condition which is nearest to heaven that here on earth we can know.

I. HE TELLS US WHAT IT IS NOT. 1. *Pride of heart is absent from it.* "My heart is not haughty." We may say this to our fellow-men, and deceive them by a show of humility; but it is quite another thing to affirm this, as is here done, before the Lord, "to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid." Happy are we if before him we can say this. For pride is destructive of all real happiness: it is continually meeting with rebuffs; nothing people like so much as to take down the man who is haughty of heart. To humiliate him is the keenest delight. If the

devil has planted pride in all men's hearts, as he has, God has so ordered the world that every man's hand shall be against such pride. 2. *It is free from ambition.* "Nor mine eyes lofty." The man's eyes are not for ever fixed on and hankering after something higher up in the world than it has yet reached. Blessed is the man who is content with the lot God hath ordered for him, and is solicitous only to be found faithful there. 3. *And from presumption.* "Neither do I exercise myself," etc. (ver. 1). But how many there are who are for ever doing that which the psalmist here disclaims! David's brothers accused him of this, though wrongly, and blamed him for leaving his sheep to come to the battle-field. But though David was innocent of such fault, many are guilty of it. They want to know all mysteries, to be able to explain all that they see around them in God's providence, and all that they meet with in the Scriptures: they want to undertake work which is beyond them, whilst that which is within their power they refuse. They could sweep a crossing, but they want to rule a kingdom; they could manage the one talent, but because they have not the five, the one they have they bury, to their infinite shame and loss.

II. HE TELLS US WHAT IT IS. To have one's soul "as a child that is weaned from its mother." Therefore: 1. *It is separation from what it once loved.* It is a terrible time for the child when this separation has to be made; the metaphor is as touching and beautiful as it is powerfully expressive. And the soul knows how it once loved the world, not so much, perhaps, the evil things of the world as those that were not evil; but it has come to give them all up, and to be content with what the Lord orders for him. Yet more is it separated from the sinful ways of the world. Once it loved them, but that time is past. 2. *And it is not only separated from them, but has ceased to desire them.* The child is happy and at rest, though no longer allowed that in which it once so delighted. The very desire is gone. 3. *And this is not through any disappointment, chagrin, or disgust with the world.* Some men rush from the world in anger because of the way it has treated them. But this is not the motive here: such are wrenched from the world rather than weaned from it. 4. *Nor either is it the relinquishment which comes from satiety with the world's pleasures*;—from having had so much that the soul has come to care no more for it, its sweets clog and nauseate rather than give pleasure. 5. *Nor from want of capacity to enjoy what the world has to offer.* But it is a willing abandonment of that which once it delighted in—the world's pleasures, profits, honours, comforts, as well as its more questionable belongings.

III. HOW WAS THIS BROUGHT ABOUT? 1. *It was not self-produced.* No child ever weaned itself. 2. *It has been the Lord's work.* By his Holy Spirit and his providence he has wrought this wondrous change. Hence we have come to find that what once delighted us so much fails to do so now. The world has become embittered to our taste. Our God has separated us from what we loved and clung to; there was no chance of our voluntarily giving it up, and so God took it away. And he has given us what is better far than that which we have lost (cf. Ps. lxxiii.). Higher, purer joys are ours. Also he has blessed our own endeavours after self-denial and renunciation; he has "worked in us to will and to do," etc. 3. *And the result is most blessed.* The calm quiet and stillness of the soul; its freedom from fret; its heavenly peace.

IV. WHAT THIS EXPERIENCE LEADS TO. A delight in God, and a conviction of his love and faithfulness, which make him call upon all his countrymen to hope in the Lord. When the soul has this experience, it cannot but commend the Lord to others. It must bear its testimony.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The sense of what is acceptable with God.* This psalm expresses the meek humility of the pardoned and restored sinner. But taken as expressing the sentiment of the restored nation, it suggests the mood of cherished feeling that keeps us in right relations with God. It is not a mood of submission, or even of submissive obedience only. It is a mood of *willing* submission, of *delighted* obedience; of submission that has ceased to be a strain, and has become the free, natural, joyous expression of the self. The "heart is not haughty;" so there is no resistance to what is felt to be the duty.

I. SUBMISSION THAT IS STILL A STRAIN CAN ONLY BE PARTIALLY ACCEPTABLE WITH GOD. And very much that is called submission is really only submission in

the making. Indeed, if we speak with absolute precision, we must say that submission wholly free from strain can never be the experience of men while they are under human conditions and limitations. We have no instance of perfect submission save that of the Divine Man, the Lord Jesus Christ; and even in his case we have to notice that strain and struggle continued up to Gethsemane, and that absolute entireness of obedience was won only on Calvary, where even the very life was surrendered. We can, therefore, while we are on earth, never gain more than a qualified Divine acceptance. There is peace, and promise, and power, and joy in the measure of acceptance we can gain; but it is always an inspiration, not a satisfaction. Very many good people never get above or beyond this apprehension of Christian life; "they submit because they *must*." They never can rise to get duty glorified. Indeed, there are many who try to persuade themselves that their submission cannot really be submission unless they *feel the strain of it*. But it is with this grace as with the digestive process—it is only healthy when we know nothing about it.

II. SUBMISSION THAT HAS CEASED TO BE A STRAIN IS FULLY ACCEPTABLE TO GOD. The will may persistently force attitudes and acts of submission. Then man is but a dual being. The goodness is forced. The man may submit with a reserve. He is willing to go *so far*. The man is wholly willing to submit sometimes and in some things. It is clear that none of these cases can be fully acceptable to God. When a man's *heart* is in the submission, then the man's will is rightly swayed, and a man's conduct is in harmonious order. The man is a unity in his submission; strain of resistance is gone, and the full Divine smile can rest upon him.—R. T.

Ver. 1.—*On knowing our spheres.* Prayer-book Version, "I do not exercise myself in great matters: which are too high for me." The poet disclaims three distinct kinds of pride; secret conceit of heart; the ostentation of the man of lofty bearing; and the presumptuous self-importance which intrudes. One of the things that can only be learned through the experiences of life is what we *can* do, and what we *may* do. Putting wise limits upon our undertakings and our spheres is one of the most important and anxious things that we have to do. And one of the chief modern sins is attempting too much, and not being willing to keep ourselves strictly within the limits of what we can do really well. The young man thinks he can do anything and everything; and it may often be the consequence that he does nothing really well.

I. OUR SPHERES ARE DISCOVERED FOR US BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE. Nothing is more remarkable in a man's life than the way in which he is led round to the occupying of spheres of which he had never dreamed, and to the undertaking of work for which he had never recognized a fitness. It may occasionally be the case that what a man has to do in life is shown him early, and he runs in the appointed rut from the beginning to the end of his days; but in the majority of cases, even if a hint of the future is early given, the way round to its realization is a set of surprising experiences; and often the life-work unfolds suddenly and unexpectedly, in the time of a man's maturity. The good man sees in this the leading of Divine providence.

II. OUR SPHERES ARE DISCOVERED FOR US BY OUR AFFINITIES. There are things we *have* to do, and things we *like* to do. And, in the long run, life comes round to fit to our likings. We can do well what we enjoy doing, and we gradually drift into the spheres to which we are fitted by bias and inclination. Ideally life would be perfect if every man was placed according to his affinities. Towards the ideal perfection humanity is moving, though its progress is greatly hindered and confused by human self-will, and the exigencies of civilization.

III. OUR SPHERES ARE DISCOVERED BY OUR ATTITUDES OF OBEDIENCE. This is taking the higher, the Divine view of life. When a man fully realizes life as *service to God*, he rests assured that his Divine Master appoints his sphere and provides his work; and his Master will be absolutely sure to provide sphere and work for every servant who jealously keeps the attitude of obedience.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Restraint of natural ambitions.* "Instead of fretting after what is too great for him, he quiets his ambition, and his spirit lies calm and gentle, like a child in its mother's arms, that, after the first trouble of weaning is over, is soothed and lulled by the maternal caress." The image is strikingly simple and true, of natural

desire stayed and of a subdued quietness of rest rather than delight. Perowne quotes the following as a mother's experience: "The weaned child has for the first time become *conscious of grief*. The piteous longing for the sweet nourishment of his life, the broken sob of disappointment, mark the trouble of his innocent heart: it is not so much the *bodily* suffering; he has felt that pain before, and cried while it lasted; but now *his joy and comfort are taken away*, and he knows not why. When his head is once more laid on his mother's bosom, then he trusts and loves and rests; but he has learned the first lesson of humility, he is cast down, and clings with fond helplessness to his one friend."

I. NATURAL AMBITIONS ARE NOT WRONG IN THEMSELVES. They do but express a man's individuality and energy. They are but the sign of the intelligence that can fix an aim and a purpose for a life. It describes a helpless, hopeless man to say, "He has no ambition." Such a man wants nothing, tries for nothing, and gets nothing. Religious people often condemn ambition as an essential evil. All we need say is that it *may* be, but it *need* not be.

II. NATURAL AMBITIONS BECOME WRONG WHEN THEY ARE SELF-CENTRED. A man is a being *in relations*. There is a measure of health in every scheme he has for the benefit of another. A man is a *dependent being*, and his first consideration has to be the approval of him on whom he depends. Ambition to secure purely selfish ends is sin against our *relationship*, and against our *dependence*. Ambition that is self-centred is only too likely to inspire unscrupulous means.

III. NATURAL AMBITIONS NEED RESTRAINT WHEN GOD'S WILL IS KNOWN. It is not that God's will is either antagonistic to, or out of harmony with, our natural ambitions; it is that they are either exaggerated, or have become masterful. If we could read life aright, we should always find that God's will for our life is in strictest harmony with our own real and well-qualified ambitions. And precisely what the revelation of God's will does for us is help us in getting our ambitions into proper limitation and control. God does not want the service of men out of whom all heart and energy have been taken. It is not any crushing out of our individuality that honours God: restraint within wise limits means the *retention* of all good and right ambitions.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Man's personal experience may be the basis of his hope in God.* "Let Israel hope in the Lord;" let him, because he has such abundant reason for so doing, in the experience that he has had of the Lord's gracious working. This is the refrain of several of these "songs of degrees," which, we have seen, are essentially "songs of uplifting," or calls to put trust and hope in God.

I. MAN'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IS SELDOM, IF EVER, PRECISELY REPEATED. Froude suggests that experience is like the stern-lights of a ship, which show the way that *has been* taken. And he hints that experience is of practically little use for the guidance of the way that *has to be* taken. But this is a very partial view. It would not culture a man in the dependence and trust, which are the key-notes of his nobility, if his life were a mere succession of precise repetitions, so that he might know precisely how to act in each recurring case, and the lessons of experience were a mere routine; a fixed measure to be applied to every instance. Life with emergencies and surprises is alone a healthy life for a moral being in whom character is to be trained. It was a misanthrope who said, "The thing which hath been is, and there is nothing new under the sun." And every man will be prepared to say, on looking over his life, that nothing ever happened in his life which was a precisely imitative experience; nothing that proved to be exactly what he expected it to be. Then it may be hastily said that experience is a delusion, and cannot really help us. What we have to see is that it cannot, and never was intended to, help us as a yard-measure does. How, then, does it help?

II. MAN'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE ESTABLISHES PRINCIPLES AND BRINGS KNOWLEDGE OF WHICH MAN CAN MAKE PRACTICAL USE. Israel restored from exile had a new set of experiences, but his knowledge of God's adaptations of grace to all previous experiences established confidence in him. It was easy to argue that God, having made adjustments to their need in forty-nine cases, was not likely to be baffled by the fiftieth. And we can always get that persuasion out of a life-experience. And we

can plainly see the force of this principle—all human experiences, though apparently unlike each other, *go into classes*. We can always find something in past experience which belongs to the same class as our present experience; and then, if we can fully apprehend the Divine intervention in some case that belongs to the class, we can confidently say to our soul, “Soul, hope thou still in God.”—R. T.

Vers. 1—3.—*Humility*. “Lord, my heart is not haughty,” etc. “The psalmist has learned from adversity the lesson of submission, and counsels the nation to fit itself in like manner for winning the blessings which are still in store.” The authorship is uncertain; but it was probably written after the Exile. The writer had learned—

I. HUMILITY. 1. *Humility is exemplified in a lowly estimate of ourselves before God and man*. Before God as well as before man. 2. *In not aiming at things which are beyond our powers of attainment*. Some men’s ambition is greater than their ability. And yet none of us uses his ability to the utmost. We ought to learn how much God will help us to do.

II. SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD. 1. *This implies the recognition of God’s will as good*. Not only as supreme, but as good. Only thus shall we be able to say from the heart, “Thy will be done.” 2. *The overruling of all discontent with the changes of circumstances*. As a child that has been weaned at length learns to rest on its mother’s bosom.

III. HUMILITY AND SUBMISSION ARE CONNECTED WITH PATIENT WAITING AND HOPE. 1. *God rewards the patient and humble*. “Giveth grace,” etc., “but knoweth the proud afar off.” 2. *All the deeper knowledge of God, springing from humble patience, leads on to a greater hope in him*. The deepest experiences lead to the highest hope in God.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXXII.

THIS present “Song of Ascents” is well suited to be a “pilgrim-song”—sung by those who went up to Jerusalem to visit the temple, and revivify their faith in the God who had chosen Zion for his dwelling-place. It is concerned almost entirely with the temple, which it sets before the faithful from the first conception of it in the mind of David to its final glory when visited by the Redeemer. Vers. 1—5 are concerned with the birth of the idea in David’s mind; vers. 6—10, with its realization under Solomon; while vers. 11—18 point to the time when David’s true Son would be set upon David’s throne, and the Lord himself would suddenly come to his temple, and make the glory of the second house greater than that of the first had ever been.

Metrically, the psalm consists of four stanzas, each of ten lines: vers. 1—5; 6—10; 11—13; and 14—18.

Vers. 1—5.—David’s abasement and vow to God. The historical books give no account of this vow, which, however, may have been recorded in one or other of the

lost compositions spoken of so frequently in Chronicles (1 Chron. xxix. 29; 2 Chron. ix. 29; xvi. 11, etc.).

Ver. 1.—Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions; rather, *remember to David all his affliction*; i.e. reckon it to him, and reward him for it. The “affliction” intended is the distress that David felt at the thought that, while he dwelt in a house of cedar, the ark of God was only lodged within curtains (2 Sam. vii. 2).

Ver. 2.—How he swore unto the Lord (see the comment on vers. 1—5). And vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; rather, *the Mighty One of Jacob* (see Gen. xlix. 24; Isa. lx. 16).

Ver. 3.—Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house. I will not take up my abode quietly and comfortably in my own solid and substantial house (see 2 Sam. v. 11). Nor go up into my bed. Indulge, i.e., in luxurious repose. (For a contrary feeling on the part of some Israelites, see Hag. i. 4.)

Ver. 4.—I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to my eyelids. Exegetical of the last clause of ver. 3.

Ver. 5.—Until I find out a place for the Lord. The “place” which David desired to “find” was a permanent resting-place for the ark of God, which he had already

"brought up from the house of Obed-Edom into the city of David with gladness" (2 Sam. vi. 12), but which he had only established in a temporary abode of the nature of a tent, or tabernacle (2 Sam. vi. 17). God approved David's zeal, but did not allow him to accomplish his design (2 Sam. vii. 5—16). **An habitation for the mighty God of Jacob; rather, the Mighty One of Jacob** (comp. ver. 2 and the comment *ad loc.*).

Vers. 6—10.—The realization of David's design. The resting-place is, after a time, discovered and prepared. The ark is brought up and placed in it (1 Kings viii. 1—11). The "priests" are "clothed with righteousness," and the "saints shout for joy." God "turns not away the face of his anointed," but accepts the costly offering. God himself "arises into his rest," and makes his presence visible from the mercy-seat (1 Kings viii. 10, 11; 2 Chron. v. 13, 14).

Ver. 6.—Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah. "It" is probably "the ark"—not yet mentioned, but a main object of the writer's thoughts; and "Ephratah" is the district south and west of Jerusalem, in which both Bethlehem and Kirjath-jearim were situated. And found it in the fields of the wood; rather, *in the fields of Jaar*. "Jaar" is a contracted and poetic name for Kirjath-jearim, where the ark remained from its return out of the country of the Philistines till David transferred it to Jerusalem (1 Chron. xiii. 5—13).

Ver. 7.—We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool. The transfer is regarded as accomplished, and the worship as re-established, which had been intermitted while the ark was at Kirjath-jearim.

Ver. 8.—Arise, O Lord, into thy rest. Another transfer, but into the place of final "rest." The words are a quotation from 2 Chron. viii. 41, and were uttered originally by Solomon at the close of his long dedication prayer. Thou, and the ark of thy strength. The quotation continues. God is regarded as entering the temple, and taking possession of it, in and with the ark.

Ver. 9.—Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness. In 2 Chronicles the expression used is "with salvation"—salvation being the effect, whereof "righteousness" is the cause. And let thy saints shout for joy. 2 Chronicles has, "rejoice in goodness," i.e. rejoice in God's goodness to them. There is no other sufficient reason for great joy.

Ver. 10.—For thy servant David's sake turn not away the face of thine anointed. Here the text diverges still more from that

of Chronicles, which runs thus: "O Lord God, turn not away the face of thine anointed: remember the mercies of David thy servant." The meaning, however, is much the same in both passages: "For David's sake, to whom thou hast shown so many mercies, turn not away the face—i.e. reject not the petition, or the offering—of his representative."

Vers. 11—18.—God's oath of promise to David. This passage is based mainly on 2 Sam. vii. 11—16, but contains likewise expressions which seem taken from other psalms, as Ps. xlviii. 1, 2; lxxviii. 16; lxxxix. 3, 4; cxlvii. 14. The chief promise is that of a special "fruit of his body" to be "set upon his throne" (ver. 11) and to reign in Zion for ever (vers. 13, 14).

Ver. 11.—The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David (comp. Ps. lxxxix. 3, 35). He will not turn from it. So it is said of another Divine oath, "The Lord sware, and will not repent" (Ps. cx. 4). Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne (see 2 Sam. vii. 12; Acts ii. 30).

Ver. 12.—If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore (comp. 2 Sam. vii. 14—16, where the conditional character of the promises made to David is also apparent).

Ver. 13.—For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. Here we are brought back again to the temple. Zion, the city of David, was also "the city of the great King" (Ps. xlviii. 2)—the place where he had "set his Name"—which he was bound to protect and cherish. "As truly as God had chosen Zion, and made his habitation there, so certainly must he also raise up for David a branch, through which to his people concentrated there he will impart salvation" (Hengstenberg).

Ver. 14.—This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 16).

Ver. 15.—I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. Literally, this seems to point to the blessing of abundance of food. Spiritually, it may be a promise of ample spiritual sustenance.

Ver. 16.—I will also clothe her priests with salvation (comp. ver. 9). More is promised than was asked for. And her saints shall shout aloud for joy. Here, too, the promise goes beyond the request in ver. 9.

Ver. 17.—There will I make the horn of David to bud. The "horn of David" budded most gloriously when "a rod came

forth out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch grew out of his roots, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon him" (Isa. xi. 1, 2)—in other words, when Messiah appeared, and re-established the Davidian kingdom, which thenceforth has endured, and will endure for ever. I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. The metaphor is changed; but the idea is the same. Christ's coming shed a glory on David's house, and on the temple, and on David himself, such as had never previously illumined them. David is often promised "a lamp" (1 Kings xi. 36; xv. 4;

2 Kings viii. 19; 2 Chron. xxi. 7). In Christ the lamp was given.

Ver. 18.—His enemies will I clothe with shame. David's "enemies" are those who oppress his "Seed," and will not have him to reign over them. All such will be "confounded and put to shame" (Ps. xxxv. 4), "clothed with shame and dishonour" (Ps. xxxv. 26). But upon himself shall his crown flourish. The true and the final Davidic representative is Christ, who "remaineth a King for ever" (Ps. xxix. 10). On him his crown will ever flourish.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—18.—*The service of the sanctuary.* We are accustomed to think of devotion in connection with the house of the Lord. The two things are clearly, though not inseparably, associated with one another. There may be piety where there is no sanctuary; there may be a sanctuary where there is no piety. Practically, however, we find the two in very close alliance. We have in this psalm—

I. THE GOOD MAN'S ANXIETY. (Vers. 1—5.) David is represented as very seriously concerned about the sanctuary of God. It is a mark of devotion when we are more willing to spend our time and our money on God's house than on our own; when we would rather have our own dwelling out of repair than let his house be neglected.

II. GOD'S FAVOURING PRESENCE. (Vers. 7, 8, 13, 14.) God chose Zion as the place of his manifested presence. There he could be worshipped (by sacrifice) as nowhere else. Though not actually more present in the sanctuary than elsewhere, he is so to our thought and feeling; and there, if we gather in the spirit of devotion and reverent inquiry (Ps. xxvii.), we may confidently expect that God will manifest his power in the enlightening and renewing influences of his Spirit.

III. MINISTERIAL EQUIPMENT AND REWARD. (Vers. 9, 16.) The ministers of God: 1. Are to be clothed with righteousness. They must be men in whom is the Spirit, and in whose lives are found the principles of Jesus Christ. It is vain to commend him with the lip when the life bears no confirming witness; but when lip and life speak the same truth, there is power and fruitage. 2. They will then be clothed with salvation. They will be men whose word will be of Divine redemption, whose work will be the healing, the strengthening, and the saving of the souls of men; and this plenitude of salvation will overflow to the life of those they serve. There is—

IV. A CONSEQUENT BLESSING TO THE PEOPLE. "They shout for joy" (vers. 9—16). 1. Where worship is rightly rendered, where the praises of a gracious God are sung with grateful hearts as well as trueful tongues, where the glories and the graces of God in Christ Jesus are unfolded as they should be, and as they will be by ministers who understand and magnify their mission, there will be pure and deep joy in the act of Divine service. This is the true, the Christian note to strike; not that of spiritual depression, but that of sacred joy; for are we not "children and heirs of God"? are we not "kings and priests unto God"? do we not "sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"? 2. When ministerial work has been faithfully discharged, it has led souls into the kingdom of God, which is "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." The psalm brings out, what we must never lose sight of—

V. THE CONDITIONAL CHARACTER OF ALL DIVINE PROMISES. (Vers. 11, 12.) The promises of God usually, as here, have a condition attached to them; but where it is not expressed it is understood. The wise and holy Father could not promise anything absolutely to his children; that would be unworthy of his wisdom, and injurious to our true interests. Forgiveness is promised to repentance and faith; the indwelling Spirit to purity of heart; peace of mind to believing prayer; the crown of life to faithfulness unto death, etc.

VI. THE GREAT FULFILMENT. The psalm is Messianic (see Luke i. 69). 1. *An availing plea.* If for David's sake God is asked not to send the suppliant away unblest, how much more confidently may we plead the Name of the Son of David, and ask that for Christ's sake he would not send us away without forgiveness and spiritual refreshment! 2. *The hope of truth and victory.* Christ, the Light of the world, the victorious Prince and Saviour, was ordained, and in due time he came (vers. 17, 18).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The power of a holy soul.* I. THAT DAVID WAS SUCH WE ARE BOUND TO BELIEVE, notwithstanding the flagrant and most grievous sins which are recorded against him. They stagger us when we read of them, and we wonder how such a man could ever have been called "the man after God's own heart." But in this psalm, as so constantly throughout the Holy Scriptures, we come across statements which prove that, in the estimation of the people of his day, and of those who knew him best, he was held most dear. A passionate enthusiasm of honour and affection gathered round his name and memory, the evidence of which is met with simply everywhere. How could this have been if he were only what many in our day say he was, and who hold him up, not for warm approbation, but for severe reprobation? We are bound to judge of a man, not according to the standards of our own age, but of his, and to accept their testimony and not our inferences from statements which it is impossible for us in this age fully to understand. His own people loved and honoured him, and that is enough.

II. AS SUCH HE WAS DEAR TO THE HEART OF GOD. For his descendants felt that they might plead his name as an argument in their prayers. They believed that they might call upon God to "remember David." There is no hint here or anywhere that they were wrong in this. Doubtless they were right. There is no saint-worship in this, and no seeking David's intercession with God; but there is the valid plea that God would remember the prayers and sorrows of his faithful servant—sorrows which came to him in consequence of his love and zeal for God. The people of God knew how God had remembered Noah, and saved him and his from the Flood; how he had remembered Abraham, and for his sake had saved Lot out of Sodom; and now they believed he would remember David, and would bless them as David had prayed. Such is the power of a holy soul to bring down blessing upon his children and upon his people.

III. WHAT MADE HIM THUS DEAR TO THE HEART OF GOD? 1. *Because dishonour to God was distress to him.* It was a grief of mind that the ark and service of God should be so ill cared for (cf. 2 Sam. vii. 2). It was to him a public dishonour done to God to allow such a thing to continue. How few there are who feel like this! All people seek their own, not those things that are God's. It was an affliction to David that God was not honoured. Oh that it may be so to us! 2. *Because he not only grieved for the dishonour, but earnestly sought to remove it.* See how intense was his desire that God should have a fit habitation (ver. 5). He would not rest in his house, nor lie down, etc. (vers. 3, 4), until, etc. (ver. 5). Oh for zeal like this! What a witness for God it would be! And how solemnly he bound himself over to this work (ver. 4)! And it was ever his anxious concern; this the meaning of "his affliction" in ver. 1. Now, because of this, though he was a man of so many faults, and though he never did build the Lord's temple, yet was he beloved of the Lord.

IV. THE RESULT THAT FOLLOWED, AND STILL FOLLOWS, FROM WHAT DAVID WAS. 1. *His name became a valid plea with God.* 2. *An inspiring memory* for all time, and especially to those who succeeded him. 3. *A perpetual encouragement* to all who work and suffer for God. 4. *A call to us to cherish holy zeal for the honour of God.*—S. C.

Ver. 5.—"*A place for the Lord.*" I. TO SECURE THIS SHOULD BE THE OBJECT OF OUR INTENSE DESIRE AND ENDEAVOUR. 1. *Because the Lord so desires it.* See his name here, "the mighty God of Jacob." What a poor mean wretch Jacob too often was! And yet how God compassionated, pitied, uplifted, and saved him! What does not

such a redeeming God deserve and demand! 2. *For the sake of our fellow-men.* It is the world's great and crying need—that the Lord God should dwell among them. It is heaven where “the tabernacle of the Lord is with men.” 3. *For our own sake.* For God's “loving-kindness is better than life.” God is the soul's exceeding Joy.

II. **WHERE WE SHOULD MAKE THIS ENDEAVOUR.** 1. *In our own heart.* Until he have a place, a habitation, there, it is no good our trying to find him a place elsewhere. 2. *In our homes.* Let our own family be the scene of our first aggressive work. 3. *In the branch of the Church to which we belong.* The Church should be God's rest for ever; he would have it so (ver. 13). But it too often is not. And until the Church is right, the world will remain wrong. To have a better world we must have a better Church. 4. *In our own neighbourhood.* All who dwell around ought to be the better for our dwelling in their midst. “Let your light so shine,” etc. 5. *Throughout the world.* The missionary cause should be dear to our heart.

III. **HOW WE SHOULD GO TO WORK.** 1. *By personal self-surrender to Christ.* This stands at the threshold of all our work. Nothing can be done till this is done. 2. *By believing prayer,* importunate and persevering, and by holy example and faithful testimony. 3. *By consecration of our substance to this work.* 4. *By continual self-denial.* 5. *By perpetual trust in Christ.* 6. *By firm, holy, and abiding resolve.* (Vers. 2—4.)—S. C.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Led of the Lord.* We do not know for certain what “it,” in ver. 6, means. Probably the ark of the covenant—“the ark of thy strength” (ver. 8). Nor do we know exactly where Ephratah was, and “the fields of the wood” (see Exposition for a possible interpretation). But we may suffer the expressions used in these verses to suggest to us the progress of the soul led by the Lord in the ways of life. We only take “it” as telling of the grace of God, the Word of life. And concerning this we may note—

I. **THAT GOD PREPARES THE HEART THAT IS TO RECEIVE HIS GRACE.** See how it was with David, how his soul was stirred in connection with the object he had in view. And so God ever deals with men. By one means and another he gets them ready for what he is going to give them.

II. **THEN HIS GRACE IS HEARD OF.** The Ephratah stage is reached. When the soul has been got ready, the seed is sown, the Word is heard, and it has fallen into good ground.

III. **THEN IT IS SOUGHT AFTER AND FOUND.** The search may be a long one, and the discovery made at last in some seemingly very unlikely place—some fields of the wood, as it were, where no one would have thought of going to look for it. In what unthought-of places and ways God is found!

IV. **THEN COME THE OPEN CONFESSION OF IT, AND FELLOWSHIP WITH THEM WHO ARE LIKE-MINDED AND HAVE ALSO FOUND GOD.** “We will go into his tabernacles.” They have found what their soul desired, and they will proclaim it before all by going to the house of God with the people of God.

V. **THIS FOLLOWED BY THE LIFE OF WAITING UPON GOD.** “We will worship at his footstool.” So the Divine life in us is matured and sustained. At what stage in this progress are we?—S. C.

Vers. 8, 9.—*The Church the rest of the Lord.* This is the only place in the Psalms where the ark is mentioned. And it is only described as here in 2 Chron. vi. 41.

I. **THE CHURCH THE LORD'S RESTING-PLACE.** (See Numb. x. 33—36.) When the ark set forward, it was “to search out a resting-place for them.” And where they were, God would be (ver. 13). It is not the magnificence of the shrine, the numbers or the rank or wealth of the attendants, but it is the spiritual character of the people, that God looks at. His Church consists of those who believe, love, and obey him. They are the objects of his love and care and choice. They shall have his presence, and his delight shall be with them.

II. **THE CHURCH CANNOT PROSPER WITHOUT THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN CHRIST.** This is the meaning of the words, “Thou and the ark of thy strength.” For though we had the presence of God, we could not know it apart from Christ. “No man cometh unto the Father but by me;” “This is life eternal, to know thee, and Jesus Christ

whom thou hast sent." Our knowledge of God is dependent on our knowledge of Christ. The ark was the ark of God's strength. Before it the waters of Jordan parted asunder; the walls of Jericho fell down; the idol-god of the Philistines, Dagon, was shattered. It was the symbol and pledge of strength from God for all Israel's need. Hence the consternation of Eli when he heard that the ark of God was taken. But so is our Lord Jesus Christ the strength of God. For through him God wins us, keeps us, inspires us, strengthens us. God can do anything with us and through us when Christ is our Life. Revealed to our hearts in Christ, we are utterly his.

III. THE CHURCH IS BLESSED INDEED WHEN THIS PRAYER IS ANSWERED. 1. *Her priests are clothed with righteousness*—endued with the spirit of holiness. The being clothed tells of manifested character, the habit and garment of the soul. And what a joy and a power to the Church is a holy ministry! Nothing can compare with it, nothing can compensate for its absence. 2. *Her saints are filled with joy*. Gladness and sanctity go together, as they ever should. Let us ever pray, "Endue thy ministers with righteousness, and make thy chosen people joyful."

IV. THE CHURCH, WOULD SHE BE THUS BLESSED, MUST SEEK FOR THE BLESSING IN PRAYER. "Arise, O Lord," etc. Then the Lord will dwell in her; she will be his rest (vers. 14—18).—S. C.

Vers. 13—15.—"*Zion of the Lord beloved.*" I. SHE IS THE OBJECT OF THE LORD'S CHOICE. 1. *We cannot get rid of the truth of God's election*. Many would like to do so. It calls up in their minds thoughts of a very painful kind. It clouds for them and to them the face of God. 2. *But we see it everywhere*. Are not we ourselves a chosen people? With whom hath God dealt, in the way of privilege, as with us? 3. *And we act upon the principle ourselves*. If we want some work to be done, we elect the best instruments we can find for it. We do not send just anybody, but we choose whom we shall send. 4. *And this fact shows us how to regard the doctrine of election*. The election is to service for the sake of others, not to their exclusion, as is so commonly thought; for their good, and not for their ill. Thus God chose Abraham and Israel, that his "way may be known upon earth, and his," etc. (Ps. lxxvii.). Not that others may be left out of the Divine blessing, but brought into it. If we are rendering no service to our brethren, then we are not of God's elect, for all his elect serve.

II. SHE IS HIS REST AND DESIRED HABITATION FOR EVER. 1. *Allusion is, no doubt, made to the ark of the covenant*. Its shiftings and migrations had been many ere it was finally fixed at Jerusalem. It went from Shiloh to Bethel (Judg. xx. 27); then to Mizpeh (Judg. xxi. 5); then, for twenty years, it was at Kirjath-jearim, in "the fields of the wood;" then, for three months, in the house of Obed-Edom; and finally at Zion, where the psalmist thought it would rest for evermore. 2. *But what was not strictly true of the ark and Zion is true of God and his Church*. He ever dwells there; for his people have been chosen in Christ from the foundation of the world. He has already done so much for them, both in providence and in grace. Amongst ourselves nothing so binds us over to render further help as help we have already given. And certainly it is so with God. He begins his good work, and therefore he goes on (Phil. i. 6). Then, God has promised to be ever with his people (see John xiv. 16—23; Eph. ii. 21, 22). Amid his people only is he honoured, loved, and obeyed; other men grieve, dishonour, and despise him and his Law; but his people count him their "exceeding Joy." And then he is beginning already to reap his blessed harvest in them. Our Lord himself was the Sower who went "forth weeping, bearing," etc. (Ps. cxxvi. 6); and already he is beginning to "come again with rejoicing," etc. For amid his people he finds even here and now—how much more by-and-by!—sympathy, love, holiness, devotion, those things in which he delights because they are of and like himself. 3. *And what is true of the Church at large is true of the individual soul*. Are we, then, members of God's Zion, enrolled in the fellowship of his Church?

III. THE PROVISION SHALL BE ABUNDANTLY BLESSED. Her praises, her prayers, her instructions, her ministers, her sacraments, her assemblies,—these are her provisions; and God shall, does, abundantly bless them to the securing of those happy results for which they were designed.

IV. THE POOR SHALL BE SATISFIED WITH BREAD. In his Church the poor are the rich, and the rich the poor. For the poor are those who know it and long for the Bread

of life, and so get it and are rich. But the rich desire not, and so have not and are poor. And Zion's poor shall be satisfied. Oh to be of these poor!—S. C.

Ver. 18.—*The shame of Christ's enemies and the glory of his crown.* That part of the Old Testament history to which this psalm refers is in all probability the dedication of the temple which Solomon had built. Part of it forms the conclusion of the prayer which Solomon offered on that occasion (cf. vers. 8—10 and 2 Chron. vi. 41, 42). And the whole of it is appropriate to that event. Its first portion expresses the earnest anxiety of God's people for his presence amongst them, and the second recounts those facts and promises on which their faith that God would come amongst them rested. David had been full of concern about the building of the house of the Lord. It was a real distress to him until he had found a place, etc. (ver. 5). And all his conduct had been in keeping with this holy desire. Now, this the psalmist prays the Lord to remember. And what an example such holy anxiety is to us all when we are seeking the presence of the Lord in our midst! Such holy longing after himself God will never disappoint. The latter part of the psalm proves this, and our text is the closing promise of a series, all of which assure the people of God that Christ shall live and reign and triumph in their midst. So, then, let us consider—

I. THE SHAME OF CHRIST'S ENEMIES. 1. *It is strange that he should have any enemies,* so good and gracious as he was. 2. *But some of these enemies do not think themselves to be such.* Those that are openly and flagrantly against Christ all can recognize; but there are a number of others who, though not with Christ, would protest against being regarded as his enemies. But such protest will not avail. To be not with Christ is to be against him—his enemy. 3. *And for his enemies there awaits open shame.* They shall be clothed with it. (1) There will be the shame of defeat. They cannot, shall not, have their way. The Church they would despoil the Lord will keep. (2) And of contempt. For think what it is they oppose; not some tyrannous oppression, but a just, holy, and most beneficent rule. And how inexcusable such opposition, for God's Word was all against them, and the testimony of the best and wisest of men, and conscience, when suffered to speak, condemned them! but, nevertheless, they persisted in their sin and folly. What but the shame of contempt can come to them? What else should come? (3) And of the profound moral condemnation of all the good. For these opponents of Christ have violated all their better nature, have incurred the guilt of deep ingratitude, and have wrought widespread evil; they have dragged down with them many precious souls, and they have done foul dishonour to God. May he keep us from all such shame!

II. THE GLORIES OF THE SAVIOUR'S CROWN. "Upon himself," etc. None of us are capable of adequately speaking of these glories, but we are able to see some of the sources whence these glories spring. As: 1. *From the nature of Christ's rule.* It is supreme, universal, eternal, attained at vast cost and in infinite wisdom, righteousness, and love. 2. *From the universal and glad response which it shall receive.* "His saints shall shout aloud for joy." His rule is their delight. 3. *From the results of his rule.* See the numbers of his subjects, their happy condition, their spotless purity. These are some of the results of our Saviour's rule.

CONCLUSION. In which shall you and I share—in these glories, or in the shame with which his enemies shall be clothed? One or the other it must be. Before God let us settle this question.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Anxious purpose delayed may prove afflictive.* "Remember for David [*i.e.* so as to fulfil the promise made to him] all his trouble" (see 2 Sam. vi. 8—15; 1 Chron. xxii.). This psalm may belong to the period of Solomon, but it is better to read it in the light of the memories and feelings and hopes of the restored exiles. It is a plea for the fulfilment of the promises made to David in the experiences of the restored nation; and it is a poetical way of saying that the anxieties of the exiles for the honour of Jehovah and Jehovah's worship were only fitly represented by the anxiety of David in the olden time. The key-note of the psalm is given in the first sentence, "Lord, remember David." "Fulfil in us thy promises to him; for we are like-minded towards thee and thy service." The point immediately before us is, that affliction is a comprehensive term, and may include providential hindrances. It should be borne in mind

that, as David purposed to build a temple for God, and could not accomplish his purpose, so the restored exiles purposed to rebuild the temple, and could not accomplish their purpose because of the opposition of the Samaritans. The psalm represents the fretting of the pious part of the nation at this enforced delay.

I. DIVINE HINDRANCES, CAUSING DELAY, MAY BE NECESSARY. It is true that God deals with the individual, and has personal interest in each individual; but he is the Father of a *family*, and must keep supremely in view the interest of the whole. The wish of one is always considered, but delay may be necessary in order to get things worked round so that the wish may be met without injury to others. Man's purposes are formed without full knowledge, so they often must be qualified.

II. DIVINE HINDRANCES, CAUSING DELAY, MAY BE AFFLICTIVE. That depends greatly on the disposition of those who form the purposes. A king, like David, who was constantly getting his own way, would find it especially hard to be hindered. The exiles, who were full of enthusiasm for God's house, must have found it very hard to have their work arrested. All the harder because their purpose was such a manifestly *good* one. It may be urged that no severer strain ever comes into a good man's life than enforced delay in accomplishing his pious purposes. In agony a man may say, "God will not let me do the good I would."

III. DIVINE HINDRANCES, CAUSING DELAY, MAY BE EDUCATIVE. They may educate *humility*, by convincing us that we are not absolutely necessary; and *submission*, by compelling our wills to wait on God's will; and *hope*, by assuring us that God being in the delay will surely be in the issue to which it leads.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The Mighty One of Jacob.* Every man has—should have—his own apprehension of God, and name for him. (For this name, see Gen. xlix. 24.) It does not appear that Jacob called him "The Mighty One." This is the name which those find for Jacob's God who can read aright the story of God's dealings with the great patriarch. But it is more than probable that there is poetical allusion to the revelation that was made to Jacob at the Jabbok. The nameless one who wrestled with him prevailed to leave on him the permanent mark of his power. So he may properly be figured as the "Mighty One." This name for God is also found in Isa. i. 24; xlix. 26; lx. 16.

I. A MAN MUST USE THE NAMES THERE ARE FOR GOD UNTIL HE CAN MAKE ONE FOR HIMSELF. Mothers give the first conceptions of God, and teach the first name for him. As the boy unfolds into the man, he will have changing, enlarging, ideas of God, and want other names for him. Israel fixed a variety of names in association with particular incidents. The earlier names chiefly embody the idea of power. Presently they enlarge to express character. But only refined minds need names that express personal relations. It may be well to illustrate what a variety of names there are in the Old Testament for God, and further, to show what differences of conception are embodied in the names for God in different nations and religions. Teut, Allah, Theos, Deus, Buch, As, Istu, Rain, Magatal, Pussa, Goezur, Yannar, etc. It may be that a man can never really get to fill the Divine name Father with its proper meaning until he realizes his own paternity; but this is getting a name out of an experience.

II. A MAN MAY GET HIS OWN NAME FOR GOD OUT OF HIS EXPERIENCES OF LIFE. And a man does not really know God, or come into right personal relations with him, until he gets his own name by which to call him. It may, of course, be an old and familiar name; but the man must make it his own. The experiences of life may bring to a man a great awe of the Divine majesty; or a fear of the Divine power; or a wondering over the Divine mystery; or a tenderness on account of the graciousness of Divine dealing. In each case we want a name; and we put our own special meaning into the name for God that we use. It means more to us than it does to any one else. And when once we have fixed our own name for God, it becomes a sort of test by which we appraise and understand all God's further dealings with us.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*Housing God's symbols.* The fitting old place was a *temple*; the fitting place now is a *heart*. The old economy was an elaborate picture-teaching of spiritual truths and relations. It is urged that, as man is a composite being, and can never transcend his bodily conditions, his religion must always be as composite as himself. It must have its visible symbols, and they must have their fitting earthly, material,

surroundings. On the other hand, it is urged, as by the Hindus, that precisely what man has to do, precisely what has to be the issue of life, is full deliverance from the sensible and material, from all reliance on form, symbol, sacrament, or other outward help; and absolute absorption in, and satisfaction with, spiritual and eternal realities. To many this must seem a dream; and it may confidently be affirmed that the majority of men will never transcend their dependence on material symbols. Religion for humanity will always have its shrines, its sacraments, and its services. And if this be so, then adequate and efficient material helps will be sought by all devout souls. And this is illustrated in David's anxiety.

I. THE FITTING PLACE FOR DIVINE SYMBOLS. David had to deal with a sacred ark, which was the symbol of Jehovah's presence as the supreme King of the nation. Clearly what was befitting to the King was a dwelling-place. But David had restored that ark to a nation that had at last gained settled permanency. The sense of security led to the idea of building a palace for David. How natural that David should think of building a palace for his supreme and sovereign Lord! A movable tent was no longer in harmony with the national life. The houses built for God, the churches and chapels of to-day, ought to represent that sense of God and of God's presence which they have for whom they are built. If the house holds the symbols which God gives, it is the symbol of God which man creates. It represents his thought of God.

II. THE FITTING PLACE FOR THE REALITY REPRESENTED BY SYMBOLS. For symbols are never realities, and never must be thought of as such, or treated as such. They are *only* symbols. The Divine presence is a *spiritual reality*. And that must have its shrine. That shrine is a human heart. "To that man will I look, and with him will I dwell, who is humble and contrite in heart." The heart-temple must be worthy of its real presence.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The history of the ark epitomizing the history of the nation.* If Ephratah is to be treated as the ancient name of Bethlehem, we must not understand this verse to affirm that the ark was ever there; but, putting himself back into the olden days, the poet represents David as having heard about the ark when he was living at Bethlehem. But it is more simple to take Ephratah as a general term for the district in which the ark was found. Historical or geographical precision is not necessary in a poem or a psalm. It should also be noticed that this psalm is arranged in answering sentences for chanting. In saying that the ark was the symbol of the Divine presence, we are hardly precise enough. The Divine presence was a wondrous light that shone above the cover of the ark, and between the guarding cherubim. The ark itself represented the nation of Israel, and in it the tables of the covenant were put, as in the heart of the nation God's laws were settled. God's symbolic light resting on the representative ark signified God's acceptance of, and favour toward, the nation. So the history of the ark becomes the suggestion of the history of the nation. This may be illustrated in four stages.

I. THE ARK REPRESENTING THE NATION'S TRAINING-TIME. It was for a time in the making, according to Divine instructions, and during the wilderness-period, a ritual and religious associations were growing up around it. It is not always clearly seen that the religious system was being developed, as well as a national and governmental system, during the years of the desert-wanderings; and the system grew round the ark.

II. THE ARK REPRESENTING THE NATION'S SELF-WILLED TIME. Every nation, during its formation, has a self-willed time, such as is represented by the period of the Judges; and the fate of the ark during that period singularly answers to the up-and-down experience of the people. We have the ark dishonoured; used for wrong purposes; lost; preserved by God; and partially restored. And these are evident suggestions of the national life of the period.

III. THE ARK REPRESENTING THE NATION'S PROSPEROUS TIME. Under David it was brought to represent the nation before God, and the light shone again on its cover, signifying full restored relations. And under Solomon the ark and the glory gained permanent location, signifying the nation's religiously founded prosperity.

IV. THE ARK REPRESENTING THE NATION'S DECAYING TIME. It ceased to represent the *whole* nation—ten tribes neglected it. Then it became ill used, and at last it was

carried away and lost, as the nation was ill used by encroaching Baalism, and carried away by Babylonian force.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*God's footstool.* "Worship at his footstool." By the "footstool" is meant the cover of the ark, on which the Shechinah-light was regarded as resting. Round the top of the ark ran a crown or wreath of pure gold, and upon it was the mercy-seat, of the same dimensions as the ark, made, not of wood overlaid with gold, but entirely of pure gold. At either end of the mercy-seat rose two golden chernim, with outspread wings, and faces turned towards each other, and eyes bent downwards, as though the Shechinah-glory were too dazzling to look fully upon. It would appear to be a special idea of David's, for in his last address to his people he said, "As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God" (1 Chron. xxviii. 2). The Eastern idea of a footstool to a throne is seen in Solomon's ivory throne. "There were six steps to the throne, with a footstool of gold" (2 Chron. ix. 18). The man who offered homage, or presented a petition, might approach no nearer to the king than his footstool. In a more general sense heaven is said to be God's throne, and the earth his footstool; then anywhere on earth is a fitting place for offering our worship (see Isa. lxvi. 1; Matt. v. 35; John iv. 20—24).

I. WORSHIPPING AT GOD'S FOOTSTOOL SUGGESTS THE DIVINE CONDESCENSION. He lets us come into his presence, and even to come so near to him, so directly into personal communion with him, as is indicated by approaching his footstool. But he permits no presumption, no irreverence. And it is well to remember that, if Christianity permits of familiarity with God, it must never be other than a *holy* familiarity. The Christian must keep at the footstool. The surprise at the Divine condescension in permitting us to come so near as this is well indicated in 1 Kings viii. 27; Isa. lxvi. 1, 2.

II. WORSHIPPING AT GOD'S FOOTSTOOL SUGGESTS THE MOOD OF THE WORSHIPPERS. A royal presence is always affecting, and a man who enters it is always set upon securing the best preparations and attitudes. There is lacking from much of our worship and prayer that sense of coming to a King who is so glorious that we may not get nearer to him than his footstool. The proper mood for the Divine presence may be elaborately unfolded and illustrated. We only suggest that the proper mood is a holy blending of humility and confidence—the humility that says, "I dare not," with the confidence that says, "I may."—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*The holy clothing.* The allusion is to the way in which the priests of God, in discharging their sacred functions, set forth his righteousness in the salvation of his people. The white garment of the priest is the symbol of the clothing of righteousness (see Zech. iii. 3, 4; Rev. xix. 8). "Fitting attire, figuring the inner still more glorious attire which they should wear, of holiness and obedience to him whom they serve" ('Speaker's Commentary'). Dr. Bushnell remarks on dress as being the "outward analogon, or figure, of character; dress relates to the form or figure of the body, character to the form or figure of the soul—it is, in fact, the dress of the soul. The option we have in one typifies the grander option we have in the other. The right we have in one, above the mere animals, to choose the colour, type, and figure of the outward man, foreshadows the nobler right we also have to cast the mould, fashion or despoil the beauty, of the inward man. On the ground of this analogy it is that the Scriptures so frequently make use of dress to signify what lies in character, and represent character, in one way or another, as being the dress of the soul. Thus they speak of the 'wedding garment,' 'the garment of praise,' that 'of cursing,' that 'of pride;' 'the robe of righteousness,' and 'of judgment,' and 'the white robe,' and 'the best robe' given to the returning prodigal, and 'the robe that has been washed,' and 'judgment put on as a robe,' of 'white raiment' and 'white apparel,' of 'glorious apparel,' of 'filthiness,' or 'righteousnesses that are filthy rags,' of 'filthiness in the skirts;' and, more inclusively and generally still, of being 'clothed with salvation,' 'with strength and power,' 'with humility,' 'with majesty,' 'with shame,' 'with fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints.' All the figures of dress and clothing are used up, in this manner, by the Scriptures, to represent the

forms of disgrace and filthiness, or of beauty and glory, into which the inner man of the soul may be fashioned—wearing Heaven's livery, or that of sin. As character is the soul's dress, and dress analogical to character, whatever has power to produce a character when received, is represented as a dress to be put on." In the references of this psalm to the white clothing of the priests, that clothing is said to represent both "righteousness" and "salvation." It may very well be that these are only two terms to represent the same thing, but, at least, they are the same thing seen from different points of view; and we may be right in seeing distinct but related things.

I. THE HOLY CLOTHING OF THE PRIESTS SYMBOLIZES SALVATION. The white garments on the cleansed body were associated with the great sacrificial acts, which bore the closest relation to the recovery, restoration, ceremonial redemption, of the people. At the great Day of Atonement, the symbol of all the Divine salvations, the high priest was required to "put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on" (Lev. xvi. 4).

II. THE HOLY CLOTHING OF THE PRIESTS SYMBOLIZES RIGHTEOUSNESS. Which is the basis, ground, and condition of salvation on man's side. A man who seeks salvation must want to be what is represented by the priests' white garments. A man who seeks Christ's salvation can never have it unless he *wants* to be as pure, as righteous, as Christ. The priest can atone for nobody and nothing unless he is, representatively at least, righteous. And nobody can be atoned for unless he is representatively—and in resolute will and purpose—righteous. Man's righteousness is no ground of acceptance with God, but man's *wish* to be righteous is the condition on which alone a sacrifice can be made for him. So when the restored exiles longed and prayed for the renewal of the glories of David's time, they wanted their priests who represent them clothed with salvation and clothed with righteousness; clothed with righteousness because clothed with salvation, or in order to effect salvation. It will easily be seen how the formal teaching of the "holy clothing" found its spiritual realization in our great High Priest, who, in his righteousness, represents what we would be to the eternal Father, and gains the power and right, through his obedience, sacrifice, and exaltation, to come into our spheres of character, and make us what we would be, and what he is.—R. T.

Ver. 12.—*Conditional promises.* "If thy children will keep my covenant." Is an unconditional promise, either human or Divine, conceivable? And if conceivable, is it reasonable, and could it ever be wise? It certainly could never be, as the promise of a *man*, who could never see all round a thing and all through it, and so never have a sufficient basis on which to make the promise. And we cannot think of an unconditional promise as ever befitting for God to make, because he must make it to moral beings, whose continuance in the same mood can never be guaranteed. The folly, and possible mischief of all unconditioned promises is indicated in the promise of excited and half-drunken Herod to the dancing-girl Salome, which tricked him into taking the life of Christ's forerunner. It may seem as if, by removing the unconditional element from God's promises, we removed our confidence, and brought in the possibility of his breaking his word. But his doing the very best for us is more important than his keeping any particular promise; and doing his best may mean *not* keeping his word; only we must clearly see that the ground of his change is change in us—is our failing to meet his appointed conditions. That conditions, affixed to promises, are a blessing to us may be readily shown.

I. CONDITIONS TEST OBEEDIENCE. While we are here on earth we never transcend the dependent child-spheres. We are under what is represented by *family* rule; and that always tests obedience by putting conditions to promises. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land."

II. CONDITIONS CULTURE TRUST. Because they keep up relations with the promise-maker, and preserve our sense of dependence on his good will. If a promise were absolute, it would tend to separate us from the promiser. It would be something distinct from him. And it would be fatal to our trust in God if we could rely upon his word as distinct from himself. We must trust the "Faithful Promiser."

III. CONDITIONS ACT AS WARNINGS. Illustrate from the constancy with which the nation Israel was warned of the covenant-conditions of its promises. The Divine "if" stands ever before us. We lose all claim on the promises if we fail to meet the conditions; and the loss is *our own*.—R. T.

Ver. 14.—*Limited permanency*. For the changed locations of the ark, see Bethel (Judg. xx. 26, 27), Mizpeh, Shiloh, Kirjath-jearim, house of Obed-Edom, Jerusalem. We are often disturbed by the fact that God's promises have a sound of permanency, but that permanency has not been realized, at least in the way in which the realization was expected. There are two things which need to be taken into consideration. 1. The Bible is largely poetry, and the poetry is of the Eastern type, in which there is always an element of intensity and exaggeration. In dealing with all poetry we have to use an answering imagination to that of the writer of it, and so get at what he *suggests* rather than what he *says*. 2. It is to be borne in mind that, strictly speaking, the idea of absolute permanency can never be applied to anything created, for every created thing must be dependent on the good will of its Creator. To these considerations a third may be added. The introduction of sin, as human self-will, into the world, has introduced frailty and brevity into everything related to the sinner. The promise of permanence for David's royal house, or for the temple which his son built, was certainly not formally realized. David's dynasty ceased; the Babylonians destroyed the temple. And it was not that the promises were conditional; it was that they were never intended to be permanent. It would not have been the best blessing for the world for David's dynasty or the Solomonic temple to have continued *for ever*, in a literal sense.

I. A THING IS REALLY PERMANENT THAT CONTINUES SO LONG AS IT IS REALLY NEEDED. A thousand things are better passed away when they are done with. Mere length of endurance in time is no necessary blessing to anybody. True permanency is fitting to use. "A man is immortal until his work is done." Then it is best for him to be mortal.

II. A THING IS REALLY PERMANENT THAT PASSES INTO WHAT IT PREPARED FOR. For everything is a matrix, forth from which something comes which is to live and be a matrix in its turn. In one sense everything is destroyed; in another sense nothing is destroyed. We live for ever in the great succession of things. Our living force goes into the stream of time, flows on to the ocean of eternity, and can never be lost.—R. T.

Vers. 1—18.—*Spiritual worship*. "The psalmist, filled with the memory of many an ancient oracle in praise of David and his city Zion, unable to bear the thought that this 'beauty of all the earth,' for which David had toiled, should remain sunk in misery and ruin, prays to God to remember his promises, and to return once more to his chosen dwelling-place;" that the temple may be rebuilt, and the national worship restored. Some of the principal thoughts suggested are—

I. THAT THE GREATEST WORK A MAN CAN DO IS TO HELP TO BRING GOD NEARER TO MEN. In this case David toiled with unwearied efforts "to find out a place for the Lord," where the ark might at length rest. But there are many ways besides of bringing God nearer to the thoughts of men. Public worship is only one means. A life divinely lived; works; conversation. God is made known best by the *living* temple.

II. GOD WILL, HOWEVER, IN DUE TIME REWARD THE LABOURS OF HIS FAITHFUL SERVANTS. "Lord, *remember* David, and all his labour and trouble." "Turn not away the face of thine anointed." Do not deny his prayers. *Seeming* delay on God's part is no *real* delay.

III. IT IS GOD'S WILL TO REVEAL HIMSELF AND BE FOUND OF MEN. "The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation," etc. He has created men for the fellowship of himself and of one another. "This is my rest for ever;" as the father finds rest at home.

IV. GOD HAS MADE ABUNDANT PROVISION FOR THE WANTS OF OUR SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL NATURE. "I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout for joy . . . ordained a lamp for mine anointed," etc. "I will bless her provision with increase, and satisfy her poor with bread."—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXXIII.

A SHORT psalm in praise of unity and brotherly harmony. As Dr. Kay observes, "The preservation of this unity was the object of the selection of ONE place, to which the tribes should go up on pilgrimage three times a year." And the intercommunion with each other, which the pilgrimages fostered, was certainly one of the chief means by which a unity of feeling and sentiment was kept up among the scattered members of the nation century after century. The pilgrimages were to the Israelites what the meetings at the Olympic and other games were to the Greeks—at once witnesses to a belief in ethnic unity, and a strong and efficient bond of union. This psalm was therefore admirably fitted for a "pilgrimage-song," which it is allowed on all hands to have been, and must have greatly helped the various classes of pilgrims—the spiritual and secular authorities, the rich, the poor, the citizen, the peasant, and the widely divided members of the Great Diaspora—to feel themselves united with each other and with Jehovah (see Professor Cheyne's Introduction to the psalm in his 'Book of Psalms,' p. 341).

Ver. 1.—Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! The unity described appears to be existent, and to present itself to the psalmist's vision. Hence the opening, "Behold!" All may see it, and see how blessed and pleasant a thing it is. "Brethren" is used in the wide sense of descendants of a common ancestor (Gen. xiii. 8; Exod. ii. 11; Acts vii. 26, etc.).

Ver. 2.—It is like the precious ointment upon the head. The anointing oil of the sanctuary was an ointment composed of

many "precious" ingredients, as myrrh, cinnamon, sweet calamus, and cassia, besides oil olive, which was its basis (Exod. xxx. 23, 24). Not only Aaron (Lev. viii. 12), but all later high priests, were anointed with it (Exod. xxx. 30). That ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard. This would be the natural result of a copious "pouring" of the oil upon the top of the head. Though not mentioned historically in Leviticus, it presents itself to the eye of the poet, on whose mental vision the whole scene rises. That went down to the skirts of his garments. Streamed even to the lower fringe of his long vesture (Kay). The high priest at his consecration was a type and symbol of unity. He bore on his breastplate the names of the twelve tribes, so that the holy oil, typical of the grace of God, when it was poured upon him, flowed down on all the tribes, diffusing everywhere an odour of fragrance.

Ver. 3.—As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion. The interpolation of the words, "and as the dew," is quite unwarrantable, and spoils the sense. It substitutes duality for unity, and destroys the parity of the two illustrations. Translate, "As the dew of Hermon, that cometh down upon the mountains of Zion." The psalmist sees the moisture which fertilizes the Holy Land, and makes it the fertile land that it is, all given forth from Hermon, the one great mountain at its head. As Dr. Kay well observes, "Physically, Hermon was to Canaan what Aaron was ceremonially to Israel—its head and crown, from which the fertilizing stores of heaven descended over the land. For not only does the one great river of Palestine, the Jordan, issue from the roots of Hermon, but the giant mountain is constantly gathering and sending off clouds, which float down even to Southern Zion." For there (i.e. in Zion) the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. The reference is to Lev. xxv. 21, and perhaps to Deut. xxviii. 8.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Unity in the Church.* Applying the words of the psalm to a Christian community gathered together for the worship and the work of our Lord, we may regard—

I. THAT IN WHICH UNITY CONSISTS. This we find in: 1. The acceptance of the same truth in the same sense. It is not enough that all subscribe to the same Creed, or agree to use the same words in prayer or sacred song,—that is only a formal and outward unity; there must be a substantial, intelligent agreement. Not necessarily, not indeed possibly, the acceptance of Christian truth in all its particulars in the same

sense; but the reception, in the mind, of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith by all professed believers. 2. Essential oneness in aim and spirit; all being animated by the same desire to promote the glory of Christ and the elevation of mankind; all having the same spirit of earnestness and holy expectation. 3. Readiness to concede and co-operate. There can be no good work without hearty union of forces, and there can be no such combining without a cheerful readiness to concede to one another. Each must "esteem other better than himself." 4. Mutual esteem and affection. This can only be attained by a disposition to recognize and to honour all that is best in other people, and a determination to make the least of anything that is displeasing or even unworthy.

II. ITS ATTRACTIVENESS. (Ver. 2.) As fragrant as the sacred oil used in priestly consecration is the odour of brotherly love. And as an exquisite fragrance attracts whilst anything offensive repels, so the presence of unity in the Church is a constant invitation, unformed and voiceless, but influential and effective. No one will come to the community where discord is the prevailing state; many hearts will be won, many feet will repair to the circle where peace and concord dwell.

III. ITS BEAUTY. (Ver. 3.) It is as beautiful in the moral realm as the dew on which the sun is shining is exquisite in the material. We admire unity when we see it. It shows the presence of the finest moral and spiritual qualities. It is the fair product of self-control, of obedience to the Word and will of God, of the study of the character and spirit of Jesus Christ. It is the reproduction of his own life. It is a spiritual result on which the eye of the soul rests with a pure and keen delight.

IV. ITS VALUE AS VITAL TO ALL TRUE SUCCESS. (Ver. 3.) "There the Lord commanded the blessing," etc. There may be the appearance of success without it, but not the reality. Other human qualities may command great congregations, large contributions, elegant and commodious premises; but without the unity which our Lord requires in his people, there will be no Divine blessing, there will not be the communication of the "life for evermore," the eternal life which is born of his Spirit. No leader or teacher can over-estimate the value of the spirit of unity in the Church of Christ. No surrender of our own preferences can be too great to secure it. For nothing should we pray more earnestly: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem;" Jesus himself prayed that "they all may be one." They who cannot achieve any great things in utterance or in organization may render essential service by breathing and diffusing a peaceful spirit, by promoting the unity which is the unvarying condition of all real success.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Unity*. This most delightful little psalm summons our attention to the exceeding excellence of this grace of unity, and by so doing it invites us to consider what are its elements and conditions. Now, we all of us have a general idea of what unity is; we need not labour after an exact definition, and we are ready to subscribe our assent to the declaration of the psalm, and say of it, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is!" These two qualities do not always go together; there are many things that are good but are not at all pleasant, and we know that there are many things which are pleasant which are not at all good. But of the grace of unity, both can be affirmed. Now, this will be seen as we consider—

I. WHAT, HERE, THIS GRACE OF UNITY IS LIKENED TO. To the sacred consecrating oil with which the priests of God were anointed (cf. Exod. xxx. 22—33). And also to the dew which descended on Mount Hermon. 1. *Take these two similitudes together.* That which is common to them both is their so descending, flowing down, that, as in the case of the holy oil, the whole person of the priest is sanctified by it; it descended from the head to the beard, and thence to the borders of the priestly garment, so that his whole service was consecrated, and all his members. And so with the dew on the lofty Hermon; it stayed not there, but descended—the word "descended" is used in each case, it is the key-word of the psalm, like the word "keep" in Ps. cxxi.—to the lower heights, and thence to the plains, so that the whole land, from Hermon in the north to Zion in the south, was blessed thereby. Now, the grace of unity is in this respect

like the holy oil and the dew—it is a blessing for all and every one; for all our service and ministry, for all the people, the lowly as well as those of high station, and for all the land. North and south in Palestine had been torn by discord, strife, and war; but when this psalm was written they were all “as one man,” gathered and bound together in the unity of their national life and of their one faith (Ezra iii. 1; Neh. viii. 1). Happy the nation, happy the Church, happy the home, where this blessed spirit of unity comes and abides! 2. *Take them separately.* And: (1) The holy oil. It was commanded of God (cf. Exod. xxx.). It was very precious and fragrant. Its composition and character were due to God. It consecrated all service, and no service could be rendered without it. But all this true of this grace of unity. (2) The dew. It gave fertility and beauty and health to all the land, which would have been bare and sterile without it. Again, this is true of this grace. That nation, Church, home, where unity reigns shall be good and pleasant to look upon and to be associated and identified with. It shall render glory to God, and be for the blessing of men.

II. WHAT ARE ITS CONDITIONS. 1. *Association.* We must come together; there can be no unity in solitariness. We are many members, but one body. It condemns all separatism for separatism's sake. 2. *Variety.* There is no unity in the mere repetition of the same things, as in a heap of sand, a flock of sheep. But unity requires harmonized varieties. Music is not a monotone, but a harmony. Acts of Uniformity cannot secure it. In a true Christian society there must be variety of thought, feeling, and opinion, of age, position, character. 3. *Liberty.* There is no unity where there is no freedom. No real agreement exists where none is allowed to disagree. A lump of ice binds together a whole mass of most discordant things, but there is no unity in such a mass. They are fettered together by the frost force; let that be loosed, and each goes its own way at once. 4. *Life.* There is no strife in a graveyard; dead things do not quarrel. A dead Church is peaceful enough. 5. *Intelligence.* The unity that is produced by priestcraft and superstition, where education and intelligence are lacking, where if light came it would at once be dissolved,—that is not true unity. But without these conditions (vers. 1—3) unity is not.

III. WHAT ITS REAL SOURCE. The Holy Spirit of God. Like as one life animates our bodies and makes them one, one common feeling the passion-swayed multitude; so when the Spirit of God comes into a community, then, as at Pentecost, there is one body, “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. iv.).

IV. WHAT THE FRUIT IT BEARS. “There the Lord commanded the blessing,” etc. (ver. 3). It is ever so.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Possible unities.* The topic of the psalm is the joy felt in the reuniting of the nation in its restoration from the scattering and depression of the Captivity. Strictly there is no Hebrew equivalent for the words rendered “in unity.” The Hebrew simply means, “How pleasant a thing it is for (those who are) brethren to dwell together also!” The idea has been thus expressed, “How good it is for those who are united by the ties of kinmanship to be united yet closer by the possession of one common place of abode!” A race in possession of a common country merges individual in national interests. The two illustrations represent the pervading influence of this sympathetic spirit. The anointing oil which reached to Aaron's feet. The dews of Hermon, which were wafted over all the land.

I. THERE IS THE POSSIBLE UNITY OF SIMILARITY. The oneness of a common life; common pleasures; a common love. The similarities may concern very simple things, and yet be deeper than all diversities, and may gain triumph over everything that may tend to separate. Similarities in language, art, scientific interests, political principles, skill in games, suffice to unite men. How much more should religious feeling, and share in Christian work! Illustrate by the uniting bond of Freemasonry.

II. THERE IS THE POSSIBLE UNITY OF DIVERSITIES. There is no necessary *form* in which any life is bound to express itself. However life genuinely expresses itself, the expression will be found in harmony with every other expression. The pictures in the Academy are set, oftentimes, in painful colour-contrasts one with another. The flowers of a garden are always harmonious. True unity consists in each being his best along his own line.

III. THERE IS THE POSSIBLE UNITY OF MECKNESS. Meekness means voluntary

putting one's own interests aside in order to fit ourselves to the service of others. And, in this sense, meekness is the deepest secret of unity. That kind of unity we should get in (1) family life; (2) Church life; (3) social life. For that, however, we need special grace, in order to triumph over sinful self-pleasing. The triumph of the Christian relationship is the unity that comes through *altruism*, for Christ's sake.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Fragrance of the brotherhood.* “True concord is a holy thing, a sacred oil, a rich perfume which, flowing down from the head to the beard, from the beard to the garment, sanctifies the whole body.” We get a better idea of the figure if we think of scent, or perfume, rather than oil, which Western people dislike, save for special uses. There can be little room for doubting that the psalm is a rejoicing over the restored unity of the Jewish nation. “Ephraim no longer vexed Judah, or Judah Ephraim.” The mutual jealousies of the tribes had ceased; and those who returned to Jerusalem belonged to all the tribes. “That at this time there was a real unity of heart and mind in the nation may be inferred from the narratives in Ezra and Nehemiah” (Ezra iii. 1; Neh. viii. 1). The point of comparison does not lie in the *preciousness* of the oil, or in its *all-pervading fragrance*; but in this—that, being poured on the head, it did not rest there, but flowed to the beard, and descended even to the garments, and thus, as it were, consecrated the whole body in all its parts. All the members participate in the same blessing (for the composition of the anointing oil, see Exod. xxx. 22—33). The point to unfold is that the consecration of God, which binds the Church in unity, secures the *unity of a common fragrance*.

I. THE BROTHERHOOD IS NOT A UNITY OF SAMENESS. God never makes the brothers of a family alike; and when he remakes men, he does not shape them to a pattern, he gives them a new common life. The oil is represented as not stopping with intellectual people, who are as the head; it goes on to the strong people, who are as the beard; and to the useful people, who are as the limbs. All the members of the body retain their individualities.

II. THE BROTHERHOOD IS A UNITY OF GRACE RECEIVED. The new bond uniting all the members of the body, and all the relations of the life (which are represented by the garments) is the oil of Divine grace which reaches to and sanctifies them all.

III. THE BROTHERHOOD IS A UNITY OF COMMON RESPONSE. Every part gives forth fragrance, and it is everywhere the same fragrance—the fragrance of that godly character and godly living which grace sanctifies. Scents are dependent on the substances on which they lie. Some absorb and destroy fragrance. Others freely give it forth. The unity of the Church is the fragrantcy of the holy living of each one of its members.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Lessons of the dew.* Palestine is a land of dews. It is very dependent on them. Destitute of rains for many months at a time, it relies for securing crops on the heavy fall of dew which is secured nightly by its multitude of mountains. Hermon is no more conspicuous in the sight than in the peculiar abundance of its dews. They become rain for the thirsty land. Mr. Porter says that one of its hills is appropriately called “Father of the Dew,” for the clouds seem to cling with peculiar fondness round its wooded top. Dr. Tristram says, “We had sensible proof at Rasheiyā of the copiousness of the ‘dew of Hermon,’ spoken of in this psalm, where ‘Zion’ is only another name for the same mountain. Unlike most other mountains which gradually rise from lofty table-lands, and often at a distance from the sea, Hermon starts at once to the height of nearly ten thousand feet, from a platform scarcely above the sea-level. This platform, too—the upper Jordan valley, and marshes of Merom—is for the most part an impenetrable swamp of unknown depth, whence the seething vapour, under the rays of an almost tropical sun, is constantly ascending into the upper atmosphere during the day. The vapour, coming in contact with the snowy sides of the mountain, is rapidly congealed, and is precipitated in the evening in the form of dew, the most copious we ever experienced. It penetrated everywhere, and soaked everything. The floor of our tent was saturated, our bedding was covered with it, our guns were dripping, and dew-drops hung about everywhere. No wonder that the foot of Hermon is clad with orchards and gardens of such marvellous fertility in this land of droughts.” Dr. Geikie gives quite a fresh explanation of the ordinary dew of the country. “There is no dew, properly so called, in Palestine, for there is no moisture in the hot summer air to be

chilled into dew-drops by the coolness of the night, as in a climate like ours. From May to October rain is unknown, the sun shining with unclouded brightness day after day. The heat becomes intense, the ground hard, and vegetation would perish but for the moist west winds that come each night from the sea. The bright skies cause the heat to radiate very quickly into space, so that the nights are as cold as the day is the reverse. To this coldness of the night air the indispensable watering of all plant-life is due. The winds, loaded with moisture, are robbed of it as they pass over the land, the cold air condensing it into drops of water, which fall in a gracious rain of mist on every thirsty blade. In the morning the fog thus created rests like a sea over the plains, and far up the sides of the hills, which raise their heads above it like so many islands. At sunrise, however, the scene speedily changes. By the kindling light the mist is transformed into vast snow-white clouds, which presently break into separate masses and rise up the mountain-sides, to disappear in the blue above, dissipated by the increasing heat." Dew seemed to the Israelites a mysterious gift of heaven, as indeed it is. (For Bible associations of the dew, see 2 Sam. i. 21; xvii. 12; 1 Kings xvii. 1; Job xxix. 19; xxxviii. 28; Ps. cx. 3; Prov. xix. 12; Cant. v. 2; Hos. vi. 4; Hag. i. 10 (Gideon's dew on the fleece is familiar, Judg. vi. 36—40); Isa. xviii. 4; xvi. 19, etc.) God's blessing is like the dew in these particulars—

I. IN ITS MYSTERIOUSNESS. The dew differs from the rain in this, that we feel as if we understood the rain, but we never seem to understand the dew. We can see the clouds that distil in rain; we cannot see the moisture of the atmosphere which distils in dew. It is God working in secret for our good. Then, too, it is not always what it seems. It seems to be a cold night mist, that chills us, and we think must chill everything. It is (God's blessing always is, whatever form it takes) the very thing that vegetation most pressingly needs.

II. IN ITS PROMISCUOUSNESS. No one can keep the dew wholly for himself. It will bless his neighbour too. Nobody can limit or imprison God's blessings. They come on evil and on good.

III. IN ITS GENTLENESS. Contrast the deluges of rain in Eastern rainy seasons. The blessings of God are often missed by us, because they come so silently, so unexpectedly, and so gently. The psalmist says, "Thy gentleness hath made me great."

IV. IN ITS GOING TO THE ROOTS OF THINGS. Dew is no surface-blessing. Its refreshing goes to the roots of the plants. God's blessings are often unobserved because they do not change our circumstances, but refresh and renew us; they give us new life.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Old Testament "eternal life."* "Even life for evermore." There is a curious legend attaching to the dew of Hermon. "An old pilgrim narrates that every morning at sunrise a handful of dew floated down from the summit of Hermon, and deposited itself upon the Church of St. Mary, where it was immediately gathered up by Christian leeches, and was found a sovereign remedy for all diseases." This legend suggests one of the connotations of the term "life for evermore."

I. IT MEANS ALWAYS AVAILABLE. The natural processes which form the dew of Hermon will go on as long as there is a Hermon; and God's blessing will be prepared for his people as long as he has a people. Dew and blessing are always available, so long as they are needed. But everything depends upon our using what is available. The dew of Hermon practically fails when the leeches neglect to gather it. The blessing of God practically ends when men no longer care to seek or receive it. Man's blessing from God is "life for evermore;" but man can himself put the limit to God's "evermore."

II. IT MEANS REALITY, NOT MERELY APPEARANCE. We think chiefly of God's blessing as a prosperity of our circumstances, and that can never be, and had better never be, continuous. It is altogether better to have that kind of blessing from God changeable, because our circumstances cannot remain long the same, and the relation of circumstances to us, and the influence of circumstances on us, are constantly varying. If God were to imprison and fix one set of circumstances for ever, and give us to choose which we would have thus fixed, we should be hopelessly puzzled, and God would be doing us no kindness. People talk about "for ever" and "everlasting," without thinking to what alone those terms can be applied, if they are to represent any real

blessing to us. The entire sphere of the sensual cannot be "for evermore." It is of its very nature that it begins and ends. The "fashion of this world passeth away." It is *life* that is for evermore. It is the spiritual being that *man is* that lives for ever. It is the spiritual character that man wins that abides for ever. And helping him to win that character is the blessing—the "life for evermore" which God bestows.—R. T.

Vers. 1—3.—*Unity*. Herder says of this exquisite little song that "it has the fragrance of a lovely rose." Nowhere has the nature of true unity—that unity which binds men together, not by artificial restraints, but as brethren of one heart—been more faithfully described, nowhere so gracefully illustrated, as in this short ode. True concord, we are here taught, is a holy thing, a sacred oil, a rich perfume, which, flowing down from the head to the beard, from the beard to the garment, sanctifies the whole body. It is a sweet morning dew, which lights not only on the lofty mountain-peaks, but on the lesser hills, embracing all, and refreshing all with its influence.

I. TRUE UNITY. 1. *Is the unity of brethren*. They feel that they have a common Father, and are children of the same household. 2. *But it is unity in variety*. Variety of thought, but unity of heart. A unity of the utmost extremes—from the head to the edge of the garments of society. From the heights of Hermon to the humbler hill of Zion.

II. ITS GOODNESS AND JOY. 1. *Unity can come only from love*. And love is the greatest goodness, and the highest, deepest joy. 2. *True unity is the most fragrant and refreshing fact of life*. In the individual and in the Church, and in society.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXXIV.

THE "Little Psalter" of "Songs of Ascents" terminates here with a short psalm, due probably to the compiler—a psalm of four lines only. It consists of two portions:

(1) A call from those without the temple, upon God's servants, who conduct his service within his house during the night season (1 Chron. ix. 33), to praise and thank the Lord in their name for his mercies vouchsafed to them (vers. 1, 2); and (2) a response from those within the temple, who ask God to "bless out of Zion" those who have addressed them. The psalm is very suitable for pilgrim-bands arriving, as they commonly would, late in the day at the temple gates, and announcing their arrival to those within, who would be expecting them, and would call on God to bless their pilgrimage to them (ver. 3).

Ver. 1.—Behold. The word calls atten-

tion to an immediate need—something that is to be done, and to be done at once. Bless ye the Lord. This must mean "for us"—"on our behalf." Thank God for having brought our journey to a prosperous end. All ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord; i.e. ye special servants of the Lord, priests and Levites, now standing within his courts, and engaged in his worship. The temple was never left without a body of priests and Levites, to keep it and sing praises in it.

Ver. 2.—Lift up your hands. The attitude of prayer and praise (Pss. lxi. 4; cxix. 48; cxli. 2). In the sanctuary; rather, *towards the sanctuary*; i.e. towards the holy of holies. Others render, "in holiness." And bless the Lord (compare the first clause of ver. 1).

Ver. 3.—The Lord that made heaven and earth (comp. Gen. i. 1; Pss. cxv. 15; cxxi. 2; cxxiv. 8; cxlvi. 6). Bless thee out of Zion. God was regarded as dwelling in Zion, and therefore as giving his blessings out of Zion (comp. Pss. xx. 2; liii. 6; cxxviii. 5).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*God and man; reciprocal relations*. "It must needs be a matter of conjecture who the speakers are" in this short psalm; but these three verses bring before us the reciprocal relations existing between our God and ourselves, particularly as those engaged in his worship. "Bless ye the Lord . . . the Lord bless thee."

I. IN APPROACH AND NEARNESS OF SPIRIT. We draw nigh unto him, and he draws nigh unto us (2 Chron. xv. 2; Jas. iv. 8). We come up to his house to "seek his face" (Ps. xxvii. 8), and he seeks us; he finds us; he makes us conscious of his presence. He manifests himself unto us as not unto the world. And when we leave the sanctuary, and (partly through the help we have gained there) cherish the sense of God's near presence, and feel that we are "with him" everywhere, then is he "with us," not only in nearness of spiritual presence (Ps. cxxxix.), but in fulness of Divine sympathy and the putting forth of Divine power on our behalf.

II. IN PRAYER ON OUR PART, AND IN COMMUNICATION OF TRUTH ON HIS PART. We speak to him in prayer (ver. 2). With uplifted hands, in reverent adoration, we pour out our heart in humble, earnest supplication, or in renewing before him and unto him our solemn vows. We may do well to put it to ourselves in these simple terms—that we are together, that with one voice and one thought and hope we may "speak to God." Then we listen as he speaks to us. As we listen to the reading of his Word, we may feel—Surely this is nothing other than God speaking to our hearts. Such a thought should make him that reads and those who hear feel that this is not the least important part of Divine worship, and is not undeserving of our best effort and attention. The preacher in the sanctuary should set before him as his high aim, as his noble and holy function, so to declare his message that, through his human voice, God will be speaking to the people of his charge. Thus, before leaving the house of God, we shall have reverently spoken to him; he will have graciously spoken to us.

III. IN BLESSING. "Bless ye the Lord . . . the Lord bless thee." 1. We bless God as we offer him our lowly but sincere adoration; as we ascribe to him all power, wisdom, faithfulness, holiness, mercy, patience; as we present to him the tribute of our praise for all his past kindness to us, and especially for his grace to us in Christ Jesus; as we thank him for all he has promised to us in the near and in the further future. 2. He blesses us as he lifts on us the light of his reconciled countenance; as he enlightens our understanding, and enables us to perceive new and fuller truth, or recognize familiar truth more clearly or vividly; as he kindles in our waiting heart a stronger flame of gratitude and love; as he establishes and strengthens our soul in our purpose of devotion; as he draws out our sympathies with all that suffer and are in need; as he sends us forth from his presence confirmed and enlarged in heart, rejoicing in himself and in his service. It may be added that: (1) If we honour him, he will honour us (1 Sam. ii. 30). (2) If we love him, he will love us (John xiv. 21). (3) If we crown him Lord of our heart and life, he will crown us with the crown of eternal life.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The songs of degrees' doxology.* This series of psalms ends, as all service of worship should, with the voice of praise and thanksgiving. It is ill if our prayers and varied waiting upon God do not bring us into the spirit which would bless the Lord, and bid all others do the same. That spirit is present in this psalm. Note—

I. THE EXHORTATION HERE GIVEN. "Behold, bless ye the Lord." Now, this psalm, being placed here at the end of the series, bids us look back and trace, in the psalms that have gone before, the manifold reasons wherefore we should bless the Lord. The first of these psalms, Ps. cxx., tells of deliverance from cruel enemies; Ps. cxxi., of God's continual preservation of his people; Ps. cxxii., of joy and delight realized in the worship of the Lord; Ps. cxxiii., of waiting continually upon God in times of trouble; Ps. cxxiv., of deliverance from fierce foes; Ps. cxxv., of experience of God's guardian care; Ps. cxxvi., of the joy of God's salvation; Ps. cxxvii., of the Lord alone being our sure Keeper; Ps. cxxviii., of God's grace and goodness sweetening the home; Ps. cxxix., of afflictions many, but of preservation in them all; Ps. cxxx., of God's blessed uplifting; Ps. cxxxi., of the soul kept in the peace of God; Ps. cxxxii., of the prosperity of the Church; and Ps. cxxxiii., of her unity; and now in Ps. cxxxiv. there is, as there well may be, the command to bless the Lord. What a long list it is of mercies, and help, and deliverances, and blessings unspeakable! If men will look back along their lives, they too will bless the Lord.

II. TO WHOM IT IS ADDRESSED. 1. *To all servants of the Lord.* For there is none that has not good reason for obeying it. But especially: 2. *To them "who by night stand in the house of the Lord."* Now, here allusion is made, so it seems, to those whose office it was to minister before the Lord during the night watches—there were priests and Levites who had duties by night as well as by day (1 Chron. ix. 33). There was "a night watch of choristers who kept up the worship of God through the silent hours." Two verses of the psalm seem to have been the salutation of the congregation addressed to them, and ver. 3 is their response. 3. *And God has yet many servants whose duty is to serve him through the night hours.* The sleepless ones—those who from one cause and another have to say, "Thou holdest mine eyes waking." Well is it for such to employ those hours in the praise of the Lord (cf. Ps. lxxiii. 5, 6). And such as the sailor pacing the deck in the night watch, the sentry on guard, the nurse in her ward,—well is it for them in the night to bless the Lord. 4. *Or, we may take the night as telling of the night of sorrow*—those times of darkness and depression through which we all have to pass (see Paul and Silas in the dungeon at Philippi, at midnight singing praises unto God). How often have these psalms been used by God's people at such hours, and with what rich results in the quickening of faith and hope and joy in God! 5. And if, as some maintain, there was no later service in the temple than the evening sacrifice, then *the many evening congregations gathered together may take these words as addressed to them.*

III. HOW IT IS TO BE OBEYED. They were to "lift up their hands to the sanctuary." The body should bear its part; posture and gesture help the spirit.

IV. WHAT COMES OF SUCH OBEDIENCE. The Lord will bless us (ver. 3). He who hath all power, who made heaven and earth, he will bless the soul that worships him (cf. Ps. cxxxv. 3). All who have thus drawn near to God have found that he draws near to them.—S. O.

Ver. 1.—*Representative worshippers.* From a Targum we learn that "the custom in the second temple appears to have been this: After midnight the chief of the door-keepers took the key of the inner temple, and went with some of the priests through the small postern of the Fire Gate. In the inner court this watch divided itself into two companies, each carrying a burning torch; one company turned west, the other east; and so they compassed the court to see whether all were in readiness for the temple service on the following morning. In the bakehouse, where the mincha (meat offering) of the high priest was baked, they met with the cry, 'All well!' Meanwhile the rest of the priests arose, bathed themselves, and put on their garments. They then went into the stone-chamber (one half of which was the hall of session of the Sanhedrim), and there, under the superintendence of the officer who gave the watchword and one of the Sanhedrim, surrounded by the priests clad in their robes of office, their several duties for the coming day were assigned to each of the priests by lot." It should be always borne in mind that, in the Divine idea, the entire people of Israel made up a nation of priests. Every man was regarded as a consecrated man, separated unto the honour, worship, and service of Jehovah. What were called the actual priests were only representatives of these universal priests, and they were only daily doing materially what every man-priest of the nation was pledged to do, and if he was a true and worthy man, was trying to do *spiritually*. If this point can be clearly seen, a new interest will be found to attach to the various doings of the representative priesthood. Men are always learning from them what they should be and what they should do in a spiritual sense. One thing is set prominently in this psalm. The work of the priests is to "bless Jehovah." This they do in a formal manner by lifting up their hands and voices, waving the censers, etc. Let an Israelite see or hear a priest blessing God, and his heart ought at once to respond, saying, "That is just what I ought to be doing, with heart, and lip, and deed, and above all by the thankful, trustful, devoted spirit of my life."—R. T.

Ver. 2.—"*Holy hands.*" (For the high-priestly benediction, see Numb. vi. 24.) Raising suppliant hands is the formal, bodily sign of earnest prayer. Every mental or moral state has its corresponding natural bodily attitude or movement; and raising and stretching forth the opened hands in a receptive attitude is the natural bodily attitude

accompanying petition. There is an important alteration in this sentence. It should be, "Lift up your hands to the sanctuary;" and the figure is of the priests turning towards the holy of holies, where the symbol of God's presence rested, and stretching forth hands of supplication towards it (see Solomon's attitude at the dedication of the temple).

I. THERE IS AN ELEMENT OF PRAYER IN ALL BLESSING OF GOD. There is for *man*; there may not be for *angels*. Man can never offer even his praise without a sense of his unworthiness. So he must always mingle a prayer for pardon and for pitying mercy with his thanksgivings. And he can never draw near to the Divine presence without a sense of need. So say what he may of God, or to God, in his praises, he finds that he always has something to ask for. His dependence always wants to find expression. We are always wrong if there is no prayer in our praises.

II. THE ELEMENT OF PRAYER FINDS EXPRESSION IN UPLIFTED HANDS. Kneeling in prayer is to a great extent a modern device. Easterns stand to pray. So did our forefathers. And so do those who now lead prayers at prayer-meetings. Stretching forth the hands is now regarded as the act of benediction, as in the Catholic and Scotch Protestant Churches. But it is such a universal and natural expression of supplication that it might very wisely be restored to use in private as well as public acts of prayer and praise. The apostle bids us "lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

III. THE UPLIFTED HANDS MUST BE HOLY HANDS. The priests had to wash their hands, as a sign of their putting away all self-indulgence and self-will and all gathered evil before engaging in the praises of Jehovah. And it is the absolutely universal law, "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." The symbol of the soul-cleanness which goes with sincerity and gains for us acceptance, is the washed and holy uplifted hands.—R. T.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXXV.

A SONG of praise to God (vers. 1—3, 19—21) for: 1. His mercies to Israel (vers. 4, 14). 2. His greatness in nature (vers. 5—7) and in history (vers. 8—12). 3. His infinite superiority to idols (vers. 15—18). Metrically divided into three stanzas of seven verses each (vers. 1—7; 8—14; and 15—21). A "Hallelujah psalm" (vers. 1, 21).

Ver. 1.—Praise ye the Lord (comp. Pss. civ. 35; cv. 45; cvi. 1, 48; cxl. 1; cxlii. 1; cxliii. 1, etc.). Praise ye the Name of the Lord (comp. Ps. cxliii. 1). Praise him, O ye servants of the Lord; rather, *praise it*; i.e. the Name.

Ver. 2.—Ye that stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God. The "servants" are not here the priests and Levites only, as in Ps. cxxiv. 1; but the priests, the Levites, and the people—all those who throng the "courts" of the temple (comp. vers. 19, 20).

Ver. 3.—Praise the Lord; for the Lord is good (comp. Pss. lxxxvi. 5; cxix. 68). Sing praises unto his Name; for it is pleasant; or, "lovely" (comp. Pss. lii. 9; liv. 6).

Ver. 4.—For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself. This is the first reason why Israel should praise God. Israel is his

people, his chosen people, selected by him out of all the nations of the earth to be his own, his inheritance (Deut. iv. 20; vii. 6; xiv. 2, 21, etc.). And Israel for his peculiar treasure (see Exod. xix. 5).

Ver. 5.—For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Here is the second reason why God should be praised—he is great, greater far than any other being—"above all gods"—"more to be feared than all gods" (Ps. xcvi. 4). This greatness is shown, firstly, in his power over nature, which is the subject of vers. 7, 8; and secondly, in his dealings with mankind, which form the subject of vers. 8—12.

Ver. 6.—Whatever the Lord pleased, that did he (comp. Ps. cxv. 8). God's power is only limited by his own attributes of truth and goodness. He cannot contradict his own reason, or his own moral qualities. Otherwise he can do anything and everything. In heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. This is intended as a complete division of space: (1) the heavens above the earth; (2) the earth and seas, in the middle sphere; and (3) the abysses, or depths below the earth, as far as they can be conceived of as extending.

Ver. 7.—He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth (comp. Jer. x. 13; li. 16) By God's contrivance vapour is

continually rising from the remotest regions of the earth, to hang in clouds, descend in rain, and spread abroad fertility. He maketh lightnings for the rain. To accompany it, perhaps to give it its fertilizing qualities (see Dr. Kay's comment 'The Psalms,' p. 428). He bringeth the wind out of his treasures (see Job xxxviii. 22, where God's "treasures" for the snow and the hail are spoken of; and comp. Virgil, 'Æn.,' ii. 25).

Ver. 8.—Who smote the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast (comp. Exod. xii. 29). The most stupendous of the plagues of Egypt is given the first place in the account of God's wonderful dealings with men, and especially with his people. It gave them the deliverance out of Egypt, which made them a people (Exod. xii. 31-33).

Ver. 9.—Who sent tokens and wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt; or, "signs and wonders" (comp. Exod. iv. 9, 21; Neh. ix. 10; Ps. lxxviii. 43). Upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants; i.e. "upon all his subjects." The plagues fell upon the whole people of Egypt (Exod. vii. 21; viii. 4, 11, 17, 24; ix. 6, 11, 25; x. 6, 15; xii. 30).

Ver. 10.—Who smote great nations (see Exod. xiv. 27, 28; xvii. 8-13; Numb. xxi. 24-30, 33-35; Josh. viii. 21-26; x. 10, 11; Judg. iv. 10-16; vii. 19-23; xi. 32, 33; 1 Sam. vii. 10-13; 2 Sam. viii. 1-14; x. 8-19; 1 Kings xx. 1-30; 2 Kings iii. 4-27; xiv. 25-28; xviii. 7, 8; xix. 35; 2 Chron. xiv. 9-15; xx. 1-25, etc.). And slew mighty kings (see Josh. xii. 9-24; Judg. vii. 25; viii. 21; 1 Sam. xv. 33, etc.).

Ver. 11.—Sihon King of the Amorites (comp. Numb. xxi. 24; Deut. ii. 33). And Og King of Bashan (see Numb. xxi. 35; Deut. iii. 3). And all the kingdoms of Canaan. Joshua destroyed thirty-one Canaanite kingdoms (Josh. xii. 24).

Ver. 12.—And gave their land for an heritage, an heritage unto Israel his people (see Exod. vi. 8; Pss. lxxviii. 55; cxxxvi. 21).

Ver. 13.—Thy Name, O Lord, endureth for ever. The result of God's marvellous doings (vers. 6-12) is that "his Name

endureth for ever"—can never be forgotten—attracts to itself eternal praise and honour. And thy memorial (or, "thy remembrance") throughout all generations (comp. Ps. cii. 12).

Ver. 14.—For the Lord will judge his people; i.e. will right them whenever they are wronged (see Exod. ii. 23-25; iii. 7-9; vi. 6; Ps. liv. 1-3). And he will repent himself concerning his servants. God "will not keep his anger for ever" (Ps. ciii. 9). When he has sufficiently chastised his sinful servants, he will "repent," or "relent" (Kay, Cheyne), with respect to them, and receive them back into favour. The history contained in the Book of Judges strongly illustrates this statement (Judg. iii. 6-11, 12-30; iv. 1-3, 13-16; vi. 1-16; x. 6-18; xi. 4-33; xiii. 1-5, etc.).

Vers. 15-18.—The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not. They have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths. They that make them are like unto them: so is every one that trusteth in them. A condensed recitation of Ps. cxv. 4-8 (comp. Jer. x. 3-5). In its present place it is a sort of exposition of ver. 5b.

Ver. 19.—Bless the Lord, O house of Israel. The concluding strain corresponds to the opening one, and is a simple hymn of praise. Israel generally, the priestly order, the Levites, and the devout worshippers of God, of whatever class, are called upon in succession to praise and bless Jehovah (comp. Ps. cxv. 9-11). Bless the Lord, O house of Aaron (see Pss. cxv. 10, 12; cxviii. 3).

Ver. 20.—Bless the Lord, O house of Levi: ye that fear the Lord, bless the Lord (comp. Ps. cxv. 11, 13).

Ver. 21.—Blessed be the Lord out of Zion. As God gives his people blessings "out of Zion" (Ps. cxxxiv. 3), so they praise and bless him most appropriately out of the same place. Which dwelleth at Jerusalem (comp. Pss. lxxvi. 2; xlviii. 1-3). Praise ye the Lord (see the comment on ver. 1).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1-21.—Reasons for the worship and service of God. The psalm suggests to us—

I. TWO REASONS FOR PRAISING GOD. (Vers. 1-4.) 1. God is worthy of our utmost reverence. "The Lord is good." The truth is too familiar to us to strike us; but if we contrast the character of the God whom we worship with that of the deities of heathen lands (see vers. 15-18), we see and feel how great is our privilege, how excellent a thing it is to pay reverent homage to One who is absolutely pure and true and kind—who is "good" in every attribute, whom we can worship, not only without loss of self-respect, but to our highest spiritual advantage. 2. Praise is pleasant. It is not merely that, in the "service of song," human art may be called into play, and

the exercise be tuneful and grateful to the cultured ear, but that to pour out our hearts in united thanksgiving and praise is an act which may fill the soul with pure and elevating joy.

II. GOD'S DISTINGUISHING GOODNESS. "The Lord hath chosen Jacob . . . for his peculiar treasure." "Ye have not chosen me," said our Lord, "but I have chosen you" (John xv. 16). God did show especial kindness to Israel. Jesus Christ conferred a very peculiar honour on his apostles. Our heavenly Father does not treat all his children alike. He is bountiful to us *all*. He gives to us all more than we deserve, he fills our cup even to overflowing; but he gives to some that which he does not bestow on others. It would be a far less happy world than it is, and there would be far less opportunity for discipline and growth, if there were a dead level of power and privilege. We should not be envious of the special good which others are enjoying, but glad and grateful on their account; we should be observant of and thankful for every peculiar gift granted to ourselves. It is certain that God has "chosen" us for a place in his kingdom and a post in his service.

III. THE EXERCISE OF DIVINE POWER. (Vers. 5—11.) God is great; he does what he pleases. He refreshes the earth; he smites kings and peoples in the day of his wrath. 1. He uses his Divine power to fertilize and enrich. God might have been "pleased" to make this earth a dreary and desolate place, but it pleased him to enrich and to adorn it, to give to us large resources for our use, so that, if we are only frugal and industrious, we can live in comfort and abundance. 2. He also uses his power to punish. When nations are guilty, as they have been, he "smites" and scatters and destroys; then "great nations" perish, and "mighty kings" are humbled. Families also, and individual men, are made to know that sin brings down punishment and penalty from God.

IV. THE ACTION OF DIVINE PITY. (Ver. 14.) Though God sends his people into exile, yet he will take pity upon them; he will "judge them;" he will vindicate their cause; he will "repent himself concerning his servants," i.e. he will reverse his decision concerning them—he will change penalty into mercy, he will turn banishment into restoration. "God will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever." He sends trouble and affliction, but "not willingly" (Lam. iii. 33); he wounds that he may heal, and, healing, restore to newness of life.

V. OUR DUTY AND OUR WISDOM. (Vers. 15—21.) It is sad to think of the vast numbers of men that have spent their powers and their means in vain, on idols that could not hear or speak, on gods that had no existence apart from the darkened imaginations of men. They are wise indeed who worship the true and living God, the holy and the loving Saviour, who put their trust, "not in uncertain riches, but in the living God"—in the Father who will guide and guard them along all the path of life, in the Divine Friend who will sympathize with them and sustain them in all the trials of their course.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—21.—*The march of mercy.* This psalm traces the progress of God's mercy to his people from its source in the Divine nature on to its complete fulfilment in their loving, glad allegiance, the expression of which begins and ends the psalm.

I. IT BEGINS IN THE INHERENT NATURE OF GOD HIMSELF. (Ver. 3.) "The Lord is good." From this proceeds all the rest, and in this all that follows finds its explanation. That "God is love" is, after all, the key which fits the wards and unlocks the difficult problems of life as none other does or can. On other suppositions many things—indeed, we may say most things, and these the most blessed facts of all—that we find in life are inexplicable; but with this, not even the darkest facts need be left out.

II. IT ADVANCES ON TO THE ELECTION OF HIS PEOPLE. (Ver. 4.) Back in the counsels of eternity the Divine love decreed the method of its working; and this involved the election of Israel to the especial service which they were to render. That purpose is not all worked out yet; but much of it has been—and who is there

can dispute its righteousness, or wisdom, or love? How could the work have been better done?

III. THE BEGINNING OF ITS ACCOMPLISHMENT SEEN IN THE CREATION OF THE WORLD. (Vers. 5—7.) The material universe was formed, and is continued, not for its own sake, but for the sake of that which is moral and spiritual. This earth was to be the arena on which God's gracious purposes were to be developed and perfected. Hence was it created, adorned, and fitted to be, not only the dwelling-place, but the training-place, of intelligent and moral beings, who should ultimately, when made perfect, become the intimate friends, companions, and ministers of the Lord God himself.

IV. IT WENT ON IN THE TRIUMPHANT AND WONDERFUL PRESERVATION OF HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE. (Vers. 8—12.) The purposes of God, after a while, came into collision with the sin and selfishness of man; they ever do, and sometimes man's rage causes sore trouble to God's people; but his purpose is indestructible, and his enemies must perish.

V. IN HIS SORE PUNISHMENT OF HIS PEOPLE WHEN THEY SINNED, AND UNTIL THEY REPENTED. (Vers. 13, 14.) This portion of his dealing with them seems to have most of all impressed the psalmist's mind. He declares that it will cause the memory of the Lord to endure for ever, "throughout all generations." We know how stern, how long-continued, were those disciplines, and how oftentimes the mercy of God in them was hidden from the sufferer's view. But it was part of that mercy all the same, as God's punishment of sin is ever part of his mercy. And it goes on until the sinner repents; and then God "repents himself concerning his servants."

VI. IN THE REALITY OF THE REPENTANCE AND REFORMATION WROUGHT THEREBY. (Vers. 15—18.) Who would ever have thought that idol-living Israel—for it was their besetting sin—would ever have come to speak thus contemptuously of idols and their worshippers? But God's disciplines accomplished this. "Our God is a consuming fire," blessed be his Name!

VII. IN THE PERFECT HARMONY OF WILL AND GLADNESS OF HEART IN REGARD TO HIMSELF, WHICH GOD AT LENGTH SECURED. This was his aim all through—to have a people like himself, filled with his love, animated by his Spirit, obedient to his will, and so a joy to themselves, their fellow-men, and to their God. Such is the meaning which lies underneath the exuberant expression of praise and love with which the psalm opens (vers. 1—3) and closes (vers. 19—21).—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*The pleasantness of the Divine Name.* "God is love," and this absolute fact concerning him is embodied in the Divine Name. This is especially true for us to whom the Divine Name of names is "our Father." The word used here is elsewhere used in the sense of *propitious* or *gracious*; and it is the graciousness, pitifulness, long-suffering of God which man thinks of as making his Name so *lovely*. In Ps. liv. 6 we find the expression, "I will praise thy Name, O Lord; for it is *good*." Some think the meaning of the psalmist is, that the work of offering praise is pleasant; but it is fresher, and an indication of deeper feeling in the psalmist, that he should associate pleasantness even with the sound of the Divine Name.

I. THE PLEASANTNESS OF THE DIVINE NAME, BECAUSE OF WHAT IT RECALLS. There is a whole history of Divine dealings embodied in the Name. Illustrate from the way in which some special intervention of God was put into a special form of the Divine Name, such as Jehovah-jireh, Jehovah-nissi, Jehovah-tsidkenu, etc. The whole story of the Divine patience, intervention, and redemption is gathered up into the general name Jehovah, and is recalled by it. So the spiritual redemption is recalled by the name given to God manifest in the flesh—Jehovah-Jesus, Jehovah-Emmanuel. How pleasant the names which recall such gracious things!

II. THE PLEASANTNESS OF THE DIVINE NAME BECAUSE OF WHAT IT CONTAINS. It is familiar to point out that a name embodies and expresses the attributes or characteristics of a person. The early Bible names have distinct meanings; they describe persons. The Divine Name is lovely because it describes our ideal of everything true, pure, kind, gracious, wise. It describes him who is the "chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." The satisfaction and rest of the human heart cannot come only out of what God *says*, or out of what God *does*; it comes out of what God *is*; and what God *is* is embodied in his Name.

III. THE PLEASANTNESS OF THE DIVINE NAME BECAUSE OF WHAT IT SUGGESTS OR ASSURES. When we have absolute confidence in a person, and seal that confidence by fixing our own name for him, all our *future* relations with that person are guaranteed. So the name Jehovah (*Yehweh*), "I am that I am," seals our absolute confidence in God, and suggests entire trust in him, and the certainty of Divine help and blessing in all that may unfold before us. He is the "same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The selection of Israel.* "Peculiar treasure" is a special covenant-name for Israel (Exod. xix. 5; Deut. vii. 6). As used in the Scripture, "election" is not a theological term. It is not what it has been made, a doctrinal term, on which a sectarian system can be based. It stands for a fact or method of Divine dealing. It does not apply exclusively to any one thing, or any one people. God is always working in this way, electing, or selecting, the best agencies for carrying out his various purposes, now of wisdom and mercy, now of judgment and destruction. It is a poetic setting, and a comfortable self-glorifying, for the psalmist to speak of Jehovah as having "chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure." The sober fact is that this particular nation was selected to carry out a particular Divine mission in the world; and it would have done better if it had thought more of its responsibility, and less of its privilege. Dr. T. Arnold wrote of Rome, Athens, and Jerusalem as representing the three people of God's election—two for things temporal, and one for things eternal. Since his time we have learned to extend his thought, and to see in every nation a distinct Divine election to some ministry for the blessing of the whole of humanity. To us the election of Israel is no more than a representative and suggestive election.

I. IF WE TAKE THE TERM "ELECTION," WE THINK OF A PRIVILEGE. The old Jews did this, regarding themselves as a petted nation, standing in the favour of God in an altogether unique manner. Consequently, they presumed on their privilege, and let it encourage self-pleasing. Those do it in modern times who make the sovereignty of their election the foundation of their religious hope. Antinomian presumptions always attend on the conception of God's election as privilege. Frail man easily turns privilege into favouritism.

II. IF WE TAKE THE TERM "SELECTION," WE THINK OF DUTY AND RESPONSIBILITY. And this is in every way healthier for us. God wants co-workers, agents in the sense-spheres, the human spheres; and he is always looking for such, always selecting such, always separating such. It is indeed an honour unspeakable to be selected; but if we think of ourselves as *such*, we almost forget the honour and the privilege, because we are so fully urged to noble endeavour by the burden of our responsibility.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*God's power can carry out God's will.* "All that Jehovah willeth he hath done." Observe the contrast with idols. If it were conceivable that they had the power to *will*, it is manifest that they have not the power to *carry out*, or execute, their will. Observe the contrast with men. They, undoubtedly, have the power to will, but the inability to perform oppresses them continually. "I would, but cannot," is the constant cry of man's feebleness. But a limitation on God's power to execute what he wills is inconceivable; and if we could conceive it, we should find we had lost all worthy ideas of God. "With God all things are possible" that are not ridiculous in the statement. Calvin says, "The specification of Jehovah's doings according to his pleasure, in heaven, earth, sea, and all deep places, puts before us in a graphic manner his particular care always and everywhere."

I. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GOD'S WILL AND GOD'S POWER. That can be seen in all the three spheres of God's relations. 1. In the material world of things. It always was, and it always is, true that "he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood forth." Laws in their working may seem to cross other laws; but they cannot hinder the outworking of what God wills. 2. In the world of people. God "doeth as he wills among the armies of heaven, and inhabitants of the earth." 3. In the spiritual world. Because that world is so difficult to apprehend, the connection between God's will and power escapes our attention, though it is as sure as anywhere else.

II. THE HINDRANCES PUT IN THE WAY OF THE CONNECTION. They never come

from things. The disturbances of nature are not real; they only represent human conceptions based on what is humanly observed. Tempests, earthquakes, etc., are in the Divine order. The hindrances can only come from intelligent creatures, to whom is entrusted a limited self-will. Man has this awful possibility given to him; he can come in between God's will and the carrying out of that will.

III. THE TRIUMPH OVER THE HINDRANCES. That must sometimes be accomplished by the putting forth of Divine power; but it is the marvel of Divine grace that it is usually done by persuading the human will, bringing it into full harmony with the Divine will, and so getting the man himself to take the hindrances out of the way. —R. T.

Ver. 10.—*The Lord is a "Man of war."* 1. So thoroughly has Christianity filled the modern mind with the love of *peace*, that the older associations of Jehovah with times and scenes of war have become positively painful to us. Taking advantage of this feeling—perhaps we should say this weakness of feeling—the infidel makes easy attacks upon the Old Testament Jehovah as an altogether unlovely and even blood-thirsty conception. Are we to be unduly alarmed, and to attempt explanations and excuses? or are we to take a firm stand, and say that, as the experience of war is one of the commonplaces of humanity, the association of Jehovah with war is inevitable; it must be made in every nation and in every generation, and according to the idea a nation has of war must be its notion of God as associated with war. In the last hundred years there have been a great variety of wars, right ones and wrong. Men cannot help it; they must associate their God with their wars. The thing to seek is a *right* association. Wars are dreadful things; but it is not possible to read history intelligently, and say that they have always been *wrong*. But if they have ever been just and right, God cannot be dishonoured by being thought of as connected with them, and working out his purposes by means of them. 2. Then, again, wars belong to that *liberty* with which God has entrusted his creatures. It is a liberty over which he watches, and which he holds in due restraints. But he would not be fair to men unless he gave them a good length of tether. Man must have liberty enough to fight for his ends. 3. Again, if the self-defence of an individual man be right, and even aggressive action under some conditions,—self-defence in an aggregate of individuals, in a nation, need not be wrong. We must distinguish between the misery of it and the sin of it. A nation has no way of aggressive or defensive action, in relation to the aggressive or defensive action of another nation, save by war. 4. And lastly, God may use nations, as well as natural forces, for the execution of his judgments. Natural forces are pestilence, famine, and convulsions, as we call them, of nature. The only national executive force is war. Reasonably, as well as poetically, God may be called a "Man of war."—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*Authoritative records of the Divine ways.* "Thy memorial, O Lord, from one generation to another." The "memorial" may be but another word for the "Name;" but from one point of view the "Name" is but gathering into a single term the records of the Divine dealings; and it does but express that conception of God himself which his Divine dealings have produced on us. So we may say that the *memorial* of his doings fills with meaning the Divine *Name*, and assures us that what God has ever been to his people, he ever will be. Once on a time learned men were sorely puzzled by certain irregular holes on the front of an ancient temple. One, more sagacious than the rest, suggested that these indentations might be the marks of nails used to fasten Greek characters to the stone. Lines were drawn from one point to the next, when they were found to form letters, and the name of the Deity unexpectedly stood disclosed. What is known as a "zikr," or memorial service, is repeated by Mohammedans, at stated intervals, at the graves of those long dead, if they have left a reputation for holiness. The word "zikr" is closely connected with the Hebrew word for "a memorial," or "remembrance," indeed, one may say identical with it. The subject suggested is the Divine arrangement that the Divine dealings should be held in men's memory through all the generations, and be a permanent moral force in every age. *The Bible is the memorial.*

I. THE BIBLE IS A BOOK OF HISTORY. It is more than this, but it is this; and

this to a very great extent. It is a collection of records of events that have happened. Take history out of the Pentateuch (or Hexateuch), out of the so-called historical books, out of the prophets, and take the references to history out of the Psalms, and what would be left? The fact is not sufficiently considered. The records in the book are *memorials*, reminders, of actual events.

II. THE SUBJECT OF THE BIBLE IS GOD IN HISTORY. This brings to view the contrast between ordinary history and Biblical history. Scripture everywhere brings to view the direct relation of God to events. And so the records become *memorials* of God to every generation. Suggestive *memorials*, showing that history never is read aright unless God is seen in it.—R. T.

Ver. 14.—*The Divine repentances.* The explanation is often made that the changes of Divine plans are responsive to changes in the *circumstances* of God's people. It is seeing deeper into the heart of truth to see that the Divine repentances even answer to the changing *moods* of God's people. His "repenting himself concerning his servants" is really his "having compassion on them;" and that is responding to their moods. The separate meanings of the word "repentance" have often been presented, and the very limited senses in which the term can be applied to God have been variously shown. It represents the Divine *responsiveness*, which is as perfect as any other Divine attribute. It greatly helps us to see clearly that the Divine repentance is a *perfect* thing, because repentance, though it may be a right thing in man, is closely associated with frailty and evil. Repentance involves change of plan; and this must be based on change of mind. But we have constantly to change our minds and change our plans, in order to meet new conditions; and we never dream of such changing being wrong. They are not made wrong by calling them "repentances." It is the association of sin with the change which brings in the element of regret which characterizes *human* repentance; but as there is no *sin* in God, there can be no *regret*; and we must eliminate these features from repentance when we apply the term to God.

I. THE DIVINE REPENTANCE IS RELATIVE TO MAN. There is no such thing as change in God, as repentance in God relative to the world of *things*. This theological truth science does but express by the "invariability of natural law." There is no created thing that has independent action, so nothing can ever make new conditions for God to adjust himself to. Man alone can do this, because he can act independently.

II. THE DIVINE REPENTANCE IS RELATIVE TO MAN'S CIRCUMSTANCES. There is a sense in which man is ever putting himself into fresh circumstances. What should we have to say of the helplessness of God, if he could not adjust himself to new conditions?

III. THE DIVINE REPENTANCE IS RELATIVE TO MAN'S MOODS. For the Divine relations are *spiritual*; they mainly concern the man himself. And changing spiritual moods require wise and gracious adjustments on the part of God.—R. T.

Vers. 15—17.—*Unresponsive idols.* (See Ps. cxv. 4—8.) As a psalm of the restored nation, this expresses the strong feeling cherished concerning the idols of surrounding small kingdoms; and the feeling was all the more bitter because those kingdoms were distressing the returned exiles by their active enmity. In denouncing their gods, the exiles intended covertly to denounce *them*. The following sentences are found in the Koran (ii. 2): "The unbelievers are like unto one who crieth aloud to that which heareth not so much as (his) calling or the sound of (his) voice. (They are) deaf, dumb, blind, therefore do they not understand." In a Chinese village, in a time of drought, a missionary saw a row of idols put out in the hottest and dustiest part of the road. He inquired the reason, and the natives answered, "We prayed our gods to send us rain, and they won't, so we've put them out to see how they like the heat and the dryness."

I. THE MATERIAL FIGURES THAT CANNOT RESPOND. It is not easy to speak with proper care and precision in relation to the figures which men make to represent their gods. To the Israelites those figures *were* their gods, and from their point of view they were quite right in vigorously denouncing their helplessness. But to those who made the figures they were but sensible realizations of abstract ideas, imprisonments in form of spiritual conceptions. And yet we are compelled to admit that the figures were only this to the thoughtful, to the philosophic mind. To the mass of men idols, that is,

figures of gods, practically take the place of the gods whom they really represent. The plea of the psalm, that idols are helpless, is effective against the sentiment of the ordinary idol-worshipper; but the reflective idolater regards it as altogether beside the mark, because the figures are but the reminders of some incarnation of his spiritual deity.

II. THE IMMATERIAL REALITY BEHIND THE FIGURES THAT CAN RESPOND. Let the figures be the agency we use for our dealing with the *unseen One*; then, though still we may not think of bodily organs or senses, we can be sure of response in the spiritual, and, if necessary, also in the material spheres. We also have the figure of the human Christ to help us to realize the eternal Father, who is the Hearer and Answerer of prayer.—R. T.

Ver. 21.—*God's earthly dwelling-place.* As in Ps. cxxviii. 5, Jehovah blesses the covenant people out of Zion, so here they bless him out of Zion—that is the place where the reciprocal relation is best and chiefly realized. What ideas can be properly associated with God's having a permanent abode on earth? We must be careful to distinguish between ideas that may be cherished, and ideas that must be dismissed as unworthy.

I. GOD'S EARTHLY DWELLING-PLACE CENTRALIZES THE RELIGION AND THE NATION. "In Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Under some circumstances it may be a good thing to have religion localized; but advancing development makes such localization a hindrance and an evil. "The time now is when neither on Gerizim nor at Jerusalem shall men worship the Father." The material help is only wanted until the spiritual has come. Then man himself is God's dwelling-place.

II. GOD'S EARTHLY DWELLING-PLACE DECLARES GOD'S RELATIVITY TO MAN. We often think of man as in God's image; but there is an answering truth—God is in man's image. That God should want an earthly dwelling-place convinces men that he is one of themselves, seeing he wants what they want. So God's temple dwelling-place was the foreshadowing of, and preparation for, his incarnation in his Son, and for the spiritual indwelling by the Holy Ghost.

III. GOD'S EARTHLY DWELLING-PLACE CONVINCES OF THE IMMEDIACY OF HIS KNOWLEDGE. God absent in heaven is thought of as knowing by report. God actually and always present knows at once, is immediately interested, and can instantly act. Illustrate by the moral effect of the absence of an earthly king, and the moral effect of the sense of his presence.

IV. GOD'S EARTHLY DWELLING-PLACE BECOMES A PERPETUAL CALL TO DUTY, AND INSPIRATION OF GOODNESS. The sense of service is quickened when that service may be called for at any hour; and the hope of winning the King's approval renews holy endeavour. God's dwelling with men is real, but unseen. No Jew would doubt that God was in his holy temple. But no Jew ever saw him. That unseen presence helped to the later conception of God dwelling unseen in the temple of man's soul, apprehended as the Holy Ghost.—R. T.

Vers. 1—21.—*God's praises.* "An exhortation to the priests and Levites who wait in the sanctuary to praise Jehovah, both because of his goodness in choosing Israel to be his people, and because of his greatness, and the almighty power which he has shown, in his dominion over the world of nature, and in the overthrow of all the enemies of his people. Then his abiding majesty is contrasted with the nothingness of the idols of the heathen."

I. THE GENERAL GROUNDS OF THE PRAISE OF GOD. 1. *Because he is good.* (Ver. 3.) 2. *Because his name or nature is beautiful, or lovely.*

II. SPECIAL GROUNDS OF PRAISE. 1. *Because he has chosen Israel to be his people.* When God has bestowed great privileges he seems to have chosen such a people, as in the case of the Jews and the other great peoples of the world. 2. *Because of the greatness of God in the works of nature.* His will is absolute and irresistible in all the material world. But man has free will, and can oppose God, though God's will is supremely good and ought to be obeyed. 3. *Because of the greatness and goodness of God in redemption.* (Vers. 8, 9.) In both temporal and spiritual redemption. He gave his people the promised land. 4. *The righteousness of God.* (Ver. 14.) He

judgeth his people, and has pity upon them. Righteousness and mercy make the perfect God worthy of all praise-worship. 5. *God's infinite sympathy compared with the idols of the heathen.* They cannot speak, or see, or hear. God is in contact and sympathy with the meanest of his creatures.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXXVI.

A PSALM with a familiar refrain (comp. Ps. cxviii. 1—4, 29; 2 Chron. v. 13; Ezra iii. 11) at the end of each line. In the main Ps. cxxxvi. follows the line of Ps. cxxxv., calling upon Israel to praise God, and basing the call upon his glorious manifestations of himself in nature (vers. 5—9) and history (vers. 10—24), repeating in the latter case the very same facts. Metrically, the psalm is arranged, till near the end, in a series of triplets, but concludes with two stanzas of four lines each (vers. 19—22 and vers. 23—26). It is conjectured to have been written as the anthem called for in Ps. cxxxv. 19—21 (Kay).

Ver. 1.—Oh give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Identical with the first verse of Ps. cxviii., which is probably a very ancient formula, and one used at the erection both of the first (2 Chron. v. 13) and of the second temple (Ezra iii. 11).

Ver. 2.—Oh give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy, etc. The phrase, "God of gods," occurs first in Deut. x. 17. It was one very familiar to the Assyrians and Babylonians ('Religions of the Ancient World,' pp. 56, 60, 68, etc.). In the Bible it is used by Joshua (Josh. xxii. 22), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. ii. 47), Daniel (xi. 36), and this psalmist. It sanctions a secondary use of the word "God," such as is found also in Pss. lxxxiii. 6; xcvi. 4; xcvi. 7, 9; cxxxviii. 1.

Ver. 3.—Oh give thanks to the Lord of lords. "Lord of lords" occurs also first in Deut. x. 17. It is used likewise by St. Paul (2 Tim. vi. 15) and St. John (Rev. xvii. 14; xix. 16). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 4.—To him who alone doeth great wonders (comp. Ps. lxxii. 18). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 5.—To him that by wisdom made the heavens. Creation is the work, not only of God's power, but of his wisdom also. Things were made as they are by the exertion of his forethought and understanding (comp. Prov. iii. 19; Eph. i. 11). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 6.—To him that stretched out the earth above the waters (comp. Isa. xlii. 5; xlv. 24; Ps. xxiv. 2). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 7.—To him that made great lights (see Gen. i. 14—16). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 8.—The sun to rule by day (comp. Gen. i. 16). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 9.—The moon and stars to rule by night (Gen. i. 16, 18). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 10.—To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn. The parallelism with Ps. cxxxv. here becomes very close, and so continues till the end of ver. 22. Five verses, however, are expanded into thirteen. For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 11.—And brought out Israel from among them (see Exod. xii. 51; xiv. 19—31). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 12.—With a strong hand, and with a stretched-out arm (comp. Exod. vi. 6; Deut. vii. 8, 14; Neh. i. 10, etc.). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 13.—To him which divided the Red Sea into parts; literally, *into sections*—cut it, as it were, in two (see Exod. xiv. 21). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 14.—And made Israel to pass through the midst of it (see Exod. xiv. 22, 29; xv. 19). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 15.—But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea (see Exod. xiv. 27, 28; xv. 1—10). That the Pharaoh's death in the Red Sea is not necessarily implied has been shown in the comment on Exodus. For his mercy, etc. Severity to their adversaries was "mercy" to Israel, who could not otherwise have been delivered.

Ver. 16.—To him which led his people through the wilderness (Exod. xiii. 20—22; xl. 36—38; Deut. viii. 15). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 17.—To him which smote great kings (see the comment on Ps. cxxxv. 10). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 18.—And slew famous kings. Oreb, Zeb, Zeba, Zalmunna, Agag. For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 19.—Sihon King of the Amorites (comp. Ps. cxxxv. 11). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 20.—And Og the King of Bashan (Numb. xxi. 33; Ps. cxxxv. 11). For his mercy, etc.

Ver. 21.—And gave their land for an

heritage (see Josh. xii. 1—6). **For his mercy, etc.**

Ver. 22.—Even an heritage unto Israel his servant (comp. Ps. cxxxv. 12). **For his mercy, etc.**

Ver. 23.—Who remembered us in our low estate. When we were brought low. The time meant is probably that of the Babylonian captivity, which is the subject of the next psalm. **For his mercy, etc.**

Ver. 24.—And hath redeemed us from our enemies; rather, *and redeemed us*—or, “snatched us”—from our enemies. **For his mercy, etc.**

Ver. 25.—Who giveth food to all flesh. Has a care, i.e., not only for man, but also for animals (comp. Ps. civ. 27; cxlv. 15; cxlvii. 9; Jonah iv. 11). **For his mercy, etc.**

Ver. 26.—Oh give thanks unto the God of heaven. “The God of heaven” is a favourite designation of God in the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel (Ezra i. 2; v. 11, 12; vi. 9, 10; vii. 12, 21; Neh. i. 4, 5; ii. 4, 20; Dan. ii. 18, 19, 37, 44). It was a phrase known to the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians. **For his mercy endureth for ever.**

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—26.—*The Divine constancy.* The refrain of each verse of the psalm may supply us with a guiding thought in our treatment of it. From the first beginnings of creation (as we are affected by them) to the last hour of human experience, we have evidence of the goodness, the “mercy,” of the Lord. It has endured through all generations, is with us now, will attend our race (we are sure) to the end of time. We find it—

I. IN THE DIVINE PROVISION. God gave us sun, moon, and stars at the first. These have been giving light to men everywhere and in all ages. They have been regulating the seasons of the year and the tides of ocean, and they have been counting time for us with unbroken constancy. Seed-time and harvest have not failed; food has been given to all flesh, to man and beast, through all the centuries (ver. 25). If the earth has been barren in one part, it has been fruitful in another. Nothing has been needed to supply all mankind with the necessaries and the comforts of life but man's own diligence, enterprise, and economy. God has supplied his part. His kindness is constant.

II. IN DIVINE RETRIBUTION. (Vers. 10—15, 17—20.) No doubt this recurring sentence, “His mercy endureth for ever,” is written by the psalmist from Israel's point of view. That is quite obvious from the words with which these verses are connected. The destruction of Israel's enemies meant the deliverance, in mercy, of Israel itself. But we may pause to remember that *all* righteous retribution is a part of Divine goodness. No greater calamity could befall us than Divine indifference to sin and unlimited permission to indulge in it; no more serious injury, therefore, could be done us than the withholding of Divine penalty when sin and wrong are done by us. That would inevitably issue in the loss of all real reverence for God, and of all respect for ourselves. It would mean the simple annihilation of human character, of human worth, of the distinctive excellency of human life. God's abiding hatred and punishment of sin is an element of his constant kindness to our race, as well as a permanent feature of his own Divine character.

III. IN DIVINE COMPASSION AND REDEMPTION. God has ever been pitiful, and his compassion has called forth his power to save. 1. There are two notable instances of this in Hebrew history—the deliverance from Egyptian hardship and bondage (Exod. iii. 7, 8), and the restoration from captivity in Babylon (Ezra i.). God “remembered them in their low estate,” and “redeemed them from their enemies.” 2. There was one culminating and transcendent illustration of this in the advent of our Lord. He saw us in our “low estate.” The world was sunk in superstition, in vice, in violence, in misery, in spiritual death. No “estate” could be lower than that of the human world when Jesus Christ came into it; and then he accomplished that work which is to issue in its “redemption.” 3. We have individual illustrations of it now. The eye that looked down in pity on the earliest sorrows and struggles of his children regards to-day with tender commiseration the sufferings and the trials of his people. In all our affliction he is afflicted. He is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. iv. 15). He is mindful of our danger when in the midst of temptation, and, in answer

to our prayer, redeems us from the power of our adversary. To the latest hour of individual life, to the last hour of time, we shall be able to look up with holy confidence for sympathy and succour; "for his mercy endureth for ever."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—26.—*Repetitions many, but not vain.* Over and over again the refrain comes, "His mercy endureth for ever." But it is never a vain repetition, unless the mind, by its heedlessness, makes it so. It is like the German piece of music which is called 'The Fremensberg,' which tells one of the old legends of the region—how "a great noble of the Middle Ages got lost in the mountains, and wandered about with his dogs in a violent storm, until at last the faint tones of a monastery-bell, calling the monks to a midnight service, caught his ear, and he followed the direction the sounds came from, and was saved. A beautiful air runs through the music without ceasing, sometimes loud and strong, sometimes so soft that it can hardly be distinguished, but it is always there. It swung grandly along the shrill whistling of the storm-wind, the rattling patter of the rain, and the boom and crash of the thunder; it wound soft and low through the lesser sounds, the distant ones, such as the throbbing of the convent-bell, the melodious winding of the hunter's horn, the distressed bayings of his dogs, and the solemn chanting of the monks; it rose again, with a jubilant ring, and mingled itself with the country songs and dances of the peasants assembled in the concert-hall to cheer up the rescued huntsman as he ate his supper, imitating all these sounds with marvellous exactness. The solemn chanting of the monks was not done by instruments, but by men's voices, and it rose and fell and rose again in that rich confusion of warring sounds and pulsing bells, and the stately swing of that ever-present enchanting air, and it seemed to me that nothing could be more divinely beautiful" (Mark Twain). So the sweet refrain of this psalm is heard amid all variety of circumstances, and is never absent, but investing with its own charm every one of the manifold statements which the psalm contains. But wherefore all this repetition?

I. BECAUSE WE ARE SO APT TO FORGET THE TRUTH IT TELLS OF. Is not this so? "The ox knoweth its owner," etc. (Isa. i.).

II. BECAUSE IT IS A TRUTH SO UNSPEAKABLY IMPORTANT. We repeat messages to those who we know are liable to forget, and we do so the more according to the importance of the message. And none can be more important than this, consider it how we will. Who is there that does not need to remember it, that is not every way the better for the remembrance of it?

III. BECAUSE, WHEN IT IS REMEMBERED, BELIEVED, AND REALIZED IN THE HEART WE CANNOT KEEP SILENCE ABOUT IT. "I believed, therefore have I spoken," said St. Paul; and it has ever been so. He who wrote this psalm believed this most blessed truth of God's mercy enduring for ever, and he could not keep silence; nor shall we when we in like manner believe.—S. C.

Vers. 1—26.—*Does his mercy endure for ever?* How many voices there are that seem to deny the blessed declaration which is repeated in every verse of this psalm, and in so many other psalms and Scriptures beside!

I. THE VOICE OF EARTHLY SORROW SEEMS TO DENY IT. "What!" says one, "his mercy endureth for ever? And I, once so happily placed, and to whom all life was bright, and now so utterly poor, a ruined mau: how can his mercy endure for ever? I cannot believe it." And here is another who has been bitterly bereaved, the light of his home gone out. And another whose heart smarts within him from a sense of cruel wrong which has been inflicted on him, and which has embittered all his life. And another whose existence is one long pain. And another racked with anxiety. Oh, how many such there are to whom the talk of God's mercy seems as an impossible and an idle thought!

II. AND THE VOICE OF THE POPULAR THEOLOGY HAS PRACTICALLY DENIED IT. For it represents God as a moral Governor who has attached a tremendous penalty to sin—a penalty at the very thought of which the heart shudders, and who would inflict this

on mankind generally, for that all have sinned, only that mercy interposes, and by the sacrifice of Christ opens a way of escape for all who will believe. Now, in this representation there is very much that is scriptural and true, but it errs in representing the foundation of the Divine character as that of the magistrate rather than of the father. As if his great purpose were to maintain a law rather than to train and to teach, to restore and to redeem. And hence they limit this salvation to the baptized, or to the elect, or to those who dwell in Christian lands. And they limit it likewise to the present life. Thus, practically, they seem to deny the ever-enduring character of God's mercy.

III. AND THERE IS MUCH IN SCRIPTURE THAT SEEMS TO SUPPORT THIS DENIAL. Certainly there are no direct statements that teach that outside the limits of faith in Christ, and of the present life, there is yet salvation, and there are many which seem to distinctly say there is not.

IV. AND THERE ARE AWFUL FACTS IN LIFE WHICH POINT IN THE SAME DIRECTION. Men, many of them, do, so far as we can see, die in their sins, having no part nor lot in the kingdom of God.

V. BUT, IN SPITE OF ALL THIS, GOD'S MERCY ENDURETH FOR EVER. 1. *It must be so, because of his declared character.* God is love. He is our Father. His mercy is not an attribute external to himself, something that he has assumed; but it is what he is in his own inherent nature. Therefore so long as God exists, his mercy must exist likewise, that is, must endure for ever. 2. *Because of his declared purpose.* He has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. He will have all men to be saved. He gave his only begotten Son to die for us all, and to him every knee shall bow. "The Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." Can his purpose, then, be for ever thwarted? 3. *The manifest design of all his dealings with us.* His perpetual goodness. The afflictions and sorrows he sends, they are for good, not ill; for healing, not harm. And the punishments he inflicts, they are not in vengeance, but to subdue the perverse will. Love is at the heart of things, the ultimate reason of them all. 4. *What he has already done.* The most stubborn wills he has subdued, and does subdue day by day. The resources of his mercy are not exhausted or exhaustible.—S. C.

Vers. 1—26 (every verse).—*The Church's antiphon.* There can be no doubt that this psalm was sung antiphonally in the Jewish temple, some of the priests reciting or chanting the first portion of each verse, and then the whole congregation responding, "For his mercy endureth for ever." But this oft-repeated declaration belongs not to the Jewish Church alone, but to the whole Church of God throughout all the ages and in all the world. "One February night, A.D. 358, the great church at Alexandria was bright with lights far into the night, and still the congregation did not disperse. The Bishop Athanasius was there, and the service was to be prolonged till morning; for next day the Holy Communion was to be celebrated, and it was the frequent custom among the early Christians to spend the preceding night in prayer and singing hymns. All knew that further troubles were hanging over their beloved bishop, and that the time of his presence with them would probably be very short. Suddenly a clashing noise broke the stillness. The church was surrounded by armed men. With calm presence of mind, Athanasius rose and gave out the hundred and thirty-sixth psalm, which has to every verse the response, 'For his mercy endureth for ever.' The whole congregation joined in thundering forth those grand words, when the door was burst open, and the imperial envoy, at the head of a body of soldiers, walked up the aisle. For a moment the soldiers drew back in awe at the solemn sound of the chanting, but again they pressed on, and a shower of arrows flew through the church. Swords flashed, arms rattled, and rough shouts interrupted the music. Athanasius retained his seat till the congregation had dispersed, then he too disappeared in the darkness, and no one knew where he was gone. He found a refuge among his old friends the hermits of Egypt" (quoted from Perowne). The blessed truth it declares is—

I. THE EXPLANATION OF ALL THAT GOD IS AND DOES. After each recital of what God is or of what he has done, it is added, as if by way of explanation, "For his mercy," etc. And it is declared, not in connection alone with statements as to the holiness, the greatness, the majesty, and the love of God, not alone in connection with his acts of

creation and of beneficence, but with those of judgment and awful punishment as well. All are included. And they all must have some explanation. The psalm gives this, "For his mercy," etc. Can any one find a better, or one that so meets the manifold aspects of the problem of human life? Even his judgments, his "strange work," have mercy at the heart of them, as a little reflection will perceive.

II. THE CLAMANT NEED OF ALL THE CHILDREN OF GOD. For who is there of woman born that does not need mercy, that can say he has no sin, that God has nothing to accuse him of? Where, but for God's mercy, should any of us have been? And not only do we need mercy, but enduring mercy. We can give God no guarantee that if he forgive us we shall need his forgiveness never more. Alas! it is our daily need. Even as we are taught to ask day by day for daily bread, so also are we to pray daily, "And forgive us our sins."

III. THE INSPIRATION OF ALL THE SERVANTS OF GOD. "The love of Christ constraineth us," said St. Paul; and as it was with him so is it with all God's servants. It is not the lack of fear, the goading of conscience, the command of duty, that impel the servant of God, but the inspiration of the love this antiphon declares.

IV. THE GLAD CONFESSION OF ALL THE REDEEMED OF GOD. They confess it here on earth; in heaven, "Worthy is the Lamb," which is but another form of this same blessed truth, is the perpetual theme of the ransomed there.

V. THE ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ALL WHO DESIRE TO RETURN TO GOD. See the prodigal. It was the memory of his father's house that determined him on returning home. He felt sure that his father's love would not fail him. And so still, it is the proclamation and the belief of the mercy that endureth for ever which emboldens the contrite heart to cast itself upon God (Ps. li. 17).

VI. THAT WHICH THE BELIEVER KEEPS TELLING OVER AND OVER AGAIN UNWEARIEDLY. See in this psalm how perpetually it is repeated, and this is but an example of what the heart of God's redeemed people ever delights in. What are the favourite hymns, the most blessed portions of Scripture, but those which tell most clearly and fully of the mercy that endureth for ever? And when we come to die, there is nothing else that so soothes and strengthens the departing soul as this same truth as it is seen in Jesus Christ our Lord.—S. C.

Ver. 4.—*The great wonders of God.* I. WHAT ARE THEY? They are seen in nature; in providence; and especially in grace. The whole purpose, plan, and accomplishment of man's salvation is full of them.

II. GOD IS EVER DOING GREAT WONDERS. It is not that he once did them and has now ceased, but he is ever doing and will continue to do them. Hence we may expect them in regard to others and to ourselves.

III. NO ONE ELSE DOES THEM. 1. *In Nature we see this plainly.* No one thinks that he can do her works. 2. *In providence we see this partly.* Men are apt to think that they themselves are the authors of the good that comes to them. 3. *In grace men are slow to see this at all.* They persist in thinking they must bring something, do something, or else they cannot be saved. They haggle over God's free gift.

IV. AND THEY ARE GREAT WONDERS. Not common and ordinary. 1. *It was to be expected that they would be.* For they are the works of God. 2. *It was necessary they should be.* For how else was man to be saved? 3. *They have all the conditions of greatness.* Rarity; transcendent power; wisdom; grace.

V. THEY DESERVE AND DEMAND OUR PRAISE. Of the heart, the lip, the life.—S. C.

Vers. 10—25.—*From Egypt to Canaan.* Almost every reader of Israel's history has seen, as surely it was intended that there should be seen, the pattern and picture of the soul's journey out of the misery and bondage of sin into the glorious liberty wherewith Christ doth make his people free. It is a long and arduous journey, but blessed are they which take it. These verses imply or state its chief stages.

I. THE PREPARATION FOR THIS JOURNEY. This is not stated, but implied. We know the weariness and distress, the hard bondage and the cruel oppression, which led Israel to cry out unto the Lord. And the like of it the soul knows in its more than Egyptian bondage and oppression through sin. And ere the actual deliverance comes there has been the cry unto the Lord.

II. ITS DIFFERENT STEPS. 1. *Believing in God.* This was shown by their obedience to the command as to the Passover. Unbelief might have cavilled and objected, but the spirit of faith was given, and all Israel kept the Passover. And ere deliverance comes to the soul, there is and must be faith in Christ our Passover; the definite trust in him as our Saviour. 2. *The breaking of the oppressor's power.* (Ver. 10.) That which in the consciousness of the redeemed soul corresponds to what this verse tells of is the suspension of the power of sin. Whether permanently or not, for a time that power seems paralyzed, as was the power of Pharaoh when the firstborn were smitten. We are under its cruel compulsion no longer. 3. *The actual deliverance.* (Vers. 12, 13.) They went out of Egypt; so does the soul abandon its old ways, and start for the promised possession. 4. *Complete consecration.* It seemed as if Israel were to be dragged back again into slavery there at Pi-hahiroth—as if the old misery were to come over again. How often the soul has found the like of that! But the command came to Israel to “go forward.” It seemed impossible, but they obeyed, and lo! the Red Sea parted asunder (vers. 13, 14). St. Paul speaks of this as their being “baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” It was the type of the soul's complete consecration. It will obey God, cost what it will; though it be like plunging into the sea, yet it will obey. That is what we must do. Then comes: 5. *Further and complete deliverance.* (Ver. 15.) When the soul thus resolves to obey God at all costs, even if it be like going straight to death, then, behold! the way will be opened, and what seemed like death will prove to be life, and our enemies trouble us no more. The soul's self-surrender to God is the destruction of its foes. 6. *The wilderness trial and training.* (Ver. 16.) The Law was given, and then came the tests of obedience. Israel was tried by providential circumstances, by evil example, by fierce attacks of mighty kings. The redeemed life must be a tried life; but, if we be really of God's Israel, it will be an overcoming life.

III. ITS BLESSED END. (Vers. 21, 22.) And so the soul shall come into its heavenly places in Christ (see the Epistle to the Ephesians). It shall gain its inheritance and keep it, in the rest which remaineth for the people of God, of which Canaan was the earthly type.—S. C.

Ver. 23.—*Remembered of God.* We were so; for—

I. WE WERE ALL IN “LOW ESTATE.” 1. *By inherited nature inclining us to sin.* 2. *By our own actual sin.* 3. *By our subjection to earthly care and sorrow.* 4. *By death overtaking us all.*

II. BUT GOD REMEMBERED US. 1. *He might have acted far otherwise.* Condemned us all to death, or forgotten us and left us to go our own ways. 2. *But he remembered us.* Indeed, though it seemed to our eye as if we had but just come into God's mind, we had, in fact, never been absent from his mind. (See the evolution of man's redemption from the first purpose of grace in God down to our own individual redemption.) On and on the blessed work proceeded. 3. *And he remembers us still.*

III. THE EXPLANATION OF THIS IS THE NEVER-FAILING MERCY OF GOD. 1. *For think of God.* Could he, being so great and gracious as he is, do other than give this redemption to us? 2. *Of the gift itself.* Could we by any acts of our own purchase or procure it? Was it not utterly out of our reach? 3. *Of ourselves.* Not only are we lacking in great amount of merit, but in all merit. How but by God's mercy can we be saved?—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The enduring mercy.* This is very evidently a psalm arranged for alternate singing in the temple service. One section of the singers gives the sentences, and the other section answers with the ever-recurring refrain of the psalm, “For his mercy endureth for ever.” It is a refrain which has peculiar point and interest when regarded as sung by the returned exiles in their restored temple. They felt very deeply what it was to be “monuments of God's mercy,” and that sense of God's mercy to them enabled them to read aright the story of the ages old and hoary, and to anticipate aright the ages that were yet to be. God's mercy evidently had been upon his people from everlasting, and that was the best of guarantees that it would be unto everlasting. Let any man worthily apprehend God's mercy to him, and that man will be well assured that God's “mercy endureth for ever.”

I. THE PERSONAL SENSE OF GOD'S MERCY. There are some things, perhaps many things, which cannot be learned intellectually, which no man can know until he knows experimentally. He may know *about* them, and may be able to talk about them, but the knowledge is a surface-matter; it is not *real*, not spiritually effective, until it comes through personal experience. God's *mercy* is one of these things. There are elements in mercy which we can mentally apprehend, such as tenderness, considerateness, gentleness, pity; but there is an element which we can only realize by *feeling* in relation to it. A man must feel *undeserving* before he can know what God's mercy is. Then he gains a right sense of the "pitifulness of thy great mercy." The self-satisfied Pharisee never thinks that God's mercy concerns him. In that mercy the penitent publican finds refuge.

II. ITS RAYS THROWN BACK ON THE PAST OF DIVINE DEALING. Let a man feel thus in relation to God's mercy, and then he can look back over his own past, and back over the past of history, and find God's mercy, as bearing and forbearing, everywhere. So the returned exiles would be able to read their old history as a nation. What shone out to view everywhere was God's mercy. Man's waywardness and wilfulness, and God's pitifulness and gentleness.

III. ITS RAYS THROWN FORWARD ON THE FUTURE OF DIVINE DEALING. It is alone on the basis of what God is to us that we can rest our confidence of what he is going to be. Our soul's argument takes this form, "This God is our God for ever and ever; he *will* be our Guide even unto the end." Because his mercy is our portion, we are sure that "his mercy endureth for ever."—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*God and other gods.* "Oh give thanks unto the God of gods." This expression appears to recognize other gods in order to make comparison with them of the One only, living, and true God. It is necessary to keep in mind that there are gods for whom their worshippers claim that they are verily and indeed gods. True, "the gods of the nations are idols (helpless vanities), but the Lord (Jehovah) made the heavens;" but that is the view which the worshippers of Jehovah take, not the view which the nations that serve these gods take. For us there is no comparison between God and the gods. And yet Scripture invites us to make comparisons. Some freshness may be gained by taking one point of view; but it must be regarded as a point of view, and in no sense a complete setting of truth in relation to this subject. *Gods*, as distinct from *God*, are always wrongly treated when they are regarded as distinct and independent deities. It may be the fact of history that to the mass of the people they become such; but that is their delusion. They never really are such; they are always either *incarnations of God*, in order to bear direct relation to human and earthly things, or they are guardian angels or patron saints. This may be clearly illustrated from the Hindu religion. Brahma is the one living god; but there are five cults of Brahma, according as he is presented incarnate in Vishnoo, 'Siva, 'Sakti, Gane'sa, or Surya. It might be said that these are gods, but the deeper truth is that they are no more than sensible helps to the apprehension of Brahma, and to right relations with him. This suggests interesting points of reflection.

I. THE SPIRITUALITY OF GOD IS OF SUPREME IMPORTANCE FOR MAN. Leave man alone, and anywhere and everywhere he will inevitably materialize God and give him some formal shape, either in act or thought. And then man deteriorates, because he puts the stamp of superiority on his *bodily investiture* instead of on his *spiritual self*. His god becomes a body, with passions to be indulged. Therefore God so jealously guards for the Israelites his unseen, spiritual Being, and forbids every attempt to make a likeness of him.

II. THE SPIRITUALITY OF GOD IS PRESERVED IN THE ONE INCARNATION IN WHICH HE HAS SHOWN HIMSELF. The "Man Christ Jesus" is the One and only true incarnation of God. It was a simple and genuine man's life, which soon gave place to a presence spiritually realized. The Christ we worship is no figure of a God. It is the God who *was* unseen passing by us and for a moment removing his hand and letting us *see*, and then passing into the *unseen again*.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Wonders of creative power.* "Who alone doeth great wonders." "Jehovah is the great Thaumaturge, the unrivalled Wonder-worker. None can be likened unto

him; he is alone in wonderland, the Creator and Worker of true marvels, compared with which all other remarkable things are as child's play. None of the gods or the lords helped Jehovah in creation or in the redemption of his people." As the theme of this psalm is the Divine *mercy*, we must find the merciful in the wonderful. This psalm recalls to our minds the first chapter of Genesis, which declares the absolute Creatorship of God. It does not consist of a precise, definite, and detailed account of the processes of creation, but contains a series of distinct and repeated affirmations of God's supreme relations to all forms of existence, in all their order, all their origin, all their growth, all their relations. It is designed to impress on us that the world was not created by chance, by self-regeneration, by impersonal powers of nature, or by many agents acting either in harmony or in antagonism. God is distinct from that he has made. God is the one primal Source of all things. God's will is represented in all laws that rule. God's good pleasure shapes all ends. This chapter impresses on mind and heart the existence, independence, and personality of one Divine Being, the universality of his rule, the omnipotency of his power, and the eternal persistence of his relationship to the world he has created. 1. The chapter declares God's unique relation to every part of creation. We may conceive of no created thing, no existing thing, to which the assurance is not attached—*God made it*, God ordained it, God arranged it. The chapter includes all the components of the earth's crust; all the treasures of the mighty deep; all the elements of the atmosphere; all the hosts of heaven, from the ruling sun to the faintest distant star; all the multiplied forms of vegetable life; all the higher forms of animal life; and all the yet higher forms of human life. And the declaration of God's creation includes all the natural laws and forces that act in creation. These things may be illustrated. 2. The relation of God as Cause and Arranger to all the changes of creation. One living God is at the beginning of all changes, designing all change, and presiding over all change. 3. The relation of God as Cause and Controller to the entire range of development in creation. Tell us of millions of bygone ages: God was there. Show us a thing: God made it. Describe a change: God ordered it. Talk of immeasurable distances, in which the stars swing free: God set them there.—R. T.

Vers. 10, 11.—*God's judgments are two-sided.* "To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn; . . . and brought out Israel from among them." Much misapprehension of the Divine dealings follows from fixing attention too exclusively on *one side* of the Divine judgments. We readily see what they are to those who suffer under them, but we do not sufficiently see what they are to those who are delivered through them. God smote Egypt, but the smiting was a delivering of his people; and if we would understand his doing we must see it on both its sides. Suppose that God designs to discipline a particular race for a great world-mission which he purposes to entrust to it, then the presence of Israel in Egypt is explained. And when the time has come for that race to go forth and accomplish its mission, the ordinary difficulties of getting a great part of a nation's population safely away had to be dealt with, and the special complications arising had to be mastered. So deliverance had to take the form of judgment. There are two possible explanations of Divine judgments.

I. THE EASIER EXPLANATION: THEY VINDICATE THE DIVINE RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE PUNISHMENT OF WRONG-DOERS. This is familiar truth. Some time or other the cup of a man's, or a family's, or a city's, or a nation's iniquity becomes *full*, and then the Divine judgments must descend. The world before the Flood, the cities of the plain, the Egyptians, the Israelites, Nineveh, and Babylon illustrate this. Egypt was smitten for its national sins. We see one special feature of that sin; it was Pharaoh Menephtah's treatment of God's people, in spite of all warnings that were given him. "Is God righteous who taketh vengeance?" Certainly he is. He would be no righteous God if he did not.

II. THE DEEPER EXPLANATION: THE LAW OF VICARIOUS SUFFERING APPLIES EVEN IN THE CASE OF DIVINE JUDGMENTS. We have yet to apprehend that all moral and spiritual laws are as absolute, universal, and unchangeable as all natural laws. Vicarious suffering is absolutely universal. Nobody ever gets any good without somebody suffering loss. Egypt must suffer if Israel is to be delivered. An adequate impression of the Divine power must be made on Israel as a basis of its belief in God, and Egypt

must suffer that God's power may be shown. It is a thrillingly interesting view of one of the supreme mysteries of human life, that on one side of them God's judgments should be apprehended as vicarious sufferings for the sake of others.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*Overcoming natural obstacles.* "Divided the sea in sunder." The peculiarity of the account given us of this miracle wrought for the deliverance of Israel is that it gives so distinctly the *natural agencies* by which it was wrought. A certain natural obstacle had to be overcome, and it was overcome by such forces as man would have used if he had had the nature-forces in his control. We can distinctly recognize the suitability of the agencies. But here the true miracle comes in. There was no manufacture of new forces; there was absolute control of existing forces. There was no accident of wind and tide; there was the Divine using of wind and tide. When God made natural forces he did not loosen them from his control. He is always controlling them, and we are made to feel sure that he is, by some such extraordinary cases of controlling as we have in this crossing of the sea. Geikie says, "Ebb and flood tide, in the narrow northern ford especially, are greatly affected by the wind prevailing at any given time. . . . A violent north-east gale blew all night, and drove the waters before it, at ebb-tide, into the south-west ford, till the sandy ridge of the ford was laid bare, the shore-waters thus becoming a wall or protection to the Hebrews on the right, and those of the open sea on the left hand. The storm prolonging the ebb, delayed the flow of the tide, and thus before morning the whole of the Hebrews were able to reach the east shore."

I. NATURAL OBSTACLES STILL HINDER GOD'S PEOPLE. Such natural obstacles as are related to the circumstances of God's people nowadays. They often appear as bodily frailty, or as sickness of those to whom we are bound in duty, or in limitation of means, or insufficiency of premises for Christian work, or hindering distances from fields of labour, or strange enmities that seem to check us in every enterprise. And it is not altogether easy to associate God with such material things, and to realize that he is actually working for us in the control or removal of them. And yet just *that* is the lesson for the ages to be learned from God's removal of the hindering Red Sea.

II. NATURAL OBSTACLES DO BUT REPRESENT THE SPIRITUAL OBSTACLES OF GOD'S PEOPLE. "We wrestle, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers." The spiritual weaknesses of ourselves, the spiritual forces of evil. Of our spiritual enemy we may say, "We are not ignorant of his devices." Nor is God. Nor does he fail to master these obstacles or to counteract his devices.—R. T.

Ver. 16.—*Providential guidance.* "Which led his people." The addition, "through the wilderness," is significant and suggestive, because a wilderness is distinctly a *pathless* region, in which mere human skill is baffled. And it reminds us that Israel was provided for and guided for thirty-eight long years in such a region. Surely Israel ought to have said, "God's providence is mine inheritance." Is it a gain or a loss that we have ceased to recognize or to speak much of God's *providence*? It was a very real thing to our fathers; it is not very real to us. At least, this might appear to be the fact. We are, however, disposed to argue that the truth and fact are as truly preserved and valued as ever they were, only they have gained a new setting and new shaping.

I. THE IDEA OF PROVIDENCE FITTED THE OLDER CONCEPTION OF GOD. It belongs to the apprehension of God as Creator, Sustainer, Ruler. He is Lord of the whole world of things, and is thought of as controlling all things in the interest of his own special people. He is the Universal Provider, and our fathers delighted in stories of remarkable providential interpositions, guidances, and arrangements. And still no man can read his own life, or watch the lives of others, without being impressed with the wonder-working ways of Divine providence, which make the "unexpected" the thing that happens. Constantly in life we find things are brought round for us which we could in no way have mastered or arranged.

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

II. THE NEWER CONCEPTION OF GOD GLORIFIES HIS PROVIDENCE. Christ has brought

to men a comprehensive name for God. It includes the very essence of every previous conception and name, but puts man into a new and more directly personal and affectionate relation with God. He is our Father. And his providence is his fatherly care of our every interest. Has a child any such providence as his father is to him? And yet a child never thinks of, or speaks of, his father as *providence*. And in the measure in which we can enter into the idea of God as *our Father*, we shall find that we lose out of use the term "providence," but keep all the reality of it, and indeed glorify it, as we lose the impersonal and therefore cold element, and see it to be the wisdom and power and activity of *our Father*, which is beautified and sanctified by his *love for us his sons*.—R. T.

Vers. 21, 22.—*Fulfilment of race-missions*. "And gave their land for an heritage." The Amorites had their race-mission; when it was fulfilled they had to pass away, and their land had to be occupied by another race, which also had its peculiar mission. It has been pointed out that no absolutely original and independent race ever existed on the face of the earth. No race has a simple beginning, and no race can unfold without streams of life pouring into it from outside and modifying its character. This may be strictly true, but nevertheless the fact remains that distinct races of men can be discerned in actual existence, as well as in the records of ancient history. Explain it how we may, qualify the statement how we may, it remains the fact that God has been pleased to separate humanity into races; and this division is even more important than that into nations. Families and races are Divine divisions; nations are purely human arrangements, which God may be pleased to use, but cannot be said directly to arrange. Races are differentiated with a Divine purpose, and each race should be regarded as entrusted with a Divine mission. It is well to bear in mind that by God everything is done or borne with a view to the ultimate well-being of humanity. God always has the whole in view, and deals with every part in the interests of the whole. The Israelitish race attracts great attention, but it was not the only race placed under Divine commission. What we so clearly see was true of it—was true of every other race, and its mission was but an illustrative mission. The better we understand the peculiarities of the races that have had their day and ceased to be, and the more fully we understand God's educative purposes for humanity, the more clearly shall we apprehend that every race has had some imperilled truth to preserve, and some active witness to make. God has commissioned them all, and worked by means of them all, just as truly as by the Hebrew race; and every race is immortal till its work is done; then it passes and gives place to the new race with the new mission.—R. T.

Ver. 23.—*The Divine dealing with the humiliated*. "Who remembered us in our low estate." This closing portion of the psalm proves its association with the restored exiles. That long time in Babylon was ever thought of and spoken of as the great time of national humiliation. Never before had the national life been broken up, the national capital been in the hands of the enemy, and laid in ruins, or the temple, as the centre of the religious life of the nation, destroyed. Humiliation expresses precisely the experience through which the nation had been called to pass. But a condition of humiliation never puts either a man or a nation out of the Divine regard. Such conditions belong to the Divine discipline, and that means the immediate and direct Divine interest. And this the psalmist recognizes. God had remembered his people in their low estate; and how practical that remembrance was is seen in the fact that, in due time, he *redeemed* his people from out of the hands of the enemies that humiliated them.

I. THE DIVINE DEALING WITH THE HUMILIATED MAY BE AN ENDURANCE. He may let it continue. He may seem to hold aloof, and to restrain himself. But endurance is altogether different from lost interest or forsaking. Endurance means knowledge, watchfulness, and sympathy. It is only "biding his time," patiently waiting until the best time has come, and so supremely seeking the highest well-being of the humiliated, that no limitation of the stern discipline can be permitted. There are conditions of life—religious life—in which God can only carry out his purposes of grace by our humiliation. It is the marvel of his love that he will even do a thorough work of humiliation.

II. THE DIVINE DEALING WITH THE HUMILIATED IS SURE TO PASS INTO A REDEMPTION. God's endurings have no stamp of permanency. They are only agencies working with a view to some issue. And God's final issues are always redemptions. God's people cannot be humiliated *for ever* in any Babylonian slavery. Man may humiliate his fellow, and never loosen the humiliation. The overruling God never does. There is always something good and gracious towards which the humiliation is moving. Sooner or later, the humiliated will be redeemed.—R. T.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXXVII.

"THE most direct and striking reminiscence of the Babylonish exile in the whole Psalter" (Professor Alexander). The psalm divides into two parts. First, we are given a picture of the unhappy condition of the exiles, drawn so evidently from the life, that almost every commentator has felt it must have been painted by one of those who had experienced the reality (vers. 1-4). Then the writer lays bare to us the predominant feelings of his own heart. These are two—intense love for Jerusalem (vers. 5, 6); and intense hatred of Israel's and Jehovah's principal foes, Edom and Babylon (vers. 7-9). The two parts are strongly contrasted. "The plaintive sweetness, which (in the first) melted us into tears, is overpowered (in the second) by a crash of discords" (Cheyne).

Ver. 1.—By the rivers of Babylon. The Euphrates and the canals derived from it, which were many, and filled with running, not stagnant, water. These would present themselves to the exiles as "rivers." There we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. The exiles had their leisure hours—they were not kept by their masters at hard work continually. During these leisure hours they *naturally* "sat down" by the rivers of Babylon, as the most pleasant and attractive places. They brought their harps with them (ver. 2), with some idea, perhaps, of indulging in mournful strains. Grief, however, overpowered them—Zion came to their recollection—and they could do nothing but weep.

Ver. 2.—We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. The superfluous "harps" were "hung" up upon the trees that grew by the watercourses. These are called "willows," or, according to some, "poplars," but were probably of a different species from any of the trees that grew in Palestine. The chief Babylonian tree was the palm, which grew in the greatest luxu-

riance along the courses of all the streams (Herod., i. 193; Amm. Man., xxiv. 3; Zosim., iii. pp. 173-179). Tamarisks, poplars, and acacias were also common, but true "willows" hardly appear to have ever been a product of the country. The *'arābah* of our author was probably either a poplar or a tamarisk.

Ver. 3.—For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; literally, *words of song*. The oppressors break into the retired gathering of their captives, and "require of them a song"—demand roughly and rudely to be entertained with the foreign music, which is perhaps sweeter than their own, or at any rate more of a novelty. And they that wasted us required of us mirth. Not only was "a song" wanted, but a joyous song—one that would wake feelings of mirth and gladness in those who heard it. Saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion; literally, *sing us from a song of Zion*. The captives had, no doubt, spoken of the joyous strains which they had been wont to pour forth in their own city upon festive occasions. Their conquerors demand a specimen, but are repulsed with the words of the next verse.

Ver. 4.—How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? The "songs of Zion" are Jehovah's songs, used in his worship, suited only for religious occasions. It would be desecration to sing them "in a strange land," among strange people, not to call forth devotional sentiment, but to gratify curiosity.

Ver. 5.—If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; literally, *let my right hand forget*; but the words supplied in the Authorized Version are necessary to bring out the sense, which is, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, so far as to desecrate thy sacred songs by making them an entertainment for the heathen, may I never have power to strike a note again!"

Ver. 6.—If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. Let me be deprived of the power of song. What was wished in the preceding verse with respect to the power of instrumental performance is here wished with respect to the vocal organs. If I prefer not Jerusalem

above my chief joy. This seems to be the true sense, and is equivalent to "If I prefer not Jerusalem above aught else."

Ver. 7.—Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; rather, remember, O Lord, to the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem. "The day of Jerusalem" is the day of her fall, when Edom took part with her enemies, and rejoiced at her destruction (see Lam. iv. 21, 22; Ezek. xxv. 12; xxxv. 5; Obad. 10—14). The psalmist prays God to "remember" this to Edom, and requite it upon her (comp. Ps. cxxxii. 1, where the same expression is used in a good sense). Who said, Base it, raise it, even to the foundation thereof; i.e. "destroy the city utterly—leave not one stone upon another." The enmity between Edom and Israel was of the intensest character (see 1 Kings xi. 15, 16; 1 Chron. xviii. 12; Jer. xlix. 7—22; Amos i. 11, 12; Mal. i. 3—5).

Ver. 8.—O daughter of Babylon; i.e. O

nation of the Babylonians (comp. Isa. xlvii. 1, 5; Ps. ix. 14, etc.). Who art to be destroyed; literally, *thou desolated one*. The desolation of Babylon began with its capture by Cyrus, but was not completed for many centuries. In the Archæmenian period it was one of the chief cities of the empire. Even under the Parthians it was still a flourishing town. But from the time of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. xliii. 1—22) it was a doomed city, and in the eyes of a devout Jew already "desolate." Happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us; i.e. happy shall he be that completes thy destruction, and the destruction of thy people. He will be the instrument for carrying out God's vengeance.

Ver. 9.—Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones; i.e. that brings on thee the worst calamities of war (see 2 Kings viii. 12; Isa. xii. 16—18; Hos. x. 14; xiii. 16; Nah. iii. 10).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—9.—*Incongruity in religion.* The psalm brings before us in very vivid colour—

I. THE DARK SHADOW CAST BY A GREAT GOOD. Patriotism is an excellent thing, and we are all of us glad and thankful to belong to a land of light and liberty. We would not, on any account, forego so great an advantage, so valuable a privilege. But how much suffering that blessing may entail! Who can measure the intensity of the humiliation and distress which the children of Israel endured when they were torn from their native land, or when they were made to feel their subjection in the streets or the fields of Babylon? They "wept when they remembered Zion." The very beauties of its situation (Ps. xlviii. 2), as contrasted with the dreary levels before their eyes; the very fulness of its privileges, as contrasted with the privations to which they were then submitting, filled their souls with grief. The richer our treasure, the severer our loss; the deeper and stronger our love, the keener and the more sustained our sorrow. "Our affections bring great afflictions, but they are well worth the cost." If we are wise we shall be more than content to pay that price for so great a good. For these sorrows are sacred; they are softening, and they are purifying; they provide the best opportunity for filial resignation; they draw us to God in hallowing communion, and in the prayer which brings down a large blessing from his Holy Spirit.

II. THE LIMITS OF THE MOSAIC CIVILIZATION. No doubt the Law given by Moses was a civilizing institution, and made Israel much wiser and worthier in every way than that people would otherwise have been. But it left much to be desired. Among other things it left its disciples unredeemed from the cruelties (or many of them) practised in war. No Christian writer could, with any sort of propriety or consistency, have written the last verse of this psalm. It pains and shocks us as we read it. We conclude that the world wanted another Teacher, whose spirit should inspire, and whose principles should guide and control, his disciples in their treatment of friend and foe. It is not, indeed, that passages could not be found in the Law enjoining mercy; it is that there was needed One who by his own life, and by his gracious Spirit, and by his sovereign power, should be able to influence and inspire his followers with his own thought, and be able to lead them along a higher and nobler way.

III. SOME MARKED INCONGRUITIES IN OUR EXPERIENCE. "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" How shall we sing the happy songs of Zion when we are in the power of the enemy, away from the city that we love, the sanctuary which

is our spiritual home? There are "strange lands" to the Christian man, in which the sounds that are native to the soil cannot be expected to be heard. There are spiritual conditions in which the graces of Christian character will not flourish, but will die away. Of such are pride, selfishness, covetousness, self-indulgence, uncharitableness. It would be quite an incongruous thing for thankfulness, helpfulness, piety, forbearance, anticipation of the heavenly kingdom, consecration to the cause of Christ and man, to abound in such "strange lands" as these. When we are called upon to practise the graces of Christian character, and when we find ourselves quite indisposed to do so, when any one of these is uncongenial to us, we should seriously inquire of ourselves where we stand. Are we on Immanuel's ground? Are we on the King's highway? Or are we in some strange land which belongs to the enemy? Is there good reason why we should return, promptly and penitently, to the kingdom from which we have been carried away captive? This is the *first* thing to do; and the way home is open to all earnest souls.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—9.—*Fruits of exile from God.* It was Israel's, or rather Judah's, exile from Zion and Jerusalem that this psalm commemorated; but the fruits that exile bore, and which are here told of, set forth the fruits of the yet sadder exile from God which many a soul has known.

I. THE MEMORY OF WHAT HAS BEEN LOST IS FULL OF SORROW. (Ver. 1.) "Yea, we sat down and wept." And if, as with God's ancient people, we through sin are banished from God, then, when we remember, we too shall weep.

II. MUSIC, MIRTH, AND SONG ARE IMPOSSIBLE. (Vers. 2—4.) How could Israel sing? How can we under like conditions? He who has once known, yet more if he has lived for a long time in, the joy of God's love, when he loses that, loses all joy along with it. How can he sing the Lord's song, etc. (ver. 4)?

III. PASSIONATE DEVOTION AND DESIRE TOWARDS WHAT HAS BEEN LOST FILL THE SOUL. (Vers. 5, 6.) His one desire is to return back; his most fervent vows that never, never will he again forget.

IV. BURNING HATRED OF THOSE WHO HAVE WROUGHT THIS WRONG TAKES POSSESSION OF HIM. (Cf. 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11.) In this sense we may use language which towards earthly enemies would be contrary to the spirit of Christ.—S. C.

Ver. 4.—*"The Lord's song in a strange land."* What a wonderful mixture this psalm contains of tears and tragedy, of pathetic sorrow and fiery patriotism! We can almost certainly fix the time when it was written. The first party of exiles had just returned from Babylon, and had come to Jerusalem, where everything on which their gaze rested—the universal desolation and ruin—reminded them of what the spoiler had done, and brought back to their memory the horrors of those dreadful days when Jerusalem was besieged, and at length captured and destroyed. The psalm tells also of the land of their exile—their widespread plains watered by the artificial canals and rivers, in the construction and maintenance of which it is probable that many of the exiles were employed. These were the rivers of Babylon, by which they sat down and wept. And he speaks of the exiles themselves; how their captors bade them sing one of those songs for which their land was famous; but they would not. Their captors wanted to be amused, and thought that these Jews should help them by their song. But the sorrow and shame of their exile had smitten their hearts too terribly, and stifled all their power of song. All that there they were capable of was the fierce and almost frantic prayer for revenge with which the psalm concludes. But the text has wider application than merely to those sad circumstances which first called it forth. Hence—

I. INQUIRE WHAT IS MEANT BY "THE LORD'S SONG." Not only one inspired utterance, however beautiful or sacred, but all such psalms and hymns as they had been wont to sing in their happy homeland. And the Lord's song includes those many sweet songs which may have no words, but are sung in the heart of God's people, to their great joy

and help. And in every case, whether with or without words, it is a song of the heart; the lips alone can never sing the Lord's song, for such song is not alone to the Lord, but from the Lord, inspired by his Spirit and taught by his grace.

II. WHEREFORE CANNOT THIS SONG BE SUNG IN A STRANGE LAND? It was not from mere sullenness that the exiled Jews refused to sing; nor from that pride in which the unhappy often entrench themselves; nor because they had lost all hope in God: they had not. But it was because of what Babylon itself was to them. 1. *Babylon was "a strange land."* In its merely physical aspects it was utterly different from all they had been accustomed to; but how much more in all its moral, social, and spiritual character! Hence there settled down upon them the deep depression and sadness which the sense of complete isolation and loneliness ever produces. Tears, but not songs, abound in such circumstances. It is ill to be separate, to stand apart, especially by our own will. 2. *There was no sympathy, but a chill, designed contempt and dislike of all they held most precious.* Let any one choose such surroundings, the Lord's song will be quickly silenced. 3. *Babylon was the embodiment of the world-spirit.* Splendid, proud, magnificent; but hard, cruel, godless. That spirit and the Lord's song cannot coexist. 4. *Was full of idols.* See the prophet's scorn of them (Ps. cxxxv. 15, etc.). And human hearts are yet haunted by idols not a few; but if so, then the Lord's song cannot be sung. 5. *Was full of sin, corrupt to the core.* But the heart that holds to sin, any sin, silences the Lord's song.—S. C.

Ver. 9.—*A horrible kind of happiness.* Can the sentiments of our text, and of these verses, and the many like them in these psalms, be justified? Are they not wicked, cruel, unchristian, and so to be utterly condemned by all good men? Such questions are continually asked. But let it be remembered—

I. OPPRESSION DRIVES EVEN WISE MEN MAD. These terrible utterances are the product of a cruelly oppressed and suffering people. Let us put ourselves in their place.

II. THAT IT IS THE LANGUAGE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, NOT OF THE NEW. Now, the Old Testament taught: 1. *That God's retributions, both to the good and evil, were given here and now, in temporal blessing or the reverse.* They had no clear knowledge of a future life, still less of any judgment to come. 2. *That the Divine character was to be known by these retributions,* and God's honour maintained, and the true religion upheld by them. 3. *Hence they were told to invoke curses on the wicked,* and they would feel it wrong not to do so. How else could God be glorified? 4. *The prosperity of the wicked was a great trial to them.* It seemed so to dishonour God and to imperil his truth in the world. Hence: 5. *We are not justified in attributing these utterances to mere personal spite and revenge.* Their motive was far other and higher.

III. THAT ALL WAR IS THE PRACTICAL CARRYING OUT OF THE PRINCIPLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. Even with all the alleviations and mitigations of modern and more Christian days, war does the very things which in these psalms many think so wrong.

IV. THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO DO DREADFUL THINGS WITHOUT BEING POSSESSED OF A DREADFUL SPIRIT. Many men deem war to be at times necessary and just; and surely it can be so, and often has been; and they have urged such war as in the sight and under the fear of God. The magistrate is not to bear the sword in vain, but to remember that he is the minister of God.

V. RECOGNIZE OUR INDEBTEDNESS TO THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. And rejoice in it and spread it far and wide. For this gospel not only takes away all excuse for the vindictive spirit, but ever tends to lessen the occasions which provoke it. Let it but spread, and there shall be no more such horrible happiness as that which our text seems to contemplate and approve.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The tears of memory.* "Yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion." The rivers of Babylon and the district were the Euphrates, the Tigris, and the branch streams of those rivers. The writer of the psalm is not in Babylon, but is recalling to mind what happened when he was there. It is not easy to recognize the mood of the psalmist when he composed this psalm. Usually it is assumed that there was first a gentle and plaintive mood, and then a fierce and revengeful mood; but perhaps it is true to the weaknesses of human nature to regard it throughout as a bitter retrospect.

The mood is one of intensity, excitement, and anger in the remembrance of sufferings and humiliations that had been endured. There is a weeping of anger and of remembered sufferings and humblings; as there is a weeping when enduring humiliations in the thought of bygone joys, relations, and privileges.

I. MEMORY MAY AFFECTINGLY RECALL LOST PRIVILEGES. The psalmist seems to himself to be again in Babylon, again oppressed with the burden of the lost national liberty and the present national bondage. He no longer belonged to a nation. He no longer had any capital city. He no longer had any centre for the religious life. The kingdom was broken up, the city was desolated, the temple lay in ruins, the nation was scattered, and the people were virtual slaves to severe and even cruel taskmasters. Some sullenly endured their fate; but to some every remembrance of the old days was a cutting pain—it either made them angry and forced bitter tears, or in softer moods it broke them down and caused tears of regret. How often the memory of the past still brings pain and tears! There is so much in it that might have been otherwise. Often *our* memory-tears are bitter. Only in good moods are they gentle and tender. They may be, they should be, tears of thankful, trustful love.

II. MEMORY MAY AFFECTINGLY RECALL THE CAUSE OF LOST PRIVILEGES. It was only an imperfect memory that recalled a desolated Zion. There was something more than loss and woe to remember—there was the sin of the nation that caused the loss, and was punished in the woe. And it is only when memory of past sorrows includes the sin that brought the sorrows, that memory brings worthy and healing tears.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Willow-types*. It is remarked that there are *now* no willows in Babylon. The name *ereb* is also applied to the tamarisk and poplar. But the drooping form of the willow branches and leaves is specially suggestive of tears. It is clear that a tree growing on the river-banks, and hanging over the stream, is meant. The weeping-willow is known as the *Salix Babylonica*. Of this tree Evelyn says, "Its branches being long, slender, and pendulous, makes it proper to be planted upon the banks of rivers and ponds and over springs; the leaves, also, are long and narrow; and when any mist or dew falls, a drop of water is seen hanging at their extremities, which, together with their hanging branches, cause a most lugubrious appearance."

I. THE WILLOW IS A TYPE OF THE WEEPING OF HUMILIATION. There is a weeping of *love*, and a weeping of *joy*; but these imply an uplifted face. Love looks through its tears into the face of its loved one. Joy lifts up its head, and mingles smiles with tears. Neither of these looks *down*, so neither can be fairly represented by the down-drooping willow. There is a weeping of *simple grief and sorrow*, that has in it no sense of sin, and this does not look down, because there is always trust and hope in the heart, and behind the tears; and the soul is not afraid to let the merciful Father see the tears. The weeping-willow is no fitting type of that holy or sympathetic weeping. But there is a weeping of conviction, of humiliation under God's judgment on sin, and of penitence, whose essential feature is down-looking; the whole man is bent down, flagging in shame and hopelessness and fear. He dare not look up. That kind of weeping is best represented by the willow, which is wholly bent down, branch and leaf ever hanging down.

II. THE WILLOW IS A TYPE OF THE WEEPING OF INSINCERITY. A poet-souled man has pointed out that the willow, which looks so meek, as if always in tears, is really beholding itself and admiring itself in the mirror of the water. And much religious weeping is no better than sentimentality and self-seeking. It is attitude to attract attention, and win praise of piety. Our Lord warned us of such insincerity when he said, "Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast." Sincere weeping looks *out* and looks *up*; it tries not to look *down*.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*A reasonable call for songs*. We fix attention on the fact that the people of Babylon expected the religion of Jehovah to be a joyous religion. They may have asked for a song partly as a taunt, but below the taunt must have been the association of the Jehovah-religion with harp and song. And men were right in this. The religion of Jehovah, and of Jehovah-Jesus, ought to make hearts glad: we should "sing on our heavenward way." Dr. Barry thinks the call for a song may have meant "an

exhortation to forget a lost home, and make the best of a new country ; " but the psalmist was in no mood to respond to such an exhortation.

I. THE CAPTIVES MIGHT HAVE SUNG EVEN IN CAPTIVITY. They would if their faith in God had mastered their circumstances. It is not much to say for them that they were so overwhelmed by their sorrows, and so crushed by their humiliations, that they could not even sing a song. True, their Zion was a desolation ; but God, their God, still lived. True, they were under his chastening hand ; but then he only chastens for our profit. True, a long waiting-time was before them ; but then God's promises never fail. It was not praiseworthy that they should hang up their harps on the willows for the wind to make melancholy music through them. They had better have kept them in their hands, and cheered each other with enlivening strains of trust and hope. And as to the people of Babylon, they would have honoured God much more if they had responded to the request brightly and cheerfully, put their own feelings aside, and sung them songs of high confidence and joy and hope. These captives who refused a reasonable request did nothing praiseworthy. A Christian's harp has no business *on the willows*.

II. THE CAPTIVES WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SING IF THEY HAD THOUGHT LESS OF THEIR OWN AFFAIRS. Their patriotism was self-centredness ; and that always makes people feel weak and miserable. It led these captives to neglect their duty. They were put in Babylon to witness for God to the Babylonians ; and instead, they made themselves miserable and helpless by brooding over their miseries, so that when a song was asked for in honour of Jehovah, they could not sing. If they had thought about God, and less about themselves and about their country, they would have found the joy of serving even by "singing the Lord's song in a strange land."—R. T.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Sanctified patriotism*. "Let my right hand forget," i.e. be numbed into deadness. The psalm expresses the feelings of an exile who has but just returned from the land of his captivity. He is oppressed with the desolation around him. His heart is heavy and bitter with the memory of wrong and insult from which he has but lately escaped. "He takes his harp, which he could not sound at the bidding of his conquerors by the waters of Babylon ; and now with faltering hand he sweeps the strings, first in low, plaintive, melancholy cadence pouring out his griefs, and then with a loud crash of wild and stormy music, answering to the wild and stormy numbers of his verse, he raises the psalm of vengeance over his foes " (Perowne). "Jerusalem is still the centre round which the exiled sons of Judah build, in imagination, the mansions of their future greatness. In whatever part of the world he may live, the heart's desire of a Jew is to be buried in Jerusalem."

I. THE LOVE OF COUNTRY MAY TAKE THE PLACE OF LOVE OF GOD. Not all patriots are personal servants of God. Indeed, it is curious to observe that, as a matter of fact, active patriots have seldom been actively religious men ; and interest in God has tended to shunt men aside from interest in country, some pious sections even going so far as to withdraw altogether from political and even social life. It is, however, the other side of the matter to which attention is now drawn. Supreme interest in the material things of patriotism tends to loosen the hold on a man of spiritual things. The patriotism of the returned exiles seems very beautiful ; but it was a most serious peril to them, and proved so engrossing that patriotism, not Divine service, became the great national characteristic during the age of the Maccabees. Men fought for *Jerusalem*, not for *God*.

II. THE LOVE OF COUNTRY MAY EXPRESS THE LOVE OF GOD. Of this it is possible to take David as an example. There could not be a worthier instance of patriotism, but back of the patriotism, and its inspiration, was the love of God. His country was God's country ; and service to his country was service to God. And this relation he kept up right through his life, and so he stands, in the historic page, the supreme example of "sanctified patriotism."—R. T.

Vers. 7—9.—*The bad moods of good people*. The psalm closes with what must be regarded as the unrestrained utterance of over-excitement. The psalmist was in a bad mood ; perhaps it did him good, and relieved undue strain, for him thus to utter his bad feelings. But no devices of explanation should be allowed to relieve our conviction

that they were very bad and unworthy feelings; and for us the record can but be a warning against cherishing sentiments of vengeance. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." If we have the spirit that Christ taught us to cherish, we shall not even *pray* against our enemies, we shall only *pray for* them. The last verse of the psalm is wholly repulsive to one who can take the Christian standpoint. With this denunciation of Edom should be compared the Book of Obadiah, and especially vers. 10—15. "It is a fierce outburst of natural resentment, which borrows almost a grandeur from the religious fervour, the devoted patriotism, from which it springs. The psalm is a wonderful mixture of soft melancholy and fiery patriotism."

I. GOOD PEOPLE MAY HAVE BAD MOODS. It is a fact that they do have such moods, and we must make the best that we can of the fact. We should read the Psalms much more sympathetically, and be much less distressed by some of their intense expressions, if we simply accepted the fact. We never judge our friends fairly unless we take into account their bad moods, and slip kindly over what they say at such times.

II. GOOD PEOPLE MAY BE RELIEVED BY SPEAKING OUT WHEN IN THEIR BAD MOODS. It is better to speak out, even dreadful things, than to keep brooding over them in our hearts. Not only is feeling thus relieved, but pitifulness and considerate gentleness is called forth from others. We kindly say, "Poor fellow! he is not quite himself; bear with him awhile." And oftentimes speaking out reveals a man to himself, and becomes the very best cure of his bad mood. One fully expects that the psalmist must have been ashamed of himself when he had said out these dreadful things. How pitiful towards him God must have been!

III. GOOD PEOPLE MUST NEVER KEEP LONG IN THEIR BAD MOODS. It is precisely there that men so often go wrong. Storm-times ought to pass. Passionate moments leave but a light impress. But keep bitter feeling; brood over wrongs; cherish revenge, and the soul must inevitably be deteriorated, and the vision of God must be darkened. We must never forget that he loves *our enemies*.—R. T.

Vers. 1—6.—"*By the rivers of Babylon,*" etc. "The psalm expresses the feelings of an exile who has but just returned from the land of his captivity."

I. THE LOSS OF LIBERTY TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL. 1. *Brings after it the most despondent sorrow.* They hung their harps on the willows, and sat down and wept. 2. *Blights the exercise of the highest gifts.* They could not sing the joyful songs of Zion—the songs of the Lord. An enslaved people lose the power, as a rule, which they had when they were free. 3. *Converts the world into a place of exile.* Home is lost, and the world becomes a "strange," mysterious place.

II. FIDELITY TO THE HOLIEST MEMORIES AND HOPES. "If I forget thee." We cannot blot out from the heart the holiest things, however much they may be mutilated and injured by ourselves or by others. The most eloquent writings in all languages have been pleas for liberty and religion, when nations have been struggling to recover or attain their liberty.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXXVIII.

A CLUSTER of Davidical psalms (Pss. cxxxviii.—cxlv.) here follows. It is not easy to trace any single line of thought connecting them all, or to explain how they come to be so entirely separated from the great bulk of the Davidical psalms. The first two are, in the main, psalms of praise; the next four, psalms of supplication (Pss. cxl.—cxliii.); in Ps. cxliv. praise and supplication are blended; while in Ps. cxlv. praise again forms the main, if not the sole, topic of the

composition. It is a fanciful exegesis which sees in all the eight psalms reflections upon the promise made to David in 2 Sam. vii.

Ver. 1.—I will praise thee with my whole heart (comp. Pss. ix. 1; cxi. 1). Before the gods will I sing praise unto thee. Some suppose the expression, "before the gods," to mean "before the great ones of the earth," and quote Ps. cxix. 46 as parallel. Others think that the imaginary vain gods of the heathen are intended.

Ver. 2.—I will worship toward thy holy temple. The term "temple" here must designate the tabernacle (comp. Ps. v. 8).

And praise thy Name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth. "Mercy" and "truth" are God's two highest attributes (Exod. xxxiv. 6). They were especially shown to Israel in God's promises and his fidelity to them. For thou hast magnified thy Word above all thy Name. Some would amend the text, and read אמרוך, "thy truth," for אמרוך, "thy Word." But if we keep the text, and understand אמרוך as "thy promise," the sense will not be very different. God has magnified his promise, and his faithfulness to it, above all his other revealed attributes.

Ver. 3.—In the day when I cried thou answeredst me. Thy answer came to my prayer almost as soon as it was out of my mouth. And strengthenedst me with strength in my soul. The promptness of thy answer gave my soul fresh strength.

Ver. 4.—All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord. The world shall be converted to thy worship when it is seen how promptly and fully thou answerest prayer (comp. Psa. lxxviii. 31, 32; cii. 15). When they hear the words of thy mouth. The promises that thou makest, and thy performance of them.

Ver. 5.—Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord. They, i.e. the kings, shall sing, no longer in their own misguided heathen ways, but in the ways of the Lord, in the mode prescribed by his Law and practised in his temple (comp. Isa. xlix. 22, 23; lx. 3—5, etc.). For great is the glory of the Lord. (So Isa. lx. 1—3; lxxvi. 18.) It is this "glory" which attracts "all nations and tongues."

Ver. 6.—Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly. Notwith-

standing all God's glory and greatness, he condescends to look upon the lowly, to consider their needs, and to supply them (comp. Isa. lviii. 15). Hence David feels sure that he will not be overlooked (see vers. 7, 8). But the proud he knoweth afar off. God keeps proud men at a distance, does not draw near to them, much less make his abode with them, but leaves them to themselves until they are ripe for punishment.

Ver. 7.—Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me (comp. Ps. xxiii. 4). David "walked in the midst of trouble" during the greater part of his life. When the persecution of Saul was over, he had trouble from foreign enemies (2 Sam. v.—xii.); when these were subdued, his domestic troubles began (2 Sam. xiii.—xix.; 1 Kings v. 53). God, however, from time to time "gave him a reviving." Thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies (comp. Psa. iii. 7; ix. 3—6; xviii. 14—17, etc.). What God had so often done for him, David is confident that he will do again. He will break the power of his enemies, and deliver him from their machinations. And thy right hand. The symbol of strength. Shall save me; or, "deliver me" (comp. Psa. xviii. 35; lx. 5; lxiii. 8; cviii. 6, etc.).

Ver. 8.—The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me; i.e. will complete what he has begun for me—will not leave his work unfinished (comp. Ps. lvii. 2; Phil. i. 6). Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever. Does not suddenly break off and stop. Forsake not the works of thine own hands. This is probably more than a mere personal request. David sees in God's care for himself a portion of his great providential scheme for the redemption of the world.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The goodness of God.* There are very few psalms where so much is crowded into a very small compass as in this. The writer in a very few strokes brings out those features in the character of God which make him to be the One who is worthy of our deepest reverence, of our fullest confidence, of our most grateful praise. We have—

I. HIS LOVING-KINDNESS. (Ver. 2.)

II. HIS FAITHFULNESS. (Ver. 2.) The psalmist gives thanks for "thy truth," and goes on to say that God has done that for him which more than fulfils his word of promise (see Josh. xxiii. 14). It is not only in the ordering of our outward life, but in his dealing with us in the gospel of his Son, that "God is faithful" (1 Cor. i. 9). It is "he that is true" who speaks to us from heaven (see Rev. iii. 7), and summons us to his service and to his friendship. It is the unvarying testimony of Christian men, as their course closes, that their Divine Lord has been faithful to them, working in them and doing for them all that he had promised to them.

III. THE CONDITIONS OF HIS FELLOWSHIP. (Ver. 6.) There is nothing more explicitly revealed, both in Old Testament and New, than this doctrine of humility.

Throughout Scripture, pride is presented to us as the insuperable obstacle blocking the way to the favour of God: humbleness of heart is held before us as the very gateway of his kingdom. We can see the reason why it should be so. 1. It is the truth. When we take a high view of ourselves, we see ourselves in a false light; when a lowly view, we see ourselves as we are. 2. It is the one way to the admission of Divine wisdom. The haughty heart will not listen when God speaks; the humble heart is open and receptive. 3. It is the necessary condition of receiving Jesus Christ as our Divine Saviour. He came "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." It was the complacent Pharisee who stood aloof from him, and who rejected his doctrine; it was the consciously unworthy who "drew nigh unto him for to hear him" (Luke xv. 2), and who "went into the kingdom" before the self-righteous and the respectable. Hence we find our Lord beginning his public teaching with the Beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 3); hence we have his word, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Matt. xxiii. 12; and see Matt. xviii. 3). 4. To be lowly minded is to be like our Lord himself (Matt. xi. 29; Phil. ii. 7—9).

IV. HIS SUSTAINING AND REVIVING GRACE. (Vers. 3—7.) In the day of our trouble we "cry unto the Lord." It is an instinct of our religious nature (see Ps. cvii.). It is the natural refuge of the devout (Ps. xli. 1). It is in accordance with the Divine desire (Ps. l. 15). His promise (and his performance) is to sustain our spirit, to "strengthen us with strength in our soul." We think that we cannot possibly endure the weight of the afflictions that press upon us; but he makes us to know "the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe;" he "revives us," he renews our hope, our confidence, our courage; he "girds us with all-sufficient grace" for the task we have to undertake, for the suffering we are called to bear. The "morning of joy" which is promised us may be a long way off; many dark hours may have to pass before that will dawn; but during the night of sorrow he will "give us songs," he will sustain our spirit, he will make us to glory in infirmity," because "Christ's own power rests upon us." There is a more signal proof of his Divine power and goodness than that which, perhaps, in human weakness, we prefer, viz.—

V. HIS DELIVERING GRACE. (Ver. 7, latter part.) For God does sometimes, and indeed often, interpose on behalf of his children. His "right hand," the right hand of his power and of his righteousness, is laid, not then and there on our souls to revive, but on the enemy to subdue him, or on the tangled events to undo them, on the reduced circumstances to raise and restore them. One touch of that wise, strong hand—the touch of a link in the chain far out of sight—and the trouble is over. It is right for us to ask this of God, whatever be the trial through which we are passing; but we must ask reverently, and in the spirit of obedience, quite ready to find that he will not take away the cross, but give us strength to bear it.

VI. THE CONTINUOUSNESS AND COMPLETENESS OF HIS WORK WITHIN US. (Ver. 8.) 1. We are God's workmanship (Eph. ii. 10; 1 Cor. iii. 9; 2 Cor. v. 5). It is he that hath made us what we are "in Christ Jesus." It is his Spirit that has "renewed us in the spirit of our mind." Our repentance, our faith, our peace and rest of heart, our hope of heaven, our interest in the work of God, our readiness or eagerness to serve in the vineyard of Christ,—all this is, we gratefully own, the work of God within us. 2. We may count on its continuance. God will *not* forsake the work of his own hands. If he "pronounces good" the objects in nature, which are the product of his skill and power, how much more will he be pleased with the cleansed heart, with the renewed will, with the obedient spirit of his own child! He will not leave *that* to be lost on the waste; he will not abandon *that* to the mercy of wind and wave. We may and *must* ask his continued care of us, his guardianship and guidance and replenishment; but, thus asking for it, we may count confidently upon it. 3. We may look with a firm hope to the completion of his work in us; he will "perfect that which concerneth us." His interest in us, his kindness toward us, will not lessen as we live our life in him and before him. As we grow into his image, and as we do his work more faithfully and effectively, his love will not lessen nor his grace slacken. This will "endure for ever." It will follow us all the way, until we are "perfected in Christ;" until we are "meet for the Master's use" in a higher and larger sphere. For that post in his heavenly kingdom which he will have ready for us we may feel sure that he is fitting

us, not only by abounding privilege and wise discipline, but by gracious influences from his Holy Spirit.

The goodness of God has large issues. 1. Its effect on the enlightened mind is *whole-hearted praise* (vers. 1, 2). A deep sense of all that God is to us, and of all that we are to him, fills our heart and constrains us to *fervent* and to *public* devotion. Whatever is meant particularly by the words, "before the gods," we may be sure that the psalmist intended to speak of public worship. He would not be satisfied with a thankful and loving spirit, good and right as that was; he would proclaim to all his sense of the loving-kindness and the faithfulness of Jehovah. Full and fearless expression is one part of sacred duty. 2. Its effect on those who stand without is correspondingly great. "The Lord hath done great things for them," said the Babylonian witnesses (Ps. cxxvi. 2). If we will so submit ourselves to Divine influences that our lives bear the mark and impress of God's hand, there will be excited in the minds of those outside the Church of Christ a wondering admiration of the power of the gospel, and they, too, will join in praising God!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Exultation in God.* What a contrast between this psalm and the previous one! There the sad-hearted writer asks, "How can we sing?" Here the psalmist can and will do nothing but sing. The effect of this spirit is seen throughout the psalm.

I. IT WILL OPENLY CONFESS GOD. (Vers. 1, 2.) "Before the gods," meaning, we think, those high princes and potentates—god-like in their majesty, power, and in the abject homage and deference that men paid to them—under whose authority and oppression they had so long lived. The den of lions, the burning fiery furnace, had hitherto been the penalty which had to be paid, did any man dare to praise Jehovah in the presence of these mighty kings. But it had been done all the same; and here the psalmist declares he will do it again. And, indeed, the spirit of praise is irrepressible. It must tell out its gladness in God.

II. AND WILL DECLARE THE REASON WHY. 1. *Because of the Lord's "loving-kindness."* (Ver. 2.) We do not know what special instance of this called forth the praise here expressed; but he whose eyes are opened of the Lord to mark his loving-kindness will never lack loving-kindness to mark. 2. *His "truth."* The Lord's fidelity to his Word. What he promised he performed. How unbelieving we too often are! Yet those who have trusted the Lord have never had cause to regret their doing so. 3. *And this in so emphatic and extraordinary a manner.* "Thou hast magnified thy Word," etc. The Lord's name and renown for fidelity were great already, and had led to high expectation; but what the Lord had done had surpassed all expectation—it had been "above all thy Name." 4. *And this had been a matter of the psalmist's own personal experience.* (Ver. 3.) Whether or no the particular burden, for relief from which he had cried unto the Lord, had been taken away, we do not know; but if, as is so often the case, it had not, there had been given strength to bear it—"Thou strengthenedst me," etc. One way or the other, the cry of the believer is heard, and either the trouble itself is removed, or grace sufficient, not only to bear it, but to enable us to glory in it, is given instead; and this, surely, is the better of the two. And all this the psalmist had himself experienced (2 Cor. xii. 9).

III. WILL CONFIDENTLY EXPECT GREAT BLESSING AS THE RESULT OF HIS TESTIMONY. (Vers. 4, 5.) Kings, not merely common people, but kings—a very unlikely class—shall be moved by it. They shall come away from the paths of sin into the ways of the Lord; they shall be really converted. And, what is more, they shall "sing in" those ways; they shall rejoice and be glad. And such confident expectation will ever result from this spirit.

IV. WILL DISCLAIM ALL WORTH AND GOODNESS OF ITS OWN. (Ver. 6.) He confesses that he is one of the lowly ones, and that it is all of the Lord's condescension that he has been noticed at all,

V. WILL GO FORWARD WITHOUT FEAR. (Ver. 7.) 1. *Of trouble*; even though he walk in the midst of it; for God will revive him. 2. *Of his enemies*; for God will save him. 3. *Of personal failure*; for (ver. 8) "the Lord will perfect," etc. He might, and probably would, fail; but God will not allow of that.

VI. BUT WILL NOT, THEREFORE, PRESUME. Instead of this, the psalm ends with the humble prayer, "Forsake not the works," etc. Such are some of the blessed fruits of the spirit of exultation in God. Let us cherish it more by confession, by trust, by personal experience.—S. C.

Vers. 1—3.—*Valiant for the Lord*. The Septuagint ascribes this psalm to Haggai or Zechariah. It can hardly be by David. But it was by some greatly tried but triumphant saint.

I. SEE HOW HE STANDS UP FOR GOD. Note his boldness. Not only would he praise God with his whole heart, but he would do this in the very face, in the teeth as it were, of the heathen gods; so would he defy and scorn them whilst honouring the Lord in whom he trusted. So would he strengthen his faith and love, as by such valiant confession they ever are strengthened. Compare Daniel worshipping towards the temple.

II. AND VINDICATES GOD'S INSULTED ATTRIBUTES—HIS LOVING-KINDNESS AND HIS TRUTH. These were insulted when Israel was in exile; the heathen would laugh at the idea of these Jews being the objects of God's loving-kindness, as they affirmed they were; and where was the truth of God, seeing that they were so very far from realizing the promises of God? But this saint of God declares that he will praise the Lord for these very things; he declares that God had helped and strengthened him, and shown to him his loving-kindness, etc. And this beyond all that even the great Name of God had led him to expect. For next he—

III. ASSERTS THE HONOUR OF HIS WORD. Many aver that God is glorious in nature, in the visible works of his hands; but that his Word often seems to have failed. But the psalmist says, No; so far from failing or falling short, God has "magnified his Word above," etc. True, there is glory in nature (Ps. xix.). But there is more in God's Word. For it speaks with clearer voice, with no need of interpreter, as nature needs; its revelation is far more complete and effectual.

IV. AND GRATEFULLY DECLARES WHEREFORE HE DOES ALL THIS. For he has put his faith in God to practical test. He cried unto the Lord, and then and there, that very day, "the Lord answered him, and strengthened," etc. This was matter of actual experience. He knew this, did not dream it, or tell of it as a mere theory. Oh the power of personal testimony! We cannot be valiant for the Lord unless we have it. But why should we not? We may.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*The Word and the Name*. In order to understand the declaration of our text, let us—

I. INQUIRE THE MEANING OF THE WORD AND THE NAME. 1. *The Name*. What is the import of this? The expression is one that perpetually occurs in Scripture, and generally it has much the same meaning. In Rom. i. 19, 20 it is spoken of as "that which may be known of God;" and he refers to "the things that are made" as a source of such knowledge. Thus St. Paul declares that ever since the Creation the unseen God has revealed himself by means of the works of his hands. The Name of God, therefore, means all the manifestations of God, howsoever made; but in the Old Testament it means more commonly the manifestation of God through his works, whether in creation or in providence. Then: 2. *The Word*. This has a threefold signification. (1) The written Scripture—the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms—and now, since Christ came, the Scriptures of the New Testament. These contain the Word of God, and hence commonly receive the title of the Word of God. But (2) the Word means also that spiritual communication from God to the heart of his servants. Hence we often read, "The Word of the Lord came," etc. God speaks to the soul by different means; but it is what God says that is his Word. (3) And chiefly, *there is God's revelation of himself in Christ*. He is "the Word," which was in the beginning, which became flesh, and dwelt amongst us, so that we could behold him, and, in seeing him, see the Father also. The Word of God, then, means God's

revelation of himself through the Scriptures, the Spirit, and through his Son Christ our Lord. Either and all are God's Word.

II. GOD'S NAME AND WORD HAVE MUCH IN COMMON. For: 1. *Both reveal God.* His existence, greatness, power, wisdom, unity, unchangeableness. We do not add his love, because there are those who deny that the love of God is to be seen in the natural world. They speak of "Nature, red in tooth and claw;" they see only her ruthlessness and frequent ferocity; stern law, but little love. 2. *Neither ever wears out the patience or the love of those who study them.* The more they search into God's works or Word, the more they find in them. Both seem to be inexhaustible mines, whose riches never fail. 3. *And both have a perpetual freshness.* No human works or words can be compared to them for this.

III. AND GOD HAS MAGNIFIED BOTH. He has revealed himself to men by both, and drawn them nearer to himself. It is foolish and wrong, therefore, for any to disparage one at the expense of the other. Some there are who boast of the study of nature only; others have no patience with such study, but insist that the Word alone is to have our regard. But both are wrong, for God hath magnified his Word and his Name.

IV. STILL, HE HAS PUT THE GREATER HONOUR ON HIS WORD. 1. *The revelation of nature is dependent on that of his Word for its comprehension.* The Word is the key of his works: without it, men cannot interpret his works. 2. *His Word declares higher truths than his works ever can.* The love of God; the whole plan of salvation; life eternal; holiness; the truth of the Trinity, etc. 3. *His Word accomplishes far more for man's highest interests than his works do.* See this in man's knowledge of God, and whence it came; in the instruction which we derive from his works; we could not have had this but for his Word (see Ps. xix.). In the understanding of God's providence; in showing us God's will concerning us; in revealing his grace; in the subduing of our will to himself;—whatever the teachings of God's work may have done for us in these respects, his Word, we must all own, has done far more.

V. THE SPREADING OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WORD IS, THEREFORE, OUR HIGHEST INTEREST AND DUTY. Men are saying to-day—Educate, teach art, science, philosophy; provide for men better homes, surroundings, and opportunities; and much more to like effect; and only a fool will despise what they say. But the real need of man is for some power which will touch his heart and change his nature; and this only the Word of God can do. Therefore let us prize that Word for ourselves, make it known to others, and ever maintain the truth that it and it alone can meet man's universal, greatest, and constant need.—S. C.

Ver. 8.—*"The Lord will perfect."* I. LET US LOOK AT THE SPEAKER. He is a man like ourselves; but as we look on him, we note how bright his eye, how radiant his countenance, how calm yet how joyous his tone, how happy in his conviction he seems to be, as he keeps saying to himself, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me." Then he pauses a moment, as if some doubt or question had entered his mind, and he adds, "Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever;" and then, with an upward look of intense devotion, addressing his words to the Lord, he prays, "Forsake not the works of thine own hands." Now, as we thus in thought gaze upon the man, and feel that assuredly he has got hold of a secret that too many of us do not possess, some less-favoured one than the speaker comes up to him with wonder, wistfulness, perplexity, and desire written plainly on his countenance, and begins to—

II. ASK HIM A FEW QUESTIONS. He asks: 1. "*What do you mean when you say, 'The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me'?*" You seem quite sure and very happy about it; but what do you mean?" The man replies, "I mean that whatever really concerns me the Lord will see after, and bring it to a perfect issue, whether it be what has to do with my outward circumstances, or with what is of far more importance—my standing in his sight, the condition of my soul. There are many things which concern me; but what they are I leave to the Lord to determine; for I often find, as many others have told me is true of them likewise, that I much concern myself about things which, after all, do not really concern me, and about which, therefore, I need not trouble. But whatever does really concern me, and especially my soul's full salvation, I am sure the Lord will perfect." 2. "*But how do you know*

all this?" so his questioner asks again; and the psalmist is at no loss for reply. "Well," he says, "I know the Lord has begun his work in me. I am as certain of this as I am that I am alive; he has given me new tastes, dispositions, and desires; the sins I once loved I now hate, and the holiness which heretofore I had no care for I now long after; hence I am sure the Lord has begun his work in me. And it is not his way to leave off what he once begins. Why should he? Is he lacking in power or love? Further, what strong guarantees I have thus to believe! The honour of the Divine Name is pledged to keep those who trust in him; the atonement of the Lord Jesus—for will he not 'with him also freely give us all things'?—the power of the Holy Spirit, which worketh in me now; the promises, so many, so great, and precious, contained in the Holy Scriptures; and my own experience thus far, and that of many others;—all encourage and establish my faith that 'the Lord will perfect that,' etc." 3. "*But are you not afraid?*" it is further asked; "for while all must admit the force of the arguments you have urged, yet there are facts which it seems to us may reasonably lead you to feel less confident than you now seem to be. Are we not perpetually warned against departing from the living God, grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit? How many are the Scriptures which bid us, by direct precept or by actual example, to fear lest we should come short of eternal life! And have not many actually made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience? Think of all those who, on the night of the Passover, came out of Egypt, but yet never entered into Canaan; their carcases fell in the wilderness, because of their unbelief. And have not you a corrupt nature, an evil bias, a heart prone to evil, and loving it all too well? And are not temptations everywhere, and so many of them subtle and strong, and before which many souls have fallen? And do you not know that you, as do even the best of men, often sin, often transgress God's commandment by thought, word, or deed?" Then we notice that he looks sad for a while, as if he cannot deny what has been urged; but presently he looks up, and his eyes are turned not to us, but lifted heavenward; and we hear him say, "Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever;" and he adds the prayer, "Forsake not the work," etc. So we cannot but—

III. NOTE THE ROCK ON WHICH HE RESTS. It is the ever-enduring mercy of the Lord on which he stays himself by means of continued faith and prayer. It is not his own strength or good resolves, but that ever-enduring mercy which fortifies him against all the risks and perils which he knows beset him; and he will abide in that mercy through continual prayer and trust.

IV. TRY TO LEARN HIS SECRET. Why should not we have like confidence? Of course, ere ever this be possible, the Lord's work must have begun in us; we must have yielded ourselves up to him in real repentance and faith; but if we have done that, why, instead of our too common misgiving and fear, have we not this glad persuasion that is expressed in our text? 1. *How it would honour God!* For it would be all through simple and utter trust in him—through nothing whatever of ourselves, but all of him. 2. *And how it would bless us!* What sunshine of the soul we should enjoy! our lives would be radiant with joy, and our lips filled with praise; the joy of the Lord would be our strength. 3. *And how, through us, others would be blessed!* The writer of Ps. li. says if but the Lord will restore to him the joy of his salvation, and uphold him with his free spirit, "then will I teach transgressors," etc. (ver. 13). And, without doubt, it is only as we are confident in the Lord that we render effective service and become channels of blessing to others: which God grant we may!—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Unity, entireness, and sincerity in worship.* "With my whole heart." The tenor and tone of the psalm suggest the authorship of Zerubbabel or of Nehemiah. Some important success had evidently been just gained; but there was still grave cause for anxiety. Some work of pressing need was seriously impeded. We can easily fit this into the times and experiences of Nehemiah. There was, consequently, the temptation to mingle fears with trust, and offer to God thanksgivings and praises that were imperfect, incomplete, the expression of the "divided heart." And oftentimes in life the godly man is placed in such a position as is represented in this psalm. He has received some sign of the Divine favour which calls for praise and encourages trust; and yet he cannot shut his eyes to the fact that this intervention of God has only lifted the fringe of his difficulties. They hang heavy about him still; and he

can hardly keep back the repining that God does not deal with the *big things* that trouble him. So his praise is in danger of being half-hearted. The psalmist indicates what the good man should do at such times. He should fully learn what God would teach by the single blessing, and, letting trust blend with thanksgiving, praise God with his *whole heart*.

I. PRAISE WITH THE WHOLE HEART IS PRAISE WITHOUT RESERVE. How reserve may spoil prayer we are often pointing out. It is illustrated in St. Augustine's prayer, "Lord, convert me, *but not yet!*" It is not so often seen that reserve may spoil praise. We may praise for something; but feel we cannot praise for everything. We may praise formally, and reserve heart-feeling. We may praise as duty, and yet keep doubts and questionings as to God's perfect wisdom and goodness in our hearts. Our praises are usually left to take their chance. We do not assure ourselves that we have praise-feelings, and worthy ones, before we offer praise or unite in offering it. And yet praise needs culture quite as truly as prayer.

II. PRAISE WITH THE WHOLE HEART IS PRAISE WITHOUT GUILT. Conscious guilt absolutely spoils praise; makes it unworthy and even offensive to God. The consciously insincere man is rejected. "Thy heart is not right with God;" and there can be no acceptance of thy worship. But what the godly man has to fear is "unconscious, unrecognized" insincerity; a guilt that he does not suspect, and so lets go, lets it do its evil work in spoiling his praise.—R. T.

Ver. 1.—The term "*gods*" as a synonym for "*great ones*." The allusion may be to the rulers of Israel (Ps. cxix. 46). The 'Speaker's Commentary,' however, thinks the meaning can only be this, "Before, or in presence of, the gods of the heathen, *i.e.* in scorn of, in sight of, the idols, who can do nothing, I will praise Jehovah, who does miracles for me and his people." Jennings and Lowe prefer the rendering, "before the national *elohim*," or great men; meaning that, even before persons high in office, in whose presence he would be naturally abashed, he will declare the praise of his Deliverer, Jehovah. It is not easy to fit these words into the experience of an Israelite among his own people. Such a man was not in the least likely to speak of the elders, princes, and statesmen of his own nation as *gods*. That term does not suit the Hebrew mind or association. But if we could fix the psalm as Nehemiah's, and connect it with his success in securing the permission of the king to go to Jerusalem—and this he regarded as a remarkable answer to his prayer—then the term "*gods*" may well enough be applied to the princes, councillors, courtiers, and great men of Babylon, to whom Nehemiah's commission would be known, and before whom he would testify that God had heard his prayer, and made the way plain for him. Nehemiah would call the princes of Judah his *brethren*; he might well call the princes of Babylon, with a tinge of satire, "*gods*."

I. WHEREVER A MAN IS, THERE HE IS TO WITNESS FOR GOD BY PRAISING HIM. It is an absolute and ever-working law that there can no more be religious life without outward expression than there can be life in the seed without a blade thrusting through the soil. And the natural, necessary, and ever-influential expression of the religious life is *praise*—the praise of God. That (1) tells the sincerity of the religious life; and (2) tells the character of the religious life; and (3) tells the worthiness and winsomeness of him who is both the Love and the Life of the godly man. So praise is testimony, and the most persuasive of testimonies.

II. WHEREVER A MAN IS, THERE CAN BE NO CONDITIONS ALLOWED TO RESTRAIN PRAISE. He may be among great men and fear. But then he must praise, only he must be wise in his praise. He may be among scoffers. Still he must praise, only he must be judicious in his praise. There is in relation to praise a being "*wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*."—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*God acting beyond expectation*. The term "*word*," in the last clause of this verse, means "*promise*." So great are God's promises, and so faithful and complete is his performance of them, as even to surpass the expectations which the greatness of his Name has excited. The psalmist often speaks of Jehovah's Name, or reputation, or honour, being at stake. Here the poet can say that the praise won is beyond anything that could have been anticipated. Generally, the Name of God

stands for the whole manifestation of himself. Or we may render thus, "For thou hast magnified thy characteristic of fidelity to promises above all the other characteristics implied in thy Name Jehovah."

I. GOD'S NAME IS THE BASIS OF OUR EXPECTATIONS. A name gathers up the characteristics of the person to whom it is applied, whenever it is a true name, and not a mere fanciful appellation, as names given to children now are. A true name embodies our apprehension of a person, fixes our relation to him, expresses the grounds of our confidence in him, and becomes a basis on which we rest our expectations of him. And so we give our own special names, pet-names, to those whom we more especially love and trust. And in the same way God's Name gathers up into a term his attributes; not, however, as intellectually conceived only, but also as personally experienced and apprehended in the experiences and relationships of the individual, and of the race. On that Name we build our expectations. "This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our Guide even unto the end." But this has to be taken into careful account—man never raises expectations that compass the possibilities of the Name.

II. GOD HIMSELF GOES BEYOND THE EXPECTATIONS BASED UPON HIS NAME. "Thou hast magnified thy Word above all thy Name." God does not go beyond himself; but he does go beyond our expectation. He does for us more than we can ask or think. In special emergencies of life this is precisely what the godly man feels. He was sure God would help him; but when the help has come, he has found that God surprised him with the fulness and the grace of his arrangements. This we can associate with Nehemiah. We can realize his almost overwhelming delight and surprise when God overcame his difficulties for him in such a quick and gracious way.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Recognized answer to prayer.* "In the day that I called thou answeredst me; thou didst encourage me with strength in my soul." Here prayer had evidently been offered for some special thing; what it was we are not told, nor does it greatly matter. Our attention is fixed on the fact that the answer came at once, and was recognized as the answer. We have ways in which we expect answers to come; and because they do not come in the expected ways, we fail to recognize them as answers at all. But it cannot be becoming for us to fix conditions to the prayers we offer. There can be no "making terms" with God.

I. THE ANSWER IN THIS CASE WAS IMMEDIATE. "In the day when I called." We need not press the word "day." It is but equivalent to "at the very time." Compare the experience of Daniel (Dan. ix. 21), and that of our Divine Lord (John xii. 27, 28). It is true that there is sometimes delay in the answer to our prayer; but, in that case, delay is the answer. The fact is that the answer is always immediate; and of this we can be sure, because the attention is always immediate. Illustrate by the orderliness of the business man, who sees to everything at once. Serious injury is done to Christian life by suggesting that God is very likely to *delay*. He is much more likely to answer *at once*.

II. THE ANSWER IN THIS CASE WAS NOT A SHAPING OF CIRCUMSTANCES. It often was in the Old Testament days; and this is strikingly illustrated in the prayer of Abraham's servant (Gen. xxiv.). The higher truth comes into view in the New Testament. St. Paul prays for a change of circumstances—the removal of the "thorn in the flesh." The answer did not change his conditions.

III. THE ANSWER IN THIS CASE WAS A DIVINE INWARD STRENGTHENING. "Thou didst encourage me with strength in my soul." To St. Paul the answer was, "My grace is sufficient for thee." The cry of genuine and heartfelt prayer is the expression of conscious *weakness*. It is, therefore, really a cry for strength. And the best answer is *strength*. But that is not what we seem to ask for, or think we ask for, and so we mistake the answer.

IV. THE ANSWER, IN THIS CASE, INVOLVED MASTERY OF CIRCUMSTANCES BY THE STRENGTHENED SOUL. Strength received in Gethsemane prayer-time enabled our Lord to endure Calvary; and so the triumph of the cross was the answer to his prayer, though it came as inward strengthening. What we should watch for is the immediate answer to our prayer for soul-strengthening. Answers in our circumstances may be left to follow.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The provision of inward strength.* “And strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.” Whether this precisely renders the thought of the psalmist may be doubtful. It certainly presents a suggestive thought to us. The statement is certainly true of God’s ways with us. His best blessings come to the inward, spiritual self—to the true individuality, the real us. The various rendering is, “Thou madest me proud;” the Revised Version gives, “Thou didst encourage me with strength in my soul;” the Prayer-book Version has, “and enduedst me with much strength.” God does, as he may see fitting, make provision for the needs of our life, by altering and mastering our circumstances. But if he does not work for us in this way, we may be quite sure that he will “strengthen us with strength in our soul;” answering us as he did St. Paul, saying, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” Inward strength to bear is a far higher provision than any mere mastery of the ills and troubles of life. In recalling sorrows, for the bearing of which we had inward peace, because our mind was stayed on God, we are conscious of recalling the noblest times of our past experience, and the times when we were most truly master of our circumstances. The Patriarch Job mastered Sabaeans, and Chaldeans, and lightnings, and the four winds, and a tempting wife, and Satan himself, by being soul-strong, and able to say, “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” We are accustomed to say that a man is not utterly lost until he has *lost heart*. But if God supplies inward strength, we never shall lose heart, and so never shall be lost. God is prepared ever to make a man’s soul triumphant over his circumstances. He may be very poor; God can make his soul very rich. He may be very full of troubles; God can make his soul quiet and calm with Divine peace; God can comfort him with the support of “the everlasting arms.” Outwardly a man may be tossed about, worn, wearied, wounded, almost broken; yet inwardly he may be kept in perfect peace; he may be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The Divine regard for the lowly.* “Lowliness and humility are the court-dress of God; he who wears them will please him well.” “Respect unto.” Bends down to look on them; draws them near to communion with him; gives them office and place beside him; entrusts them with honourable commissions for him. There is sharp contrast with God’s treatment of the proud. Them, too, he knoweth; but them he knoweth *afar off*; he keeps them at a distance; he has no intimacy with them, and could have no pleasure in their company. The proud man is the self-sufficient man, who is his own centre. He does not want God, and would not know what to do with him if he had him. And there is no reason why God should want him, or trouble to find a place for one who does not want any place found for him.

I. GOD HAS REGARD FOR THE LOWLY BECAUSE THEY WANT HIM. All good persons are fully responsive to frail, weak things, that are entirely dependent on them. See the mother with a sickly child; or the teacher with a backward but loving child. Lowliness is a *noble* quality. It must not be confused with timidity, or self-conscious humiliation. It is that kind of estimate a man has of himself, when he has set before himself a worthy standard. But what is here more especially in view is that lowliness is the consciousness of want; and, in its best form, the consciousness of want which only God can supply. The lowly man is “not sufficient of himself;” “his sufficiency is of God.” It is of the very nature of God to be the “Friend of the friendless and the faint.”

II. GOD HAS REGARD FOR THE LOWLY BECAUSE HE WANTS THEM. God ever alone, in solitary and isolated grandeur, is a totally inconceivable idea. God is Love; and love wants somebody to love. And the lowly ones are precisely those whom God can love, whose love he can enjoy, and on whom his love can be wisely expended. Bonar has a striking hymn, beginning, “Thou needest me, even *me*.”

III. GOD HAS REGARD FOR THE LOWLY BECAUSE THEY ARE LIKE HIM. It may be difficult to recognize lowliness as an essential of the Divine character, but it is of the essence of goodness; and it is plain enough in God manifest in the flesh. Kinness in this brings man and Christ, man and God, into loving fellowship.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Walking in trouble.* “Though I walk in the midst of trouble.” This suggests a particular phase of human experience. Sometimes troubles come upon us,

crash after crash, until we are, like Job, utterly crushed; and can but clothe ourselves with sackcloth, and sit in ashes. But the text indicates a more frequent, if less readily recognized, experience. The tone is gentler; there is no crashing of sudden calamity, no bursting of wild and desolating storms. The man is moving to and fro in the ordinary scenes of life, meeting his obligations and doing his duties. But everywhere things seem to go wrong; on all sides trouble, anxiety, worry, seem to attend him. He cannot get free night or day. These dog his steps continually. *He walks in the midst of trouble.* How true to universal experience all this is!

I. WALKING IN TROUBLE IS A MOST DEPRESSING EXPERIENCE. The constant wearing produces a fixed weariness; the constant worry produces a fixed fretfulness; the constant fear of some new anxiety produces a fixed hopelessness. Because nothing goes right, we are too ready to say nothing *ever will* go right. And then the heart is taken out of us; we become unfitted for battling with difficulty, and so largely increase our troubles; we make them for ourselves, as well as have them made for us. And those we make for ourselves are always the worst to deal with. There is one striking illustration of this depressed mood in the life of David. He walked in the midst of various and well-nigh overwhelming troubles, and in a hopelessness that was both pitiful and sinful, he exclaimed, "I shall now one day perish by the hand of Saul!" It may further be shown that such depressed moods, responsive to surrounding worry, very much depend on natural disposition, especially on that nervous irritability which can always see, or expect, evil.

II. WALKING IN TROUBLE MAKES US OBY FOR DIVINE REVIVING. "Thou wilt revive me." The state of mind induced by the circumstances is much more important in the sight of God than the circumstances. And this the good man recognizes. His hope is in God's soul-cheering, God's inward reviving, God's keeping from despair, and freshening trust and hope. And God does lead the walker out "into a large place," in his own good time.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*God completes what he undertakes.* (See Phil. i. 6.) "The Lord will carry to an end all things that concern my welfare." Man lives and moves through life surrounded with unfinished things. He has constantly to say, "My purposes are broken off!" He is always attempting what he cannot accomplish, beginning what he cannot carry through. God must be thought of as always having a distinct purpose in whatever he undertakes, and as active until that purpose is realized. Illustrate by reference to 2 Sam. vii. 25—29.

I. GOD ALWAYS HAS A PURPOSE. Thoughtless action, unpremeditated action, can never be associated with God. Men drift into things without knowing where they are going to. God never does. Men may talk about "waiting for something to turn up." God never does. He is the Infinite Mind; and mind is put into everything he does. He knows the end from the beginning. We have always this consolation—there are no accidents to God. He is never surprised, never taken at unawares. He has a meaning in everything he does, a purpose in every design he forms. "Throughout the ages one unceasing purpose runs."

II. GOD'S PURPOSE IS NEVER FORGOTTEN. Man so often crowds his life with interests that he forgets what he intended to do. He is carried away with new attractions, and quite forgets what he meant to do. So man's path is beset with the "young lions" of unfinished schemes—things dropped and forgotten in order to take up some new thing. God never forgets. To us he may seem to; and this may be *our* explanation of his delay. His purpose is kept ever in view.

III. GOD'S PURPOSE IS NEVER FRUSTRATED. Man's often is. He proposes to himself too much, and life beats him. Or what he proposes crosses what somebody else proposes, and the opposition beats him. God never proposes to himself what is beyond himself; for he can do what he will. God permits no rivalry of human purposes to cross or frustrate his perfect plan.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The greatness of the Word of God.* "For thou hast magnified thy Word above all thy Name."

I. GOD'S WORD IS GREATER THAN HIS MATERIAL WORK. His word of command was the cause of creation. "Let there be light;" "He commanded, and it stood fast."

II. GOD'S WORD EXPRESSES MORE THAN HIS WORK. God's Word is his uttered thought, and expresses more than the utmost science of nature can utter. Goes beyond all the teachings of chemistry, electricity, etc.

III. GOD'S WORD CAN REGENERATE HIS WORK. In man and in all intelligent beings, when it has been injured and partly destroyed. Christ, *the Word of God's regenerating power.*

IV. GOD'S WORD ABIDES UNCHANGEABLY, WHILE SOME OF HIS WORK ALTERS AND PASSES MANY. "Wax old, as doth a garment; but thou remainest," etc.

V. GOD'S WORD OF PROMISE IS GREATER THAN ANYTHING HE HAS DONE. That Word furnishes not only the pillars on which the present order of things rests, but is the ground of all the new and future. Of whatever is to come, in the outward and inward universe of man.—S.

Ver. 8.—*God's perfecting.* "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands."

I. THE PSALMIST'S CONVICTION. Words such as these are said only in the strongest grandest moments of a good man's life. David, St. Paul, St. Peter, St. John, could say them; but the majority of believers in Christ cannot say them at all times; only at certain privileged moments of their lives. And the reason is—they see their own imperfections more strongly than God's unchangeable love towards them; that salvation has a multitude of convictions as well as a multitude of promises. Look at some of the words of Christ and the apostles, and ask what they mean (John x. 27—29); Paul (Rom. viii.; Phil. i. 6; 1 Pet. v. 10). I think it may be said that the meaning of these uniform utterances is that the strength of God's faithful love to us, and not the strength of our love to him, is the pledge of our salvation—the guarantee that we shall not be left to perish in our sins and weakness. We may unfold this in two particulars. 1. *That God will do for us towards this end what we are unable to do for ourselves.* Some think little of their sins. Forgiveness, renewed day by day, extending to the new sins I commit. I have not the *right* nor the *disposition* (often) to pardon myself. He will give grace—that is, help and strength—according to our needs. "But my God shall supply *all your need* according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ." He will permit no temptation to assail us for which he does not furnish the means of resistance. He can do no more. In dying, we shall be utterly helpless in ourselves; but he will be with us to save and preserve—to lead us through the dark labyrinth. He will raise us up at the last day. 2. *God will do for us what we are not willing to do for ourselves.* A great part of our danger arises more from want of will than want of strength. He will institute *purifying processes*. "Every branch in me that beareth fruit he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." We are averse to this—to trials and afflictions and discipline. The clay does not know into what beautiful shapes it may be wrought by the hand of the potter. Gold when it is in the ore does not know its need of the furnace, to be separated and refined from the dross. We are disinclined, naturally, to love him supremely, and to employ the means that will lead to it. He conquers our aversion by successive revelations of his love. "He worketh *in us* the willing and the doing" by his own sovereign will.

II. THE GROUNDS OF THIS GLORIOUS CONVICTION. 1. *God's enduring, unchanging mercy.* His disposition to pardon—his delight in saving. Can it be a question, even for a moment, whether God would rather save you or allow you to perish? "His mercy endureth for ever;" "He delighteth in mercy;" "Who is a God like unto thee?" "Then he will *endure* you and save you, though you have many sins in your heart—if you do not love the sins so that you cannot be separated from them. He will endure many *backslidings*, till he has healed you of them. Will endure your cold *earthliness* of mind, till he has made you heavenly minded, etc. 2. *God will not forsake the work of his own hands.* Has not forsaken the earth, or the sun, or any work in the material universe, much less the most precious work he ever began. "The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed." The sculptor may leave his statue unfinished, the artist his picture, and the poet his epic; but God the *Ever-Living* will not forsake the work of his hands.

CONCLUSION. 1. Take courage. 2. Be diligent to make calling and election sure.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXXXIX.

A song of praise to God for his omniscience, his omnipresence, and his marvellous powers, ending with a prayer for the destruction of the wicked, and for the purifying from evil of the psalmist's own heart. The psalm divides into four stanzas of six verses each—the first (vers. 1-6) dealing with the omniscience of God; the second (vers. 7-12), with his omnipresence; the third (vers. 13-18), with his omnipotence; and the fourth (vers. 19-24) containing the supplication.

Ver. 1.—O Lord, thou hast searched me; rather, *hast searched me out*; i.e. examined into all my thoughts and feelings (comp. Ps. xvii. 3). And known me; i.e. arrived at a full knowledge of my spiritual condition.

Ver. 2.—Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising. All that I do from one end of the day to the other. Thou understandest my thought afar off; i.e. while it is just forming—long before it is a fully developed thought.

Ver. 3.—Thou compassest (rather, *siftest*) my path and my lying down; literally, *my path and my couch*—the time of my activity and the time of my rest. And art acquainted with all my ways (comp. Ps. cxix. 168, "All my ways are before thee").

Ver. 4.—For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. What has been already said of deeds and thoughts is now extended to "words." God hears every word we speak.

Ver. 5.—Thou hast beset me behind and before; i.e. "thou art ever close to me, and therefore hast complete knowledge of me. Thine omniscience arises out of thy omnipresence." And laid thine hand upon me. To uphold me, and at the same time to restrain me (comp. ver. 10).

Ver. 6.—Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. The psalmist does not say, "such knowledge," but simply "knowledge," i.e. real true knowledge, such as deserves the name. "The thought of God's omniscience makes him feel as if real knowledge were beyond his reach" (Kay).

Ver. 7.—Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? The transition is now made from God's omniscience to God's omnipresence, ver. 5 having paved the way for it. God's presence is not to be escaped; his spirit is everywhere. "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28). When

Jonah sought to flee from his presence, he only found himself brought more absolutely and more perceptibly into his presence (comp. Jer. xxiii. 24).

Ver. 8.—If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; i.e. "if I were to ascend up into heaven, if I could do so, thou wouldst still be there—I should not find myself where thou wert not; no, nor even if I went down to hell (*Sheol*), should I escape thee—thou wouldst be there also." If I make my bed in hell means, "if I go down and take my rest in hell"—the place of departed spirits. Behold, thou art there; literally, *behold, thou!*

Vers. 9, 10.—If I take the wings of the morning. If I were to speed across the earth on the wings of the dawn, and, having done so, were then to dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea—the extreme west, where the sun sets—even there shall thy hand lead me. In that distant region I should still find thy guiding hand. And thy right hand shall hold me. Thy strong right hand would uphold me.

Vers. 11, 12.—If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. If I think to escape thee by plunging into darkness, and say to myself, "Surely the darkness shall screen me, and night take the place of light about me," so that I cannot be seen, even then my object is not accomplished; even the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day. Thy essential light penetrates every dark place, and makes the deepest gloom as radiant as the brightest sunshine. The darkness and the light are both alike to thee; literally, *as the darkness, so the light*; but the paraphrase of the Authorized Version gives the true sense.

Ver. 13.—For thou hast possessed my reins. Thou knowest me and seest me always, because thou madest me. Thy omniscience and thy omnipresence both rest upon thine omnipotence. Thou hast covered me (rather, *woven me*) in my mother's womb (comp. Job x. 11).

Ver. 14.—I will praise thee. The note of praise, which has rung through the whole poem in an undertone, is here openly struck. Reflections upon God's wonderful works must overflow into praise; and the phenomena of man's creation and birth are, at least, as calculated to call forth praise and adoration as any other. For I am fearfully and wonderfully made. The wonderfulness of the human mechanism is so great that, if realized, it produces a sensation of fear. It has been said that, if we could see one-half of what is going on within us, we should not dare to move. Marvellous are

thy works; *i.e.* thy doings generally. And that my soul knoweth right well. The extent of the marvellousness I may not be able to comprehend; but at least I know the fact that they are marvellous. That fact I know, "right well."

Ver. 15.—My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret. The formation of the embryo in the womb seems to be intended. This remains as much a mystery as ever, notwithstanding all the prying of modern science. And curiously wrought; literally, *and embroidered, or woven with threads of divers colours* (comp. ver. 13b; and note that modern science speaks of the various "tissues" of the human frame, and calls a portion of medical knowledge "histology"). In the lowest parts of the earth. This is scarcely to be taken literally. It is perhaps only a variant for the "secretly" of the preceding clause.

Ver. 16.—Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; or, "my embryo." The Hebrew text has but the single word *לול*, which probably means, "the still unformed embryonic mass" (Hengstenberg). And in thy book all my members were written; literally, *all of them*; but the pronoun has no antecedent. Professor Cheyne and others suspect the passage to have suffered corruption. But the general meaning can scarcely have been very different from that assigned to the passage in the Authorized Version. Which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. Modern critics mostly translate "the days," or "my days," "were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them;" *i.e.* "my life was planned out by God, and settled, before I began to be."

Ver. 17.—How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! If God's works are admirable, and, therefore, precious, so still more are his thoughts—those deep counsels of his, which must have preceded all manifestation of himself in act or work. How great is the sum of them! Were they all added together, how immeasurable would be the amount! What a treasure of wisdom and knowledge!

Ver. 18.—If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand (comp. Ps. xl. 5, "Thy thoughts which are to usward cannot be reckoned up"). When I awake, I am still with thee. I meditate

on thee, both sleeping and waking, nor ever find the subject of my thought exhausted.

Ver. 19.—Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God; or, "Oh that thou wouldst slay the wicked!" (comp. Ps. v. 6, 10; vii. 9—13; ix. 19; x. 15; xxi. 8—12, etc.). Depart from me therefore, ye bloody men (comp. Ps. cxix. 115). There is no fellowship between light and darkness, between the wicked and the God-fearing.

Ver. 20.—For they speak against thee wickedly; literally, *who speak of thee for wickedness*; *i.e.* use thy Name for the accomplishment of wicked ends. And thine enemies take thy Name in vain. The text must be altered to produce this meaning. As it stands, it can only be rendered, "Thine enemies lift up [their soul] to vanity" (comp. Ps. xxiv. 4).

Ver. 21.—Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? Those who love God must hate God's enemies. The psalmist claims to be of this number.

Ver. 22.—I hate them with perfect hatred; *i.e.* with pure, absolute, intense hatred—a hatred commensurate with the love that he felt towards all God's saints. I count them mine enemies; *i.e.* I regard them as my private foes. I have the same feeling towards them as I have towards those who are at open enmity with me, and seek my destruction. The command had not yet been given, "Love your enemies" (Matt. v. 44).

Ver. 23.—Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts. Examine me, and see if I have not represented my feelings as they really are. Keep on always searching me out (comp. ver. 1), and "trying my reins and my heart" (Ps. xxvi. 2). My desire is to be proved and tested.

Ver. 24.—And see if there be any wicked way in me; literally, *any way of grief*. "Ways of grief" are ways which lead to grief, which involve either bitter repentance or severe chastisement. And lead me in the way everlasting; *i.e.* either "the way that leadeth to everlasting life," or "the good old way, the way that endures—the way of righteousness." David, with all his faults, is one of those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt. v. 6).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*God's knowledge of us.* 1. We sometimes say that "we know" a certain man who is a neighbour. By this we may mean nothing more than that we can distinguish him from his fellows, and give him his proper name. That is a slight acquaintance indeed. 2. Sometimes when we make such an affirmation we mean that

we have a general knowledge of his occupation and his more outward and formal habits. That goes a very little way. 3. Sometimes we mean more than this—we intimate that we know what a man's principles are, what he believes, after what manner he worships, what are his tastes and his companionships. Here we may think that we have arrived at something very definite and solid. 4. We do not really know what a man's spirit is, and what is his real character, until we have seen him (as the apostles saw our Lord) both in public and in private—at those times when he is conscious of our observation, and when he is perfectly unrestrained, and expresses himself with unchecked freedom. 5. Even then, how imperfect is our knowledge of one another! how often and how greatly we mistake one another! how frequently we ascribe to one another deeds that were not done, or words that were not spoken, or feelings that were not cherished! how different we know ourselves to be—in character, in spirit, in motive—from the conception of ourselves which our neighbour has formed of us! 6. And, yet again, how far from being absolutely true is the estimate we form of ourselves! how possible and how practicable it is for us to over-estimate our virtues and under-estimate our weaknesses, our follies, our guilt! So much so that it is a question whether a man knows himself as well as his discerning neighbour does. We are convinced that it is often the case that the verdict of a man's intimate friend is much nearer the mark of truth than is his own. 7. The conclusion to which we are driven is that One, and only one, "knows us altogether." Only God knows us as we are. Guided by the text, we think of God's knowledge of us thus.

I. ALL THINGS ARE OPEN TO HIS VIEW. (Ver. 1.) He "searches" us through and through. There are inward recesses and remote points that escape our eye, but not one that escapes his penetrating, his far-reaching glance. We may conceal some things from man and elude his keenest search; we can hide nothing from God; he searches and knows all things, even the most secret chambers of the soul.

II. HE OBSERVES ALL OUR WAYS. (Vers. 2, 3.) From morning till evening, from evening till morning, everything is done before him. He is the Lord "before whom we stand," as the old prophets used to say. There is no action of ours that is too slight for his notice; he is the Infinite One, and infinity reaches downwards as well as upwards.

III. HE IS FAMILIAR WITH EVERY UTTERED WORD AND UNUTTERED THOUGHT. (Vers. 2, latter part, and 4.) It is not difficult to think of our shouted sentences or of our formal addresses being heard and noticed by God; it requires some effort of thought to realize that the casual conversation, the interjected remark, the whispered secret,—that these are heard and heeded by him. Yet it becomes us to remember that they are. This is the thought of Christ when he said, "Of every idle [casual] word shall men give account," etc. (Matt. xii. 36, 37). Nay, the unspoken sentence, the half-formed thought, the rising feeling, that has not found expression, the "thought afar off," is understood by that omniscient Spirit! What reason here for purity of mind, for the "clean heart and the right spirit"!

IV. HE TOUCHES US AT EVERY POINT. "Thou hast laid thine hand upon me." It has been the unseen and unfelt touch of the Divine hand that has: 1. Preserved our spirit in being from moment to moment; for all earthly forces have been the working of his power. 2. Restored us every night, and renewed to us the vigour of body and mind we have needed for the labour and endurance of another day. 3. Quickened our mind and enabled us to think, to reason, to reply, to invent, to devise, to direct. 4. Brought us back from sickness and the shadow of death to life and health again. 5. Made our souls to be refilled with love and hope and sacred joy, so that we have lived the life of holy service and of spiritual growth. The explanation of all our power, our excellency, our success, is found in the simple words, "Thou hast laid thine hand upon me."

Vers. 7—16.—*The domain of God.* The main thought of these noble words is—

I. THE BOUNDLESSNESS OF GOD'S DOMAIN. Wherever we are, whithersoever we go, we are always within his charge. Could we reach the highest heavens, he is there; or the lowest depths of Hades, he is there; and could we wing our way to the far horizon, where sea and sky meet, he is there. In vain should we seek the shelter of the darkness, for darkness and light are alike to him. Even before the light of life

shone upon us, when our members were unformed, everything about us and before us was within his knowledge. There is absolutely no remotest or darkest corner of this wide world which is not included in God's realm—the realm of his presence, his observation, his action. Everywhere his hand leads us; everywhere his right hand of power upholds and restrains us. Since God is everywhere, we infer—

II. THE FOLLY OF OBDURACY. The psalmist is not the man who wishes to escape from the presence and the power of God, but his words bring out very forcibly the impossibility of so doing. There are too many souls who would gladly “flee from his presence” if they could. 1. Many try to escape from the consciousness of it by immersing themselves in some form of activity, or burying themselves in excitement, but they are very partially and only temporarily successful. Beneath all and after all that they do rises up the unextinguishable thought, “Surely God is in this place!” 2. Many try to escape the remorse of a rebuking conscience by taking their own life, but they only pass from one part of God's domain to another. Whithersoever they go, “his right hand holds them.” If it be possible, they only enter his *nearer* presence, and come into *closer* contact with his power than ever. The one wise thing to do is to draw near to God in penitential prayer, to seek and find reconciliation to him by faith in the Divine Saviour, that there may be no need and no desire to hide from his face, to shun his voice, to fear the touch of his hand.

III. THE CONFIDENCE OF CHRISTIAN SONSHIP. That thought which is a terror to the guilty is a comfort and a security to the good. It is a strong assurance to the heart to feel that whithersoever its path may lie it *must* be where the Father is at hand to guide and bless.

“I know not where his islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond his love and care.”

It must be well with us; for we shall be with God, we shall be with Christ, in whatever part of the universe we may be. Anywhere, everywhere, his hand will be laid upon us, his arm will be around us.

Vers. 17—24.—*Thoughts, Divine and human.* With some apparent abruptness, the psalmist calls our attention to—

I. THE THOUGHTS OF GOD. 1. *Their manifoldness.* 2. *Their preciousness.* Everything we see and hear and touch is a manifested thought of God; it must have existed in his mind before it took shape, colour, substance. It adds deep interest to all *natural scenery* to think of sea and sky, of flower and tree, of the wooded glen and the snow-clad mountain, as thoughts of God. So also of *ourselves*, of our wonderful, complex nature, of manhood and womanhood in their strength and beauty, in their intellectual and spiritual maturity. And so also of the profoundest, of the loftiest, of the most beautiful and entrancing thoughts we have ever entertained in our minds. They are there because they were first in the mind of God. They are thoughts that have passed from the Divine to the human intelligence. How elevating and enriching must it be to be daily receiving the thoughts of God into our souls! What a new aspect is given to all study, in every sphere of knowledge, by looking at all objects and processes in this light! How near it brings God to us! We are never far from him whose uttered thoughts are around us on every hand—shining in the sun, singing in the song of birds, etc. At all times we are with him—as we walk, and as we work, and as we rest; and “when we awake we are still with him.”

II. OUR THOUGHT ABOUT HIM. (Vers. 19—22.) The psalmist cannot tolerate the idea of men living to deny, to blaspheme, to disobey, to grieve God. His anger is stirred against them; they are an offence to him; he would like to have them removed from the earth. Jesus Christ has taught us a “more excellent way” than that of destroying such men. He bids us go forth and win them; conquer their disobedience, their rebelliousness; capture their will for wisdom and worth; bring them into that captivity to truth and righteousness which is freedom itself and lasting joy. But the root-thought of the psalmist is true. It is deep sympathy with the Divine; it is the identifying of ourselves with the Divine Object of our love. We love them that love

him; we hate (are grieved with and are opposed to) those that hate him. The Christian man regards all things as they affect Jesus Christ and his kingdom; he looks with a profound dissatisfaction and sorrow on lives that are dissociated from the service of Jesus Christ. He feels that something vital is wanting to those who do not call Jesus Lord and Friend. He is separated by an immeasurable distance from those who speak ill of his Master. His soul is stirred to its depths by conduct or language which is irreverent or antagonistic toward him. His prayer is for their conversion; he hopes that such may be convicted and ashamed.

III. A WISE THOUGHT FOR OURSELVES. (Vers. 23, 24.) "Who can understand his errors?" There is no maxim more difficult to obey than that which seems the simplest of all, "Know thyself." For we are all of us subject to the law which makes familiarity blunt the sense of importance; and we are all of us liable to form the habit of excusing ourselves those duties which are disagreeable, and lessening the guilt of those sins to which we are inclined; and the result is that our measurement of ourselves is often very far from being the true one. We do not see ourselves as others (who judge without prejudice or passion) see us, or as God sees us. There may be within us, awakening and arising to power, some "wicked way," some evil habit, some strong craving, which, if not eradicated or subdued, will gain a mastery over us, and will destroy us. Or if not that, there may be within our heart, or in our life, some distinct imperfection or inconsistency which goes far to diminish our worth and to nullify our influence for good; and *we may be unconscious of it*. We do not know ourselves. We may be making a very serious, if not fatal, mistake about ourselves. Hence the wisdom of accepting, modestly and even gratefully, the counsel of the wise and true; hence the wisdom of asking the Searcher of hearts to try us and to cleanse us, and to lead us in "the way everlasting." If we do thus honestly and earnestly ask God's interposition, we must be prepared for his answer. That may take a different form from what we expect or desire. It may come in the shape of trouble, of loss, of affliction, of humiliation. But however it come, it is infinitely better to be led back into the way of everlasting life than to be allowed to go on and down in the path of sin and death.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—24.—"*Lord, thou knowest altogether.*" This psalm, one of the most sublime of them all, is of unknown authorship. It seems to be the composition of some saint of God who lived after the Captivity. If so, what proof it gives of the blessing of sanctified sorrow (cf. the probably companion psalm, Ps. cxix., vers. 67, 71, 75)! The furnace of the Exile, the husks of the far country, did bring prodigal Israel to himself; and this psalm is one clear evidence thereof. And so, we believe, God will do with all like prodigals. They may seem set against him—they very often are; but his resources are not exhausted, and he will find ways and means to bring them to a better mind. The psalm is divided into four stanzas, of which—

I. THE FIRST TELLS OF THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF CONCEALING ANYTHING FROM GOD. (Vers. 1—6.) 1. *Here is a fact asserted.* "Lord, thou hast searched me," etc. The word originally means "to dig," and is applied to the searching for precious metals (Alexander). God had penetrated far below the surface of the psalmist's acts and words, so that he knew him perfectly. And he knows our time of rest and of going forth to active work (ver. 2). He winnows or fans—such the meaning of the word rendered "compasseth"—so as to sift our whole life, separating the evil in it from the good, as the chaff is separated from the wheat. And this is true of the night-life as well as of the day (ver. 3). He knows not only the words that we do speak, but those that we are going to speak (ver. 4). The past and the future—that which is behind and before—are all known to him, and under the control of his hand (ver. 5). We cannot understand all this, but so it is (vers. 5, 6). Thus emphatically is the truth asserted. 2. *And altogether credible.* (1) For reason would infer it (comp. Ps. xciv. 9). The maker of a machine would surely know how his machine would work! Much more must the Lord know our nature and the workings of man's mind and will. He knows our nature (twice) as one knows the dwelling in which he has lived, for he

tabernacled in it and dwelt among us (John i.). He was the Son of man, and he knows what is in man. (2) And there is the testimony of conscience. The very etymology of that word implies the knowledge of some one with us; and what we call "conscience" is our recognizing that God sees and judges all we are and do. "Thou God seest me" is not a mere text, but the confession of every soul. (3) And then there is the testimony of our Lord's life on earth. He revealed God in his holiness, power, and love; but he revealed this also—God's knowledge of our inmost heart. Again and again do we meet with statements that assert this superhuman knowledge of our Lord. See how he knew Nathanael, Peter, Judas. Others did not thus know themselves or their fellow-men, but he knew them perfectly. This also was a revelation of what is ever in God. 3. *And blessed.* For it shows that we are not under the rule of a stranger. The rule of a stranger is ever a hard and irksome rule. And it shows how gracious he is; for, though he knows all about us, yet this does not stay his blessing. And how holy; for, though with us the knowledge of evil and the continual contact of it defiles, or at least tends to deaden our sense and horror of evil, and so to lessen our own holiness, it is not at all so with God. See this in Christ. He was surrounded always by sin, but yet was himself "holy, harmless, and undefiled." And because he thus knows us, he must know what is best for us, so that we may be well content with his ordering of our lot. What a holy restraint this truth exercises upon the believing soul! Indeed, it is only to such soul that this truth is or can be welcome; to the ungodly it is all unwelcome, and they seek to cast it out of their minds. God forbid that we should do this!

II. THE SECOND DECLARES THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF ESCAPING FROM THE PRESENCE OF GOD. (Vers. 7—12.) The height of heaven cannot transcend him; the depth of hell cannot hide from him; flight, rapid as the rays of the morning sun, cannot outstrip him; distance, like that of the uttermost parts of the sea, cannot separate from him; darkness, deep as midnight, cannot conceal from him. It used to be said of ancient Rome that the extent of her empire rendered it impossible for any one who had incurred the displeasure of her emperors to escape their vengeance; yet more truly is it impossible for us to do what Jonah vainly tried to do—to flee from the presence of the Lord. But this perpetual presence is a perpetual joy to the people of God. Our Lord cheered his disciples ere he left them, by promising that he would be with them always. He had said before that "wherever two or three are gathered together in my Name, there," etc. He is a God "at hand, and not afar." "At thy right hand, therefore, I shall not be moved." But this perpetual presence, unescapable, is the terror of the wicked man, for he knows he cannot get away from God. How needful that we should acquaint ourselves with God, and so be at peace! So shall the terror be turned into joy.

III. THE THIRD SETS FORTH THE GROUND OF GOD'S PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF US. (Vers. 13—16.) "The mysterious beginnings of life which none can trace, the days all of which are ordered before the first breath is drawn,—these are fashioned and ordered by the hand of God." How, then, can it be otherwise than that he should know us altogether? And how reassuring is this truth of God's knowing us from the very start of our being, because he is the Author of that being!

IV. THE FOURTH SHOWS THE EFFECT OF THIS TRUTH ON THE DEVOUT SOUL. (Vers. 17—24.) 1. *It gives rise to a vast throng of precious thoughts within him.* He calls them (ver. 17) "thy thoughts," which may refer either to God's thoughts about us, or to our thoughts about God. Probably both are meant; for God's thoughts about us are precious, for they are thoughts of good, and not evil. And how great and undeserved and freely given is that good! And our thoughts about God are precious also, if indeed we be reconciled to God. None others can think about God and find delight in such thoughts. But if we be his servants, we think of what God is in himself, of what he has done and will do, in things temporal and in things spiritual, for ourselves, for others dear to us. How vast the sum of these thoughts, and how precious! 2. *His soul is filled with a holy hatred of the ungodly.* Not because of what they had done to him, though that was bad enough, and could not but wake up the spirit of resentment, but because they were the enemies of God (vers. 19—22). It is good to hate evil, first in ourselves, then in others; and if those others will cleave to it, then they and their sin cannot be separated, and we must "count" both our "enemies," "Ye that fear the Lord hate evil." Would to God we all did (cf. homily

on Ps. xcvi. 10)! 3. *An intense longing after entire holiness.* (Vers. 23, 24.) The psalmist yearned to be free from all sin, not only from some sins. Therefore he would lay bare his soul before God—would come into the full light of God, that the Divine scrutiny might be thorough and complete. He knew that after all his own search sin might yet lurk in unthought-of places, and hence he prays God to search, and try, and know, and see, and show him the wrong, and then lead him “in the way everlasting.” Such is the effect of this faith: “Lord, thou knowest me altogether.”—S. O.

Ver. 14.—*The mystery of man's being.* The psalm shows that the knowledge of God brings peace. It appeals to God's omniscience, that which would confound him if he were not at peace with God. They who are not hide away from God, and dread the truth the psalm declares. But let us listen to the patriarch Job (xxii. 21). The psalmist had done so, and hence he is able now to challenge even the all-searching eye and the absolute knowledge of God, to attest his sincerity and the integrity of his heart. No hypocrite or pretender to piety could possibly do this, or ever can. Our text tells how God had known man from the beginning of his life—must know him, for he had created him. This leads to reflection on the mystery of man's being. Note—

I. THE TRUTH OF THE PSALMIST'S ASSERTION. “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Now, this is true: 1. *As regards the body.* This is what the psalmist had mainly in his thoughts. Now, our corporeal structure is wonderful, whether we regard it as a whole or in its separate parts. But it is “fearful” also; there is an awe and mystery about it, as his soul knew right well. That it should be subject to pain and disease; that it should be so often a clog to the spirit and a hindrance to our higher life rather than a help; and that it should be ever hastening deathwards, and be at last a prey to corruption. And yet God made it—not man. 2. *As regards the soul.* It is marvellous, whether, as with the body, we consider it in its entirety or in its several parts—intellect, imagination, affections, judgment, conscience, will. How wonderful it is! But how fearful also! That it should be born with a fatal bias and tendency towards evil; that thus it is in continual peril, and is often in bondage to sin; and it can perish, and, so far as we can see, it often does. And yet God formed the soul as he did the body. How true that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made”!

II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH WE ARE TO REGARD THIS TRUTH. With praise. “I will praise thee.” So speaks the psalmist. 1. *Many wonder how he or any one could possibly do this.* Some even dare to censure and blame the Creator that he has made man so; and they audaciously assert that the coming judgment will not be so much God calling us to account for what we have done, as man calling God to account for what he has done. Far enough are such from the spirit of this psalm. 2. But we cannot but ask—What was the ground of the psalmist's praise? Now, it was not in spite of evil, defying and scorning it; nor ignoring it, for none were more sensible of it; nor by minimizing it in comparison with the superabundant good. And, in comparison with the good gifts of God, evil is as the small dust in the balance—not worthy of account, though to us here and now it looms so large. But not for such reasons is this praise. But because by means of this strange and fearful mingling of evil in our constitution we come to know, as otherwise we could not, the highest good. God has caused that sin should be as a foil to make more manifest his grace. The devil meant only our harm. God turned it round to good. Thus we come to know evil and hate it; we come to know God in Christ, and to love him as we never else should have loved him; the unfallen angels cannot love him as we may and will and do. And we come to know good—holiness, purity, truth, and to hunger for them, and to rejoice in them as else we had not done.

III. THE LESSON TO BE LEARNED. If God turns the greatest ill into good, be sure he will all lesser ones. But it is only by the knowledge of God that evil is thus transformed. Praise him evermore!—S. C.

Vers. 23, 24.—*God's searching desired.* In these verses we seem to be standing by a fair river, a very river of the water of life—full, flowing, beautiful, fertilizing; a joy to all beholders and all who dwell by it. And as we look back at the former parts of this “crown of the psalms,” as it has been called, we see the lofty spiritual heights

from whence this river has flowed down; we realize the glorious truths about God—his omnipresence and omniscience—which are the source from whence this prayer we are to consider has sprung. But such thoughts about God have not always such results. They are terrors to the mind of the godless, and of all who are not walking in the light of the Lord. Hence the truths taught in this psalm serve as a test of our own spiritual condition. Are they welcome to us, or the reverse? They cannot be welcome to an ungodly soul, but they are to such as him who wrote this psalm. Now, in our text, note—

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED. 1. *That there has been a previous searching of ourselves.* Here is one great excellence of this prayer—it compels sincerity. For how can the sin-loving man pray, "Search me, O God!" when he can see quite plainly himself what he is? And how, "See if there be," etc., when there is no "if" at all? It is only those who, like Peter, can lay bare their hearts, and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee," that can thus pray. We do not say that a man must be sinless, but he must be sincere. Can we pray this prayer? 2. *That our searching is not sufficient.* It is implied, what all experience proves so surely, that none of us can understand his errors; and we ever need God to cleanse us from our secret, hidden, and so, to us, unknown faults. "The heart is deceitful above all things; . . . who can know it?" None but God can.

II. THE REGIONS WHERE GOD'S SEARCHING IS FELT TO BE NEEDED. 1. *In the heart.* Our life is visible to others and to ourselves, and our words audible, but our hearts are neither. The seeds of conduct and character are so minute, so seemingly insignificant, our motives are of such mingled, mixed nature, so chameleon-like, that we are baffled. 2. *In the thoughts.* "Try me . . . thoughts." They need to be tried; they often seem right when they are not so. Judas was, no doubt, self-deceived in this way, thinking his thought to be right when it was all evil. And God does try them; he is ever applying his tests and revealing us to ourselves, as the moonlight reveals the ship that crosses its path, as the lightning reveals the unseen precipice. And he does this for gracious purposes, that so we may be led to betake ourselves to this prayer. 3. *The ways.* "See if . . . way in me." The prayer confesses that a man's ways are in him before he is in them. There were evil ways he knew—behind him, and he had gone in them; around him, many were going in them; before him, seeking to attract him. But all this did not matter so long as they were not *in* him. That the ship should be in the water is all right; but for the water to be in the ship! It is what is *in* us which is all-important.

III. THE ULTIMATE OBJECT OF THIS PRAYER. That he might be led "in the way everlasting." 1. *There is such a way*—the way of the everlasting God. 2. *And the ways of God are fitly so called.* Other ways may go on for a long distance, but they are out short at last. 3. *All joy, goodness, and strength are in these ways*; all that the heart can desire, all that can bless our fellow-men, and that can glorify Christ. 4. *And in these ways we need to be "led,"* not merely have them shown to us. Many see them, but do not walk in them; and none ever will unless the Lord leads them. But this he is most willing to do. If sincerely we pray this prayer, his leading has begun.—S. O.

Ver. 1.—*The Divine inspection.* "Searched;" the figure is "winnowed" or "sifted." "Before men we stand as opaque bee-hives. They can see the thoughts go in and out of us, but what work they do inside of a man they cannot tell. Before God we are as glass bee-hives, and all that our thoughts are doing within us he perfectly sees and understands" (Beecher). How near the ancient poets of India could get to the thought and feeling of this psalm is indicated in the following hymn taken from the Atharva-Veda: "1. The great lord of these worlds sees as if he were near. If a man thinks he is walking by stealth, the gods know it all. 2. If a man stands, or walks, or hides; if he goes to lie down or to get up; what two people sitting together whisper,—King Varuna knows it: he is there as a third. 3. This earth, too, belongs to Varuna the king, and this wide sky with its ends far apart. The two seas (the sky and the ocean) are Varuna's loins; he is also contained in this same drop of water. 4. He who should flee far beyond the sky, even he would not be rid of Varuna the king. His spies proceed from heaven toward this world; with thousand eyes they overlook this earth.

5. King Varuna sees all this, what is between heaven and earth, and what is beyond. He has counted the twinklings of the eyes of men. As a player throws the dice, he settles all things. 6. May all thy fatal nooses, which stand spread out seven by seven and threefold, catch the man who tells a lie! may they pass by him who tells the truth!"

I. THE DIVINE INSPECTION IS AN OBSERVATION. All outward things related to us are "naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Illustrate by the regiment inspected by the colonel. Everything—health, bearing, dress, weapons, etc.—is carefully observed. God knows all about us.

II. THE DIVINE INSPECTION IS A SPIRITUAL TESTING. It concerns the inner man. It deals with cherished thought, fixed motive, passing mood, varying feeling. There is so much that never gets expressed in word and act, which nevertheless makes up our real selves; and all this God knows.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The oppression of the Divine omniscience.* "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me." "Nowhere are the great attributes of God—his omniscience, his omnipresence, his omnipotence—set forth so strikingly as they are in this magnificent psalm. Nowhere is there a more overwhelming sense of the fact that man is beset and compassed about by God, pervaded by his Spirit, unable to take a step without his control; and yet nowhere is there a more emphatic assertion of the personality of man as distinct from, not absorbed in, the Deity" (Perowne). A philosopher was asked by a monarch about God, and he desired a day for his answer. He then asked for another day in which to give his answer. The more he thought about God, the more he seemed unable rightly to describe him. At last the monarch asked the philosopher why he so often delayed to tell him what he knew about God; and he replied, "The more I think about God, the more incomprehensible he seems to be." The kind of oppression which comes from feeling that God knows even the very minutest things about us, and even everything that will come to us, may be illustrated by the oppressed feeling that the persons skilled in palmistry give us. Looking at our hands, they seem able to read our character and our destiny; and we shun them with a kind of fear, lest, knowing so much, they become mischief-makers. It really is an awe-ful thing that God should know us altogether. This is seen in Hagar's oppressed exclamation, "Thou God seest me!" and in a better way, in Jacob's devout utterance, when he had seen the ladder of God's care, "How dreadful is this place!" Notice—

I. HOW PERFECT THE DIVINE OMNISCIENCE IS! The psalm illustrates the Divine knowledge, not of things in general, but of *us*—"Thou knowest *me*," my doing this or that; (1) my imaginations; (2) my designs and undertakings; (3) even my retirements and hidings; (4) my sayings; (5) my entire history; (6) every part of me ("Beset me behind and before").

II. HOW OPPRESSIVE THE DIVINE OMNISCIENCE IS! Even when we are in right relations with God, it is oppressive. It is an awful feeling that we can never be alone. We can never escape the eye. The only relief comes by the knowledge that it is our Father's eye. He *knows* only that he may *help*. What is Divine omniscience to those who neither *know* nor *love* God?—R. T.

Vers. 7—10.—*Omnipresence a fear and a satisfaction.* Calvin says, "The word 'Spirit' is not put here simply for the power of God, as commonly in the Scriptures, but for his mind and understanding." Milton, as a young man, travelled much abroad. Years afterwards he thus expressed himself: "I again take God to witness that in all places where so many things are considered lawful, I lived sound and untouched from all profligacy and vice, having this thought perpetually with me—that though I might escape the eyes of men, I certainly could not the eyes of God."

I. OMNIPRESENCE A FEAR. This term is not here used in a sense that applies to the ungodly man. Indeed, such a man will in no way apprehend or encourage the idea of God's omnipresence; it has no practical reality to him. The omnipresence of God is a religious man's idea, and we have to think of its influence upon *him*. It fills him with a holy fear, which is a mingling of awe and reverence and anxiety. That presence brings the perpetual call to worship; it keeps before us the claims of obedience; and it shows us continually the model of righteousness. "Be ye therefore

perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." It has been said that a "Christian should go nowhere if he cannot take God with him;" but that presence would make him afraid to go to many places where he does go; and it is a weakness of Christian life that the holy fear of the sense of God's presence is not more worthily realized. The fear to offend or grieve is a holy force working for righteousness.

II. OMNIPRESENCE A SATISFACTION. When we really love a person, and are quite sure of their response to our love, we want to be always with them. Separation is pain; presence is rest and satisfaction. And it is in the fullest sense thus with God. "We love him because he first loved us." And since there is this responsive love, we cannot be happy away from him; and we are permitted to think that he cannot be happy away from us. And so the psalmist says, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever, to behold the beauty of the Lord." And the Lord Jesus satisfies the longing of his people with his promise, "Lo, I am with you all the days."—R. T.

Vers. 13, 14.—*The mystery of being is with God.* The expression translated, "hast covered me," really is, "thou weavest me," as boughs are woven into a hedge. The "reins" may denote the sensational and emotional part of the human being. It is not possible to deal with the detailed expressions of this psalm in a public ministry. Reticence in regard to the human origin and birth, and in regard to the inner mysteries of bodily life, is characteristic of our times. Eastern people are still accustomed to talk freely of such matters; and conversation was much less delicate at the time our Bible was translated. It must suffice for us to set before our minds the great truth concerning God which is thus illustrated.

I. THE DESIGN OF A HUMAN BEING IS THE THOUGHT OF GOD. Here we may be met by the doctrine of evolution, which teaches that the bodily organization of man is a development out of some lower forms of life. But this in no way affects our position. It does not say that man is an accident—made without any design; it only explains to us what the design was; it unfolds for us the particular *method* in which the Divine design was out-wrought and accomplished. Because God's design took ages to complete, it did not cease to be God's design. God thought a man. But a *man* is much more than a body. Man is not the fulfilment of God's design until God has got him into his image, breathed into him the breath of life, and even requickenened him with a spiritual life. But what a thought that design of God was! It embraced all the complicated and delicate organs of man's frame, all the subtle relations of body and mind, and all the varying response which body and mind must ever make to surrounding circumstances. A man designs a house or a machine, and his work is within limits that can be grasped. God designs a man, and the complications are beyond us; we can only wonder and adore.

II. THE WORKING OUT OF HIS DESIGN IS IN THE HANDS OF GOD. A man may give his design into the hands of a fellow-man, and entrust him with the duty of working it out. God can never trust his design to anybody; for there is nobody who could understand or grasp it. He must work it out himself. And to us the great glory of the complex story of humanity is this—humanity is God's thought and God's purpose, and that thought and purpose God himself is working out.—R. T.

Vers. 15, 16.—*What a man can be and do God knows.* The latter clause of ver. 15 has been well rendered, "When I was wrought with a needle in the depths of the earth." There is an evidence of allusion to the sacerdotal robes, and the undescrivable texture of the human system is compared to the exquisite needlework of the high priest's garments. Every man is a bundle of possibilities; but no man has precisely the same possibilities as any other man. Each man can *be* what nobody else can be; each man can *do* what nobody else can do. This does not mean that any man can transcend the sphere and limitations of man, only that there is a very wide variety within the limitations. There are, indeed, general powers and faculties, and general elements of character and disposition, so that men can be classified; but within the classes there is what may be called an infinite individuality—remarkable varieties of ability, and even more remarkable combinations of ability and disposition and sphere. Nothing oppresses so much as to think what we should do if it were laid on us to find their right places for every man and every woman.

I. GOD KNOWS EVERY MAN'S INDIVIDUALITY. Science may trace that individuality to heredity, to the bodily and mental condition of parents, to food and atmospheres, or anything else; it remains the fact that the estimate of the individuality is possible only with God. Man must have the actual story of another man's life and experience ere he can discern his individuality. God alone can know it anticipatively from the beginning. A man's individuality is not shown in any one thing; it is the stamp on the life, and the life must be lived before it can be seen. God knows the end from the beginning, because he knows what man essentially is. Of Christ it is said, "He knew what was in man."

II. GOD CAN PRESIDE OVER THE ADJUSTMENT OF MAN'S PLACE AND WORK TO HIS INDIVIDUALITY. Oftentimes the surprise of life is the place in which God puts men, and the work he gives them to do. Men always err when they force themselves to do what they think they would like to do. We are only on safe lines when we do what God gives us to do. He knows us; he knows all places, all work, all circumstances; so he can fit things and people together, and make both work together for good. "My times are in thy hands."—R. T.

Ver. 18.—*The abiding sense of the Divine presence.* "I fall asleep, exhausted with the effort of counting thy thoughts or desires; and when I awake I find myself still engaged in the same spiritual arithmetic, which is my dearest delight."

I. IT IS THE SUGGESTION OF DELIGHTFUL THOUGHTS. The psalmist exclaims, "How precious are thy thoughts unto me!" This may mean, "my cherished thoughts of thee," or, "thy loving thoughts of me, of which I have the most comfortable assurance." Probably the psalmist meant the former. "Thy presence wakens in me such loving, tender, trustful thoughts concerning thee." "We cannot conceive how many of God's kind counsels have been concerning us, how many good turns he has done us, and what variety of mercies we have received from him." The sense of God's presence excites *meditation*; and what is lacking in modern Christian life is that which meditation can supply.

II. IT IS THE ASSURANCE OF DIVINE SECURITY. Compare the absolute confidence of the psalmist when he sings his refrain, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Refuge." Compare apostolic assurances: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "For he hath said, I will not leave thee, nor forsake thee." If God is with us, we can always have this confidence—whosoever would deal adversely with us must take account of God, and deal with him; and

"He is safe, and must succeed,
For whom the Lord vouchsafes to plead."

III. IT IS THE INSPIRATION OF NOBLE ENDEAVOUR. It is not just a cold doing of actual duty, "as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye." The loving child-soul never talks about the "great Taskmaster." It is a parental presence that wakens everything noble and beautiful in the child. And God's presence is peculiar in this, that it brings to us the sense of power. It makes us feel that we *can* do whatever he inspires us to do. "I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me."

IV. IT IS THE COMFORT OF EVERY TROUBLE. The hardest thing in trouble is to have to bear it *alone*. It is eased if another sympathetically shares it with us. We are never alone in trouble-bearing if we cherish the sense of God's presence.—R. T.

Vers. 23, 24.—*Our thoughts.* "Know my thoughts." This psalm contains the finest utterance of human feeling about the Divine omniscience that has ever come from human lips. God sees everything and everywhere. He sees the hidden mystery, man's secret thought and purpose. To the God-fearing man that is no trouble; it is rather a source of satisfaction and holy joy.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR THOUGHTS. The wise man says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." A man is as his thoughts. Man cannot rightly judge the thoughts of his fellow-man; but God is the "Discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Many religious people cherish the notion that they have no control over the suggestions that are made to their minds, no responsibility for the *contents* of their thoughts—only for *cherishing* thought, only for letting thought inspire conduct. This,

however, is only true within certain narrow limits, which need to be very carefully defined. 1. The importance that attaches to our thoughts we may realize from our observation of men. We have to do with them, but we cannot be said to *know* them until we come into such relations as reveal to us their *thinking*. We can only be said to know our friends, in whom is the "mirror of an answering mind." 2. The experience of Christian life impresses us with the importance of our thoughts. It is difficult to restrain and mould aright our conduct and conversation; but the supreme difficulty is to control and purify our thoughts. There are two hard things we have to do—"patiently continue in well-doing;" and "keep the heart with all diligence." And the latter is the harder of the two. Its hardness has driven men and women into convent and hermit-cells, as providing the only hopeful conditions. The scheme of redemption is really a heart-regeneration, a purifying of the very springs of thought and feeling. It does deliver us from outward foes; but its supreme interest lies in its going right down to the very root of the mischief in man. It proposes to deliver man from his own evil self. It reaches to the very fountains of our thoughts, and cleanses them.

II. THE CONTROL WHICH WE SHOULD HAVE OVER OUR THOUGHTS. We must have some measure of control over them, or we could have no responsibility in relation to them. 1. We have control over the *material* of our thoughts. It is commonly assumed that thoughts and suggestions are absolutely *put* into our minds either by God or by Satan. But thought is really the comparison, selection, and association of the actual contents of our mind in the power and activity of our will. All that has impressed us during our lives, by the eye, the ear, or the feeling, has passed into our mental treasury. It is all there, and all linked together by the most subtle connections. The contents of each of our minds to-day is the sum of past impressions and associations; and we are adding to that sum day by day. What we call "thinking" is taking up a portion of these contents, and recombining and rearranging them to form new ideas. Then we must be, in some measure, responsible for the contents of our minds. Not wholly, because we have been placed in circumstances and under influences over which we had no control. We can, however, put ourselves where we shall receive evil impressions, and we can put ourselves in the sphere of good impressions. No man needs to fill his mind with evil things, which sooner or later must become the material of evil thoughts. We need not choose evil companionships, or read demoralizing books. Our lives are so far in our hands that we can to a large extent settle what shall be the materials of our thoughts. We might fill up our souls with good things. 2. We have control over the course and the processes of our thought. We can deliberately choose to think about evil things or about good things. If our will is a renewed and sanctified will, then we ought to expect it to gain presidency over our thoughts.

III. THE HELP WHICH GOD IS EVER READY TO GIVE US IN THE EXERCISE OF SUCH CONTROL. This help the psalmist sought, "Try me, and know my thoughts." Our self-trusting attempts to regulate our thoughts are sure to bring us a feeling of depression, almost of hopelessness. The work proves to be beyond us. It is not beyond us when God is our Helper. And his gracious response ever freshly comes to the trustful, up-looking soul. He does "cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit."—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*Wonderful knowledge*. "Thou hast laid thine hand upon me." Aben Ezra called this "the crown of all the psalms." Man is completely in God's power—physically, intellectually, and morally.

I. LOOK AT THE PROOFS. 1. *Man's spiritual natura*. Sense of sin and responsibility; conscience; instinct of prayer; sense of Divine omniscience. 2. *The Divine providence*. God's omnipresence; our lot appointed and mysteriously controlled. 3. *In the provisions of the gospel*. Cannot wholly throw off the power of the Divine love or Divine Law. God's hold of us through Christ much greater than our hold of him.

II. FOR WHAT PURPOSE DOES GOD EXERCISE HIS POWER OVER MAN? Not to destroy his freedom of will and action. 1. *To assert his property in us*. 2. *To make man conscious of his calamity and his hope*. By the remedy in the gospel. 3. *To draw man to himself as the exclusive Redeemer*.—S.

Vers. 7—10.—*God everywhere.* “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there,” etc.

I. GOD IS PRESENT EVERYWHERE. Let us try to fill ourselves with this great thought. 1. *God is in heaven.* There have been atheists on earth—fools who have said in their hearts that there is no God. Let me tell you what an atheist is like. He is like a man going to hear an oratorio—the ‘Messiah’ or the ‘Elijah’—performed by a hundred musicians, and who says that all those wonderful harmonies that intoxicate the soul were not previously arranged and designed by Handel or Mendelssohn, but were the accidental result of those hundred men playing at random upon a hundred instruments. But if an atheist could be taken to heaven, he would be an atheist no longer. He would be overpowered with the proofs, not only of God’s existence, but with the tokens of his presence. What and to whom are those mighty hymns the angels sing? Who commands those mighty works which they perform? Not a God whose existence is argued out or doubtfully apprehended. Why has the city no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it? Because the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the Light thereof. Why is there no temple? Because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple of it. The throne of God and of the Lamb is in it; and his servants serve him, and they see his face, and his Name is in their foreheads. 2. *God is in hell—Sheol, Hades.* The devils believe in God, and tremble. There are no atheists in hell. God will be felt in the consciences of lost spirits. This is one of the most powerful ways of feeling God’s presence. Hell is the carrying out of the Divine law. The Law-giver is known in the carrying out of his law. As in a jail the power of the state is felt. 3. *God is in every part of this world.* The meaning of the text is that God is in the most distant, even the uninhabited, places of the earth. The thought of the psalmist was that God could be found amongst the solitudes of nature. And it is not in crowded cities that we can most strongly feel the presence of God. On the sea, on the mountain-top, down in deep glens and valleys, in the morning or at midnight, studying the smallest or sublimest of God’s works. But God is to be found amongst men, only so often face to face with the devil. Go on the Exchange, into the street, into the gin-palace, and there the world seems without a God, or without a God that cares for it. But go into that sick-room where the Christian is dying, or into that closet where the saint is wrestling with God, or where a sorrowing mother is pouring out a broken heart before God over a profligate son or daughter, or into that family where there is a daily altar before which all devoutly kneel, or glance into the dark cell of the prisoner, and you exclaim, “The darkness hideth not from thee.”

II. THE RELATION OF THIS TRUTH TO SEVERAL CLASSES OF MEN. 1. *To those who wish to escape from God.* “Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down.” In no part of any world can you fly from him. If, therefore, you cannot fly from him, there are two things which you may try to do—either to make yourself blind and deaf and dead to his presence; or to awake up more intensely to him, and welcome his presence. The former you cannot do for ever; the latter you might do. 2. *To those who depend upon God for support.* “If I take the wings of the morning, . . . even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.” God is present everywhere, not only to judge the wicked, but to reward the righteous. The Bible tells me I have begun a very long journey; that I shall often become footsore and weary, often miss my way; but also that God will be with me; that as my day is so my strength shall be; that “they that wait upon the Lord,” etc. It tells me that I shall die; that I must go into a far-distant country which eye hath not seen. 3. *To those who are seeking the everlasting way.* There are many ways leading to honour, pleasure, wealth, but none of them is the everlasting way. We are guided in them and to them by false lights which will go out and leave us in darkness. But God is always present, and he can light us and guide us into the one everlasting way. He is a Lamp and a Guide.

“Nearer, my God, to thee! . . .
E’en though it be a cross
That raiseth me;

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

If God could or would come to me only at times, what should I often do?—S.

Vers. 23, 24.—*Request for God's searching.* "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

I. SOME THINGS IMPLIED IN THE TEXT. 1. *The imperfect knowledge of his own character.* Though it lies so near to us—not a far-off country. Though it is the most important of all knowledge. Knowledge of the body important; but that we can trust to another—not this. Sin creates darkness. 2. *That he was aiming at the perfection of his nature.* It is only such as he who want to know themselves better. This is the idea of a Christian; and all other aims are poor and selfish.

II. SOME THINGS STATED IN THE TEXT. 1. *That he was willing to know the worst of himself.* Men generally are afraid to know themselves. If we think our child is in danger from some disease, we ask to know the worst; and so of our own bodily disease. But not so with the soul. Men try to keep out of sight and forget their true selves. 2. *That he was willing to be tried—to submit to the means by which this knowledge could be gained. Put me to the proof.* Few know what they are asking for in using this prayer. "Try me, so as to show me what I am." The axe willing to be proved is put on the grindstone, and then taken into the forest. The wheat—"try me"—is bruised; the gold is cast into the furnace. Christ tried the rich young man in the Gospel.

III. THE PRAYER OF THE TEXT. Founded on the conviction: 1. *That God alone is able to show us what we are.* We want a revelation from heaven for that. It is not self-developed knowledge, nor is it a sudden, but a gradual, revelation. No man knows himself till he has known Christ, his true and better Self. 2. *That God, and not himself, is his Saviour.* "Lead me in the way everlasting." Ways that last—God leads us into them, keeps us in them, and draws us onward along these ways.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXL.

MAINLY a psalm of supplication. David is in great straits, threatened by violent and malignant enemies (vers. 1—5), against whom he prays to God for aid (vers. 1, 4, 6, 8). At the same time, he praises God for his protection in past dangers (ver. 7), and expresses his confidence that judgment will overtake the wicked (vers. 9—11), and the cause of the righteous be vindicated (vers. 12, 13). The ascription to David is borne out by the contents.

Ver. 1.—*Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man.* The prayer is not directed against an individual, but against David's enemies generally. They are "evil" or "wicked" men, and especially "men of violence" (see the next clause, and comp. ver. 4). Preserve me from the violent man; literally, from the man of the violence (comp. 2 Sam. xxii. 49; Ps. xviii. 48).

Ver. 2.—*Which imagine mischiefs in their heart* (comp. Ps. xxviii. 3; xxxvi. 4; lxii. 3). *Continually are they gathered together for war; rather, continually do they stir up wars* (comp. Ps. lxxviii. 30; cxx. 7).

Ver. 3.—*They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent* (comp. Ps. lii. 2; lvii. 4; lix. 7; lxiv. 3). *Adders' poison is under their lips* (comp. Ps. lviii. 4; Rom. iii. 15). The meaning is that their tongues inflict wounds which are as painful as poisoned wounds. The pause-sign, "selah," marks off the first stanza.

Ver. 4.—*Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man.* A repetition of ver. 1 in a modified form. The fact of iteration indicates the extremity of the psalmist's need. *Who have purposed to overthrow my goings; i.e. to bring me to destruction* (comp. Ps. xvii. 5).

Ver. 5.—*The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords.* An instance of the figure *hendiadys*. What is meant is a snare composed of cords. Such snares, when laid for animals, were "hidden" in long grass, or

low shrubs, or rough ground. They have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me (comp. Pss. xxxi. 4; xxxv. 7; lvii. 6; cxix. 10; cxli. 9; cxlii. 3). A second pause-sign marks off a second stanza.

Ver. 6.—I said unto the Lord, Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O Lord (comp. Pss. xxxi. 14; cxliii. 1). The expressions used are markedly Davidical.

Ver. 7.—O God the Lord. In the Hebrew, "Jehovah Adonai"—a comparatively rare address. The strength of my salvation. The solid strength upon which I ground all my hopes of salvation (comp. Ps. lxxix. 26). Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle. In past combats thou hast protected me, as with a shield (Pss. xviii. 2; xxxiii. 20), wherefore I put the greater trust in thee for the future. The "head" is mentioned as one of the chief vital parts.

Ver. 8.—Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked. The "desires of the wicked" are hurtful both to themselves and others. It is in his mercy that God does not grant them. Further not his wicked device; lest they exalt themselves. So the LXX., *μήποτε ὑψωθῶσιν*. Others translate, "Or how they will exalt themselves!" The third stanza here terminates.

Ver. 9.—As for the head of those that compass me about. The "head" of David's enemies is put in contrast with his own "head" (see ver. 7). While God shields and protects his head, theirs has no protection, but the mischief of their own lips which covers them, but with confusion, rather than with defence or safety.

Ver. 10.—Let burning coals fall upon

them; or, "burning coals shall be thrown upon them." Let them be cast (or, "they shall be cast") into the fire, into deep pits, that they rise not up again. The clauses are declaratory rather than optative. The psalmist sees the wrath of God poured out upon his enemies, who are at the same time God's enemies—they are cast into the fire prepared to receive the wicked—and plunged into deep pits whence they find it impossible to extricate themselves.

Ver. 11.—Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth; literally, *a man of tongue shall not be established in the land*—a man, *i.e.*, of pretence and seeming, who talks grandly, but effects nothing. Such a one shall not obtain permanent establishment as a power in the land. Evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him; literally, *to destructions*—a plural of completeness.

Ver. 12.—I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted. The psalmist is confident, not only that the wicked will be punished, but also that the righteous, whatever sufferings may come upon them, will ultimately be delivered out of their afflictions (comp. Ps. ix. 4, 9, 12, 18, etc.). And the right of the poor. It is not to be supposed that "the right" is always with "the poor;" but, when it is, God will assuredly be their champion.

Ver. 13.—Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy Name; the upright shall dwell in thy presence. The result of God's punishment of the wicked, and deliverance of the righteous is naturally that the righteous give him thanks, frequent his courts, and "dwell," as it were, "in his presence."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—13.—*In danger.* The position of the psalmist is that of a man in danger. His enemies are strong and cunning; they are bent on his destruction, and spare no pains to accomplish his ruin. At such a time the godly man has one resource which never fails him. The psalm speaks to us of—

I. THE PERILS WHICH SURROUND US. These are twofold. 1. *That of violence.* (Vers. 4, 11.) Not the violence of the sword and the spear, but that of fierce, forcible temptation, coming down upon us suddenly, and likely to overthrow us in one fateful and fatal hour; that which attacks and overwhelms the soul "between the morning and the evening." 2. *That of deceit.* (Ver. 5.) We think we are secure, we are not aware that any evil awaits us, we are like the man in whose path the secret pit is digged; but in truth we are going on in the direction of some serious sin—selfishness, worldliness, pride, vanity, intemperance, impurity, unbelief, or some other moral or spiritual calamity—and if we are not arrested in our way, we shall fall in and be destroyed. It is the unseen and unsuspected peril which is most to be dreaded in the path of life.

II. A SENSE OF PAST DELIVERANCE. (Ver. 7.) As we look back we see that our strong Deliverer, "the strength of our salvation," has put forth his power on our behalf, has "covered our head in the day of battle." There were times when our virtue or our piety was energetically assaulted; but, in the strength of God, we stood firm and

were unmoved. There have been more ways than one in which our moral and spiritual integrity has been in danger of being undermined, but the peril is past; we are true, we are free, we are pure; we have "kept the faith;" the Lord has been on our side; the aim of the enemy has been turned aside.

III. OUR REFUGE IN GOD. David makes his appeal to God (vers. 1, 4, 6, 8—11). He prays God to preserve him while he brings his enemies to destruction. In his position as aspirant to, or occupant of, a throne, assailed by unscrupulous and sanguinary enemies, and in his day when war was regarded as a natural, if not necessary, element in a nation's life, it is perfectly comprehensible that David would desire, and would ask God to accomplish, the ruin of his foes. To him with his measure of enlightenment, not to have done this would have been positively irreligious, for he would then have failed to bring to God what he regarded as his first duty as well as his pressing need. It is otherwise with us. In the light which shines on our path, it becomes us: 1. To ask daily and earnestly for God's help against our spiritual adversaries, that we may defy and defeat them. 2. To pray for our individual opponents, that they may be won to all that is wise and good. The "burning coals" we, as Christian men, desire should fall on the heads of our enemy, are those of Rom. xii. 20—the complete triumph of magnanimity, in which hatred is converted to love, and cruelty to kindness.

IV. OUR ASSURANCE OF VICTORY. (Vers. 12, 13.) Our confidence is in the God of righteousness. He will not regard with indifference either the arrogance and assumption of the proud and strong, or the suffering of the poor and weak. Divine Providence is *not* "on the side of the strongest battalions;" it was *for* the small band under Gideon, and *against* the mighty host of the Midianites; it was *for* the hundreds under Judas Maccabæus, and *against* the thousands under Antiochus of Syria; it was *for* the small vessels of England, and *against* the great galleons of Spain. God is "for the right," and that very often means for the poor and the despised; and they who fear him and do his will and live his life will not seek his help in vain. The night of adversity may be long, but "the morning cometh," and "joy cometh in the morning." "Surely the righteous shall give thanks" unto him. The upright will dwell before him now, conscious of his favour and his blessing; they will dwell in his nearer presence soon, partakers of his glory and his joy.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—13.—*Our adversary and our Defence.* Some there are who unhesitatingly and strongly condemn this psalm: they say it moves only on the low plane of bodily needs; it never mounts up to holy, spiritual desire at all. Further, it is wholly personal, not to say selfish; it is all for "me," no one else, throughout the psalm; also, it is aflame with the "burning coals" of fierce revenge, and is, at the same time, saturated with self-righteousness. Such are the charges brought against this psalm, and a protest is entered against its being used in Christian worship, or regarded as Christian at all. But, to take a present and pressing matter: how do we Christians feel in regard to the unspeakable Turk, now inflicting such awful cruelties on the Armenian? Is there a sentence in this psalm that we would hesitate to apply to that detestable oppressor? If in an Armenian church this psalm was sung just now, as probably it often is, would we unchristianize them for it? Surely not. Then let us, ere we condemn its writer, try and place ourselves in his oppressed and persecuted condition, then we shall be able to judge more fairly and to speak less rashly. But the psalm has its use and application for ourselves; for we have, if not earthly, yet assuredly, spiritual enemies, above all, our "adversary the devil," and of him and of his agents all may be said that is here said, and all prayed that is here prayed. Therefore consider—

I. OUR GREAT ADVERSARY. 1. *Is he not evil?* Do not the manifold manifestations of evil around us and within us prove the existence of a prince of evil, as do the like manifestations of goodness prove the existence of One whom we call God our Father? 2. *And violent.* With what cruel might does he often assault our souls! 3. *And even aiming at our hurt.* "Going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Are not the declarations of vers. 2—5 absolutely true—so incessant, so subtle, so

malignant, so venomous, so hidden and unexpected, are his snares? Let those who have been his victims tell, and the many who still are perpetually oppressed by him.

II. OUR ONLY BUT SURE DEFENCE. It is God the Lord. No power of our own, or of our fellow-man, or of any religious rite, but all and only in God. So do his delivered ones with unanimous voice declare.

III. THIS DEFENCE MADE OUR OWN. How may we avail ourselves of the deliverance which God assures us of? Well: 1. *Our peril must be clearly seen.* See how in this whole psalm, especially vers. 1—5, the writer, whoever he was, is vividly conscious of the formidableness of his foe. And so must we be, as, unhappily, too many are not. Many see no peril, feel no anxiety, are wrapped in profound indifference. Such fall an easy prey to the tempter's power. True, the world is not the devil's world—it was one of his lies when he told our Lord that all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory were given to him; it is not so; but still he is here in the world, and we ever need to be on our guard. 2. *We must betake ourselves to prayer.* Prayer brings the unseen and the eternal near to us, so that they become visible and tangible to our spirits, and as living realities exercise their mighty influence upon us. As the earth gets out of the darkness by swinging itself round to the light, so by prayer we turn to where God and all the power of his blessed Spirit are, and so deliverance comes. 3. *Evil must be intensely hated.* (Vers. 9—11.) No matter whether it be that embodiment of evil external to us, which is called the devil, or whether it be that inward corruption and wicked disposition which we find still lurking in our souls. We cannot curse it too bitterly or hate it too intensely. "Ye that fear the Lord *hate* evil"—so are we commanded, and any less intense feeling towards it is incompatible with the true love of God. 4. *Personal appropriation of God.* We must be able to say unto the Lord, "Thou art *my* God." A mere abstract creed will not help us; we must each one know God as "the Strength of my salvation." 5. *Remembrance of former mercies will greatly help us.* "Thou hast covered," etc. (ver. 7). 6. *Let there be confident faith.* (Vers. 12, 13.) The faith of Israel was shown by their believing shout as they compassed the city of Jericho. The walls had not yet fallen, but they knew they would, and so they shouted. So the psalmist says, "I know" (ver. 12), and "surely" (ver. 13). We must come to God, expecting that he will answer our prayers (Jas. i. 6). Such are some of the suggestions of this psalm as to God's way of deliverance. May we be able to avail ourselves of them!—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*The mischiefs of evil-disposed men.* "Mischiefs" is a very suggestive and comprehensive term. It is frequently used in the Psalms in the singular form, and always suggests *scheming*, underhanded plotting, to do some evil. In the plural form there are only two passages in the Scriptures, besides our text, in which the word is employed: Deut. xxxii. 23, "I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them;" Ps. lii. 2, "Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully."

I. REGARD MISCHIEFS AS MALICIOUS INTENTION. "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth;" "How long will ye imagine mischief against a man?" It is the characteristic of the evil-hearted, evil-disposed man, that he "deviseth mischiefs upon his bed." It is his pleasure to plan an injury; he delights in making misery, and ruining reputations. Any man may do a mischief on impulse or by accident. The evil man cherishes malicious intentions.

II. REGARD MISCHIEFS AS INJURIOUS SPEECH. "They have sharpened their tongue like a serpent." There is speech that cuts and wounds by its bitterness; that injures by its untruthfulness; that destroys reputations by its slanders. There is no surer sign of the evil heart than the evident pleasure felt in saying mischievous things.

III. REGARD MISCHIEFS AS VIOLENT ACTS. (Vers. 4, 5.) It is the peculiarity of evil-disposed men that cherished evil thoughts inspire evil deeds. The good man checks unkind and evil thoughts, lest they should get expression in acts. But the evil man nourishes them, enjoys them, puts himself into their power, and is by them urged on to violent and injurious deeds. Cherish malicious thought, and you put yourself into its power; and it may lead you on to shameful deeds. But the mischiefs of evil men never transcend the Divine limitations. God has his hand on them, and we may be absolutely assured that he says, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further;

here shall thy proud waves be stayed." And we may even see deeper into the heart of Divine dealing, and say that the mischiefs of evil men become ministries of the Divine purpose of grace concerning God's people.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The rest of personally appropriating God.* "I said unto the Lord, Thou art *my* God" (comp. Ps. xvi. 2, "I have said unto the Lord, Thou art *my* Lord; I have no good beyond thee;" Ps. xxvii. 1, "The Lord is *my* light and my salvation;" and many other places). Indeed, a characteristic feature of the Psalms is this personal appropriation of God. It is an essential feature of spiritual religion. There must be this sense of kinness with God, and actual relationship to him. So St. Thomas exclaims, "*My* Lord and *my* God!" And our Divine Lord, as model and representative Humanity, said, even in a time of overwhelming darkness and distress, "*My* God, *my* God, why hast thou forsaken me?" From this psalm we learn how such personal appropriation of God really comes to us.

I. IT COMES FROM GOD SEEN IN OUR PAST. "Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle." Some one thing was in the psalmist's thought, but it would be sure to lead on a great panorama of Divine defences and interventions. The one thing was like the first star seen in the evening sky. It is "the glorious token of millions more." God has always been on our side. He is *our* God.

II. IT COMES FROM GOD REALIZED IN PRESENT RELATIONS. We express this when we call him the *living* God. It should always be clearly seen that "living" involves present activity. Silent and inactive Buddha does not live, does not sustain personal relations, is only an object of contemplation. God lives; is active; is in relations; as these relations are seen to be directly present and personal ones, we call him *our* God. Our God is here now; he is for us now; he is *ours* now.

III. IT COMES FROM GOD FELT AS THE LOVED AND LOVING ONE. We can appropriate a thing in a cold mood of acquisition. We can only appropriate a person by the act of affection. And herein is a remarkable thing. We cannot appropriate a *person* unless he is willing to be appropriated. He must love us, or our love to him only keeps us at a distance from each other. We may appropriate God in our love because he appropriates us in his love.—R. T.

Vers. 8—11.—*The intervention of God sought.* We need not fix close attention on the intensity of the language which the psalmists use concerning their enemies, or even concerning the enemies of God. All that unrestrainedness belongs to the *times* and the *race*. Eastern people use language which to the Western mind appears extravagant and unworthy. We feel, under persecution and calamity, precisely as they felt, but we know how to express our feelings more guardedly. Only in moments of passion do we ever permit ourselves to say or to wish such things as these psalmists utter so freely. The topic suggested here is this—What is to be done by the godly man when he finds himself in the midst of malicious foes?

I. HE IS TEMPTED TO INDULGE REVENGEFUL FEELING. Such feelings at once come. They are the natural, or we may more truly say the unnatural, response of our hearts. Indeed, if we do not watch ourselves well, we at once *answer back*. It is not our sin that revengeful feeling is aroused. It is sin when revengeful feeling is *encouraged*; our grievous sin when it is *enjoyed*.

II. HE IS TEMPTED TO VINDICATE HIMSELF BY ACTS OF RETALIATION. "Rendering evil for evil." Taking the avenging of his injuries into his own hands. Children do that. Uncivilized and unorganized nations do that. Each one avenges his own wrongs. But from the Divine standpoint that is always and altogether wrong; for one supremely good reason—that a man can never avenge himself without seriously *injuring himself* in so doing. The worst thing that can happen to a man is to get his revenge. That dims the fine gold of character.

III. HE IS PERSUADED TO LEAVE VENGEANCE TO GOD. And this he may safely do, because whosoever touches God's people touches God—touches the "apple of his eye." Moreover, God never lets the wicked go unpunished; but as he loves the wicked and seeks his good, he alone can adjust the punishment to the individual, and to the securing of wise and gracious ends. God can be *calm* in judgments.

IV. HE IS MOVED TO ASK GOD TO UNDERTAKE THE VENGEANCE FOR HIM. And

then he is altogether relieved from the pressure of responsibility, and is free to bear the burden quietly and calmly.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*The inward sense of right is an assurance of safety.* The “upright” man is the man of integrity. And the consciousness of integrity gives, and properly gives, confidence and security. A man may cherish a sense of right, of uprightness, of sincerity. He may be sure that this puts him into the sympathy and favour of God. The psalmist—who may well have been David—may properly plead before God and say, “Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me.” When the psalmist made this plea, he was suffering from unjust suspicions and unworthy accusations, very much as was the writer of the psalm now before us. But these terms, “uprightness,” “integrity,” “righteousness,” need very careful consideration. They can be applied to a *man*. It is certain that man can be said to have a righteousness. “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.” We have known men and women of integrity who were right-hearted and sincere, and gained our confidence because they were. Sometimes, in the Scriptures, the word “righteousness” means right-heartedness, sincerity; it shows a man who is, at heart, centred on God and virtue. We have a way of speaking of men as being “good at bottom.” If we say that as any excuse for men’s sins, we are altogether in the wrong. If we say it in recognition of human frailty, and with discernment of life as the conflict of the human will over the disabilities that surround us, then it is a true and worthy speech.

I. A MAN MUST HAVE ESTABLISHED GOOD PRINCIPLES IF HE IS TO HAVE AN INWARD SENSE OF RIGHT. When there is drifting and uncertainty as to what is right, there can be no restful inward conviction that we are right.

II. A MAN MUST HAVE GOOD CONTROL OF HIS LIFE IF HE IS TO HAVE AN INWARD SENSE OF RIGHT. There must be harmony between the conduct and relations of the life and the cherished feelings of the heart, or the sense of sincerity will be destroyed.

III. A MAN MUST BE SURE OF DIVINE DEFENCE IF HE IS SURE OF HIS OWN SINCERITY. God is true; he must be on the side of the true. God is served by the sincere; he surely defends his servants.—R. T.

Vers. 1—13.—*The holy war.* The speaker is a king, in danger from crafty and violent and rebellious subjects, who prays for deliverance from them. The situation may be generalized and taken as an account of the struggle for ever going on between the righteous and the wicked.

I. THE NATURE OF THE WAR OF THE WICKED AGAINST THE RIGHTEOUS. 1. *A war carried on by brute strength.* “Violent men” (vers. 1—4). When men have not reason and justice on their side, they resort to the employment of physical force—*Nihilism, dynamite, insurrection.* 2. *Slander.* (Ver. 3.) Poisonous reports, full of lies and libels, and foul imaginations of a wicked heart, are propagated without scruple, with a view of taking away the character. 3. *Crafty plots.* (Ver. 5.) When open warfare is unsuccessful, they resort to traps and plots that shall surprise the unwary, and seek to ruin a man by secret means.

II. THE RIGHTEOUS MAN’S SECURITY. Commits his cause to God; he cannot defend himself by retaliations—by using their means in reply. The grounds of his hope. 1. *God was his; therefore God would hear and answer him.* (Ver. 6.) God the Almighty and All-sufficient was his, and he was God’s. 2. *His past experience.* (Ver. 7.) God had already defended him in scenes of danger. 3. *God cannot favour the wicked cause.* (Ver. 8.) Therefore God would appear for him, on his side.

III. HIS FAITH IN GOD RISES INTO THE STRONGEST ASSURANCE. 1. *There is a law of retribution at work.* (Vers. 9—11.) The imprecations of the ninth and tenth verses emerge into the prophecy of the eleventh. 2. *An assurance that God is pledged to the righteous cause.* (Ver. 12.) 3. *The righteous shall ultimately rejoice in the manifested presence of God.* (Ver. 13; see Pss. xi. 7; xvi. 11.)—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXLI.

ALMOST wholly a psalm of supplication. David is again in danger, and needs a prompt deliverance (ver. 1). This time the danger seems to be that he may fall away, and be absorbed into the company of the wicked. He therefore prays: 1. That prayer may be with him a settled institution (ver. 2). 2. That he may be saved from sins of the tongue (ver. 3). 3. That he may be saved from sins of thought or act (ver. 4). 4. That he may be given grace to welcome reproof (ver. 5). The circumstances of the time are then shortly touched. There has been a severe judgment on the rulers of the people (ver. 6), and a great national calamity (ver. 7), with the result that the people are touched in their hearts, while David's confidence in God is in no way diminished. This is followed by a renewal of prayer: (1) for his own deliverance (ver. 9); and (2) for a further punishment of the wicked (ver. 10).

Ver. 1.—Lord, I cry unto thee; make haste unto me. The need is pressing and urgent. God is therefore entreated to "hasten" (comp. Ps. xxii. 19; xxxi. 2; xxxviii. 22; xl. 17, etc.). Give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee (comp. Ps. cii. 2).

Ver. 2.—Let my prayer be set forth (or, "established") before thee as incense; i.e. with the regularity of the incense, and with its acceptableness. And the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. The hands were "lifted up" in prayer, which was reckoned a sort of sacrifice (Hos. xiv. 2).

Ver. 3.—Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips (comp. Ps. xxxix. 1). David's was a hasty, impetuous temper, which required sharp control. He strove to "keep his own mouth with a bridle"—to "be dumb with silence, and hold his peace"—but this was not always possible for him of his own unassisted strength. He therefore makes his prayer to God for the Divine help.

Ver. 4.—Incline not my heart to any evil thing; i.e. let not my heart be inclined to any form of evil. To practise wicked works (rather, *wicked practices*) with men that work iniquity; and let me not eat of their dainties. Let me not be drawn in to their life of sinful luxury.

Ver. 5.—Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness; rather, *let the righteous*

smite me kindly, as in the margin. And let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head; rather, *which my head shall not refuse*. The psalmist will prefer the reproof of the righteous to the dainty allurements of the wicked. He will regard their words as an oil of welcome, such as was poured upon the head of favoured guests (Luke vii. 36), and his head will not refuse it. For yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities; rather, *their wickednesses*. This healing oil will strengthen him to continue to pray for his enemies, even though they still continue in their "wickednesses."

Ver. 6.—When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words. Calamity opens the heart to receive instruction. The "judges"—i.e. the leaders—among David's enemies are visited with a grievous calamity, expressed metaphorically by their being dashed upon rocks. This disposes them to listen to David's words, which are well worth listening to, since they are sweet.

Ver. 7.—Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth. The calamity is not confined to the "judges." The bones of the people generally lie scattered at hell's mouth—unburied, i.e., but ready to go down to Hades. As when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth; rather, *as when one cleaves and breaks up the earth*. "The bones of God's servants were strewn as thickly over the ground as stones over a newly ploughed piece of soil, so that the Holy Land looked as if it had become an antechamber of Hades" (Kay).

Ver. 8.—But mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord. I, however, the psalmist says, do not despair—I look to thee, O Jehovah the Lord (comp. Ps. xl. 7)—in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute. The last clause is, literally, *pour not out my soul*; i.e. destroy me not—do not spill my life on the ground (comp. Isa. liii. 12).

Ver. 9.—Keep me from the snares which they have laid for me, and the gins of the workers of iniquity (comp. Ps. xl. 4, 5).

Ver. 10.—Let the wicked fall into their own nets (comp. Ps. vii. 15; xxxv. 8; lvii. 6; Prov. v. 22). The moral sense is always satisfied when the wicked man falls into his own trap, or is "hoist with his own petard." Even a heathen poet could say—

"Nec lex justior ulla est,
Quam necis artifices arte perire sua."

Whilst that I withal escape; literally, *until that I pass over*; i.e. whilst I pass over the nets, or traps, in safety.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*Acceptable sacrifices.* The more distinctive teaching of this psalm respects—

I. THE SACRIFICE OF PRAYER. (Vers. 2, 8, 9.) When the sacrificial services of the tabernacle (or temple) could not be rendered, it was open to the devout Israelite to “lift up his hands” in reverent, believing prayer. And this, we are sure, was acceptable to “him that heareth prayer.” The essence of all sacrifice was an appeal to God by the spirit of man, the going forth of the human spirit to the Divine Spirit; it was this that was symbolized by the incense or slain lamb. The presentation of the visible meant and expressed the offering of that which was invisible—the grateful, or the penitent or the dedicatory thought and feeling of the worshipper. Prayer, therefore, was of the essential nature of a true sacrifice. We cannot offer, at any altar, anything which is more well pleasing to God than the prayer which “goeth not forth from feigned lips,” which rises from the heart—the morning sacrifice of supplication for guidance and protection throughout the duties and difficulties and temptations of the day; the evening sacrifice of thanksgiving for the blessings that have been bestowed, of prayer for the forgiveness of imperfect service, and of trustful surrender of body and spirit to the Divine keeping for the coming night.

II. THE SACRIFICE OF SPEECH AND SILENCE. (Ver. 3.) The psalmist prays God to “keep the door of his lips” (see Pss. xxxiv. 13; xxxix. 1; Jas. iii. 3—12). It is well to ask God to do this, but it is also well to recognize that he requires of us that we should do this also. The use we make of our tongue, that member which is “our glory” (Pss. xxx. 12; lvii. 8), and too often is our shame, is a very serious and important feature of our Christian life. 1. By a determined silence when we are tempted to speak and to strike, we may save ourselves and others from a “fire” (Jas. iii. 6) which might desolate and destroy. He that “ruleth his spirit” and hudgeth his tongue is a true conqueror (Prov. xvi. 32). 2. And when we use our tongue to utter words of conciliation, to express regret for inadvertent error or omission, to excuse unintentional or pardonable faultiness, to pardon wrong, to encourage weakness, to enlighten ignorance, to impel to duty or devotion, to lead men in prayer to God, we are offering a very acceptable sacrifice—“the calves of our lips” (Hos. xiv. 2).

III. THE SACRIFICE OF SEPARATION AND ABSTINENCE. If we pray (see ver. 4) to be delivered from an inclination to join the wicked in their evil courses and in their ungodly revelries, we must exercise in ourselves a strong restraint; we must resolve to “enter not into the path of the wicked,” to “turn from it and pass away” (Prov. iv. 14, 15). The duty of declining invitations from the unholy, of keeping away from the hearth and the table where nothing virtuous or valuable is to be gained, and where much that is most precious may be lost or injured, is a duty, a sacrifice, very needful to the young. Regard or disregard of it may make all the difference between life and death. A wise separateness from sin (2 Cor. vi. 17) will be a very acceptable sacrifice to him who is our thrice-holy Lord, will save us from a peril which has meant ruin to many who imagined themselves strong and safe, and will place us by the side of him who himself was “undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. vii. 26).

IV. THE SACRIFICE OF DOCILITY. (Ver. 5.) “It is allowable to learn from an enemy.” It is much more obviously right to learn from “the righteous;” and, though they speak reprovingly and reflect on what we have said or done, their words should be well received. 1. The correction of man may be, in truth, the guidance of God. He may be speaking to us through his servants; it has often been the case with others, and it may well be so with us. It may be a Samuel, or an Elijah, or a Nathan, or a Paul that is speaking in God’s name. 2. We acknowledge ourselves to be in error, to be at fault, *generally*; why should we be unwilling to learn when we are so *in particular instances*? 3. The docile reception of rebuke may save us from much graver sorrow that we should otherwise suffer; it may result in an improvement of conduct and enlargement of usefulness for which we shall give God heartiest thanks.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—10.—“*Keep me from the snares.*” This difficult psalm seems to be the cry of a greatly tempted soul. And the temptation now did not arise so much from the persecutions of the ungodly as from their seducing favours—what he calls “their dainties” (ver. 4). And he seems to have found this even harder to resist than their cruelty and harshness. Consider—

I. THE SPIRIT OF THIS PRAYER. 1. *Note its impassioned earnestness.* (Ver. 1.) “Lord, I cry unto thee.” No mere formal, ordinary prayer, but a pleading cry. 2. *He pleads for haste on the part of the Lord.* He can bear no delay. 3. *That his cry may find much acceptance.* (Ver. 2.) The burning of incense was one chief part of the evening sacrifice, and the meaning of it was to set forth, by its fragrance and sweet odour, the acceptableness of sincere believing prayer. Hence the psalmist here seeks that his cry may be thus acceptable before God.

II. ITS SUBSTANCE. His enemies, by bribes, favours, and blandishments of one kind and another, are seeking to lead him astray from God. Hence he prays: 1. *That he may not commit himself by rash and unguarded speech.* (Ver. 3.) What a peril and a snare this is to many! How often have they found themselves entrapped and entangled by some hasty utterance, which should never have passed their lips! These doors open too quickly and too easily, and let out what should be kept in; they need a watchman to guard them and to determine when they shall or shall not be opened, and only the Lord can set that watch. Happy the man for whom he does this! 2. *That his heart may be kept true.* (Ver. 4.) It is a blessed thing when our external conduct is kept right, when our hands are tied by God’s providence, and so held in from mischief; but it is better far when our hearts are made right, so that they will have no desire for evil things. And God will do this for us. “The blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth from all sin.” 3. *That the dainties of the wicked may not seduce him.* Thus do they persuade men of unstable mind to practise wicked works. The way is smoothed, made to seem so attractive and right, just as our first parents were tempted, for theirs was the pattern of all successful temptation. The devil has great store of these “dainties;” he knows how to suit all tastes and to please all palates. 4. *That he may not lack a faithful reprover.* (Ver. 5.) There are plentiful prophets who will prophesy smooth things for the sin-loving soul; but faithful Micaiahs (1 Kings xxii. 8) are few and far between. But the psalmist here prays that he may never want for such. Let us pray the little prayer. How many go wrong just for want of such faithful reproof! Those who should reprove often shrink from their duty, for it is the reverse of pleasant. 5. *That his soul may not perish.* (Ver. 8.) That its life may not be poured out,—such is the meaning of the word; emptied as a vessel. He was in sore peril; his enemies by “their dainties” were devising all manner of stratagem against him—snares, gins, nets. 6. *That in spite of all, he may escape.*

III. HIS CONFIDENT HOPE. (Ver. 6.) That when the leaders, the rulers and judges, who led the way in wickedness,—when they were hurled down the rock (cf. 2 Chron. xxv. 12; 2 Kings ix. 33), then their followers would hear his words and welcome them. Let the ringleaders be got out of the way; the rest would gladly listen to godly counsels. And these leaders in evil deserved such doom; for they had been cruel persecutors of the people of God (ver. 7), whose bones were scattered along the borders of the grave in vast numbers, like so many furrows made by the plough. And for such turning of the hearts of the people and for his own escape from his present trial he would continually wait on God, for God was his trust (ver. 8). Hence he confidently hoped to see the wicked leaders destroyed, their followers converted, and his own soul kept by the grace of God. Such prayers will ever inspire such hopes.—S. C.

Ver. 3.—“*Keep the door of my lips.*” How needed is a sentinel and guard at the door! For lack of it, what mischief has been wrought! Who can recount all the ills of unguarded speech?

I. LIP-SINS: THEIR CAUSE. 1. *Impulsive temperament.* Like as a stroke from the whip, which would only make the common cart-horse slowly shake his head, but would send the thorough-bred flying over the hedge in a very tornado of rage, so there are men who are never roused to hasty speech, they never get into trouble that way;

whilst others, quick-witted, agile-minded, swift to see what can be said on any given subject,—they are apt to think that all that can be said must be said, and with sad un wisdom they haste to say it. These are the “good talkers;” unhappy ones, they should rather be called. 2. *Vanity*. A liking to show off, coupled with the consciousness that they can do so if they choose. 3. *Want of self-control*. There are times when even cautious, well-balanced men are driven out of their wonted self-restraint, so great is the provocation they have received; but there are others who never seem to put any check upon themselves, but yield to every impulse and follow at once every prompting of their uncontrolled thoughts; they need no great provocation, but will pour out their multitude of words on any and every occasion, whether wise or otherwise. 4. *Evil temper* and mere thoughtlessness are other causes of much of the unguarded and hasty speech with which the world is afflicted; and so is: 5. *The lack of real religion*, of the fear of God, and of the sense of the seriousness of life and conduct.

II. THEIR CONSEQUENCES. 1. *To the speaker himself*. (1) “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin.” The man who lets his tongue run on unrestrained is sure to say something that will bring guilt on his soul and burden on his conscience. (2) Weakening of the character and will. The invaluable blessing of strength of will is only won by diligent self-restraint and watchful self-recollection; but it is sapped and wasted by unguarded and multitudinous speech. (3) Loss of reputation. Men reckon one another up, and a man of many words never wins their confidence; they almost instinctively distrust him. Thus the man may do himself real harm, and lessen his influence, and misrepresent his own character. (4) Such loose unrestrained talk rarely bears reflection; it is generally followed by much regret and sadness and repentance. 2. *To the hearer* of such unguarded speech. Great harm may be done. “You drop, in the thoughtlessness of conversation, or for the sake of argument or wit, some irreligious, sceptical expression; it lodges in the memory of a child or a servant; it takes root in a soil favourable to such seed; it gradually springs up and brings forth fruit in disregard of religious duty, neglect of the means of grace, and the various steps of a downward course, the end of which no one can tell. This is all too common a case. But there is a Being who knows where it began.” We little know what great things from little ones may rise. And how often, in loose unrestrained speech, we inflict cruel and needless pain! We did not think to do harm, but it is done all the same. And what an ill example we set to those who hear us; and one so apt to be followed! 3. *And to those spoken of*. They are likely to be misrepresented. From careless good nature we may commend some who, if we do not censure and warn against them, we, at least, should be silent concerning them. Or, on the other hand, and a more likely case, those of whom we speak so carelessly are likely to be injured, and perhaps seriously, and a false impression given of them, which they by no means deserve. How repeatedly the Scriptures give warning on this subject (see Prov. xviii. 21; xv. 2, 7; Matt. xiii. 36, 37; Jas. i. 26, etc.)!

III. ITS CURE. 1. *Prayer*. The text is a prayer. It will be God’s special grace that alone can conquer this too common sin. 2. *Cultivate the habit of thoughtfulness and self-recollection*. Lift up your heart to God for his aid in this matter, when you go into company where temptation to this sin is likely to beset you. 3. *Vows of silence for given periods*. These will tend to strengthen the habit of self-control. 4. *Seek and cherish love to your fellow-men*—to do to them as you would they should do to you. 5. And because as the tree is so will be its fruits, therefore *seek the grace of God*, that you yourself may be possessed and sanctified and kept of the Holy Spirit. Then shall ways and works and words be alike good.—S. C.

Ver. 5.—*The excellent oil of reproof; or, kindness smiting*. Much may be learned from this verse concerning the very difficult and delicate task of reproofing others. We learn—

I. THAT REPROOF MAY BE SO ADMINISTERED AS TO BE EVEN WELCOMED. “Let the righteous smite me,” etc.; and further down in the verse, “Let not my head refuse it;” such is the truer rendering of the Revised Version in the clause which our Authorized Version reads, “which shall not break my head.” It is evident, therefore, that the reproofing told of here was not hated and resented, as reproof commonly is, but even gratefully accepted. Generally, as we know, reproof is amongst the most

unpalatable of things (see an admirable sermon by C. H. Spurgeon on Job vi. 6). And we know this, and therefore needed rebuke and admonition are not given as they should be. We too often see our brother go wrong, and out of craven fear we hold back the warning and the reproof.

II. AND THIS, NOTWITHSTANDING IT MAY BE SEVERE. The psalmist calls it a smiting: "Let the righteous smite me." And on the head also; for he says (Revised Version), "Let not my head refuse it." A blow on the body would be far less injurious, painful, and ignominious than one on the head, such as is contemplated here. But still it is welcomed. This is difficult when "the righteous one" is God, who, as some expositors affirm, is here meant (see 2 Sam. vii. 14, 15). To humble ourselves under even his mighty hand (Heb. xii. 5—11), to whom we should "much rather be in subjection," is often found far from easy by our rebellious hearts; but if "the righteous" spoken of be our fellow-men, then it is more difficult still. But here such smiting is not only submitted to, but welcomed. This is a very unusual thing indeed.

III. FURTHERMORE, IT SHALL BE DEEMED "KINDNESS," AND GRATEFUL AS "THE OIL OF JOY." For this is what is here referred to (cf. Pss. xxiii. 5; xlv. 7; Matt. vi. 17). His soul is glad because of it; he counts himself happy and fortunate to have received it. How is all this to be understood? Therefore note—

IV. THE EXPLANATION OF SUCH RARE RECEPTION OF REPROOF. 1. *Certainly it is not because the man is mean-spirited* and lies down like a slave or a stricken dog to be beaten. It is no "Uriah Heep" kind of humility. If we thought that such language as we have here would be nauseating, we should, as we ought, despise it. 2. But the evident explanation of it is *that the man's whole soul longed after holiness and purity*, and loathed sin with a great loathing. He so dreaded being betrayed into sin, that he welcomed with joy any rebuke, no matter how severe and shameful, that restrained him from it. Thus is this strong, strange speech explained. 3. *And what a revelation of the grace of God in a man's soul it is!* Oh to so hate sin that we shall be glad of any suffering, yea, death itself, rather than come under its power! Happy the heart that can say "Amen" to the psalmist's prayer!

V. THE REPROVER AND THE REPROOF. 1. *The reprover.* He must be righteous and felt to be so by him whom he reproves. It is not, "Let anybody reprove me," but "the righteous." Reproof from others would be of no avail. But the righteous reprover is one who knows that what he says is true, that reproof ought to be given, because a brother's soul is in peril. Also he is one who feels deeply the dread evil of sin; it is no trifle to him, whether in himself or others; the honour of God is dear to him, and so is his brother's soul. For he not only feels, but loves. That is the motive which urges him, apart from which he would have said nothing. Such are the characteristics of the righteous reprover. 2. And then, *the reproof.* The similitude here employed—the fragrant, refreshing, healthful anointing oil—suggests much. As to the gentleness of the reproof. Though the psalmist says he would welcome it though it were as a smiting on the head, it need not, should not, will not, be like that (see our Saviour's reproofs of his disciples, Matt. xxvi. 41). And as to its insinuating, penetrating power, not by its harshness, but the very reverse. And as to its being much mingled with love and evident kindness of heart. Reprove so; for such reproof will not repel, but rather bind yet more closely to you the heart of him whom you reprove. See what he says, "For yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities." We prefer this rendering; it tells how the psalmist loved the righteous ones who had reproved him, and would still pray for them amid their sorrow: they might say anything to him, it would not sever his soul from theirs.—S. O.

Ver. 5.—*Praying for others.* The psalmist here says he will do this. We need not trouble about the right rendering of this difficult verse, but may take it as it stands. It says that the calamities of the righteous shall stir the psalmist's soul to pray for them. He loved them much, even though they severely rebuked him, indeed, because they did so.

I. IT IS A BEAUTIFUL EXAMPLE. We pray for ourselves, and it is right we should, for unless we ourselves are right with God we shall care but little for the highest good of others, and we shall be disqualified for interceding for them. How ungodly parents who, nevertheless, love their children very dearly, should remember this! They cannot

render their children the highest service of all until they themselves are reconciled to God. But we ought not to pray only for ourselves. We can be selfish even in prayer; it is to be feared we very often are. But selfishness is as wrong there as elsewhere.

II. IT HAS THE HIGHEST SANCTION. Our Lord Jesus Christ now at the right hand of God "ever liveth to make intercession for us." Moreover, he has taught us to pray, "*Our Father, which art,*" etc. It is not "*my:*" our Lord would have us be intercessors for others when we pray for ourselves.

III. THERE ARE INNUMERABLE REASONS FOR IT. 1. *It is part of our obedience to Christ.* We are to love our neighbour as ourselves. Surely this includes prayer for him. 2. *It unites us with Christ.* We cannot "redeem our brother or give to God a ransom for him;" but we can pray for him. 3. *It does such good.* (1) To those we pray for. We may be sure that God never draws forth our hearts in fervent prayer for others, and then disappoints that prayer. See Abraham's intercession for Sodom. How much do not we ourselves owe to those that have prayed for us! Saintly fathers and mothers, holy men and ministers of God, asked for our salvation, and it has been given. What a motive this for like prayer on our own part! What faithful preacher does not know that his congregation's preparedness to receive the Word is largely in proportion to the fervency of his prayers! (2) And to ourselves who pray, such prayer is blessed. It clears our minds of ill will; it prompts us to kindly, helpful thought, word, and deed; it wins the smile of God on our own souls. 4. *It is a work we can all engage in,* though we may not be able to do much else. What do not the ministers of God owe to poor bed-ridden people who pray for them as they minister!—S. C.

Vers. 7, 8.—*The victory of faith.* In these verses two contrasted scenes are set before us. We are shown—

I. AN UTTERLY HOPELESS CONDITION. 1. *The psalmist seems to be contemplating the mournful state of the people of God, of whom he rejoices to be one.* He represents them as being not merely a defeated company, but large numbers of them destroyed, and their bodies in long furrow-like heaps left in dishonoured and horrible neglect to be the prey of the vultures and the wolves. Overwhelming destruction has come upon them; they seem fallen, to rise no more. It is a piteous sight for the survivor to contemplate; for they are his own people, he identifies himself with them. "*Our bones,*" he says, "*are scattered,*" etc. He might well cast himself down in despair. 2. *And how often in the history of the Church of God, and in the lives of individual men, such seemingly sad and hopeless conditions are met with!* The Bible gives us instances not a few. See Abraham when called on to offer Isaac as a burnt offering; how dark the prospect seemed then! Moses, when sent to deliver Israel from Egypt. Gideon, when the Midianites were ravaging the land. David before Goliath. How reasonable it had been if despair had fastened upon them and upon many other such tried souls! And many a child of God is to-day brought into like circumstances, his soul smitten down to the gates of death, even as our Lord in Gethsemane.

II. A VIRTUOUS FAITH NOTWITHSTANDING. (Ver. 8.) True, there lay his hopes, scattered, overwhelmed, destroyed, like the bones of a defeated, destroyed, dead but unburied army. Nevertheless, the soul of the psalmist is up unto God. "*Mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord.*" The more hopeless the state of things seemed, the more steadfastly was his gaze fixed on God, the more emphatically was his confession given. "*In thee is my trust;*" and the more confidently ascended his prayer. It is a beautiful spectacle, the soul holding on to God in spite of all the buffetings of disastrous circumstances, and all "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," in spite, too, of the apparent abandonment of his career by God. O glorious faith, what hast thou not done? what canst thou not and wilt thou not do?

III. SOME REASONS WHEREFORE THESE THINGS ARE SO. 1. *As to the sad and seemingly hopeless conditions in which God's people often find themselves.* They are terrible trials to a man's faith; often men have utterly broken down under them, and fallen into the depths of atheism and irreligion. Faith is not universally victorious, sometimes far otherwise. Wherefore, then, are such trials sent? Well, sometimes to give opportunity for bearing the most emphatic testimony for God that a human soul can give. One chief reason of the cross of Christ was that he might there, as, blessed be his Name! he did, give such mighty testimony to the all-sustaining power

of the love of God. Those whom he came to save had fearful sorrows to bear, and on the cross he showed them that God was the great Burden-bearer, the never-failing Solace and Stay of the soul. And for like reason his people now are often called upon to bear burdens heavy indeed. Then another reason is that there is no other way whereby the innate and inveterate earthliness of the human heart can be overcome. God has to let men see that this world will not satisfy them, no, not even when its pleasures are of the fairest and most innocent kind. We are so apt, so certain, to think they will, that God has not seldom to "scatter our bones at the grave's mouth," ere we will see our mistake. The earthly cords that hold the soul down have to be cut. And also to compel men to take refuge in God, to drive them to the shelter and shadow of his wings. And God deals thus with individual souls, that others through them may learn that this is not our rest, but that God is. 2. *Then as to the blessed victorious faith, its explanation is:* (1) The grace of God. Bunyan tells of the picture seen by Christian of the fire which would burn on in spite of water perpetually and profusely poured upon it, and when he wondered how this could be, he says that he saw a man, unseen by others, continually pouring oil on the fire, and so it burnt on in spite of the water. That is ever the explanation of victorious faith—the grace of God secretly keeps it alive. (2) The power of prayer. "Mine eyes," etc. His soul looked to God continually. (3) The habit of trust. "In thee is my trust." The will more than the reason is needed. "I will trust, and not be afraid." This blessed habit can and should be zealously cultivated.

IV. WHAT ENSUES. 1. *God is glorified by such faith.* How could it be otherwise? 2. *Our suffering brethren are greatly helped by the testimony we give.* 3. *The peace of God fills our own soul.*—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*The plea of former prayer.* Associating this psalm with David, Spurgeon thinks we have here "David under suspicion, half afraid to speak lest he should speak unadvisedly while trying to clear himself; David slandered and beset by enemies; David censured even by saints, and taking it kindly; David deploring the condition of the godly party, of whom he was the acknowledged head; David waiting upon God with confident expectation." The point before us now is brought out by the Revised Version, which renders thus: "Lord I have called upon thee; make haste unto me: give ear unto my voice, when I call unto thee." The psalmist uses as a plea the fact that he *had* called upon God. But his precise thought seems to be, that the prayer he had offered still remained unanswered, and he must therefore offer it again, and even more earnestly. So there are two topics which may be unfolded and illustrated.

I. ANSWERED FORMER PRAYERS ARE AN EFFECTIVE PLEA. And a store of these every good man holds in loving memory. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard, and saved him out of all his troubles;" "Verily God hath heard me." Every true life, when looked back upon, is seen to be full of Jehovah-jireh pillars erected as memorials of answered prayer. These become a plea in fresh prayer, because they are (1) God's pledges of his personal interest in us; (2) God's illustrations of what he can and will do for us; and (3) the best influence toward nourishing in us that spirit of trustfulness, and humble but confident hope, which is the acceptable spirit of all prayer. We trust God to heed us because he *has* heeded us; and his ways with us have revealed to us what he is, the "prayer-answering God."

II. UNANSWERED FORMER PRAYERS ARE AN EFFECTIVE PLEA. The psalmist has prayed about some particular need. The prayer is still unanswered. On some this might act depressingly, and they might pray no more. This psalmist watches unto prayer. Delay does its intended work, and excites importunity. Because the answer has not come, he must pray again, and even plead that he is anxiously awaiting the answer. Illustrated by the Syro-phœnician woman.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Prayer as incense.* From the mention of the *evening* sacrifice we may gather that the psalmist is actually praying in the evening. Incense was offered when the lamps were trimmed in the morning, and when the lamps were lighted "between the evenings," after the evening sacrifice. Incense, offered after sacrifice, is the symbol of the worship of the soul already reconciled to God. The evening sacrifice is the regular burnt offering of self-dedication. "As incense is carefully prepared,

kindled with holy fire, and devoutly presented unto God, so let my prayer be." There are two things about incense which may be taken as suggestive—its steady ascending as smoke; and its pleasantness.

I. THE ASCENDING OF INCENSE AS A SUGGESTION OF PRAYER. The smoke, richly laden with perfume, rises steadily up, in a quiet and gentle, yet persistent way, until it is lost to sight in the high air. It should not be lost sight of that incense appeals to sight as well as to smell. And prayer is really the soul's ascending to God. It is as the smoke laden with the soul's perfume of dependence, desire, and trust. It is the man who is continually either looking on the level, or looking down, looking *up*, nay going up, getting soul-wings and rising to God. It implies getting, at least for the time, free from earthly entanglements. It is leaving the baser self, as the incense smoke leaves the wood of the spices; it is carrying up the sublimer self, as the incense smoke carries up the very essence of the spices. We do not apprehend prayer until we see it as *the soul's going up to God*.

II. THE PLEASANTNESS OF INCENSE AS A SUGGESTION OF PRAYER. Using the figure of a man, God is said to have "smelled a sweet savour" from the smoke of Noah's sacrifice. Smoke of incense is not pleasant to us, but Easterns love strong and unusual scents. We note that the smoke was full of perfume, and *that* God is well pleased with. Then there must be perfume in our prayer that ascends to him—perfume of trust, humility, love, fervent desire, and confident assurance. Can we think of God as *enjoying* our prayers?—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Our lip-watchman*. Our lips are poetically presented as the door of our mouth. A man's heart is not to be trusted as an inspirer of speech. Every man needs to have the speech examined and tested before it is let pass the door of his lips. The psalmist feels that he cannot trust himself to examine, criticize, qualify his own speech, especially in times of excitement. And yet he must do this work himself. No one but himself can know what he is inwardly urged to say. In asking God to set a sentinel at the door of his lips, the psalmist does but, in a figure, ask God to give him quietness and self-control, so that he may be able to judge the wisdom of what he is moved to speak. For if any man asks God to "set a watch at the door of his lips," God will answer the prayer by making the man his own sentinel, and giving him that most valuable power, the power of *self-criticism*. Why do we need a watchman?

I. BECAUSE OF OUR NATURAL DISPOSITIONS. Many are nervously excitable; over-sensitive; quick to reply; impulsive; ready to suspect evil; or passionate. And many have no keen sense of the befitting or the becoming. Some are talkative, and readily carried by excitement beyond the bounds of prudence. What all such persons really need is not to be put into bonds and limitations, but by Divine grace to be helped to gain control of themselves. Their life-work is in their own dispositions; and God's grace is ready for the strain and conflict of that life-work.

II. BECAUSE OF OUR PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES. The psalmist was suffering persecution; he was misunderstood and slandered, and was afraid of himself lest he should speak, under excitement, rash and bitter words. Our circumstances of peril are: 1. When anger rises within. 2. When those we address are angry. 3. When speaking of those against whom we are prejudiced. 4. When in the presence of those who may wrongly report us. 5. When we have reason to fear that the innocent may be injured. 6. When we have reason to doubt our own motives. In this matter of watching speech, God helps those who help themselves.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The power of human speech for good and evil*. There is, perhaps, no other power given us by God which more evidently distinguishes us from the beasts, than the power of intelligent speech. And perhaps we have no power that can do more to help and bless others. And yet this also is true—no other faculty is more degraded by sin. One is led even to exclaim, "What shall be done unto thee, O thou deceitful tongue, thou lovest all devouring words!"

I. THE POWER OF MAN'S SPEECH FOR GOOD. Describe the power of Demosthenes to sway an Athenian audience to patriotic enterprise; or Peter the Hermit calling for a Crusade; or Father Mathew pleading the temperance claims. Show what a gentle-voiced, sympathetic woman can do at the bedside of the sufferer.

“Words, sweet words;
A blessing comes softly from kindly lips.”

II. THE POWER OF MAN'S SPEECH FOR INJURY. The few words of a king, a ruler a statesman, have often loosed the dogs of hateful war. The lecturer can persuade young souls to deny God and righteousness and truth. Men, and women too, can by the blandishments of speech, become tempters, drawing others into sin. The Bible has metaphors suggesting the good and evil of our speech. “The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters;” “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in framings of silver;” “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life;” “My speech shall drop as the rain, and distil as the dew;” “There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword;” “Their tongue is an arrow shot out, it speaketh deceit; one speaketh peaceably to his neighbour, but in heart he layeth in wait.” The Apostle St. James makes the bad tongue to be a “spark of hell, lighting upon earth the flames of perdition.” Everything else may be tamed, but the “tongue can no man tame;” it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

III. THE PRACTICAL POWER OF CHRISTIANITY ON MAN'S SPEECH. 1. The foundation of the restraint of speech is a change and renewal of the heart. 2. Then there should be formed a very resolute and sincere purpose to win the rule of it. The matter should come forcibly before us. The habits we have formed must be considered; the indulgences of the tongue must be tested; our life in the light of our speech must be judged. And there must be constant watchfulness, with keen recognition of occasions of failure. Prayer may well be directed to winning power over our tongue.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*God's preventions.* This prayer, “Incline not my heart to any evil thing,” should be compared with the clause in the Lord's Prayer, “Lead us not into temptation.” In neither case can God be thought of as the direct cause of evil or temptation; but in both cases he may be thought of as the indirect occasion. God does place men in circumstances in connection with which temptation may come to them; and the circumstances may even induce an evil inclination to yield to the temptation. It belonged to the intense Hebrew conception of God, and of God's relations with men, that the distinction between God as cause and God as occasion was hopelessly confused. “Incline not my heart” can only mean, “Do not put me into such circumstances as must incline my heart to evil.” Here is—

I. A DEEP SENSE OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CIRCUMSTANCES AND FEELINGS. “Oh that nothing may arise in thy providence which would excite our desires in a wrong direction!” We are creatures of circumstance. Inward moods answer responsively to outward conditions. 1. There are circumstances which excite evil feeling in us always. 2. There are circumstances which excite evil in us when we are in particular states of body or of mind. These, being the more subtle mischief, send us the more earnestly seeking the Divine defending and help.

II. A DEEP SENSE OF THE CONTROL WHICH GOD CAN HAVE OF OUR FEELING THROUGH THE MASTERY OF OUR CIRCUMSTANCES. “Our times are in his hand,” and through our *times* he can effectually control *us*. It is often left as an impression on religious minds that something called “natural law” is ruling in the sphere of *things*; and that God's operations are confined to the sphere of *hearts*. That impression needs to be removed. God does work in hearts in a *spiritual way*, but it is also true that he is ever active in the sphere of events and circumstances, in order to use them for his higher work in feeling and in souls. So the good man asks God to be in the circumstances in order that he may have control in the feelings.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*Reproof and kindness.* “Let the righteous man treat me with any amount of ignominious reproach for my sins, yet I will prefer him to the ungodly, however prosperous, my prayer being ever that I may be saved from the evil deeds of the latter.” Read, “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: let him reprove me; such oil for my head let not my head refuse.” Roberts tells us that in the East “certain oils are said to have a most salutary effect on the head; hence, in fevers, or any other complaints which affect the head, Eastern medical men always recommend oil. I have known people who were deranged cured in a very short time by nothing more than the application of a peculiar oil to the head. Thus the reproofs of the

righteous were compared to *excellent oil*, which produced a most salutary effect on the head." What seems plain, and what gives the best key to the allusions of this difficult psalm, is that the psalmist had done something which was very doubtfully right, perhaps even manifestly wrong. He was not, however, disposed to admit this to himself, though at times he felt painfully uncertain. Other people were in no doubt at all as to the impropriety of his action, and his enemies made it the occasion of bitter scorn, while his friends, in their grave anxiety for him, sought to reprove him, and liberate his conscience so that it might render its free testimony. The psalm may very well be illustrated by the moods of David when he had sinned in the matter of Uriah.

I. SCORN OF A MAN IN SIN DOES BUT HARDEN HIM. Many a man has gone into greater lengths of sin simply because he failed to get sympathy and help in his first stumbling.

II. REPROOF OF A MAN IN SIN MAY BRING HIM TO REPENTANCE. A man in sin must not be left alone. But reproof, to be effective, must have love, as well as righteousness, for inspiration. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

III. RESPONSE TO THE REPROOF OF THE GOOD REVEALS A MAN. There is hope if he is receptive to the personal persuasions of those whom he can esteem, and counts reproof a kindness.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*Soul-destitution*. "We have been so harrowed and torn that we are brought to the brink of the grave." "To be destitute in circumstances is bad, but to be destitute in soul is far worse; to be left of friends is a calamity, but to be left of God would be destruction. Destitute of God is destitution with a vengeance. The comfort is that God hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.'" The margin is, "Make not my soul bare;" strip me not of every hope; leave me not completely naked; abandon me not to nature's beggary and misery; let me not go down to the pit with all my sins upon my head; leave not my soul destitute of pardon and peace. The mood is well indicated in David's sense of being left alone of God for long months after his sin in the matter of Uriah. A comparison may be made between this prayer, "Leave not my soul *destitute*," and the confident assurance, "None of them that trust in him shall be *desolate*."

I. THE SOUL IN RIGHTEOUSNESS FEELS BEFRIENDED. That is, the soul that is in *right relations*, and has *right desires* inspiring *right endeavours*. That man can always say, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our Refuge." And that befriending makes him superior to all surroundings of distress, and all consciousness of frailty.

II. THE SOUL IN SIN FEELS DESTITUTE. He is conscious that he has put himself out of the atmosphere in which alone the God of love and righteousness can reveal himself. The prodigal son felt destitute as soon as "he came to himself," and realized that no love wrapped him round. When a man sins, and persists in his sins, it is his soul that feels destitute. His surroundings may not immediately change, but his soul does. That loses what is its supreme treasure, the sense of God. "Man was made for God, and can find no rest till it gets rest in him." When man sins, and keeps his sin, he must lose his treasure. But soul-destitution may set man seeking after God's return with a passionate intensity.—R. T.

Vers. 1—10.—*A comprehensive prayer*. The psalm has some peculiar difficulties, due to the extreme abruptness with which the thoughts follow one another, and the great obscurity which hangs over the allusions. Let us try and select the principal thoughts. 1. *The psalmist was threatened with some immediate danger which could brook no delay*. (Ver. 1.) Like the disciples in the storm on the lake. If relief comes at all, it must come at once. 2. *He seeks that his prayer to this end may be as acceptable as the incense of sacrifice*. (Ver. 2.) True prayer more effectual than sacrifice. 3. *But, though danger is close at hand, he would be preserved from hasty words*. (Ver. 3.) Religion should help us to be self-contained in the presence of danger. 4. *Though wickedness may seem to prosper, we must not be tempted by its success*. (Ver. 4.) If men become rich in evil-doing, we must not be seduced by the prospects of similar gain. 5. *The wounds of a friend are better than the kisses of an enemy*. (Ver. 5.)

It is good to welcome reproof from the righteous, even though it seems harsh. 6. *Prayer is a better defence against persecutors than retaliation.* (Ver. 5.) If we cannot conquer wickedness, we have still the resource and the comfort of prayer for our enemies. 7. *When the leaders of insurrection are overthrown, then their followers should hear words of forgiveness.* (Ver. 6.) A true sovereign will delight more in amnesty than in punishment. His words will be sweet to the guilty. So also in private relations. 8. *The bones of those straitened in a righteous cause are as seed cast into soil that has been ploughed.* (Ver. 7.) "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." The allusion here is obscure; but the above would make a good meaning. 9. *But do not give up my life to destruction; but rescue me.* (Ver. 8-10.) 'Tis the repetition of the prayer at the beginning of the psalm. How much all prayer is a repetition, because the some wants and desires are continually recurring!—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXLII.

DAVID once more cries to God for protection and deliverance. The "title" says that the prayer was composed by him "when he was in the cave," by which we must understand "the cave of Adullam" (see 1 Sam. xxii. 1, 2; and comp. Ps. lvii., "title"). The contents and style of the psalm are thoroughly Davidical.

Ver. 1.—*I cried unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication.* "With my voice" means aloud, and therefore earnestly and pressingly (comp. Ps. iii. 4; xxvii. 7; lxiv. 1; lxxvii. 1; cxxx. 1, 2, etc.).

Ver. 2.—*I poured out my complaint before him; I showed before him my trouble* (comp. Ps. cxl., cxli., and cxliii.).

Ver. 3.—*When my spirit was overwhelmed within me; or, "fainted within me."* Then thou knewest my path. I had not to tell thee because thou didst not know, but to relieve my own feelings. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me (comp. Ps. cxl. 5; cxli. 9, 10).

Ver. 4.—*I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me. I looked about, i.e., for human aid, but there was no one who would so much as know me. I was utterly deserted in my trouble. Refuge failed me. I had nowhere to flee unto—no safe and sure abiding-place. The "cave of Adullam" was but a miserable spot to hide in. No man cared for my soul; or, "looked after my soul" (comp. Jer. xxx. 17).*

Ver. 5.—*I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my Refuge.* When men's fathers and mothers forsake them, the Lord taketh them up (Ps. xxvii. 10). David looked to God as a sure Refuge at all times (Ps. ix. 9; xviii. 1, 2; lvii. 1; lix. 9, 16, 17). And my Portion in the land of the living; or, "my inheritance" (comp. Ps. xvi. 5; lxxiii. 26).

Ver. 6.—*Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low* (comp. Ps. lxxix. 8; and see also Deut. xxviii. 43; Judg. vi. 6; Ps. cxvi. 6). In the cave of Adullam David had but four hundred outlaws to defend him against Saul, who was at the head of all the thousands of Israel (1 Sam. xxii. 2). Deliver me from my persecutors. Saul, Doeg, the Ziphites, and the armed bands with whom Saul "hunted David in the mountains" (1 Sam. xxvi. 20). For they are stronger than I; or, "too strong for me."

Ver. 7.—*Bring my soul out of prison.* The word "prison" is used symbolically, as a metaphor for trouble and distress (comp. Ps. lxxxviii. 8; cvii. 10-14). That I may praise thy Name; or, "that men may praise thy Name." David's deliverance from his enemies would cause the godly generally to "praise the Lord." The righteous shall compass me about; rather, in me shall the righteous triumph (Kay, Cheyne). Viewing my cause as their own, they will glory in my deliverance (comp. Ps. xxxv. 27; xl. 16). For thou shalt deal bountifully with me; i.e. thou wilt assuredly "hear my cry" and "deliver me" (see the preceding verso).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1-7.—*Our resource in extremity.* Few passages in Scripture more aptly illustrate the words, "They learn in suffering what they teach in song," than does this psalm. In a few strong sentences we have placed before us—

I. THE EXTREMITY OF HUMAN TROUBLE. David is "brought very low." His persecutors are too strong for him (ver. 6), too numerous; moreover, they are very wily, their stratagems are clever, and they involve him in great peril (ver. 3). He is abandoned by his friends; he is placed outside the reach of kindly sympathy and succour (ver. 4); nay, he is so shut up and surrounded that there seems no way of escape for him (ver. 7); he feels as if he were defeated, and he is a disheartened man (ver. 3); the waves of misfortune go over him. We may find some correspondence to this desperate position in our own case: 1. In very serious sickness, when the husband and father is stricken down in the midst of his life and of his responsibilities, and there does not open any way for the maintenance of his family; or when the student, who has spent many years in preparation for the Christian ministry, breaks down in health as the door of usefulness is about to open. 2. In the loss of reputation; when a true man is, through the "wicked devices" of some heartless neighbour, charged with a sin or crime of which he cannot possibly prove himself innocent, and he has to meet the averted looks and cold address of those who were once his cordial friends. 3. In desertion; when some pure and tender heart has trusted one that "smiles and smiles, and is a villain," and is by him betrayed and deserted, and all human "refuge fails," and no one seems to "care for the soul" of the sufferer, and the heart is indeed "overwhelmed." 4. In the bitter disappointment of some noble and generous hope; when the toiling evangelist or the lonely missionary makes no way, and the heathenism at home or abroad appears to be as dense and as dark as ever. 5. In some moral or spiritual entanglement (ver. 7); when the mind is imprisoned in some inextricable difficulty, in some harassing doubt, or even in utter disbelief; or when the life is darkened because the will is ensnared by some unworthy and, it may be, even degrading habit, and the soul is in a bondage compared with which that of stone walls and iron locks is as nothing; or when the spirit finds itself in the hard and cruel fetters of selfishness, or worldliness, or pride, and is therefore a long way off from the favour and friendship of Jesus Christ. In all such cases as these—and the moral are far more serious than the material—we are "brought very low;" we may well be "overwhelmed within us."

II. OUR ONE RESOURCE. Our refuge is in God; he is our Portion. 1. We go to our Divine Lord for refuge, that we may hide ourselves in him, to cast ourselves on his unfailing friendship, to rest in his deep and perfect sympathy (Heb. iv. 15, 16). 2. When everything else is lost, when we are abandoned by our human friends, we have a heritage in God; we have still a heavenly Father to trust and love, and a holy service and filial submission to render; we have fellowship with God. 3. We ask and we hope for Divine deliverance. We know that an almighty arm is on our side; we believe that the All-wise can and will show to us a way of escape from the very midst of our difficulties; we are assured that God can break the net in which our soul is taken, and can enlarge us and give us a blessed spiritual freedom. Has not a Saviour come to "preach deliverance to the captives"? and "whom the Son makes free, are they not free indeed"?

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7.—"*When my spirit was overwhelmed.*" This is said to be one of David's cave psalms. There are some seven or eight which, according to their inscriptions, have to do with David's persecution by Saul. What cave is meant, whether Adullam or Engedi, we do not know.

I. HERE IS A MOST DISTRESSFUL CONDITION SET FORTH. It is described: 1. *As being overwhelmed.* (Ver. 3.) As if some fierce flood had rushed down upon him and his, and with sore difficulty they could bear up against its cruel might. 2. *As being in great need of refuge, but utterly failing to find it.* (Ver. 3.) He had looked round on the right hand and the left, but in vain. 3. *As rejected by men.* "No man would know me." They had cast him off, would have nothing to do with him, would certainly render no help. 4. *As "brought very low."* (Ver. 6.) All hope and joy had fled from him; he was utterly cast down. 5. *As one shut up in prison.* (Ver. 7.)

Now, all this sets forth what is often true in the experience of God's people. We are told also—

II. HOW THIS CONDITION WAS BROUGHT ABOUT. 1. *By the snares of the wicked.* (Ver. 3.) The snare was secretly but surely laid, and the psalmist seems to have fallen into it; it was laid along the path wherein he was wont to walk. He had not wandered off into strange or forbidden ways, but in his own proper and accustomed path, there the snare was secretly set. "The daily round, the common task," may become to us not only the path of life, but the evil one knows how, in the midst of them, to lay, and often too successfully, snares for the soul. 2. *By the indifference and apathy of his fellow-men.* "No man cared for my soul." It is a thought full of pain and sorrow to many a Christian heart that, by neglect, they have suffered so many souls to go astray. We have not cared for them as we should. When we think of it, we can only say, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord." But let us also forsake the sin we confess. 3. *By persecution.* This does often bring the soul "very low." Even our blessed Lord cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But it matters not, so long as we cleave to God.

III. WHAT TO DO UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES. 1. *Turn to the Lord in fervent prayer.* Lay before him all your trouble. Keep well in mind that the Lord who loves you, and whom you love, knoweth the way you take. 2. *Call to mind what God has been to you in the past.*

IV. WHAT SHALL COME OF IT. The Lord will deal bountifully with us. We shall praise the Lord. All the righteous will rejoice.—S. C.

Ver. 4.—"No man cared for my soul." It may be that the psalmist was thinking only or chiefly of his life; but more commonly the soul refers to that which is of far more worth than the body—to that in us which is spiritual, immortal, and made in the image of God. And thus we shall understand the word here, and speak of "the evil and danger of neglecting the souls of men." See Dr. Doddridge's great sermon on this theme. The psalmist declares, "No man cared for my soul."

I. IS THE ASSERTION TRUE? 1. *It often seems so.* How many there are to whom no one ever speaks, for whom no one makes any direct effort to win them for God! They are just let alone. And it is not because they would resent such endeavour. Often they greatly desire that some one would speak to them; for they know they are wrong, and need help to be other than they are. But it seems as if no one cared. 2. *But, strictly speaking, it is not universally true.* For there have never been any periods of time when there were not some faithful workers for God, and earnest intercessors for sinful men. And often it has been that, unknown to the soul that thinks itself uncared for, fervent prayers have been going up to God for that soul. And if not specially for that soul, yet for all such souls, that God would have mercy upon them, and lead them into the way of truth, for that they have erred and are deceived. When do God's people ever gather together without such prayers being offered? 3. *Still, it is far too largely true.* The neglect of souls on the part of those who should care for them is a terrible and distressing fact.

II. WHO ARE TO BLAME? 1. *All Christians generally.* For if we be saved by the compassion and grace of God ourselves, we are bound by every motive to try and get others saved likewise. If we do thus try, prayerfully and earnestly—let men call us by any ill name they please—the consciousness of Christ's approval and benediction will become surer and fuller of holy joy and help every day we live. If we make no such endeavour, the salvation we have will dwindle and starve, and, ere long, utterly disappear, and our last state will be worse than the first. 2. *But more especially those who are nearest to such souls, and who have, therefore, most influence over them.* Fathers and mothers first and chief of all. As they are, so the children will be. Then teachers, especially teachers in Sunday schools. What is the good of such schools if the teachers do not, above everything else, care for the souls of those they teach? And ministers: theirs, beyond most others, is the cure of souls. How awful, if they to whom this charge has been especially given, should be found faithless! What will such answer, when asked by the "chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls," as they will be asked, what they have done with those entrusted to their care?

III. HOW COMES THERE TO BE SUCH NEGLECT? The causes are many. 1. *With some*

it is unbelief. They doubt almost every truth which the Church teaches. Some actually deny, others do not more than half believe. 2. *With others it is misbelief.* They pervert the doctrine of the sacraments, of the eternal mercy of God, of final perseverance, and, on such grounds, say, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. 3. *With more it is that they are not saved themselves.* Their belief, whatever it is, does nothing for them, gives them neither peace, purity, strength, nor joy. They profess, but do not possess, and therefore cannot impart to others what is not their own. 4. *Fear of man.* How many, who should be directly and avowedly caring for souls, are ensnared here! And they save their consciences by thinking that such work belongs to the clergy or the ministers—not to such as they. We shall never do anything until we are willing to be thought "fools for Christ's sake." 5. *Dread of doing harm rather than good.* But duty is ours, not consequences; and if God, by his Spirit, prompts and bids us speak for him, as he very often does, all we have to do is to obey. He will take care of the consequences. Such are some of the causes of this sad lack of care for souls.

IV. THE EVIL OF IT. 1. *The glory due from us to Christ is not rendered.* The martyrs whom St. John saw overcame "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." Christ claims our confession of him. 2. *Men are hardened in sin.* They say, "If these people believed what they profess, they would not leave us alone as they do. They don't believe it, and we won't." 3. *Our own souls perish;* for we are guilty of our brother's blood.

V. HOW IS IT TO BE REMEDIED? What is involved in the caring for souls? 1. *Belief in the existence of the soul.* In its worth; its peril; in the willingness of God to save it. 2. *Solicitude for its salvation.* 3. *Open, active, and definite endeavour to secure this.* 4. *Be sure that we are saved ourselves.*

CONCLUSION. To those who bring the charge, "No man careth for my soul," we would say: 1. *If others do not care, see to it that you care yourself.* It is your concern, after all. 2. *If others care ever so much, and you do not, you will be only worse off than before.* 3. *But if you care, then, whether others care or not, you will certainly be saved.*—S. C.

Ver. 5.—*Pleading what we said to the Lord.* This is what the psalmist is here doing; he is putting the Lord in remembrance of his servant's earnest vows.

I. WHAT WAS SAID. 1. *He reminds the Lord how he had "cried unto" him.* His coming was with all earnestness and sincerity of soul; and he tells the Lord this, as much as to say, "Lord, thou knowest that my prayer went not forth out of feigned lips, but it was with true heart that I turned to thee." Such is the prayer the Lord loves, and which alone has power and prevails. 2. *He had said, "Thou art my Refuge and my Portion."* First, the Lord was his Refuge. Many were his distresses; some of them inward, others outward. But from them all he found refuge in God. And he was but an example of what all may do, for where he found refuge from the sense of guilt, the power of sin, the cares of life, the fear of death, the craft and cruelty of men, there also may we. Blessed is he who hath sincerely said to the Lord, "Thou art my Refuge." And, further, he had said, "Thou art my Portion in," etc. He had chosen the Lord before all else. Many there were who were saying, "Who will show us any good?" but his prayer was, "Lord, lift thou up the light of," etc. He could say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth," etc. Thus had he taken the Lord for his Portion, for his chief good. Blessed are they who have done the same! 3. *And he had said this.* To the Lord himself. He had made this confession and profession to him repeatedly, deliberately, solemnly; he was even declaring it when speaking to the Lord. And he had said it to himself, had habitually kept before his mind that he was not his own, but the Lord's. And he had said it before his fellow-men. He was openly and avowedly the Lord's; he made his boast in God. 4. *And here he pleads this fact before God.* For he felt sure that God would not cast off such as he was, but would assuredly hearken to him when, as now, he was "brought very low." And he was right.

II. HOW IT WAS SAID. Very earnestly. In no light mood, in no formal way, but he had "cried," etc. And he said it, in spite of opposition and persecution; and he means, by thus reminding the Lord of what he had said, to affirm his adherence thereto,

and that he would by no means go back therefrom. And the obligation such avowal involved he was ready to meet and fulfil, God helping him. We are wont to make all manner of profession, but is it with this sincerity and resolve of heart?

III. WHY IT WAS SAID. 1. *Why did he make such profession at all?* He had felt his need of the Lord to be his Refuge and Portion. He had been brought to that conviction, as many are now. And he believed that God was both able and willing to be what he desired of him; hence he had sought the Lord on the matter, and he had actually found that the Lord was his Refuge and his Portion, his God and his exceeding Joy. Having found that, he could not do otherwise than avow it: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare," etc. 2. *Why does he recall to his mind this that he had said?* Doubtless it was, as such a thing ever is, a great delight to him. Thus to recall it, to have said such things sincerely, is one of the facts in one's life that emphatically does bear recollection. It is not so with all life's facts. Then, by such recall, he would tighten their hold upon his own heart, engrave them there yet more deeply. Such is ever the effect of so doing. Every way it helped him. The Lord became more precious. It held him off from other proffered refuges and portions, of which the world pretends to have large store; it quickened in him the resolve to fulfil the obligations of his vow—such as abstaining from all sin, following after holiness, ever looking to the Lord. And he pleads what he had said, because he believed the Lord would allow its force, and let it be availing.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Let us take the Lord for our Refuge and Portion.* 2. *Openly avow it.* Say out before the Lord and before all men what you have done. 3. And then, as here, *often recall to memory what you have said*, and that the vows of the Lord are upon you.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*Prayer as complaint.* "I pour out my complaint before him." "Before God we may speak out our minds fully, and name the persons that afflict, affront, or trouble us." True religion must be genuine. What a man really does feel he ought to be able to express. Reserve is the bane of friendship; it is of our friendship with God. A friend should be free to tell his friend precisely what he is feeling, even when the feelings are neither good nor right. It is healthy and hopeful when there is such confidence between child and mother that the child can tell its *bad* thoughts and wishes as well as its good. When there is absolute confidence in the love of God to us, there can be free utterance before him of our bad moods as well as of our good. And seeing that the best of men are subject to human frailties, are influenced by bodily states, affected by changing circumstances, and mastered by peculiarities of disposition, he could be no God to us at all who could only bear relations to conditions and moods which represented us at our best.

I. A SPIRIT OF COMPLAINING NEED NOT BE WRONG. It often is the proper and natural response to surrounding conditions. As natural as the response we make to things that are pleasing. To be tempted involves us in no wrong. To be set upon complaining need not involve us in wrong. To complain is a part of our complex human nature. The man is below his full manhood who is unable to complain. He does not feel in response to his circumstances as he *ought to*.

II. A CHERISHING OF THE SPIRIT OF COMPLAINING MUST BE WRONG. When the spirit is awakened in us, we have to deal with it. And everything depends on how we deal with it. If we keep it, nourish it, brood over it, it exercises a mischievous influence on us, it grows into an evil far worse than itself, it excites to envious and unworthy conduct towards others. Keep to ourselves the complaining spirit, and a spiritual "dry rot" will be sure to get into our souls.

III. PUTTING COMPLAINT INTO PRAYER PROVIDES SAFETY AND RELIEF. It is evident that prayer must include more than petition. Prayer is really the expression of the soul's confidence in God. And there is no fuller sign of confidence than telling freely our complaints. And yet doing so is a request for the Divine intervention and help; only in telling our trouble we wholly leave with God the *way* in which our circumstances shall be dealt with.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The confidence of the crushed heart.* Literally, "In the muffing of my spirit upon me." When my spirit was so wrapped in trouble and gloom, so muffled

round with woe, that I could not see the path before me, was distracted and unable to choose a line of conduct, *thou* (emphatic) knewest my path. We are often placed in circumstances in life which baffle intellect and power of judgment. We are overwhelmed because we cannot understand, and cannot steer our way through conflicting conditions, so as to form a safe judgment as to the course we should take. But the condition of the psalmist, as indicated in this sentence, was altogether more serious. Intellect and judgment remained to him, but they were silenced, crushed, overwhelmed, with a weight of feeling; his "spirit was overwhelmed within him."

I. THE MASTERY OF OUR SOUL-MOODS IS OUR DEEPEST DISTRESS. We cannot watch for it to guard against it. We cannot account for it so as to excuse it to ourselves. We cannot deal with it so as to gain security out of our experience. Every man knows that, any day, he may be beaten by the mastery of his soul-moods. And the strange thing is that the peril is greater the more spiritually sensitive a man becomes. The more worldly a man is, the *fewer* soul-moods he has. The more spiritual a man is, the more soul-moods he has. Often in life we are placed in circumstances that are not really very anxious, but which we make overwhelming by the response of our souls to them. And this explains how little we understand one another in the perplexities of life, because we cannot know how differently souls answer to things.

II. CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S OVERRULING RELIEVES OUR DEEPEST DISTRESS. "Then thou knewest my path." At such times there is always something to *do*. And the psalmist is close near to the very heart of truth when he shows that God relieves feeling by *leading into duty*. Keep feeling, and the hands will hang down. Take feeling to God, and he will lead into active service, and so bring relief to feeling. We may be so blinded by feeling that we cannot see the way we should take. We may be sure that our feeling does not represent God's. He never is so blinded. He always sees our way, and will lead us if we put our hand in his.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Uncared-for souls*. This expression may very properly be associated with David, or at least may be illustrated by certain experiences in his life. When he was hunted by Saul among the hills of the south country, he seems to have fallen into a desponding mood, and to have thought that nobody cared for him (see 1 Sam. xxii. 1; xxiv. 3). And as regards the help of man, he certainly then did seem desolate. But in God there still was hope. We may think of those who, with some measures of truthfulness, may nowadays say these words, "No man careth for my soul."

I. THE SO-CALLED HEATHEN. It would, perhaps, be well if we could give up using this term, which makes of those who have other thoughts of God than we have a distinct and lower class of beings. We have no right to put upon them the slur of a bad name. They are our brethren of this humanity, and God is both their Father and ours. They are the vast multitude of men. They are in mental bondage, and in moral degradation. Each one of them is kin with us in nature and destiny. Each one has intense inward desires, of which his particular religion is the wild, wandering expression. We have many interests in them that lie in the range of civilization and commerce, but how little and limited is our concern for their souls!

II. MULTITUDES IN OUR OWN NEIGHBOURHOODS. Everywhere we are surrounded with those who do not know God, or do not hold him in personal and saving relations; and, alas! even with those who are living in the wretchedness of sin and vice. Do you think that their souls are altogether silenced? Do not they excuse their degradations by bitterly saying, "No man careth for my soul"? And in the sadly *unaggressive* character of very much present-day Christian life and labour, have they not a right to say it?

III. MANY OF OUR NEAREST AND DEAREST FRIENDS. Who among us has no unregenerate friends? Who should care for them? Are not some hindered because we have not *shown our care* for them? They question the worth of our professions if they do not inspire activity in winning and saving others. 1. Cultivate a deeper sense of the worth of souls. 2. Suspect that God's work for us to do will begin with what lies close to our hands.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Caring for souls the work of the Church*. "Refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul." For present purposes associate the psalm with the anxious time

of David's life, when he was persecuted by Saul. The point of his sadness was that nobody seemed to care for him. That was likely to make him restless. If he had further said, "and even God does not care for me," he would have grown desperate, and exclaimed, "Why should I care for myself? Why should I try to be true and good and faithful?" By his word "soul" David meant "life;" but we mean spiritual and eternal interests.

I. CARING FOR SOULS IS NOT THE WORLD'S WORK. We use the term "world" in many senses. Sometimes for the evil element in the midst of which we are set. So far as men come together in mutual interest and service, men as men, apart from any such distinctions as *godly* men, their interest in each other is limited to *morals*. There is such a thing as the welfare of the race. There is an "enthusiasm of humanity." But see what it embraces, and where are its limits. Trace through an ascending scale. 1. Physical well-being; bodily development, conditions of health. 2. Social well-being; all that pertains to the relationships which men sustain. 3. National well-being; the attainment of the highest civil liberty consistent with stable government. 4. Intellectual well-being; education in elementary, middle, and advanced stages. 5. Moral well-being; the general conception of virtue as the moderate and harmonious use of all faculties, or emotional culture. But there the world stops. Even the best men who care for the race seem to recognize no *souls*, no spiritual natures. (The spirit of modern philosophy may be thus expressed: Dismiss *noumena*, and deal only with *phenomena*.) And if men did recognize souls, they would be incompetent to render the care that souls need. They have not the suitable powers or agencies at their command. Chemistry, electricity, and education will not touch souls. So far as men *are* souls, they may look abroad over the world and say, "I can get much for body and mind, but 'no man careth for my soul.'" And yet the part that men miss caring for is the chief part. They care for the box and the setting, but they neglect the jewel. Consciousness testifies that we are souls. Revelation deals with us as souls. God cares for souls. Christ cares for souls. The true care for man is care for his soul; and this includes care for all lesser things that are interesting to him.

II. CARING FOR SOULS IS PRECISELY THE WORK OF CHRIST'S CHURCH. Physical, intellectual, and moral good is not the Church's first work. The Christian is, of necessity, also a philanthropist. 1. The Church exists to give testimony to the worth of souls in the sight of God. 2. The Church exists to devise and carry out schemes for the salvation of souls. This is indeed the work of every regenerate individual; but it is especially the duty of the Church as an organization. In it men are banded together for the care of souls.

III. IN MANIFESTING ITS CARE FOR SOULS, THE CHURCH WILL HAVE A SPECIAL CARE FOR THE YOUNG. Why? 1. Apprehending the peril of souls, the Church will want to keep the young from temptation, rather than to deliver them when overcome by it. 2. Apprehending the hardening influence of sin, the Church will try to deal with it in its initial stages. Youth is the plastic time when men may be fitted to good life-moulds. 3. Apprehending the nobler possibilities of a godly life, the Church seeks to secure for it the earliest possible beginning. Every godly life is rich in blessing; but those who serve their generation best as Christ's servants are those who began the service in early youth.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*The soul's rights in God.* "Thou art my Refuge, my Portion in the land of the living." This apprehension of God's relations belongs to a man who was placed in distressing circumstances, which were all the more distressing because he looked this way and that for human helpers, and found none. It is not that, disappointed in man, the psalmist turned to God. It is that, having linked together God's help and man's, he has had to learn that there are times in life when a man must turn from the help of brother man, and use for his entire help his soul's rights in God. For the soul has rights in God which God will acknowledge.

I. THE SOUL'S RIGHTS IN GOD ARISING OUT OF ITS VERY BEING. We speak of man as a spark from God, the Eternal Fire; of man, the spiritual being, as made in God's image. The relation is absolute. In God we "live, and move, and have our being." If, in a sense, man is a soul put forth from God in some sort of separateness, that

separateness involves no *independence*. "All souls are mine." God never puts from himself his rights in souls, and souls can never put from themselves their rights in God. He is, by virtue of their very being, the Refuge and Portion of souls, whether they know it or not.

II. THE SOUL'S RIGHTS IN GOD ARE RECOGNIZED IN THE DIVINE COVENANT. This psalmist speaks within the covenant, and bases his confidence on covenant pledges. It may seem as if the formal Abrahamic covenant concerned only a particular people, and pledged, on either side, merely material things. But we must always regard the covenant as representative of the spiritual covenant into which God enters with all men. It is picture-teaching of spiritual things. God makes covenant with souls, pledging himself to be, what they feel him to be, their "Refuge" and "Portion." Our rights in God are secured by his covenant.

III. THE SOUL'S RIGHTS IN GOD ARE RECOGNIZED IN THE DIVINE REDEMPTION. It should never be lost from view that, however formal and outward was its setting, the redemption wrought by Christ was a spiritual redemption—a redemption of *souls*. It was really the response of Divine love to the soul's rights in God as its Refuge, when that soul had come into conditions of disaster and distress. Souls never can lose their rights in God.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*God's bountifulness*. "Thou shalt deal bountifully with me." The point here seems to be that an unusual experience of the Divine goodness, in one particular case, excites the attention of *others* who trust in God, and becomes, for them, an inspiration to increased confidence in God.

I. GOD'S BOUNTIFULNESS AS OUR IMPRESSION OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH US. It is not the constant impression. Sometimes we have to say, "My purposes are broken off;" "He hath hedged up my way with thorns." Sometimes what strikes us is the narrow limitations within which God puts his answer to our needs and desires. But there is no good man's life into which, at some time, the almost overwhelming impression of God's bountifulness has not come. He has surprised us with his benedictions; altogether gone beyond our expectations and our prayers. The times he has chosen, the deliverances he has wrought, the guidance he has given, the provisions he has made, have altogether astonished us. His bountiful goodness has called forth our songs. But the cases of bountifulness illuminate all his dealings with us. We know what he can do, and what he will do sometimes, and so light is thrown on *all* his dealings. He is never short of the bountiful, save for good reasons. He is always as bountiful as he can wisely be. It is helpful to read all our life in the light of those times when God, as it were, went beyond his usual in blessing. The infinite resources are open to us.

II. GOD'S BOUNTIFULNESS AS OTHER PEOPLE'S IMPRESSION OF GOD'S DEALING WITH US. St. Paul thought of himself as a monument of grace, on whom other people might look, and from whom other people might gain confidence in the grace of God. The unusual in our lives sets us in the world's eye, makes us spectacles unto men. If the unusual is manifestly *God's* unusual, *God's* bountifulness in dealing with us, it has a most gracious impression on those around us. They learn "what almighty grace can do." And if ours is a Divine triumph over extraordinary difficulties and depressions, it is the assurance to others that God *can* make his grace abound unto all sufficiency.—R. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*A cry for deliverance*. "The last of the eight psalms to be referred to David's persecution by Saul. Supposed to describe his thoughts and feelings when he was in the "cave," though whether of Adullam or of Engedi is not clear. It expresses the cleaving of the heart to God, the deep sense of loneliness, the cry for deliverance, the confidence that that deliverance will call forth the sympathy and the joy of many others."

I. IMPORTUNATE PRAYER UTTERED ALOUD WITH VOICE AND WORDS. (Vers. 1, 2.) Not mere inward communion with God, but with audible prayer pours out his distracting trouble, and lays open before him the burden and the distress of his heart. Uttered prayer *more soothing and strengthening* than mere silent desire, though both are effectual with God.

II. IN OUR DARKEST, MOST DANGEROUS TIMES GOD IS WELL ACQUAINTED WITH THE

WHOLE EXTENT OF OUR TROUBLE. (Ver. 3.) God, therefore, can listen with the more sympathy to prayers, because he can understand how to estimate the depth and meaning of our complaints. This a source of great comfort—that God is not ignorant of our circumstances till we inform him of them. His interest is awakened by his own knowledge previous to our prayer.

III. GOD'S ALL-SEEING EYE RECOGNIZES HIS LONELINESS AND HELPLESSNESS. (Ver. 4.) No human being will recognize him, nor afford him any help, nor take any sympathetic interest in his affairs. All this is perfectly open to the knowledge of God.

IV. DESPAIRING OF HUMAN HELP, HE URGENTLY CRIES TO HIS ONLY REFUGE. (Ver. 5.) Jehovah is his "Refuge" and "Portion"—the only possession that suffices and satisfies him, and guarantees his continuance "in the land of the living." He cannot die, he cannot perish, though abandoned of all human friends and helpers.

V. HIS OWN FEEBLENESS AND THE SUPERIOR STRENGTH OF HIS ENEMIES IS ANOTHER PLEA FOR DELIVERANCE. (Ver. 6.) He has the calm assurance that this plea will be answered, and the Divine Name glorified.

VI. HIS DELIVERANCE WILL CALL FORTH THE SYMPATHY AND JOY OF OTHERS. (Ver. 7.) He is not, therefore, so entirely alone as he once thought; there are other righteous persons besides himself whose destiny is interwoven with his own. In this manner God deals bountifully with him.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXLIII.

ALMOST entirely a psalm of supplication, partly general (vers. 1, 7), partly special (vers. 2, 8—12). Vers. 3—6, however, give the grounds upon which the supplications are made; vers. 3, 4 describing the psalmist's wretched condition; and vers. 5, 6 his behaviour under his afflictions. Again, there is no reason to doubt the superscription, which assigns the psalm to David. Almost all the phrases used are found in other Davidical psalms. The composition divides itself into two stanzas of equal length (vers. 1—6, and vers. 7—12).

Ver. 1.—Hear my prayer, O Lord, give ear to my supplications (comp. Ps. xxviii. 2; xxxix. 12; liv. 2; lv. 1, etc.). In thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness. In thy faithfulness to thy promises, since thou hast promised to hear prayer, and in thy mere righteousness, since it is right and just that thou shouldst do so, hearken unto me.

Ver. 2.—And enter not into judgment with thy servant. The psalmist, having touched the point of abstract justice, shrinks from pressing it. He knows that he is not "righteous before God," and that his life and conduct "cannot endure the severity of God's judgment" (Art. XII.). He therefore "deprecates a strictly retributive treatment" (Cheyne). For in thy sight shall no man living be justified (comp. Ps. cxxx. 3; and see also Job iv. 17—19; ix. 2; xv. 14; xxv. 4).

Ver. 3.—For the enemy hath persecuted

my soul. "The enemy" may be Saul, but is more probably an abstract expression—for "my enemies" generally. He hath smitten my life down to the ground; or, "crushed my life to the ground"—brought me, i.e., very low (comp. Ps. xlii. 6). He hath made me to dwell in darkness (comp. Ps. lxxxviii. 6). As those that have been long dead. I have dwelt in a darkness like that of *Sheol*; i.e. in gloom and unhappiness (comp. Lam. iii. 6).

Ver. 4.—Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; or, "faint within me" (see Ps. xlii. 3). My heart within me is desolate (comp. Ps. xl. 15).

Ver. 5.—I remember the days of old. Still, in the midst of all my troubles, I do not despair—"I remember the days of old"—the great things which God has done for me in the past (comp. Ps. lxxvii. 5, 10, 11). I meditate on all thy works; or, "on all thy doings." I muse on the work of thy hands (comp. Ps. lxxvii. 12).

Ver. 6.—I stretch forth my hands unto thee. These recollections draw me to thee, O God, and make me stretch forth my hands in prayer to thee (Ps. cxli. 2b), and entreat thee for succour. My soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. As a parched and withered land seems to look up to heaven and long for rain, so does my soul long for thee, O Lord, "and thy refreshing grace" (comp. Ps. xlii. 1). The "pause-mark," "selah," at the end of the verse, at once gives time for secret prayer, and makes a division of the psalm into two parts.

Ver. 7.—Hear me speedily, O Lord. Here the direct supplication of ver. 1 is taken up and pressed. "Hear me, O Lord; and not

only hear me, but that speedily. It is a time for haste" (comp. Ps. cxli. 1). My spirit faileth; or, "fainteth" (LXX., ἐξέλιπε). Hide not thy face from me (comp. Ps. xxvii. 9; lxix. 17; cii. 2). Lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit (see the comment on Ps. xxviii. 1).

Ver. 8.—Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; i.e. early, speedily (comp. Ps. xli. 5; xc. 14). For in thee do I trust. His utter trust in God gives him a claim to be heard and helped. Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; i.e. illumine me, so that I may perceive the course which I ought to follow (comp. Ps. v. 8, "Make thy way straight before my face"). For I lift up my soul unto thee. Again, a sort of claim seems to be urged, as in clause 2.

Ver. 9.—Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies (comp. Ps. cxl. 1, 4; cxlii. 6). I flee unto thee to hide me; literally, to thee I hide myself, but probably with the meaning expressed in the Authorized Version.

Ver. 10.—Teach me to do thy will (comp. Ps. xxv. 4, 5; cxxxix. 24). For thou art my God. Therefore my Guide and Teacher.

Thy spirit is good; i.e. gracious and merciful. Lead me into the land of uprightness; rather, along a land of smoothness. Some critics unite the last two clauses, and translate, "Let thy good Spirit lead me along a land of smoothness"—"conduct me," i.e., over smooth ground, where I need not stumble.

Ver. 11.—Quicken me, O Lord, for thy Name's sake; i.e. give me fresh spiritual life (comp. Ps. cxix. 25, 37, 50, 88, 93, etc.). For thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble. To show how righteous thou art, i.e. how good and gracious.

Ver. 12.—And of thy mercy out off mine enemies. In thy goodness towards me, remove those enemies whose conduct towards me has been described in vers. 3, 4. And destroy all them that afflict my soul. This is David's ordinary prayer with respect to his enemies, whom he counts as God's adversaries, and the persecutors of faithful Israel (see Ps. v. 10; vii. 9; x. 15; xxviii. 4, 5; xxxv. 4—6, 8, etc.). For I am thy servant. Entitled, therefore, to thy special care and protection (comp. Ps. xxvii. 9; lxix. 17; lxxxvi. 2, 4, 16; cxvi. 16, etc.).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—12.—*The soul's appeal to God.* The groundwork of the psalm is that of great affliction. The psalmist is in very sore trouble; the strongest expressions are used to convey the idea of complete outward disaster and inward dejection (vers. 3, 4). There is only one respect in which things could be worse than they are—death itself, and the going down into the dark land of forgetfulness (ver. 7). But, as in the preceding psalm, his dire extremity is the very occasion for holy trust in the almighty power and unfailing righteousness of Jehovah. His refuge is in God. Here, indeed, is a strong Rock in which to hide in this dark night of trouble. We have—

I. HIS RELIANCE ON ALL THAT HE KNOWS OF GOD. 1. He remembers what God has been to him and has done for him and for others in past days; what "doings," what "works," what deliverances he wrought in "the days of old" (ver. 5). "Thou hast been my help," etc. (Ps. xxvii. 9). 2. He relies on the known character of God; his loving-kindness (ver. 8); his faithfulness, his perfect truthness to his word of promise; his righteousness, his constant readiness to reward those who seek him and serve him, and his determination to punish the wicked. These recognized and steadfast attributes of God are to him a strong security. God cannot be inconsistent with himself.

II. HIS CONSCIOUSNESS OF INTEGRITY. The writer would not dare to make his appeal to the Holy One if he himself were living in sin. He knows well that the man who purposes to continue in rebellion against God, or in rejection of his offered mercy, has no ground on which to stand (see Ps. lxvi. 18; l. 16). Not, indeed, that he claims absolute inerrancy or perfection; he knows that such purity is beyond him (ver. 2); but at the same time, he is conscious of moral and spiritual integrity; he is God's servant (ver. 12). The purpose of his heart is toward God and the keeping of his commandments. He intends to walk uprightly and holily before God, to the full height of his strenuous endeavour. His God is the Lord, and no other lord shall have dominion over him.

III. THE FULLNESS OF HIS APPEAL. 1. He prays God to "quicken" him, to reanimate him, to fill his soul with courage and with hope, that he may play a brave

and manly part. 2. He prays for deliverance from his evil estate; for the confusion of his enemies; for restoration to peace and joy (vers. 9, 11, 12). 3. He prays to be led forward in his rectitude, that he may fulfil all God's holy will concerning him (ver. 10). We cannot hope to rise higher than the spirit shown in this devout desire. It is right to wish and to ask, with all filial deference, for recovery from sickness, or for rescue from bondage, or for deliverance from anxiety or poverty; but it is a loftier and worthier aspiration to long to be led by the good Spirit of God into "the land of uprightness," into a state of full acquiescence with the will of God, into a spiritual condition in which the doing or the bearing of the will of God is the supreme aim and endeavour of the soul.

IV. HIS EARNESTNESS. (Vers. 6—8.) There is every indication here of great earnestness of spirit. His soul thirsts for God's interposition as a parched land for water; he cries for a speedy response to his appeal; he yearns to hear God's loving-kindness "in the morning," and "lifts up his soul" unto God. Everything is to the earnest. Lukewarmness is offensive to God, as we learn from the risen Saviour. A spasmodic piety, a fitful enthusiasm, will accomplish nothing for ourselves or for the world. It is steadfast purpose and sustained devotion that rises to the high tablelands of exalted worth and abounding fruitfulness.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—12.—*The cry of the overwhelmed spirit.* I. ITS CHARACTERISTICS. 1. *How earnest it is!* The psalmist was not in any light, indifferent, or formal spirit when he uttered this prayer. Its intensity is evident all the way through. 2. *And believing.* "In thy faithfulness answer me" (ver. 1). He believed the promises of God, and claims their fulfilment, expects that what God has promised he will make good. Such expectation is all too rare; and its rarity accounts for the many unanswered prayers over which we mourn. 3. *And sincere.* "And in thy righteousness" (ver. 1). If he had regarded iniquity in his heart, he could not thus have prayed, for he would have known that the Lord would not hear him; but he could appeal to him who was the righteous Searcher of all hearts, that with true heart he prayed. Hence he could appeal to the righteousness of God, because "the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance doth behold the upright." 4. *Humble.* (Ver. 2.) For whilst he could appeal to God to attest his innocence and sincerity of heart, that did not prove him to be faultless in the sight of God. St. Paul said, "I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified." And similar to this is the psalmist's confession here. He might be, and he was, innocent before men, and sincere in heart toward God; but yet there were many a transgression and fault and failure, the remembrance of which made him pray, "Enter not into judgment," etc. (ver. 2). Such were the characteristics of this prayer, and should be of all prayer—indeed, must be, if our prayers are to avail.

II. ITS COMPLAINT. The psalmist tells what his enemies had done against him (ver. 3). 1. *They had persecuted his soul.* He had, no doubt, some outward, present persecution in his thought; but in reading this psalm we may transfer his words to those spiritual persecutions which we often have to suffer at the hands of our great enemy; and, thus applied, the whole psalm answers to all too frequent experience of the people of God to-day. For the enemy doth by all manner of temptation persecute our soul—he suggests doubt, he stirs up evil thoughts, he assails our faith, he darkens our mind, and in every way seeks to loosen our hold on God. 2. *And some have to confess, "He hath smitten my life down to the ground."* There have been periods in the history of God's servants—there were in David's—when the Divine life in them has been all but non-existent, when they could not pray, nor witness for God, nor give him praise, nor render any service of a spiritual kind. They have been terrible seasons—the enemy hath come in like a flood, and the overwhelmed ones were unable to pray that "the Spirit of the Lord would lift up a standard against him." 3. And then, in consequence, *there has been the "dwelling in darkness, as those that have been long dead."* Oh, the darkness of that time! it was as the gloom of the grave. The soul that the enemy hath so smitten is conscious of his awful loss; that the life of

God in him is seemingly gone; and he seems abandoned to the utter corruption of sin! No wonder that his spirit is overwhelmed and his heart desolate (ver. 4). How could it be otherwise? He is simply and utterly miserable.

III. THE COMING OF RELIEF. 1. *God leads him to remember the days of old.* 'To hunger after those blessed times when God came to his soul, and was his Helper and Deliverer. Full of help are memories like these. 2. *Then to "meditate on all thy works."* To see the wisdom, power, and love displayed in them, and so to hope that for him, too, there should be wrought some gracious work of God. As he thus mused, the fire of love and desire and faith would begin to burn, and then his musing thought would take form and action; for: 3. *He would stretch forth his hands unto God.* His soul was athirst for God, and now forth go his hands in prayer. Yes, relief was coming; for there are its near harbingers, everywhere and always.

IV. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN TAKEN BY FORCE. (Vers. 7—12.) What a crowd and rush of prayers, protestations, cries, and pleadings, these verses contain! One after another they come, in hot haste and eagerness, that will take no denial. It is a very besiegement of the throne of grace. But the chief burden of all is, not for deliverance from enemies, but for a closer knowledge of God; the consciousness of his favour, the speedy hearing of his loving-kindness; the being made to know the way wherein God would have him walk. Then come prayers that God would teach, would lead, would quicken, and would bring his soul out of trouble. There is prayer for deliverance from calamities; but the great longing is after the doing of God's will, and the quickening of his soul in righteousness. Prayer helps him in attaining that submissiveness of will which is essential to his gaining that unspeakable blessing on which his heart is set. And in proportion as a man is taught of God, this is the supreme desire of his soul. If he gains this, it matters not much whether the outward calamities go or stay. If God's face shines upon him, man's may frown as it will. He has heaven within him, even though hell be outside of and all around him. What can any enemy do unto him, since God is on his side? He has won the kingdom of heaven, and no man can take it from him. Blessed is any sorrow when such reaction as this psalm reveals follows from it! The light affliction which was for the moment is now working out the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The travail of his soul has issued in the glorious birth of the life of the love of God. And this is ever God's intent in all our sorrows; for this he lets the enemy smite our soul down to the ground, and make us dwell in darkness. He desires that we should flee unto him to hide us. And, blessed be his Name! he ever will; and far more than that will he do.—S. C.

Ver. 7.—*Becoming "like unto them that go down into the pit."* Such was the psalmist's horrible dread, the extreme terror of his soul.

I. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? The dead were they who went down into the pit. 1. *The expression is one of those which mark the intense repulsion with which the Old Testament saints regarded death.* Listen to David's piteous cry, "Oh, spare me that I may recover strength," etc. (Ps. xxxix.; cf. also Pss. lxxxviii. 1—7, 10—12; cxv. 16—18; and *passim* throughout the Old Testament). They regarded the grave with feelings of the deepest gloom—as a dark pit, a prison with bars (Job xvii. 16). See also Hezekiah's entreaty that he might not die (Isa. xxxviii.). The grave was the land of destruction, of darkness, where they could not praise God nor enjoy his favour; where they would be utterly forgotten; and whence they should never return. Because of its dread associations, our translators have often rendered the Hebrew word into our word "hell," as in the well-known passage, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all," etc. But it is the same word as is used by Jacob when he says, "Ye will bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave." The souls of the pious Jews shrank from death with an unutterable repulsion; and hence, when the psalmist here would express the extremity of spiritual distress, he describes it as becoming "like unto them that go down into the pit." Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel; but those ancient saints had not that light. Contrast St. Paul's courageous "I am ready to be offered up," and the mournful moan of the psalmist, "Oh, spare me!" the joy and hope of the gospel with the gloom of the Old Testament (cf. Job xiv. with John xiv. and the whole of the New Testament). 2.

But, wherefore—so it will at once be asked—was this hope withheld from the psalmists and such as they? And we reply that probably one reason was that they might learn as they did learn, to put all their trust and find all their delight in God. He was to be everything to them; their God and their exceeding Joy; and, when this was so, they could leave to him to determine what their future should be. They were to have, and to teach us to have, a present salvation, and to trust in God for all the rest. And this, in our best moments, is what we do. It is not the thought of the future life that most of all influences the true believer, but the present realization of God. If he has that, it is well with him; but without that, even the hope of the future life waxes dim. What the soul of man wants is a salvation here and now; and it is what we may have, and many have, and all should have, and then the soul will be at rest as to all the future may bring. And to teach this was, we think, one of the reasons why the clear promise of the future life which we enjoy was not given to them. But to return to the text, we inquire—

II. WHENCE SUCH DISTRESS OF SOUL AS THE TEXT INDICATES ARISES? 1. *Sometimes it is owing to the presence of earthly sorrow, and the cruelty of men.* Such was the case, evidently, with the writer of this psalm. "Man's inhumanity to man" will not seldom smite the "soul down to the ground," and make the spirit faint. It has done such cruel and cursed work again and again. 2. *Delayed answers to prayer.* How frequently do these psalms show the terrible strain upon the faith of God's people which such delayed answers to their prayers has caused (Pss. xxii. 2; lxxxviii. 9, and parallels)! 3. *The sense of sin.* (See Pss. xxxii. li.; and the penitential psalms generally; also the publican's prayer, "God be merciful," etc. l.) Where no relief comes, sometimes, as in the case of Saul and Judas, men have rushed to self-destruction. The agony of this sense of sin is to the soul like that of broken bones to the body (Ps. li. 8). Think of what the prodigal's home-journey must have been, what bitter thoughts must have filled his mind. The conviction of sin has no comfort in itself, though it should lead thereto. 4. *And sometimes God lets his beloved ones fall into such deep depression.* See our blessed Lord in Gethsemane, and in the darkness on the cross. He knows what such soul-agony means; in this, as in all points, he has been tried like as we are.

III. WHEREFORE IS IT PERMITTED? 1. *For the trial and so the strengthening of trust in God.* See the Syro-phenician woman—how her faith was tried! But she stood the test, as the Lord knew she would; and she rose thereafter and because of it to a glorious height of faith, such as even made the Lord himself to marvel, and to pronounce on her a benediction which otherwise she would never have gained. Hence it is that St. James bids us count it all joy when we fall into such trials. They are the opportunity for the soul's winning the high prizes of the kingdom of God; and when God sends to us such trials, he is but entering us for the glorious contest. Therefore count it all joy! 2. *For the working in us of a holy hatred of sin.* That is the reason of the Holy Spirit's convicting work. Burnt children dread the fire; therefore God lets sin burn the sinner. 3. *For the helping of others.* He who endures trial witnesses for God as none other can. He declares in the face of an unbelieving world—not to say Church—that God's grace is sufficient, and that therewith he can do and bear all things. That testimony is needed, and is fruitful of blessing. It was thus that always and everywhere the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the Church. What heart-cheer it brings to tempted yet timid souls! See to it that *we* thus witness for God. It was thus our Lord witnessed.

IV. WHENCE RELIEF COMES. "Hide not thy face from me"—so the psalmist prays, and thus plainly declares that what would certainly bring him relief would be the face of God shining upon him. When God thus blesses his servants, then it is that he gives them quietness, and none then can make trouble (Job xxxiv. 29); for then, man may be as cruel as he will, the specific answers to our prayers may be delayed as long as God sees fit, the sense of sin will be swallowed up in the certainty of God's pardoning love, and we are able to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him!"

CONCLUSION. 1. *Can God's face shine upon us?* Not if we are refusing to let go our hold of sin. If we will not renounce that, God's face cannot shine upon us. Therefore, be now, at once, reconciled to God. 2. *Will it shine upon us?* Yes, it ever does; though, as with the sun, clouds may obscure its brightness. We patiently

wait till the clouds clear. That is what the believer has to do—"wait patiently for him."—S. C.

Ver. 8.—"*The way wherein I should walk.*" The tone and language of this psalm lend colour to the general belief that it was written by David, and, perhaps, as the LXX. adds, when he was a fugitive from before the rebellion of Absalom. He had very great need of help. He could not plead that he had done no wrong; on the contrary, he virtually confesses that he has (ver. 2). But his present distress was very great; and we can well believe that he turned to his accustomed arms of prayer and supplication. His prayers, however, do not seem to have, thus far, much aided him; he is still in desperate straits—his spirit overwhelmed, his heart desolate; he was nigh to becoming "like them that go down into the pit." And amongst his other troubles, there was this one—that he was in utter perplexity as to the way he should take. He did not know what that way was; and hence he prays, as in this eighth verse. But he feels that if only it were well with his soul, if the life of God there could but be revived, then most of his difficulties would clear away. Now, this perplexity of the psalmist teaches us—

I. THERE IS A WAY IN WHICH MEN SHOULD WALK. 1. *There are some ways in which a man cannot walk*; as e.g. the way which would reverse the past, which would undo or alter that which is past. How much we should like to be able to do this! But it is impossible. What is done cannot be undone: even God cannot make that not to be which has been. Nor can we walk so as to retrace our steps. We cannot put back the clock of life, so as to recall the years that are gone. Forward our path lies; backward we cannot go. What urgency this fact gives to the Preacher's charge, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for," etc. (Eccles. ix. 10)! But: 2. *There are some along which we must walk.* Those which lead to the grave and to the judgment-seat of God. If death did end all, even then the squanderings of life's opportunities would be miserable folly and grievous wrong; but when we read and know that "after death the judgment," then the seriousness and responsibility of life become vastly greater—so great that we cannot over-estimate them. And there is yet another path in which we must walk—that which leads to the formation and fixing of our character. We are for ever building up the fabric of character—building in the wood, hay, stubble, or the gold, silver, and precious stones. We are forming habits which are the garment of the soul. No day leaves us without having added its contribution to the final character we shall bear. But: 3. *We have to speak of the way in which we should walk*—the way we should deliberately choose and decisively prefer and cleave to, as the only right way. There can be no doubt of there being such a way (see Isa. xlv. 5). There is a life-plan for each of us, a definite will of God. (1) Nature attests this. There, everything from the minutest atom up to the most magnificent star, the drop of water as well as the wide ocean, have each and all of them their course marked out, the way they are to take. Nothing is left to chance or haphazard. Is it likely, then, that man, the highest creation of God, should be sent purposeless and without definite course in the world? (2) And experience and observation confirm this belief. See the history of Joseph (Gen. xlv. 5—8). And of Moses and many more. We can see how God ordered their lives, and fitted them for the work he had for them to do. And for us there is no joy greater than to know that we are in the way God appoints. All difficulties and sorrows of the way can be borne if we know we are where God would have us be. 4. *But man can refuse to walk in this way.* How often he does refuse, and turn aside to his own self-chosen way! It seems right to him, but it ends miserably. It must do so. How terrible is this power of choice! Happy the man who has said to God, "Choose thou for me"!

II. THIS WAY IS OFTEN DIFFICULT TO DISCOVER. Who does not know that very often the doing of what is right is far less difficult than the discovering of what the right is? Many causes may contribute to this difficulty. It may be part of God's discipline for us. Earthly sorrow and trouble may bewilder. The faculty of clear seeing in such cases may not be ours. Self-will may pervert judgment.

III. GOD CAUSES MEN TO KNOW THIS WAY. By angels, visions, pillar of cloud and fire, by dreams, by Urim and Thummim,—so in ancient days he guided his people.

And he guides them now: his Word, his providence, his Spirit, acting on our minds, reveal his will.

IV. HE DOES THIS FOR THOSE WHO LIFT UP THEIR SOUL UNTO HIM.—S. C.

Ver. 9.—“*I flee unto thee to hide me.*” Thus does the psalmist set forth the soul’s swift flight to its sure shelter in God. The man who wrote this psalm was evidently one who had been greatly tried; but when we see the blessed help that has come to myriad souls through the records of his experiences, we are taught thereby one reason at least for the trials of the people of God. Now, here—

I. WE HAVE A GOODLY EXAMPLE. That in all our troubles we should flee to God to hide us. Now, in order to this: 1. *We must see our need of such shelter.* We shall never do as did the psalmist, unless, like him, we see and feel the great danger we are in. Our text is the language of one who realizes his peril. This, in regard to things of the soul, is what so many fail to do. They cannot be got to believe that there is any need wherefore they should trouble themselves. Hence, as in the days of Noah, men went on in their wonted ways, although solemnly and repeatedly warned, until the Flood came and swept them all away. And thus indifferent and unbelieving the mass of men are still. But he who is awakened by God’s grace to the reality of things will clearly see his need of shelter from the guilt of his sin, from its terrible power, and from the cruel oppression of this world’s calamities and sorrows. He sees this, and therefore says, “*I flee unto,*” etc. 2. *He sees also his own weakness.* He would not flee if he could fight with any hope of success; or if he knew how to protect himself from the evils which he fears, or had resources of which he could avail himself. But it is because he knows all this is impossible to him, therefore he flees unto God. 3. *He has implicit and unlimited confidence in God.* He believed that God was both able and willing to save him, and that God would be well pleased that he should flee to him, which he might do if he would. He felt that all would be well with him were he once sheltered within the cleft of the Rock, hidden in the secret place of the Most High. He was quite sure that to betake himself there was his truest wisdom, even as it was his settled resolve. 4. *He realizes that his need is urgent.* “*I flee unto thee,*” etc. No time was to be lost; he might not delay having recourse to God. “The Name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” So would he run into the strong shelter of God. 5. *His trust in God is real and active.* Thousands of men talk of finding refuge in God, but they never set out to find it. But the psalmist’s religion was a reality to him; he got real blessing and help out of it; he had evidently often found a sure retreat and hiding-place from all evil in God. Ah! how much we lose by not *doing* the things that we say! by letting professions serve instead of practice! This man actually fled away to God.

II. THE SUGGESTED AND SADLY TOO COMMON CONTRAST. Every word in the text reminds us of the different conduct which is so commonly seen. For example: 1. *Many will recommend others to flee unto God; but they never do so themselves.* They cannot say, “*I flee unto thee.*” This is why so many sermons are so ineffectual. The people who hear them feel that the preacher knows nothing experimentally of what he is talking about. 2. *Or, if they do not refuse to go, their going is very slow.* There is all too little of fleeing unto God. We take things far too easy for that. John the Baptist might preach, “Flee from the wrath to come!” but how few heeded what he said! And so it is still. Men do not believe that there is any need to escape as for their life; and hence, with all leisure, and often listlessness, they proceed in regard to their salvation. 3. *And many when in trouble flee away from, rather than unto, God.* They plunge into business, into pleasure, into sin; they harden themselves in unbelief; they set themselves defiantly against God. 4. *Others flee to all manner of substitutes for God.* “Take away her battlements; they are not the Lord’s!” so said the Prophet Jeremiab, concerning the many refuges of lies behind which so many of his countrymen were thinking that they would find shelter. And so still, how many are thinking that in priests and sacraments, in Churches and Creeds, in religious rites and observances, they shall find help, when such help is in God alone! 5. *And many will seek from God, not deliverance from spiritual evil, but rather comfort in it.* They do not mind the sin so much as its discomfort, and they want God to take that away. If he will do that, they will not mind the evil thing itself. All they want is comfort,

But God's will and way is to sever us from our sin, and to place us where it cannot reach us. This should be our desire, as it was his who wrote this psalm. Then alone are we blessed.

III. OUR SUPREME WISDOM. For to do as is here said is nothing less; we then are wise unto salvation. For: 1. *God is honoured when we thus flee to him.* How did the king in the parable feel when he had made the great supper, and all things were ready, but the invited guests began with one consent to make excuse? And God has provided for all our need. Will he not feel dishonoured if we refuse, but glorified if we take what he has offered? 2. *And our fellow-men will be encouraged to follow our example.* "No man liveth unto himself." If any one travel truly the road to heaven, he will not want for companionship. 3. *We ourselves shall be blessed indeed.* Having fled unto God to hide him—guilt, sin, sorrow, death, are powerless to really harm him even now; and soon they will be unable to reach him at all. He dwells "in the secret place of the Most High, and abides under," etc.—S. C.

Ver. 1.—*Man's hope in prayer lies in what God is.* Righteousness is, from one point of view, that side of Divine justice which is turned towards good men; hence it comes to mean "beneficence." There is some good reason for associating this psalm with the experiences of David in the time of Absalom's rebellion. Delitzsch says, "The psalms of this time of persecution are distinguished from those of the persecution by Saul, by the deep melancholy into which the mourning of the dethroned king was turned by blending with the penitential sorrowfulness of one conscious of his own guilt." "It is to God's own character that the appeal is made. It is there first, and not in his own misery, that the sinner finds the great argument why his prayer should be answered." "Faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John i. 9). The relation between the two terms "faithfulness" and "righteousness" may be thus indicated: Faithfulness is God's strict keeping of all those covenant terms to which he has pledged himself. Righteousness is his vindication of the oppressed, as is witnessed both by history and by experience.

I. MAN'S HOPE BASED ON WHAT GOD HAS DONE CANNOT SUFFICE. Because man must take into account *all* that God has done, and then he is sure to be bewildered. If a man takes out all the manifestly mighty and apparently kind things that God has done, and attempts to base his hope in prayer on them, he is always in danger of having his foundations destroyed by some one who will remind him of things God has done which seem strange and cannot be explained. It is not that God is ever other than himself. It is that man cannot safely read the meaning of all God does; and some of his doings excite in some men doubt and mistrust rather than confidence.

II. MAN'S HOPE BASED ON WHAT GOD IS WILL ALWAYS SUFFICE. It is true that we can only know what God *is* by what he says and what he does. But everything depends on our willingness to let these things teach us God himself—teach us *what he is*. The point may be illustrated by our relations with our fellow-men. In whom is our confidence fully placed? In those of whom we only know what they have done? Nay, it is reserved for those whom we know personally, whose characters have made a profound impression on us. We trust God fully only when we *know him* worthily.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*Prayer cannot be based on man's rights.* The prayer of a being who had kept his rights can be. We are able to conceive that the prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ were acceptable to God when presented on the ground of his own right to be heard. He never prayed in any other name than his own.

I. MAN HAS, IN A SENSE, LOST HIS RIGHTS. It is necessary to deal with this point carefully. Things are virtually lost when they are undervalued, put aside, and unused. They remain, but are as treasures left in the lumber-room, while the house is filled with other interests. Man has rights in God, rights of prayer, by virtue of his very being and primary relations with God. And these he can never absolutely lose. They are part of him—part of his necessary being. But he may undervalue them, and put them out of consideration, so that they may be virtually lost. He has, therefore, as a practical fact, no rights to plead in prayer. He cannot plead his creation; for he has come to neglect or defy his Creator. He cannot plead his sonship; for he is not

offering the obedience of a son. He cannot plead the Divine promises; for he is not meeting the conditions on which the promises depend.

II. MAN HAS, IN FACT, PUT HIS WRONGS IN PLACE OF HIS RIGHTS. And man's wrong is his wilfulness. The dependent being has tried to force himself into independence. The son has become a self-willed prodigal. And now, if man wants to pray, he cannot do it without carrying his *wrong* into the presence of God; and, whether he knows it or not, that wrong is the plea which alone God can hear. The thoughtful man feels this; it is the fact for every man. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." God would hear a man's prayers if the man *had his rights*. He cannot hear when a man only brings his wrongs.

III. MAN MUST, IN ORDER TO PRAY ACCEPTABLY, HAVE HIS RIGHTS RESTORED TO HIM. That is, restored to active power and use. It is an important and suggestive aspect of the redemptive work of Christ, that it is the mastery of man's self-willed wrong, and the recovery, into active power, of man's natural rights. Christ is making men what God meant them to be, and what he is; and *such* men may base prayer on their rights.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Our worst trials are in the sphere of feeling.* "Is desolate;" or, is full of amazement; astonies itself; seeks to comprehend the mystery of its sufferings, and is ever beaten back upon itself in its perplexity; is dispirited. "How poor a judgment can be formed of a man's state from the considerations of comfort only!" There are trials which are wholly kept in the physical sphere. There are aches and pains of body, and disabilities of bodily organs, which have no direct connection with sin, and so no bitterness through witnessing conscience; and which arouse no feeling save the simple feeling of enduring. There are trials which have no relation to the outer world of circumstances; they belong wholly to the inner world of feeling.

I. TRIALS THAT KEEP IN THE BODILY SPHERES HAVE MANY RELIEFS. Especially may be noticed those that come by sympathy. Others can understand and estimate these trials. The comfortings they present are kin with the trials. There is no secrecy about these trials; they who suffer under them need not be lonely. And of God it can be said, "He knoweth our frame," and can be in closest sympathy with us. A grief that we can *tell to another* is not our worst grief.

II. TRIALS THAT GET INTO THE SPHERE OF FEELING HAVE FEW RELIEFS. So mysterious is human nature; so complex are the relations of body and mind; so strangely possible is it for a man to live an interior life distinct from bodily conditions and relations,—that it is possible for a man to have trials wholly in the sphere of feeling. And these are the worst trials, because for them we can get little or no human sympathy. They put us apart from our fellow-men in loneliness. Our Lord suffered bodily on the cross; but the sufferings in feeling were his real sufferings. Yet even in these worst trials we are not separated from God. Indeed, as these belong to the spirit-region, they belong more especially to the sphere in which God works most freely. When the "heart" is desolate, there is the more need for its filling and comforting with that sense of God which may be so fully realized.—R. T.

Vers. 5, 6.—*God our first Hope and our Last.* The hunger and thirst after righteousness is ultimately a thirst for God. "Observe how he binds himself to God alone, cuts off every other hope from his soul, and, in short, makes his very need a chariot wherewith to mount up to God." "I remember the days of old;" "I spread forth my hands unto thee."

I. GOD ALWAYS HAS BEEN OUR HOPE. A good man is here speaking in the name of good men. They can never look back over life, and estimate its scenes of trial and strain, without clearly seeing that their hope was in God, and that God had ever met and satisfied their hope. One thing man has to learn over and over again in the experience of life. It is the untrustworthiness of things and people, and the safe foundation of hope that a man has in God. It is not usually long after a man enters on what may be called a personal experience that he discovers there is no hope to be placed in man. One of the most humiliating and depressing experiences of life is finding our most trusted friend fail us in the hour of need. Then we learn that God is our first and only Hope. Then God does not fail. We may trust him. We find

him the "Strength of our heart and our Portion for ever." That experience is repeated again and again as life unfolds.

II. GOD ALWAYS WILL BE OUR HOPE. Estimate aright the painful experiences through which we may now be passing; times when our life-erectings seem to lie in ruins about us; times when trusted friends fail us; times when the outlook before us is dark; times when the sense of loneliness oppresses us, we look to the right hand and to the left, but there is no helper;—they are all times in which we are recovering and re-establishing our hope in God. It is well to remember that we always have *that*. The soul's deep rest is in him who is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever;" always the "Friend of the friendless and the faint." Life rightly viewed is a liberating us from every bond that would keep us from restful, strengthening *hope in God*.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The fear of not doing right in times of stress.* The people of Israel, on coming to the banks of the Jordan, and facing a time of great strain and difficulty, were called to stop and consider, and estimate their needs, and their sources of strength. They were reminded, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." They were even more forcibly reminded, "The living God is among you." If they responded aright to this call, they would pray the prayer of this text, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk."

I. THE SPIRIT WE OUGHT EVERY DAY TO CHERISH. A man's heart is revealed in every true prayer that he offers. This prayer shows (1) a great sense of God's nearness and personal interest. Contrast the renewed man's cherished ideas of God, and God's relations, with those of the unrenewed man. (2) A true humility under God's mighty hand; not merely the impression that God is great, but the feeling, too, that we are wholly dependent on him. (3) A happy trusting of all our interests to God's care. Power and wisdom do not satisfy reliant, trustful hearts. They find rest only in personal affection, interest, and service. Tenderly beautiful are the words, "Thou knowest, Lord!" when upon the humble, quiet-minded, loving Christian's lips.

II. THE PRAYER WE OUGHT DAILY TO OFFER. Offer each day anew, and as freshly as if then offered for the first time. The promise comes to us anew every morning, "As thy day so shall thy strength be." 1. Cause me to *see* the way. We always walk in twilight; sometimes in utter darkness. "In thy light we shall see light." 2. Cause me to *choose* the way. Because even when we know the right, we will not accept it or do it; so we want the Divine strength in our will and decisions. 3. Cause me to understand the *claims* of the way. For it must be full of duties and responsibilities. He is the truly happy man who can see clearly what God's work for him is, chooses it for himself, is satisfied with it, and wants to do it. 4. Cause me to *meet* the claims of the way. We need grace first in order to know the right way, and then grace to act aright in the way. So this prayer covers the whole field of the religious life.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*Fleeing from God: fleeing to God.* Literally, "Unto thee have I hidden myself;" or, "my sorrow."

I. WHAT IS REVEALED BY THE MOOD OF MIND THAT FLEES FROM GOD. That mood is suggested by the experience of Adam, who hid himself from the presence of the Lord, when the holy voice was heard in the garden, when the evening breeze was felt. 1. A mood of dissatisfaction with self is revealed. There is a good sense in which a man may be at peace with himself—satisfied with himself; feeling no abrupt division between his doing and his sense of right doing. In that state the man loves the thought of God, and cherishes the sense of his nearness. God is kin with him. If a man is dissatisfied with himself, not sure of his own rightness, that man will get away from God, put away the thought of him. 2. A mood of fear is revealed. A man knows how much he is dependent on God, and how closely he is related to God; if he wants to get away from God, he must have some reason to fear what those Divine relations must involve. The fear is based on either (1) taking up wrong thoughts of God; or (2) conduct which must offend God. Fear, as alarm that compels a man to hide, reveals cherished sin as exciting fear. (3) Sometimes it reveals an independence which persists in doing without God. This is the mood which is most hopeless. The man is satisfied with himself on wrong grounds.

II. WHAT IS REVEALED BY THE MOOD OF MIND THAT FLEES TO GOD. 1. A right apprehension of God. Wholly consistent with reverent thought of God is a restful confidence in him. No man apprehends God aright who only knows him as *good*; he must know that he is *good to him*. His knowing this is seen in his fleeing to hide in him. 2. A right apprehension of self. This involves cherished assurance of dependence, and absence of all desire to be other than dependent. Only to the dependent soul can God ever reveal himself. 3. A full confidence of safety in the defence of God. That full confidence involves the assurance of safety from perilous self as well as from treacherous foes.—R. T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Vindications left with God*. "Whatever of human frailty may attach to the desire of vengeance, yet the fact remains that to smite the oppressor of righteousness is a part of 'the goodness' of God." "It is worthy of observation that the psalmist pleads God's *righteousness* as the foundation on which he bases his supplication for the deliverance of his soul out of trouble; and God's loving-kindness or mercy as that on which he grounds his prayer, or his conviction, that God will destroy his enemies."

I. WHAT A MAN MAY DO WITH HIS ENEMIES. Submit and suffer; or oppose and suffer. A man may take dealing with his enemies into his own hands; and spend his life in seeking opportunities for crushing them and avenging himself. But then one of two things will happen. (1) He may fail, and bring ruin upon himself by his attempts. Or (2) he may succeed, but only at the cost of his own *moral* ruin; for he fatally injures his own character by cherishing hateful, revengeful feeling through the long years. Can a man ever safely avenge himself? The answer is an emphatic *No*. He cannot do it wisely. He cannot help injuring himself in the doing. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves."

II. WHAT A MAN HAD BETTER DO WITH HIS ENEMIES. Leave them with God. But that may involve keeping the slur upon our reputation. Never mind, God can vindicate us in his own time and way. His own approval of us is the pledge that everybody else will approve of us sooner or later. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." We may always be sure of two things. (1) In the economy of life punishment works out for the wrong-doer; and (2) God will surely see that the outworking is not interfered with. But leaving our enemies with God means praying to God *about* them. Not praying to God *against* them. Not telling God what we wish him to *do with* them. Only commending them to his consideration in such a way that we shall be wholly relieved of the burden of dealing with them.—R. T.

Vers. 1—12.—*A complaint and a prayer*. This the last of the penitential psalms. The authorship and occasion of it uncertain. Pervaded by a deep tone of sorrow and anguish and a deep sense of sin. Roughly divided, the *first* part (vers. 1—6) contains the *complaint*; and the *second* (vers. 7—12), the *prayer* founded on that complaint.

I. THE COMPLAINT. 1. *His enemies overwhelmed with a sense of desolation*. (Vers. 3, 4.) "His life was smitten down;" he dwelt as in the darkness of death; his heart was desolate. No friend was left; no protection from the cruel injustice of men. He was as if forsaken of God. All this was the means of revealing the sinfulness and misery of his own heart. 2. *The contrast between his past and present experience*. (Ver. 5.) This embittered his anguish and added to the sense of his desolation. 3. *He stands as one imploring help*. (Ver. 6.) But to whom, as yet, help has not come. As parched land thirsts for rain, so he pants for the help of God.

II. THE PRAYER. The petitions in vers. 7—12 may be thus grouped: 1. *Prayer for speedy loving-kindness and direction*. (Vers. 7, 8.) 2. *For deliverance from enemies and fuller knowledge of God's will*. (Vers. 9, 10.) And for power to obey that will when thus made known. 3. *For new life and deliverance from the sufferings caused by his enemies*. (Vers. 11, 12.) A new internal and external life—a complete change. 4. *The ground of the several petitions is the personal relation of the psalmist to God*. "Thou art my God;" "In thee have I trusted;" "I am thy servant;" etc. Man is God's child. These the strongest appeals that could be made.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXLIV.

A PSALM in which praise and prayer are commingled. Almost certainly Davidic:
1. From the title. 2. From the style.
3. From the way in which David is mentioned in ver. 10 (comp. Ps. lxi. 6; lxiii. 11; and especially xviii. 50).

Ver. 1.—**Blessed be the Lord my strength;** or, “my rock” (comp. Ps. xviii. 2, 46; xxxi. 3; lxii. 7, etc.). **Which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight** (comp. Ps. xviii. 34).

Ver. 2.—**My goodness, and my fortress;** my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust. The general resemblance to Ps. xviii. 2 is striking, but there are peculiar and original touches which indicate the author, not the copyist. For instance, the expression, “my goodness,” occurs nowhere else. **Who subdueth my people under me.** Another reading gives, “Who subdueth peoples under me.” Either reading suits the circumstances of David, who had to subdue a great portion of his own people under him (2 Sam. ii. 8—31; iii. 6—21), and also conquered many foreign nations (2 Sam. viii. 1—14).

Ver. 3.—**Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him!** (comp. Job vii. 17, 18; Ps. viii. 4). Or the son of man, that thou makest account of him! It enhances our estimate of God’s goodness to consider the insignificance and unworthiness of the creatures on whom he bestows it.

Ver. 4.—**Man is like to vanity;** or, “to a breath” (comp. Ps. xxxix. 5; lxii. 9). **His days are as a shadow that passeth away** (see Ps. cii. 11; cix. 23). And yet God has regard to this weak creature of an hour.

Ver. 5.—**Bow thy heavens, O Lord, and come down.** The strain changes. From praise of God’s loving-kindness and might, the psalmist proceeds to invoke his aid. Taking his metaphors from Ps. xviii. 9, “Bow thy heavens, O Lord,” he says, “and come down” to earth—appear in thy might, to the discomfiture of thy enemies and the relief of thy faithful ones. **Touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.** Do as thou wert pleased to do at Sinai, when thou showedst thyself—“Touch the mountains, and let a smoke go up from them” (see Exod. xix. 16, 18; Deut. iv. 11; Ps. xviii. 7—14)—a consuming fire, that shall burn up the ungodly.

Ver. 6.—**Cast forth lightning, and scatter them: shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them** (comp. Ps. xviii. 14).

Ver. 7.—**Send thine hand from above; literally, reach out thy hands from on high. Bid me; rather, rescue me. And deliver me out of great waters.** “Great waters,” or “deep waters,” is a common metaphor in the Psalms for serious peril. David’s peril at this time was from the hand of strange children; literally, sons of strangers; i.e. foreign foes.

Ver. 8.—**Whose mouth speaketh vanity; rather, fraud** (comp. Ps. xviii. 45). A feigned submission of some foreign enemy is probably glanced at. **And their right hand is a right hand of falsehood.** The right hand was lifted up in the taking of a solemn oath (see Ezek. xx. 15).

Ver. 9.—**I will sing a new song unto thee, O God.** Another change of strain. The psalmist returns to his original theme of the praise of God (see vers. 1, 2), and promises a “new song,” as in Ps. xl. 3. **Upon a psaltery and an instrument of ten strings will I sing praises unto thee; rather, upon a psaltery of ten strings** (see the Revised Version, and comp. Ps. xxxiii. 2). Assyrian harps had commonly, in the earlier ages, either eight, nine, or ten strings (‘Ancient Monarchies,’ vol. i. p. 530, 2nd edit.).

Ver. 10.—**It is he that giveth salvation unto kings.** There has always been a belief, especially in the East, that “a divinity doth hedge a king.” Saul himself was regarded by David as sacrosanct, and to kill him, even at his own request, was a sacrilege (2 Sam. i. 14—16). **Who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword.** David speaks of himself by name, not only here, but in Ps. xviii. 50; 2 Sam. vii. 26.

Ver. 11.—**Bid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood** (see above, vers. 7, 8). The passage is made a refrain, to terminate stanzas 2 and 3.

Ver. 12.—**That our sons may be as plants.** The stanza which these words introduce is a very remarkable one, having nothing at all corresponding to it in the rest of the Psalter. It has been thought by some to be an antique document, quoted by the writer of the psalm, as suited for a festal occasion. Our translation makes it a picture of the condition to which the writer hopes that Israel may one day come; but the best recent critics see in it a description of Israel’s actual condition in the writer’s day. Professor Cheyne translates, “Because our sons are as plants;” and Dr. Kay, “What time our sons are as plants.” **Grown up in their youth; literally, grown large.** The sons are compared to ornamental trees or

shrubs, growing outside a building. That our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished (or, "carved") after the similitude of a palace. The daughters are like carved pillars, lighting up the angular recesses of the structure.

Ver. 13.—That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store; or, "while our garners are full," etc. That our sheep may bring forth; rather, *and our sheep bring forth*. Thousands and ten thousands in our streets; rather, *in our fields*. *Khutsóth* (חֲטָטִים) is rendered "fields" by our translators in Job v. 10 and Prov. viii. 26.

Ver. 14.—That our oxen may be strong

to labour; rather, *and our oxen are heavily laden*. A sign that an abundant harvest is being gathered in. That there be *no breaking in, nor going out*; literally, *and there is no breach and no removal*; i.e. no breach made in our walls, and no removal of our population into captivity. That there be no complaining in our streets; rather, *and no wailing in our streets*. Here the description of a happy time ends, and a burst of congratulation follows (see the next verse).

Ver. 15.—Happy is that people, that is in such a case! yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord! The cause of Israel's prosperity is their faithfulness to Jehovah.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—15.—*National piety and prosperity*. The latter part of this psalm seems hardly to belong to the former; but looking at it in the light of the last verses, we regard it as an utterance which has in view, from first to last, the well-being of the nation. Thus considered, we have—

I. THE ONE TRUE SOURCE OF NATIONAL SECURITY. (Vers. 1, 2, 10.) The writer is presumably David. He takes the position of a leader, of a warrior-king. And though *we* do not look upon war as the principal activity of nations, we must remember the times to which the psalm belongs, and must take into account the fact that national independence and prosperity were then determined by the sword. We need not be surprised or shocked that the psalmist thanks God for teaching him to be a successful soldier; that he calls God "his Strength, his Goodness, his Fortress," etc., *in this connection*. We, too, may thank God heartily for the great soldiers who achieved or preserved our national independence; for the courage and the patriotism which made us secure from all assault from without, and from all attempts to infringe liberty within our borders. We pray for "peace in our time;" we work and strive (if needful) for the maintenance of peace; we may be prepared to make some sacrifices for peace; but we shall not shrink from asking God to "go forth with our armies" when they defend our liberty; nor will we fail to ascribe their victories to him who is *our* Strength and Fortress, as he was Israel's under David and Hezekiah.

II. THE CONSTITUENTS OF NATIONAL PROSPERITY. Some of these are mentioned here. Let it be assumed that there is perfect security; that there is no danger of any breach being made in the wall of the city, or any crossing the border of the country—no "breaking in;" nor yet of any being led forth into captivity or exile—no "going out." Then there will be, or should be: 1. *Industrial activity*, with its full reward (vers. 13, 14). Agricultural and pastoral pursuits are here mentioned; but, while including them, we naturally think of manufactures, of trade, of commerce, of mining—of all those fields of labour and sources of wealth which are familiar to us. The wise king (ver. 10), the wise government, will give its first concern to the promotion of all kinds of activity, in which every one of its citizens may have his share. 2. *The peaceful home*. (Ver. 12.) That country, whatever be its pastoral or mineral wealth, is poor indeed whose sons and daughters are not growing up in health, in wisdom, in virtue, in piety. However full the garners, or well stocked the fields, the great question is that of the home-life and the character of the young. We want our sons to be as plants or trees—strong, living, fruit-bearing, with power of growth, obedient to the laws of Heaven; and our daughters to be as "corner pillars"—fair with the beauty of holiness and kindness, helping to sustain, useful in the house in which they dwell. Where the children and the young people are declining, there the country is on its downward course; but where they are pure and beautiful and strong, there the country is secure, and its future is assured. 3. *True, acceptable worship*. "Whose God is the Lord" (ver. 15). The service of God is not only the source of national prosperity; it is an integral and important part

of it. Then are the activities of a people most worthily employed, and then is its happiness of the best and truest order—when its citizens are engaged in worshipping the living God, in learning of the great Teacher, in communicating his holy will to the children in the home and in the school. 4. *Happiness.* (Ver. 15.)

III. THE WAY TO SECURE IT. (Vers. 1, 5.) Praise and prayer. "Bless the Lord," etc. "Bow thy heavens and come down." As the king blesses God and prays for his presence, so also must the people. The recognition by all of the hand of God in past and present mercies, and the continual prayer for future blessing,—this is the condition of Divine favour and the way to permanent enlargement.

IV. OUR INSIGNIFICANCE NO BAR TO OUR PRAYER OR OUR HOPE. (Vers. 3, 4.) "Will God in very deed dwell upon the earth?" Will he "bow the heavens and come down"? Will he take note of us on this small earth? Will he care about one section, one nation, on its surface? Is not frail man, who passes away like a fitting shadow, beneath his regard? The answer to that natural and repeated question is in the historical fact of the manifestation at Sinai; it is also in the much less imposing but immeasurably more affecting and convincing fact of the birth at Bethlehem. Then God came to visit us, to dwell with us, to show us how much he cared for us, to fill our hearts with the truth that not only every nation, but every human soul, is dear to the Father in heaven.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—15.—*What the goodness of God does for me and in me.* This psalm is a string of quotations, mostly from Ps. xviii., as any reference Bible will show; and as that psalm is almost undisputedly one of David's composition, therefore this, which owes so much to it, may be called his likewise. It is also one of the war-psalms, breathing the fierce and sometimes the truculent spirit, the presence of which in these psalms has so often perplexed the Christian reader. In order to understand such psalms, we need ourselves to live in war-times; to be strenuously engaged in it, and against an enemy who has done us much wrong, and whom, therefore, our souls abhor. There have been many such times; and when they come, psalms like this one, and many more, are easily understood and readily adopted as utterances both natural and justifiable. But when all that is said, we still feel, and ought to feel, that such psalms and the spirit of Christ are far removed from one another. We may, however, gain much help from these psalms if we transfer their thoughts and words to the spiritual conflict—those wars of the Lord in which we all have to engage. There its language is felt to be true, because in harmony both with Scripture and experience alike. Thus reading it, we may note what the psalmist tells of—

I. THE GREAT GOODNESS AND MERCY OF GOD. He praises and blesses God: 1. *For what God is to him.* (Ver. 1.) "My Strength." Perpetual demand arose for strength. Fierce foes were all around, and as formidable as they were fierce. No mere weakling could possibly stand against them; strength was imperatively needed, and he found it in God. All this which was true of the psalmist is true of the spiritual warrior still. "My Goodness." Whatever good there was in him, it was all of God. In the rough hurly-burly of war, character and all moral excellence had but hard times; deterioration was apt to set in. Therefore, if there were any goodness in him, it was from God. And is it not true of ourselves? Will any one dare say that his goodness is self-derived, his own production, due to his own power alone? "My Fortress" (cf. 1 Sam. xxiii. 29 for local allusion). David knew well the value of such safe retreats. He had availed himself of them again and again. And for us all there is "the secret place of the Most High." "My high Tower." As in Central Europe, as you traverse its rivers, you see on the summits of the lofty hills, commanding the entrances and exits from the valleys beneath, the lofty towers and castles, mostly now in ruins, which warlike chieftains in bygone days erected, and within which they dwelt secure from attack, and from which they sallied forth to attack others. Such loftily placed towers were frequent in the hill-country of Palestine also, and were places of great strength. Now, of such advantage was the help of God to David, and so it is to-day to all who make the Lord their Refuge. From that high tower the movements

of the enemy can be clearly discerned, guarded against, and aggression made upon them in a most successful way. "My Shield." That which wards off from me the stroke of sword, the thrust of spear, the point of dart and arrow. So is God to the soul. Well may he say of the Lord, "It is he in whom I trust." 2. *For what God has done for him*—as his Teacher. (Ver. 1.) "Which teacheth my hands to war, and," etc. Literally, this has been true again and again. See Gideon before the Midianites, David before Goliath, etc. And wherever there has been warlike skill and the wisdom which commands success, devout men have confessed that it was God from whom all the wisdom and skill came. And yet more is this true in the holy war—the conflict we have to wage with the world, the flesh, the devil. Never was there a successful warrior there but owned at once and always that it was the Lord who taught him. "My Deliverer." So was he, so is he, so will he be. David could recall instances not a few; and what servant of God, in looking back over his spiritual life, does not own, as he thinks of one trial and another that has befallen him, "Yes, the Lord was my Deliverer"? "Who subdueth my people under me." This a yet greater mercy. Life might have been delivered, but enemies might have remained enemies still, ready to break out against him at the first chance that came. But over and above deliverance, there has been given the submission of the people. And God thus deals with his servants. Not only will he deliver them from their spiritual foes, but these foes he will subdue. The lawless passions, the evil propensities, the unhallowed temper, the uncontrolled craving,—these God will subdue, so that the very desire for sin will cease. So great is God's mercy, and so full his salvation. 3. *For that God has done all this for the weak and unworthy.* This seems to be the connection of vers. 3 and 4 with what precedes. It is not for the great and good, the worthy and the strong, but for such as man, who is like to vanity and whose days are as a shadow. Truly it is wonderful that God should take knowledge of such a one, or make account of him at all. It is of a piece with our Lord's declarations, that he had come to call, not the righteous, but sinners; to seek and to save, not the ninety and nine safe in the fold, but the wandering sheep away and lost in the wilderness. "God so loved the world"—the mass of the unworthy.

II. THE CONFIDENCE THAT GOD'S MERCY CREATES. (Vers. 5—8.) The psalmist is encouraged by what God has done to ask for yet greater things. Hence he asks: 1. *That God would manifestly appear on his behalf* against his enemies. Reminiscences of the old Hebrew history float before his mind: the terror and discomfiture of Pharaoh; the awful display of God's majesty at Sinai—the thunder-roll, the lightning-blaze. 2. *He feels that only God can give him victory*, or deliver him out of the great waters of trouble by which he is well-nigh overwhelmed. (Ver. 7.) The barbarous, cruel, and lying strangers who were against him were too many for him, and hence he turns to God (vers. 7, 8, 11). But what God has done for him encourages him thus to pray.

III. THE GRATITUDE IT INSPIRES. (Vers. 9, 10.)

IV. THE BRIGHT HOPE WHICH IT FOSTERS AND SUSTAINS. (Vers. 11—15.) Many regard these verses as belonging not to this psalm at all; but it seems better to look on them as declaring the motive both of its gratitude and its prayers. The hope which it expresses was cherished with longing desire, and underlaid the whole psalm. The verses point to the golden age of Hebrew history, and pray for its return. 1. *It concerns their children*—that they might be vigorous, strong, goodly. 2. *The prosperity of their land.* 3. *Freedom from invasion and capture.* Then happy should they be, for God would be their Lord.—S. C.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Children who are a sorrow and shame, and those who are our unspeakable joy.* In these verses we have contrasted the children concerning whom we pray, "Rid and deliver us," with those who are such as every godly man desires and craves of God that his own sons and daughters may be. The prayer of our text, it has been repeatedly remarked, is the prayer which may well come from every prince, patriot, and parent. The interests and well-being of each depend upon its being answered. As is the character of our sons and daughters, so will be the happiness of the throne, the nation, the home. But especially is it the godly parents' prayer. Consider—

I. THE STRANGE CHILDREN HERE SPOKEN OF. (Ver. 11.) From them the psalmist prays, "Rid and deliver us." 1. *Who are they?* (1) The children of foreigners, or the foreigners themselves; the heathen peoples around them, and especially those with whom they were in conflict;—these may be meant. (2) Or the evil children of God-fearing parents. There are, alas! such children, and many a home is saddened and shamed by them. *They are rightly called "strange children."* Literally they are so, if the children of strangers; but rightly too, if they are the offspring of saintly parents. For they are strangers to their father's God, their father's thoughts and ways, their father's joys and blessed anticipations, their father's holy character. They are out of sympathy with the spirit of their home, and their influence in it is of a hostile and most hurtful nature. (3) Or wicked children generally. 2. *Their characteristics are given.* "Their mouth speaketh vanity." No wholesome, helpful speech is heard from their lips, but only that which is worthless or worse, and which comes from and leads to no good. What a miserable amount of such speech there is in one day, heard or read, spoken, written, or printed! and what incalculable mischief it has worked, and must ever work! The strange children, the foreign speech as read in their literature—what an amount of uncleanness and ungodliness is not that responsible for! And "their right hand is a right hand of falsehood." This is another of the characteristics of the "strange children." The meaning seems to be that they are unfaithful to their covenants, false in their dealings; they cannot be trusted or relied upon at all. Further, their conduct is such as, by its influence upon men, leads to the denial of God's existence, authority, and Word, and to the belief of the falsehood that this world is everything, and is alone worthy of our care. They are utterly ungodly both in speech and deed. 3. *Bible instances of such strange children.* Cain, Esau, Jacob's sons, Absalom, and apparently all David's sons, and many more. 4. *The motives that should lead to the prayer in our text concerning them.* We would not have such children, for we remember what their end must be; what the sorrow they bring upon those who love them (see David's sorrow about Absalom); what the disastrous influence they exert upon others; what the dishonour they bring upon God. Let all this quicken our prayers, as parents, for our children's real conversion to God, and our endeavours to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

II. THE CHILDREN THAT ARE LIKE THE TREES AND THE POLISHED PILLARS OR CORNER-STONES. (Ver. 12.) These are the sons and daughters that the psalmist longed to behold and to possess; and such may well be our longing likewise. *Note the imagery employed.* In both, the metaphors here, though they are manifestly unlike, as a stone is unlike a plant, yet they have some common characteristics, and these seem to have been in the psalmist's mind. 1. The grown-up plant. As such, so it is prayed, may our sons be in their youth—that is, whilst yet young. It is the grown-up plant, not the root; because that is out of sight, and the psalmist would have their godly character a visible thing. And not the tender plant, for that would be wanting in strength, and strength of character is another blessing desired. Hence the ideas suggested by the metaphor seem to be these—that, as the grown-up plant, the moral character of their sons *may have root*. Rootless plants never abide or come to full maturity; therefore there must be the inward principle and spring of life. Then, *visibility*. All can see the grown-up plant; it attracts attention—is evident to all. So should our son's character be—not only inward, but outward and visible. *Beautiful*, too, as the grown-up plant, whether tree, or herb, or flower. There should be about the godly character what too often is conspicuous only by its absence—symmetry, attractiveness, loveliness, and spiritual beauty. The matured flower, how beautiful it is! "So," etc. Then, further, there should be *strength*. The vigour of the plant is when it is grown up. And how essential is it that our children's character should be strengthened with all might by the Spirit in the inner man (Eph. iii. 16)! "Be strong" is a perpetual charge in the apostolic writings, and they ever point us to the one Source of strength. And there is yet one other idea suggested—*that of God*. The plant is no man-made or man-matured thing; it is of God. And so with that character which we so crave—it must be of God. He must create, he must sustain, he must perfect it. Character that is simply man-made, that relies on self alone, what a sad contrast it offers to that which is depicted here! how much it always and inevitably lacks! 2. The polished pillar or corner-stone. This is the other metaphor.

In the courts of the Lord's house we know there were trees. Josephus plainly tells us so, and Ps. lxxxiv. implies it when it speaks of the home of the birds there. And in the palaces of the great, in the quadrangles around which they were built, there were generally many beautiful plants; and there would be also conspicuous the beautifully worked and decorated stones, placed at the angles of the building, or the polished pillars on which they rested. So, prays the psalm, may our daughters be. Here the same ideas are suggested by this metaphor as by the other. The corner-stone rests on its foundation as the plant springs from its root. St. Paul speaks in Eph. iii. as if he had these verses in his memory, of "being rooted and grounded in love;" rooted like the plant, grounded as is the foundation of a building. So must character be—based on firm foundation. Then the idea of visibility is common both to the matured plant and the polished pillar. Beauty also is even more suggested by this second figure than by the first. St. Paul teaches the same lesson when he speaks of our comprehending "with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height." It is the fair proportion and the beautiful comeliness and completeness of the Christian character which he desiderates so earnestly. Strength, again, is in this metaphor, as in the other. Both pillar and corner-stone would alike need to be strong. Some have regarded the word as pointing to "the Caryatides, the exquisitely sculptured forms of maidens which adorned the corners of some magnificent hall or chamber of a palace" (Perowne). But, with all their beauty, these pillars supporting the angles of the building must have strength. But inasmuch as the Prayer-book Version, and other authorities beside, give the meaning of "temple" rather than "palace," and as such rendering is more in harmony with this devout utterance, we accept it, and find in it that suggestion of God in the character here spoken of which is also found in the emblem of the plant (Ps. xcii. 13). Added on to the idea of strength and beauty which belonged to the temple of God there is that of godliness—consecration and devotion to him, without which no character is perfect and complete.

III. HOW WHAT IS SO DESIRED MAY BE SECURED. 1. *Parents, and all who have charge of children, must pray for it;* and the prayer must be endorsed by appropriate action. 2. *Believe in God's willingness to bestow this.* He would not have inspired such prayer else. 3. *Our young people must yield themselves up to God.* They must renounce sin, and surrender their all to him, and then continually trust and expect the blessing sought.

IV. THE GREAT EXAMPLE OF THIS BEAUTIFUL CHARACTER. Our Lord Jesus Christ.

V. WHY YOU, OUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS, SHOULD THUS PRAY. 1. *For the sake of the Lord,* who calls you to this blessed life. 2. *And for the sake of those who love you,* and long that you may be the Lord's. 3. *And of those whom you must influence for good or ill.* 4. *And for your own sake.* Oh, how many have mourned, and are mourning now, that they have not lived this true life! But never one who did so live has done other than be profoundly grateful for God's grace that led him thereto. —S. C.

Vers. 1, 2.—*War-figures of God's relations.* "The psalmist recounts glorious victories in the past; complains that the nation is now beset by strange, i.e. barbarous, enemies, so false and treacherous that no covenant can be kept with them; prays for deliverance from them by an interposition great and glorious as had been vouchsafed of old; and anticipates the return of a golden age of peace and plenty" (Perowne). If it ever has been *right*, the manifest duty of the hour, for a man to engage in war, it must be right to associate God with that doing of duty. No man would venture to say that it never has been right to engage in war. Till human nature is wholly renewed and sanctified, war will probably continue to be one of the forces which help collective humanity to make right triumph over wrong. And God may be thought of as the Trainer of soldiers for the wars of righteousness.

I. HE WHO TRAINS FOR WAR TRAINS ONLY FOR WARS OF WHICH HE CAN APPROVE. It is usual to say that defensive wars may be necessary, but offensive wars never are; but this is to take a very limited view of life, facts of history, and Divine dealings with men. God has commissioned nations to carry out his purposes of judgment and mercy by offensive wars. War as a scourge of organized societies, of nations, has been, and

may still be, used by God in execution of his judgments, and even in the movement of the locations of men to different parts of the globe. Old Testament history distinctly associates God with aggressive war. Israel invaded Palestine for God. Assyria invaded Palestine as God's servant. Mere dynastic wars are selfish wars, and wholly wrong. Wars that are really race-movements may be right. There is a good end in all war of which God approves.

II. HE WHO TRAINS FOR WAR PUNISHES THOSE WHO USE TRAINED POWERS FOR THEIR OWN ENDS. And this is the thing to which nations, and rulers of nations, are continually tempted. It is illustrated by God's dealing with Assyria, which was the rod to execute his anger against his people, but proceeded to serve its *own ends*, and so brought upon itself the judgments of God.—R. T.

VERA. 3, 4.—*The transitoriness of man.* "The occasion of the introduction of these sentiments here is not quite clear. It may be the humility of the warrior who ascribes all success to God instead of to human prowess; or it may be a reflection uttered over the corpses of comrades; or, perhaps, a blending of the two."

I. THE VANITY OF MAN CREATES SURPRISE AT GOD'S CARE. "Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him?" This is an exclamation of surprise, which is repeated by every devout soul when the frailty of man is brought impressively before him. It is not merely the brevity of life that is in view, nor its uncertainty; it is the smallness of all human doings and aims. Relative to the size of the globe, the highest mountain is but a slight and scarcely perceptible ridge. Relative to the mountain, a single man is scarcely as big as a pin's head. And what can man accomplish? His mightiest achievements are but as the triumphs of the ants whose work he despises; and he is seldom permitted fully to achieve anything, for he is usually cut off before the thing he intended can be completed. Man is a smaller being than some of the animals, and it is hard to conceive of his doing anything that is really worthy of Divine notice. And yet God *does* care for man as he cares for nothing else that he has made. We can only wonder over the fact, glory in it, and let it bring home to our hearts the mystery—"God is love."

II. THE VANITY OF MAN SHOULD LEAD HIM TO PUT HIMSELF INTO GOD'S CARE. For it is not enough that God should care for us. The joy of that care is not realized until we *care* that God should thus care. It may be a fact, but it is no helpful, comforting fact until we respond to the fact, accept the care, and voluntarily put ourselves entirely into it. The psalmist here speaks as one who had mastered the depressing influence of his own sense of frailty, by assuring his heart of God's personal care. That brings to man a sense of dignity which more than matches the sense of frailty. Man may be "crushed before the moth;" but it is also true, he is only "a little lower than the angels," for God—yes, the great, eternal God—is mindful of him.—R. T.

VER. 5.—*God's intervention is his condescension.* "Bow thy heavens, and come down." This prayer follows on the acknowledgment of man's frailty and transitoriness. His sphere is altogether below God, who must stoop down to help him. God's intervention involving his condescension may be illustrated in several spheres. To create material things; to remedy the disturbance of things; to provide for the wants of things; to recover self-ruined things;—all involve the Divine condescension.

I. TO CREATE MATERIAL THINGS. We want the mind of a Hindu philosopher in order to conceive of God as an absolute, uncaused, unrelated, independent existence; eternally and infinitely happy in himself, without what we call "personality," because without relations. Just in the measure in which we can conceive such a being, we can realize his condescension in coming out of the abstract into the concrete, and making, and putting himself into relation with, a world of *things*.

II. TO REMEDY THE DISTURBANCE OF THINGS. Once let things be in any sense separate from himself; once let there be forces (which we call *laws*) in nature, and free-will in man, and God's order will be sure to get disturbed. But he may be sublimely indifferent to the disorder in his creation. It is his condescension that he is the constant Rectifier of the difficulties and disasters which come in his creation.

III. TO PROVIDE FOR THE WANTS OF THINGS. What impresses us so greatly is the

minuteness of attention which creation daily needs. We bow ourselves to do a thousand insignificant but necessary things in our households. How God must bow himself to guard the life of every grass-blade, and to feed every gnat that hums in the summer evening!

IV. TO RECOVER RUINED THINGS. This brings to view the havoc which man's sin has made in individual lives and in God's fair world of things. For there is a ruin of the world which answers to the self-ruin of man. Why should not God let things go, and leave men to ruin themselves, and the world in which they dwell, if they please to do so? He is not bound to intervene. If he does, it can only be in condescending love.—R. T.

Vers. 7, 8.—*The known God and the unknown foe.* "Stretch forth thine hand from above; rescue me out of the hand of strangers." This is but saying, "I do not know those who trouble me, but I do know thee."

I. ALL AROUND US IS THE UNKNOWN. 1. There is so little that we can understand. Spite of all the attainments of science, the "known" to-day bears no comparison at all to the "unknown." The philosopher has but scooped up in his shell a little of the water of the great ocean of truth. The more a man knows, the more he feels how little he knows. We need not be philosophers, and argue that man never does know more than phenomena, the accidents of things; it is enough to see that, concerning almost everything, a child can ask questions which the wisest man cannot answer. 2. There is so much that never comes into the field of human thought at all. For we have no right to say that the laws which we apprehend as controlling the movements of nature are the *only* laws that control them. We are constantly baffled by intimations of the working of laws of which we know nothing at all. 3. And the human experience through which we have to pass is hopelessly unknown to us. Known to no man are his coming positions, relations, friends, or foes. Every day every man has to say to himself, "I have not gone this way heretofore." It just has to be accepted as the fact for every life, "We are of yesterday, and know nothing."

II. UP ABOVE US IS THE KNOWN. In a recent exhibition there was a very touching picture of an old farm-labourer, dressed in his smock-frock, and with a lined, wearied face that told of a long life of troubles, but over the seams and lines seemed to spread a soul-smile as, looking away through the clouds, he said, "Up beyant is the blue sky." It may be thus with every man. For the *mind* there is no rest; there is nothing but a fretful worrying with the surrounding *unknown*. But for the soul there is rest. It does not look around; it looks up, and knows God—knows as love can know, knows as trust can know. And that is the only satisfying knowledge. A man can only be an agnostic till his soul finds God; then he *knows* as souls only can know.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*The first stage of salvation is deliverance.* "Who rescueth David his servant from the hurtful sword." This describes what is involved in "giving salvation unto kings." An act of deliverance is always the beginning of salvation; but such act of deliverance is *only* a beginning.

I. AN ACT OF DELIVERANCE IS THE BEGINNING OF SALVATION. This is the truth of a fact that is once for all illustrated in the history of Israel. God would *save* that people in a large sense of saving. He must begin by a formal act of deliverance, in bringing his people out from bondage in Egypt. That truth once presented in so large a way, is afterwards presented again and again in more limited spheres. In the time of the Judges, when God would save his people, he began the salvation by a formal act of deliverance, as is seen strikingly in the case of Gideon. When God would save his people from captivity in Babylon, he began by the formal act of liberation made by Cyrus. And it was the same with the great spiritual salvation of men. Its beginning is that sublime act of sacrifice which is man's rescue from the thralldom of sin. The formal act of surrender made on the cross was Christ's triumph over man's sin, his "leading captivity captive." And so in personal experience salvation begins in that act of consecration to Christ which we make, and which is met by Christ's act of delivering us from the power of self and sin.

II. SUCH AN ACT OF DELIVERANCE IS ONLY A BEGINNING. The deliverance of
PSALMS—III. 2 a

Israel from Egypt was only a beginning of God's dealings in their salvation. Gideon's overthrow of the Midianites was only a beginning. Cyrus's decree was only a beginning. Our Lord's sacrifice was only a beginning. Our consciousness of acceptance is only a beginning. The salvation of a nation is a large and comprehensive thing; so is the salvation of a man. But in every case God's beginning is the pledge that he will carry on the work and perfect it.—R. T.

Vers. 12—15.—*True national prosperity.* "It is only a narrow and one-sided religion that can see anything out of place in this beatitude of plenty and peace." *As plants*: this figure marks the native strength and vigour and freedom of the youth of the land. *As corner-pillars*: marks the polished gracefulness, the quiet beauty, of the maidens; who are like exquisitely sculptured forms (Caryatides) which adorned the corner of some magnificent hall or chamber of a palace." (It does not, however, seem probable that at any time sculptured figures were allowed in Hebrew houses or palaces.) Ornamentation and various colouring of pillars may be referred to. Three things make up temporal prosperity. Family joys; business success; social security. The sense of God's gracious relations sanctifies all three.

I. FAMILY JOYS. From Eastern points of view, large families were desirable; but usually in the East daughters are despised. Two things are noticeable in these verses. 1. Daughters are spoken of as honourably as sons. 2. It is the growing up, developing character of children, that is the chief source of family joy.

II. BUSINESS SUCCESS. Dealt with in the psalm from the strictly agricultural point of view. The figures employed all belong to farm-life. This may give indication of the date of the psalm; but we may take it as illustrative of all the ways in which men work for their living. Harvest is the key to the prosperity of the year, and that is in God's hand. Times of confidence and enterprise bring national prosperity.

III. SOCIAL SECURITY. This is suggested by the sentence, "That there be no breaking in nor going out." Security is the condition of business enterprise. Men will not work for what they have no hope of keeping when it is gained. Social security is imperilled by fear of attack from national foes, and also by the restlessness of sections within the nation (nihilists, and extravagant socialists, etc.). But family joys, business success, and social security are, in a way, merely material things. Back of them all there must be this secret of happiness—the "nation's God is the Lord."—R. T.

Vers. 12—15.—*A golden age.* "The psalmist recounts glorious victories in the past; complains that the nation is now beset by barbarous enemies, so false and treacherous that no covenant can be kept with them; prays for deliverance from them by an interposition great and glorious as had been vouchsafed of old; and anticipates the return of a golden age of peace and plenty." The people who have Jehovah for their God, who obey his will and are governed by his laws, will be distinguished in the following ways.

I. BY THE CHARACTER OF ITS YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN. (Ver. 12.) 1. *They will be beautiful.* In body and mind. Like plants, the young men, with vigour and freedom and beauty. Like polished corners, the maidens—or corner-pillars, with exquisitely sculptured figures. 2. *They will be vigorous.* As a consequence of their purity and health. 3. *They will be free.* The plant has the freedom of all the air of heaven; nothing between it and heaven.

II. BY THE WEALTH OF ITS POSSESSIONS. 1. *Rich in merchandise.* (Ver. 13.) Full garners. A free, healthy, pure people are bound to prosper. 2. *Rich in agricultural and pastoral possessions.* (Ver. 13.) Sheep and oxen multiplied.

III. BLESSED WITH THE PROSPERITIES OF PEACE. (Ver. 14.) "No sallying forth from our walls, and no cry of battle in our streets." A state of war destructive of all kinds of prosperity.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXLV.

WITH another hymn of praise, this late collection of Davidical psalms, previously omitted from the Psalter, terminates. Like Ps. xxv. and xxxiv., also Davidical, this psalm is alphabetic, and also, like them, it is incomplete, the letter *nun* being omitted. Like most of the other alphabetical psalms, it consists of meditations on a single theme, which is here the righteousness and goodness of God (1) to men in general; (2) to his own people; and (3) and more especially, to those that suffer. The metrical arrangement of the psalm is into three stanzas of seven verses each.

Ver. 1.—I will extol thee, my God, O King; rather, *O my God, the King*; i.e. the one and only King of heaven and earth. And I will bless thy Name for ever and ever. An internal conviction of the writer's immortality is implied in these words.

Ver. 2.—Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy Name for ever and ever. An emphatic repetition of the second clause of ver. 1.

Ver. 3.—Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised (comp. Ps. xlviii. 1; xvi. 4). And his greatness is unsearchable; literally, *and of his greatness there is no search* (comp. Rom. xi. 33).

Ver. 4.—One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. The handing down of God's meritorious and deliverances from age to age is always regarded in Scripture as the principal mode whereby they are kept in remembrance (Exod. xii. 26, 27; xiii. 8—10, 14; Deut. xxxii. 7; Ps. xlv. 1; lxxviii. 3—7, etc.).

Ver. 5.—I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works (comp. Ps. xxvi. 7; lxxi. 17). It was the duty of every faithful Israelite to set forth God's majesty, and to "declare his works with rejoicing" (Ps. cvii. 22). David proclaims himself ready to perform this duty. Then, he thinks, others will join in.

Ver. 6.—And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts. Men will "speak of the might of God's terrible acts," which are those that attract them most—the plagues wrought in Egypt, the overthrow of Pharaoh's host in the Red Sea, the earth swallowing up Dathan, and the like. And I will declare thy greatness (see above, ver. 3).

Ver. 7.—They shall abundantly utter the

memory of thy great goodness; literally, *they shall pour forth*—as a strong spring—the memory of thy great goodness; i.e. the tale of all the mercies that thou hast vouchsafed them. And shall sing of thy righteousness; i.e. shall sing hymns of praise for thy righteous dealings with them.

Ver. 8.—The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. Professor Cheyne compares the epithets in a Babylonian hymn to the sun-god; but a closer parallel is to be found in Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7, "The Lord God is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin" (see also Ps. lxxxvi. 15).

Ver. 9.—The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works. "The Lord is good to all," he "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. v. 45). He "wouldeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live." And his "tender mercies," or "compassions," are not only over his human creatures, but "over all his works"—all that he has made—animals as well as men, "creeping things," zoophytes, all that can feel.

Ver. 10.—All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord (comp. Ps. cxlviii. 2—13, where all creation is called on to praise the Lord). And thy saints shall bless thee; or, "thy loving ones"—those who are devoted to thy service.

Ver. 11.—They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom (comp. Ps. xxii. 28; xlv. 6). The "glory" of God's kingdom is such that the faithful are naturally drawn to "speak" of it. "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endureth throughout all ages" (ver. 13). "His kingdom ruleth over all" (Ps. ciii. 19)—heaven and earth, and hell, and all space, and whatever space contains. There is no limit either to its extent or its duration. And its "glory" transcends all human thought—much more all description. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," etc. And talk of thy power. "Power" is of the essence of kingship, and comes naturally to the front whenever the character of a kingdom is spoken of.

Ver. 12.—To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts. It is a part of the duty of "saints" (ver. 10) to make known as widely as possible—if possible, to all men—the "mighty acts" and glory of God; primarily, for God's glory; and secondarily, to bring about their conversion to God's

service. And the glorious majesty of his kingdom (comp. vers. 5, 11).

Ver. 13.—**Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom** (comp. Dan. iv. 3, 34). It is inconceivable that God's kingdom should come to an end. He cannot will it to cease, and so dethrone himself. Much less can any other, and necessarily inferior, power overthrow it. And thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. This is rather an anti-climax, since the generations of men will one day cease; but it was a customary phrase (Pss. xxxiii. 11; xlv. 17; xlix. 11; lxi. 6; lxii. 5, etc.), and brought home to men the thought that his special "dominion" was over them.

Ver. 14.—**The Lord upholdeth all that fall. Lifts them up, i.e., and again "upholds" or supports them** (comp. Ps. xxxvii. 24). **And raiseth up all those that be bowed down** (comp. Ps. cxlvi. 8).

Ver. 15.—**The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season** (cf. Pss. civ. 21, 27; cxxxvi. 25; cxlvii. 9). The constant supply of all living creatures with their necessary food is little less than a standing miracle.

Ver. 16.—**Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.** Not only are they given what is necessary for them, but every desire which they entertain is satisfied.

Ver. 17.—**The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy (rather, *gracious, or merciful*) in all his works.** Mercy and truth meet in God (Ps. lxxxv. 10). He is at once perfectly just, and absolutely tender and compassionate. "*All his works*" experience both his justice and his tenderness (comp. Pss. xxv. 8; cxvi. 5, etc.).

Ver. 18.—**The Lord is high unto all them**

that call upon him (comp. Deut. iv. 7; Pss. xxxiv. 18; xlv. 1; oxi. 151, etc.). God draws near to those who draw near to him; i.e. he makes his presence (which is always everywhere) felt by them. To all that call upon him in truth. A limiting clause. More formal prayer is useless, does not lessen the distance between God and man, rather augments it. If we really desire to enjoy the consciousness of his presence, we must call upon him "in truth," i.e. sincerely, with earnest desire and strong confidence.

Ver. 19.—**He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him** (comp. ver. 16). What he does for "every living thing," he will do more especially for men, if they truly "fear" him, and love him (ver. 20), and draw near to him in sincerity and truth. **He also will hear their cry, and will save them; i.e. deliver them out of their troubles.**

Ver. 20.—**The Lord preserveth all them that love him** (comp. Pss. xxxi. 23; xcvi. 10). But all the wicked will he destroy. The "severity" of God is always set against his "goodness" in Holy Scripture, lest men should misunderstand, and think to obtain salvation though they continue in wickedness (see Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7; Rom. ii. 2—11; xi. 22, etc.).

Ver. 21.—**My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord.** The "psalm of praise" (title) ends as it began (vers. 1, 2)—with the strong determination of the psalmist that he at least will praise Jehovah. Others, he hopes, will join with him, and all flesh bless his holy Name (literally, *the Name of his holiness*) for ever and ever; but for this result he can only wish and hope and pray—he cannot ensure it. But he can, and does, fulfil his own duty in the matter.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3, 7, 21.—*Our response to God.* What feeling should the greatness and the goodness of God call forth from us, and how should we utter it? We will praise God in every way that is open to us.

I. CONTINUALLY. (Ver. 2.) "Every day" will we bless him: his praise shall be "continually" in our mouth (Ps. xxxiv. 1). Not that a man is necessarily more devout because the Name of God is always on his lips, but that the spirit of thankfulness should be always in the heart, and should spontaneously and freely rise for utterance.

II. CONTINUOUSLY. (Vers. 1, 2.) "For ever and ever." Through all the days and the years of life—and beyond. Many things eagerly undertaken will be allowed to drop out, but this, never. The tongue may well forget its office before it ceases to praise God. There is no end to which language can be put which is worthy to be compared with that of rendering praise to the Giver of all good, the God of our salvation. We will bless God—

"While life and thought and being last,
Or immortality endures."

III. **HEARTILY.** This may well be included in the "abundant" utterance of ver. 7. For thanksgiving is fundamentally lacking if it does not come from the heart as well as from the lips. Praise should be abundant even to overflow, because the cup of the heart is full of intense gratitude, of filial love and joy.

IV. **INTELLIGENTLY.** Those who only recognize the more superficial blessings may be content with thanking God for his "benefits," for his bestowments, for those things that gladden the heart and enrich the life; but they who look deeper and judge more wisely will "sing of his righteousness" as well as of his kindness (ver. 7; see also Ps. ci. 1). For we have the deepest interest in God's righteousness, and should extol him for that quite as earnestly as we do for the multitude of his mercies.

V. **INSTRUMENTALLY.** (Ver. 4.) It should be our hope, our prayer, and our endeavour that our own praise of God be *extended*, through us, to our neighbours, and be *carried down*, through us, to our children and our children's children. It may depend on us, on our devotion and on the conduct of our lives, whether the praises of Christ shall be sung by lips that have so far been silent, by those who are now scarcely able to speak his Name, and by those who are still unborn. How much may a wise and earnest spirit do to enlarge and to perpetuate the praises of his Redeemer!

VI. **INDIRECTLY.** If all God's works praise him (ver. 10), even those which are unintelligent and insensible, surely we may say that the pure and beautiful lives of the good, the kind, the generous, are ever unconsciously, but most effectively, praising God.

Vers. 3, 5, 6, 10—13.—*The greatness of God.* In this exquisite psalm the greatness and the goodness of God are celebrated, and the writer passes so freely from one to another, that it is very difficult to keep them separate. Nor is there much need to do so; for God's greatness, his glory, is in his goodness (Exod. xxxiii. 19), and the two are really inseparable. Endeavouring, however, to look at them apart, we are here reminded of—

I. **HIS MAJESTY.** We read of "the splendour of the glory of his majesty" (ver. 5). The manifestations of God's presence, given in the earlier times, were those of radiant, insupportable effulgence; those who witnessed them shrank from them. God dwells in the "light inaccessible, to which no man can approach." The splendour of his glory is such as would dazzle and bewilder our mortal sight.

II. **HIS POWER.** We have "the might of his terrible acts," "his wondrous works," "his mighty acts." From the time when David looked up into the heavens and was awed by the tokens of Divine power shining down upon him from above, to our own time, when we first sang of him whose power "made the mountains rise," "spread the flowing seas abroad," and "built the lofty skies," men have been affected and subdued by the "almighty power of God;" and they always must be while the wonderful fabric of nature lasts.

III. **HIS INFINITY.** The kingdom of God is "everlasting;" it endures "throughout all generations." Nations rise and fall, dynasties appear and disappear, centuries begin and end, but God's dominion knows no bound at all. It continues from generation to generation. There is something which powerfully affects us as we think of that which lasts, and will last, while every other thing fades and vanishes away.

IV. **HIS HOLINESS.** (Vers. 6, 17, 20.) The psalmist speaks of God's "terrible acts," and he says that he "will destroy the wicked." History, sacred and profane, is full of proofs that the holiness of God is as great as his majesty and his power. "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil." "By terrible things in righteousness" God makes us to know that sin is hateful in his sight, that continuance in it will result in ruin, in shame, in death. On the other hand, God's greatness in righteousness is seen in the rewards he gives to the upright, in lifting up the lowly, in abundantly blessing the true and pure and good. Who would not fear God who is of such majesty, power, infinitude, holiness? Who would not worship him? How foolish and how guilty to refuse to listen when he speaks, to come to him in willing subjection when he calls us to his service!

Vers. 7—9, 14—16, 18—20.—*The goodness of God.* As the years increase we are inclined to review the past rather than forecast the future. What shall we dwell upon

as we look backward? We should cherish not the recollection of past troubles and difficulties, but "the memory of God's great goodness" (ver. 7). And we do well to extend the field of observation beyond our own experience, and regard—

I. **THE VAST BREADTH OF HIS BENEFICENCE.** "*All his works praise him,*" for he is "good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." On whom doth not his light arise? He makes his sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. "*The eyes of all wait upon him,*" etc. (vers. 15, 16). To his care the insect owes its hour of pleasure, and to his goodness the strong beast of the forest its strength and swiftness, and to his skill and his remembrance the bird of the air its flight and its song. We, too, ascribe our life, our health, our comforts, our domestic joys, our social happiness, our intellectual delights, our spiritual satisfactions, to the bounties of his hand and the kindness of his heart of love. There is no living thing whose powers and whose pleasures do not testify of the goodness of the beneficent Creator. "*All his works praise him*" (ver. 10).

II. **HIS PITIFULNESS AND HIS TENDERNESS.** (Vers. 8, 14.) 1. "The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion." This is another utterance of that invaluable truth contained in Ps. ciii., "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (see Exod. iii. 7; Joel ii. 18). It is one of the truest comforts in suffering and in sorrow that we are pitied by our Divine Saviour; that he feels with us in our grief; is "full of compassion" for us. The presence of pure and strong human sympathy is, in itself, an assurance of the Divine; but we are thankful for this clear and express statement of it. 2. The Lord is gentle toward us. He looks upon those that have fallen into error, into fault, into disgrace, into defeat, and he "upholds them;" he regards those that are "bowed down" in sorrow, in weakness, in discouragement, that can "in no wise lift themselves up," and he "raises them up" (see Luke xiii. 11). The compassion shown by our Lord during his earthly life, his pity for those who were faint and hungry, and for those who were diseased, and for the children of sorrow, is the best assurance, as it is the perfect manifestation of the compassion of the Father himself; while "the gentleness of Christ" in all his treatment of those that were down and that were despised is, and will ever be, the most exquisite illustration of "the gentleness of God" (Ps. xviii. 35; 2 Cor. x. 1).

III. **HIS PATIENCE AND FORGIVENESS.** (Ver. 8.) He is "slow to anger, and of great mercy." 1. The patience of God was illustrated in his forbearance with his rebellious people in "the days of old;" the patience of Jesus Christ was shown in his treatment of his disciples who were so "slow of heart to learn," not only what the prophets had spoken, but what their own Master taught them (Matt. xv. 17; xvi. 9). The patience of our Lord is exemplified in his bearing toward us, whom, notwithstanding all our imperfections, he regards as his friends and fellow-labourers. Now, as before, he is "slow to chide, and swift to bless." 2. He is of "great mercy," pardoning those who have done the worst things, who have gone the furthest or stayed the longest away from him.

IV. **HIS RESPONSIVENESS.** (Vers. 18—20.) 1. He is very near in spirit and in sympathy to those who reverently and inquiringly draw near to him, so that those who seek him may feel that he is not afar off, but "very present" with them; nearer to them than they to one another. 2. He hears and answers his people's prayers; he interposes on their behalf. He gives them their hearts' desires; he saves them from all spiritual evil; he causes them to triumph; he preserves those who love him in their faith and in their love, and therefore in their joy and in their hope. He gives to them the heritage of the holy, here and hereafter.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

VERS. 1—21.—*The Te Deum of the Old Testament.* So this glorious psalm has been fitly named, and it is the germ of that great Christian hymn. "It is one, and the last, of the acrostic, or rather the alphabetic psalms, of which there are eight in all. Like four other of these, this bears the name of David, although some are of opinion that in this case the inscription is not to be trusted" (Perowne). One letter of the Hebrew

alphabet—*nun*—is omitted; how this came to be, we cannot tell; the Septuagint, however, and other ancient versions (with one Hebrew manuscript) supply the omission thus: "The Lord is faithful in his words, and holy in all his works." The Jews were accustomed to say that "he who could pray this psalm from the heart three times daily, was preparing himself best for the praise of the world to come." It is the first and chief of the praise-psalms with which the whole Book of Psalms terminates. We have left the region of sighs and tears and piteous entreaties, and are, as one says, in the Beulah land, where the sun shineth night and day. How like it is to the life of many a child of God! There have been many long and weary years of vicissitudes and trials, and sorrows of all kinds, but at eventide there is light. As life went on it was a mingled strain that was heard, but now at its close it is all joy and peace. So is it in this Book of Psalms; so is it with many of God's beloved ones; so, when our eventide comes, may it be with us! And now let us notice—

I. THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS WHICH ENTER INTO THE HIGH PRAISE OF GOD which this psalm sets forth. Note: 1. *Its different forms.* (1) "I will extol thee;" that is, lift up. He meant that he would do this by his song, by his words continually; he had found God to be his God, his Saviour, his ever-bounteous Benefactor and Helper, and he meant that he would proclaim all this, that all men might hear and know. How good it is for a man to act thus! (2) "I will praise thy Name." The Name of God continually stands for all that God is, and by which he is known to his people. We extol God, or should do so, for what he is to us, as the psalmist does; but praise of his Name means praise for all that he is. This is a more difficult work than the former, for in that we had God's gracious aspect turned towards us; in this, other aspects of his character are included—the mysterious and the stern. It is, indeed, the grace of God when the soul can praise God for *all* that he is. (3) "I will bless thy Name." This is something yet higher, and of it we may say, that whilst to extol God is good, and to praise his Name yet better, that which is best of all is to *bless* his Name. For blessing as distinguished from praise involves the grateful, loving, and heart-adoring element. There are those whom we praise, but do not bless; we may praise men for genius, skill, integrity, righteousness, but we do not bless them unless, not only is their character admirable, but also we have been brought into contact with them, and have had personal knowledge and realization of their goodness; then we bless as well as praise. Lower down in this psalm it is said, "All thy works praise thee, but thy saints shall bless thee." May this be our portion! 2. *The object of all this high praise.* (1) It is none other than God. Not to man, nor to angels, nor to any being less and other than God is rendered this devout and adoring homage of the heart. We are very apt to be so taken up with the achievements of the agents and instruments God uses that we are in danger of forgetting him, or of putting him in a too subordinate place. For it is he, and none other, who is the real Author and Accomplisher of all. But the writer of this psalm falls into no such error, but lifts up his praise solely to God. (2) And to God whom he has by faith personally appropriated: "my God." God was to him no distant, abstract, or mere ideal Deity, but One whom he had so found to be his perpetual Benefactor and Helper, that his heart clung to him, and he called him "my God." It is such personal appropriation of God that gives vigour and intensity to our praise; without it our praise is poor work. (3) And confessed as King: "my God, O King." His faith had grasped the blessed truth that God ruled over all; none could withstand his power. "The Lord reigneth, be the nations never so unquiet." Oh, the joy and peace that come from this faith! It was delight to the psalmist's heart to be assured, as he was, that the Divine King, whom he gladly obeyed, was King over all. 3. *Fixed resolve.* Four times in these two opening verses we have the words, "I will;" and so again (vers. 5, 6). Praise, like faith, is very much a matter of the will. We are prone to make it dependent upon the emotions. If we feel happy, then we sing praise easily; but if we do not thus feel, then praise falters and dies. But let us remember that the dominant faculty in our nature is not feeling, but will. When God says, "My son, give me thine heart," he means not the feelings, but the will, and if that be ever on God's side, everything else will soon fall into its proper position. Let the will be right, the feelings will soon give way. 4. *Its continuousness and permanence.* "Every day will I," etc. Not only the bright days, but the dark ones. Praise, like prayer, must be a habit, a constant practice, or we shall fall out of both its use and

blessing altogether. And this habit must be permanently maintained. "For ever and ever" (vers. 1, 2). Here is the real test and trial of the religious life. Many are induced to begin, but, alas, how many show that they have no staying power! They get cold and indifferent, and after a while break away altogether. But the earnest, impassioned soul of the psalmist resolved that his praise of God should be every day, and for ever and ever.

II. THE GROUNDS ON WHICH THIS PRAISE IS BASED. There are three divisions in this psalm, and each one tells of one special reason for this fervent praise of God. 1. *In the first seven verses it is the greatness of the Lord.* (Ver. 3.) And when one thinks of the seemingly irresistible might of the manifold forces of evil, our hearts are apt to die down; but how greatly are they cheered and strengthened when we call to mind and do firmly believe in that greatness of God against which all these forces hurl themselves in vain! 2. Then next (in vers. 7—16), *the tender mercies of the Lord are celebrated.* When the soul thinks of them, what can it do but perpetually praise and bless the Lord? 3. And last of all (from ver. 17), *the righteousness of the Lord is the theme of thanksgiving.* Without this even his tender mercies would be shorn of well-nigh all their preciousness. It is because we have a righteous salvation that our heart is glad.

III. ITS EXCEEDING BLESSEDNESS. 1. *Many forget this.* They pray to God, but too often fail to praise him. We say our prayers more often than we sing our praises. But this is wrong. 2. *God deserves and delights in our praise.* Love ever loves the response of love; and in regard to God, such response takes the form of praise. 3. *And it is powerful in its influence with others.* If they see that our God is one who fills our heart with joy, will not they be led to desire and to seek him? 4. *And for ourselves its effect is as blessed as it is powerful.* It gives us confidence before God, joy in the heart, drives away fear, prepares us for heaven, cheers us in all the work of life and amid its darkest trials.—S. C.

Ver. 4.—*The charge of the generations.* How are we to understand these words? We may take them in either one of three ways.

I. AS A PREDICTION THAT HAS BEEN ABUNDANTLY FULFILLED. One generation has handed on to its successor its treasure store of knowledge and wisdom. We are the heirs of all the ages; it is their accumulated knowledge that has come down to us, and which we, with the fresh additions we shall make, are to hand on to those who come after us. And amongst the varied indebtedness under which we lie to those who have preceded us, chief of all is this—for the knowledge of God's ways. The Word of the Lord has proved to be an imperishable seed, which liveth and abideth for ever. It has seemed at times to die out in some regions; but in others it has sprung up and borne fruit; and there have never been lacking those who stood ready to hand on the torch of truth to others who would keep it burning and then hand it on again.

II. AS A PROMISE OF MOST HEART-CHEERING NATURE. For what would have been our condition now, had not God been mindful of this promise? We might have inherited vast wealth, and succeeded to chief place amongst the nations of the world; in the eyes of men we might have been exalted to the highest summits of earthly greatness and glory; but if we had lost, through the unfaithfulness of those that went before us, or from any other cause, the blessed knowledge of God, what pledge or guarantee should we have that even our earthly blessings should long continue ours? and what would have guarded us from the doom which has come on other nations who have not known God, or cared not to retain his knowledge? But so it will not be with us or ours; for as the past generations have declared to us God's mighty deeds, and praised his works, so likewise shall this generation, in regard to that which shall follow. There may be sad unfaithfulness here and there, and sore suffering must ensue; but God will not suffer himself to want for faithful witnesses who shall transmit that knowledge of himself, which is life eternal, to the generation that receiveth it. We need not tremble for the ark of God. We have many such blessed promises as this before us now, and we may rest confident that our generation, evil as many comprising it may appear, shall yet "praise God's works to another, and," etc.

III. A PRECEPT THAT EACH GENERATION MUST DILIGENTLY OBSERVE. Many read our text as a command; and it is a command, though a prediction and a promise as well.

As a command, it enjoins: 1. *That this service shall be undertaken, not by one here and there, but by the whole of the existing generation.* It is to be a public—a universal service. It is a frightful condition of things for the coming generation if the present be careless about, or opposed to, such transmission of God's truth. Better that children should be brought up in *any* form of the Christian faith, than in no religion at all. God help our land, if the secularists of our day have their will in regard to our national education! The people at large are to care for the children at large, that they may be taught the truth of God. 2. *But it is especially the business of the parents.* This evidently is in the mind of the psalmist, that fathers to sons should teach the works of God. Nature, their own love for their children, regard for their own comfort; for what more rends the hearts of parents than ill-bred, ungodly children? Justice and right demand it; for what parents are there that do not transmit much evil to their children? Therefore let them see to it that they teach them that which shall blessedly counteract the evil. And God plainly commands it. All these motives, and yet others, enforce this duty. 3. *And the duty is urgent.* We have not much time. One generation cometh, another goeth; our opportunity will soon be gone. 4. *If we do not obey this command, no one else will.* After all, if parents fail in this plain duty, none can really supply their lack of service or take their place; what the home is, that will, well-nigh always, the children be.

CONCLUSION. Let children, whose parents have obeyed this command of God, remember how great is the responsibility that rests upon them. "To whom much is given, of the same," etc.—S. C.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The one and the many.* It is interesting to note the alternations in this psalm, as in numerous others, of the one and the many. The psalmist declares what he himself will do, and then he tells also what the people at large will do. So it is here. The psalm opens with a personal declaration, "I will extol," etc.; "Every day will I bless," etc. Then in ver. 4 he speaks of all the generations of men; then (ver. 5) he returns to himself and his own purposes; ver. 6 asserts both the general conduct and his own, and then again speaks of men at large. Then at the end the declaration is made, both as to himself and "all flesh." Now, what do such alternations as these suggest? Surely the relations in which the one and the many may stand to each other in regard to God's service.

I. AS HERE, THERE MAY BE BOTH. The psalmist is not left alone, but his joy in God and his praises are sympathized with and shared in by a goodly company of others. How rarely can this be said of any nation? Some there will be who will be on the Lord's side; but they are very far from being all the people. It will be, as in this psalm, when we reach the heavenly world; there there will be universal praise. But rarely is it so here. Still, there may be, and there are, oftentimes, approximations to this blessed condition, when not one here and there only, but when the people generally praise the works of the Lord. Let it be our prayer and endeavour to bring about such condition. It is the prayer of Ps. lxxvii. Would that it were that of all the people of God!

II. BUT THERE MAY BE NEITHER. Not only are the voices of the many silent as to the praise of God, but not one solitary voice is heard anywhere. So will it be amid the abodes of those who have finally rejected the grace of God, and are therefore lost. And there are, alas! utterly godless communities even now! When Noah was taken from his generation, all the rest could not furnish a solitary servant of God. So at Sodom and Gomorrah. And when the Christian Church had left the doomed Jerusalem, and betaken themselves to Pella, there remained such another godless people. Thank God, amongst mankind at large, he has never left himself without witness in some region or another; but in different localities it may be that there are neither the many nor even the one on the Lord's side. If any servant of God knows of such a locality, that is where at once he should go and bear his testimony, and extol the Name of his God and King. The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty; but woe betide that Church or that individual Christian who cares not for it, or seeks not to enlighten that darkness! Let us all remember that we are day by day fitting ourselves either for the abode where all men praise the Lord, or where none do, and each day sees us nearer the one or the other.

III. OR THERE MAY BE ONLY THE ONE. There have been scenes where but one solitary voice has been lifted up for God, whilst all the rest have been either indifferent or his declared foes. Elijah thought he was such a one: "I only am left alone." And our blessed Lord foretold that it would be so with him: "Ye shall leave me alone," he said to his disciples. And sometimes it is so with faithful servants of God, as St. Paul before Agrippa and before Nero, when he said, "No man stood by me." And many a faithful missionary has known this awful loneliness; and had not God, for whom they alone witnessed, come and revealed himself to them, they could not have borne it. But this is the encouragement of the faithful yet solitary servant of God, that God will never let him be really alone, because the Lord himself will come and manifest himself to such servants, and thus fill them with his own joy. "My grace is sufficient for you." So spake Christ to the much-tried Paul; and so he speaks still to every one of his lonely witnesses, wherever they may be.

IV. OR THERE MAY BE THE MANY, AND NOT THE ONE. The one may live in a very atmosphere of worship and service, and yet stand aloof from it himself. Have we not known families where every member is an avowed and faithful servant of Christ, and yet some one of their number stands separate and apart from all the rest? How is this? Sometimes such sad facts occur because, half unconsciously, but yet really, the reserved one is trusting to the godliness of the rest, and reckoning that that will serve for him without his becoming as they are. But let such remember that not one of us "can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him;" each one of us must personally and individually give himself to God. There is no praising in a crowd. There was but one at the wedding-feast that had not on the wedding-garment; but when the king came in to see his guests, he was at once detected, and cast out into the outer darkness. That is a never-to-be-forgotten fact. And what makes the sin of such the greater is that they were so favourably placed for gaining eternal life. Everything is in favour of an individual soul, if all those around him are pressing into the kingdom of God. He has but to go with the stream—not against it, as so many have to. How much increased, therefore, is their responsibility! Be thankful for such hallowed, helpful surroundings, and avail yourselves of them, as you should.—S. C.

Ver. 7.—*Love's full-flowing spring.* This is what is meant by the abundant utterance told of in this verse. It is as the waters bursting out from a full spring—irrepressible, perennial, abundant; so when the memory of God's great goodness possesses the soul, it leads to such outpouring of grateful expression as the psalmist here tells of. Now let us speak—

I. OF THE SPRING ITSELF. It has two great sources. 1. *God's great goodness.* The psalm tells much of God's providential goodness—how "the eyes of all wait upon thee, and," etc. (vers. 15, 16). And what a theme for never-failing praise this is! Who can reckon up the mercies of God given to us here and now, for the supply of our temporal wants, and for the comfort of our lives? Since this life is brief, earthly, inferior, of comparatively little worth; and yet how doth God care for it! He crowneth it with loving-kindness and tender mercy. But his "great" goodness has to do with the eternal life; and when we think of what he has done for that, we can see that his goodness is indeed great. Whether we contemplate the depths of sin and misery from which his grace has brought us up; or whether we tell of the glorious heights of joy, sanctity, and service, to which he is bringing us; or of the pure beauty and grace which prompted him thus to deal with us so utterly undeserving; or of the fearful cost at which he purchased us—even the precious blood; or of the present blessed help of his Holy Spirit, which we daily enjoy, and by which we are enabled to serve and glorify him, and to become channels of blessing to others;—when we think of all this, or of any part of it, our souls are lost in wonder as we gaze with awe and unspeakable gratitude on his great goodness. 2. *The other source of this spring is God's righteousness.* "They shall sing of thy righteousness." To the guilty soul, trembling with fear of God's condemnation, God's righteousness is a source of terror rather than joy. But to him who has received God's salvation aright, it causes his soul to sing for joy. For deep down in the heart of man is the conviction that nothing but righteousness can endure for ever; it is the permanent element in all things that

do endure. Without it that which seems most stable, fixed, and sure will ere long perish and disappear. And even the goodness of God—his great goodness, unless there were righteousness at the heart of it, could not give the soul rest. It is because Christ is the Lord our Righteousness, as well as the Lord our Redeemer, that therefore we believe he is our Redeemer. In him we see how God can be just, and yet the Justifier of him who believeth in Jesus. And the righteousness of God is our soul's support amid the manifold and many sorrowful mysteries of life. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" That is our deep conviction, though we cannot understand all that he does. We are sure that in good time all will be seen to be right, which now often seems to us most wrong. And there is yet another element of joy in God's righteousness—that it is sure to reproduce itself. "Good and upright is the Lord, *therefore* will he teach sinners in the way." Then he will teach me, he will satisfy my soul's hunger after righteousness.

II. ITS CHANNELS. They are pointed at in ver. 6. 1. *Men have been convinced of God's righteous judgments.* They "speak of the might of thy terrible acts." A solemn fear of God takes possession of them, they tremble with deep alarm, they are pricked to the heart. "When thy judgments are abroad, then the inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness." Like the men of Nineveh under Jonah's awful preaching, and like many a sinful soul since. Deep conviction of sin is wrought by the Holy Spirit, and it is along this channel God's great goodness flows. 2. *The proclamation of God's exceeding grace.* "I will declare thy greatness." The psalmist sees and seizes the opportune time; and now, when the conviction of the Holy Spirit has prepared the way, sets forth the grace; for that is the greatness of God. Of the greatness of his justice and his power they already know; now they are told of the greatness of his mercy and of his readiness to forgive. Well is it when the Christian teacher can find hearts thus prepared; for then it is speedily seen that God's Word does not return to him void. 3. For there follows *the reception into the heart of the truth of God's great goodness.* They could not have afterwards abundantly uttered the memory of that great goodness, unless first they had believingly received it. Thus along these channels of conviction, proclamation of the grace of God, and believing reception of it, we come next to—

III. ITS RESERVOIR. Its storage in the memory. The truth of God's grace had not merely glanced on the minds of those here spoken of, but it had come to stay. Hence it was treasured up in the reservoir of memory. Well is it when our minds are thus stored with memories of the grace of God—his great goodness to our souls.

IV. ITS OUTFLOW. 1. *In abundant utterance.* Some keep a wretched silence, and say never a word for God; others, if they do speak, do so in such a half-hearted way that they might almost as well be silent. But those who have known the grace of God in truth, and realize the greatness of the salvation they have experienced, they will "abundantly utter," etc. Not alone their lips, but their lives, their look, their whole spirit and temper, will tell forth the vividness of their memory of God's great goodness. And : 2. *In song.* "They shall sing of thy righteousness." The utterance will be a joyful one—a glad sound,—not a dirge or any other such mournful strain, but a song befitting the glad tidings of great joy which have been made known to them. May we learn this song!—S. C.

Ver. 9.—"*The Lord is good to all.*" I. NEVER WAS IT MORE NECESSARY THAN NOW TO INSIST UPON THIS BLESSED REVELATION OF GOD. 1. *For one main characteristic of the days in which we live is men's sensitiveness to human suffering.* From one cause and another they have become open-eyed and tender-hearted in regard to the terrible distresses which afflict such vast portions of the human race. And this sensitiveness and compassion are unquestionably from God, and are the product of that good and blessed Spirit of God, who "like as a father pitieth his children." He has been, so we believe, moving upon the minds of men, and has caused the bitter cry of human sorrow to pierce and penetrate, and rouse to practical help, many who before were but little conscious of, and less concerned about, the dark and deplorable facts that lay all around them. Here and there we find those who regard these sad conditions of society as inevitable, and therefore hopeless, and who look on with cynic doubt and disparaging suggestions; whilst others are bestirring themselves to find some sort of

remedy. 2. *But this very sensitiveness needs to be soothed and sustained*, strengthened and guided, by the faith of the love of God. For else it will rush into wild schemes, which can do no good to those in distress, and will only recoil in many sad and terrible ways on those who devised them. Or else it will settle down into a hopeless despair, and to vain, frantic protests against what it deems the cruel laws under which men are condemned to live. 3. *Nothing but confident trust in the love of God will avail*. For all efforts to ameliorate the lot of our fellow-men demand patience and energy, and a hopefulness that nothing can quench. To face the gigantic evils of human life is no child's play, no holiday sport, but real, serious, earnest work, from which all but the true-hearted will turn away. Apart from this, men cannot and will not persevere in the often apparently hopeless task of lightening the burdens which oppress so terribly so many of their fellow-men.

II. FOR THE FOES OF THIS FAITH ARE FOUND, FOR THE MOST PART, IN THE FALSE OPINIONS OF MEN. Opinions which they seldom express openly, but which, nevertheless, paralyze their power for good, and hinder all the efforts which they make to mend or end the evils around them. These false opinions confront the truth of our text, and fight against it, and too often seem to get the better of it. 1. *Now, one of these false opinions is this—that chance rules all*. Life, according to this opinion, is as a mere chip on a stream, caught now by this eddy, now whirled about by that, driven by this current in one direction, and then by another in a different one; borne hither and thither, from side to side, the sport of every breeze and of every stray force that may bear upon it. Life, they say again, is a labyrinthine puzzle, the clue of which no man has found; and so men go groping on, hoping always to find the right turning, but quite as likely to take the wrong. The poor and the distressed are simply unlucky, the prosperous are but the favourites of Fortune, the fickle goddess who, they say, governs all our lives. Now, no doubt, there is much in human life that looks as if it were the result of mere chance. For it could not be foreseen, nor influenced by anything within our power; as, for example, of what parents we should be born, the kind of home which we should have, the circumstances amid which we should be trained, what constitution we should inherit, by what teachers we should be instructed. And many more and all-important elements in determining what our lives shall be, are, without doubt, beyond both our knowledge and control. Any hour of any day, in a moment, something may happen utterly unexpected by us, and which we could in no wise have helped or hindered, but which may have the effect of entirely altering, for the better or the worse, our whole future. Just as by one pull of a lever the pointman shunts the entire train on to a different line, the effect of which will be to take it the whole breadth or length of the land apart from where it would have gone had that lever not been pulled. And so often is it with the effect of some seemingly insignificant and unforeseen event upon our lives. When, some years ago, the huge reef of rocks which barred one of the entrances to the harbour of New York was removed, who that did not know of the arrangements that had been made, would have imagined that there was any connection between the tremendous upheaving and shattering of those massive rocks, and the mere moving of a handle by a little girl on shore some miles away? But we know they must have been connected, and that, without the insignificant antecedent, the great result could never have followed. And similarly slight are many of the causes which make or mar a man's life. Observing such facts, the old Greeks came to believe in the doctrine of chance. The universe, according to them, was but the fortuitous coming together of the atoms which compose it. And still there are those who, if not professedly, yet really, do believe that chance, good luck, fortune, and mere accident govern all things. But the doctrine is horribly and utterly false. It is only our ignorance of the connection between events that makes us judge as we do. In any manufactory, our ignorance of the relation of one process to another never leads us to deny that there is such relation. We are sure there is, though we do not know what it is. Why cannot we reason in the same way in reference to the various processes which go to make up our lives? We are not the sport of mere haphazard or blind chance, but we are under the wise, firm, loving rule of our Father in heaven; he is ordering, directing, and controlling all our affairs, and causing all things to work together for good to them that love him. 2. *Another foe to the faith that "God is love" is the doctrine of destiny*. It teaches that our lives

are all governed by irresistible Divine decrees, and that we are happy or miserable, good or bad, saved or lost, according to Divine determinations made concerning us from the beginning, and entirely irrespective of our merit or demerit, or any choice or will of our own whatsoever. A vast theological system has been formed upon this basis, and is still upheld by many. It was first sketched out by St. Augustine, in the fifth century; but it was elaborated and developed into a rigid system by the great Protestant leader Calvin. According to this system, the human soul is helpless. From the foundation of the world it has been elected either to eternal glory or to eternal damnation; and to this latter awful doom the great mass are predestined, whilst only the few elect souls are ordained to eternal life. The author of this frightful system himself says of it, that it is "*decretum horribile fatem attamen verum.*" Such is Calvinism, this doctrine of destiny. It is marvellous how men with human hearts in them, men who had ever known a mother's love or a father's care, could have come to entertain and maintain dogmas so horrible and so heart-crushing as these. The stern and awful days in which both Augustine and Calvin lived may partly account for it; for they were such as stirred the darker and fiercer moods of men's minds into terrible activity. And men, forgetting the whole spirit of the Bible, and oblivious of the great love of God in Christ, and failing amid their terrible days to see the innumerable proofs of God's grace and goodness, set up their poor logic and their interpretations of particular texts, and they heeded not the gentler teachings of their own hearts, and so they forged and fashioned that dark creed which has saddened and bewildered and injured in many ways all those on whom its grim shadow has fallen. But it is a false creed, and to be scouted and abhorred of every truth-loving soul. It must be false; for it has the whole of the deepest instincts of the human heart against it, as well as the spirit of the whole Bible and the revelation of God in Christ. Furthermore, it is suicidal to the very aim and intent of God's dealings with us, which is that we should love him with all our heart, etc. But no man who really believes what this dreadful creed teaches can love God. If it were true, God would be a Moloch, and not our heavenly Father; a monster to be dreaded, and not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. A creed that has such result is thereby proved to be false, and it is therefore to be condemned by all good men. 3. *The belief that we are the creatures of circumstances.*

III. "MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN." Here is another fruitful cause of men's doubt of the love of God. Also—

IV. OUR SORROWS, AND YET MORE, OUR SINFULNESS. These stand—must do so—in the way of our faith. The sinful heart is ever an unbelieving heart. It is only when "our hearts condemn us not," that we have confidence towards God. But let Christ take away our sin, and then we shall readily believe.—S. C.

Ver. 10.—*The inner circle of God's worshippers.* This psalm brings before us the glorious picture of universal homage rendered to God, and the reason of such homage, and the effects thereof. How vast the choir which celebrates this high praise! How varied the notes of their song! How high the value at which God estimates their praise, and how great is its volume!—it is as "the sound of many waters." In this verse we are shown both the inner and outer circles of this choir of God's worshippers, and the intent is that we may be led to find and claim our place, not merely among all God's works which praise him, but also among his saints who bless him. Consider—

I. THE OUTER CIRCLE OF THE CHOIR. It is very large; for it includes *all God's works*. 1. *Such as are inanimate*—the outspread earth, the mighty mountain masses, the great and wide sea, the heavens, and all the stars of light. 2. *And such as have life.* From its lowest vegetable forms up to the most lofty of all the creatures of God; from the meanest insect that for one brief summer day flies through the air, up to man made in the very image and likeness of God. 3. *And such as have intelligence and will and a moral nature* capable of knowing good and evil; for these also are among the works of God, though at the head of them all. And they all praise him in so far as they are his works. This cannot be said of our works. Too many of them discredit and disgrace us, and the less seen or said of them the better. But of God we can say, "All thy works praise thee." Examine them how we will, subject them to the severest scrutiny, and the verdict of the psalmist will remain unchallenged. The

power, the wisdom, the skill, the goodness of God, are evident in them all. And this not alone in the greater works of God, but in those that are less known and are on a smaller scale. Most of them have no power or choice in the matter, others act on the impulses of mere animal instinct, and yet others who have intelligence and will, but, alas! a corrupt heart likewise, even they, in those regions of their nature where their evil will has no power, are compelled to render their tribute of praise. As it has been said, the ungodly are creatures of God, even if they be not of his new creation; and all that is in them that is of God in the structure of their body, mind, and will, unites, and cannot but unite, in the universal chorus with which all God's works praise him. It matters not whether we survey his works in nature, in providence, or in grace. Of them all, when rightly understood, the same may be said—they all praise him. But all these—magnificent as so many of them are, and radiant with beauty and with ever manifold proof of the power, the wisdom, and goodness of God—these are yet but the outer circle. Consider, then—

II. THE INNER CIRCLE OF THIS GLORIOUS CHOR, who ever worship God. This consists of the saints of God. "Thy saints shall bless thee." But: 1. *Who are God's saints?* The name has fallen into ill repute. It is a term of scorn, of contempt, of dislike, in the mouths of not a few. They hold and affirm that if a man is called a saint, it is because he is either a hypocrite or a fool. It is because the world has seen too many sham saints, that it thus speaks of all saints. Hence no one now would dare to say of himself, however much he might hope it in his heart, that he was one of God's saints. The Church of Rome professes to be able to make saints. Her canonization is held to entitle any deceased individual to a right to a place amongst God's saints. But will any one take upon himself to show that the saints of the Roman calendar are all of them thus entitled? We hope they are; but we cannot say there is no room for doubt. Man-made saints are ever of a questionable kind. Nor is it essential to be numbered amongst God's saints that we should no longer live here upon earth. Those of whom the psalmist speaks were not dead, but living people. They might be poor, tried, troubled, tempted; but amid all such circumstances they lived here on earth as God's saints. Nor were they absolutely perfect. Some of them were very far from that; and we do not know where to find any such now. There have been self-deluded, though well-meaning people, who have professed perfection; but to other eyes their perfection has not been evident. They have been good, devout, kind-hearted, and truly religious people; but flawless, faultless, they have not been. And where are there any such? But if the name of saint belongs only to such, then there are no saints, and there never have been. But they are those of whom it may be said that the whole trend and aim of their lives is to do God's will. They trust him, they love him, they worship him, they seek ever to obey him. It is the steady aim and honest endeavour of their lives, and in the main and increasingly they do walk with God and are well-pleasing in his sight. And, blessed be God! there have been, and there are, many such—the good Lord make all of us such!—and these are the saints of God. Not flawless, immaculate, perfect people, but those who come nearest to it of all people living. They are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the elect Church, God's best gift to our world. They are found in every Church, they are confined to none. No Church is without them; none has them all. 2. *These form the inner circle of God's worshippers.* Their prerogative and privilege the highest of all. For they are more than others. God has not dealt with any others as he has with them. To them he has opened the treasure-store of his grace, and blessed instalments of what shall be fully theirs one day, they both here and now enjoy. They are the temples of the Holy Ghost; they are inheritors of eternal life. And they glorify God more than others. It is the aim and bent of their lives. Through them many other precious jewels of God are taken up out of the mire of sin, in which they have been long lying, and they witness for God amid the world of the ungodly. God is their exceeding Joy, and they are his beloved. For them God orders his providential government. They are as the apple of his eye, and for them God's well-beloved Son was given up to die, and the Holy Ghost was sent and yet abides in the world. "And it doth not appear what they shall be." 3. *And they render special worship.* The other works of God praise him, but his saints bless him. That is more than praise; for though we praise that which excites our admiration—as do skill, genius, wisdom, power—yet we only bless

where our love is stirred. Admiration is good, but love is that in which God delights, and only his saints can render him that. Admiration, that which excites our praise, may leave our heart cold and uncheered; but love enkindles a blessed inward fire, which illuminates and cheers the heart wherein it burns. Those who bless the Lord are blessed of him, and blessed they are.

III. THE TRANSITION FROM ONE TO THE OTHER. From the outer circle to the inner. 1. *For men it is possible.* For it has often been accomplished. Every regenerated heart has been translated from the one to the other, and the transition is ever taking place. And the whole Bible is full of declarations and directions on the matter. To bring it about is the aim of all God's dealings with us. 2. *And the means are plainly shown.* Let there be the desire to enter into this inner circle, then the steps are the renunciation of all known sin; for it is sin alone that keeps us back. Then the surrender of the will to God, that which he means when he says, "Give me thine heart." This will involve obedience to God's commands, and then, for the maintenance of all this, and for the full entrance into the state of grace, let there be continual trust in God to do his work in your soul. 3. *And how infinitely desirable all this is!* For our own sake, for that of others, and for the honour of Christ.—S. C.

Ver. 14.—*For the fallen and the falling.* How different are the ways of him whose everlasting kingdom and enduring dominion are told of in the previous verse, from the ways of the world and of hard and selfish men! *Væ victis!* is the world's verdict, and the facts of life too often confirm it; but the Lord, he is the Saviour of the unsuccessful, the Speaker of heart-cheering words to the crushed ones in life's stern conflict, and the Performer for them of corresponding deeds.

I. CONSIDER THE TWO CLASSES OF PERSONS HERE SPOKEN OF. 1. *Them that fall.* How many of these there are in the *secular* struggle! The fight for mere life is not seldom so severe that many are beaten down, and unless men have some upholder, some strong support and prop, there would be no hope for any of them. And in the *social* struggle: there is the perpetual effort to advance in position; but there are many who are not only utterly unable to raise themselves to a higher social grade, but are unable even to maintain the position in which they now are; they are on the verge of a precipice, and they are in constant peril of falling over and down. And in the *intellectual* struggle: how the eager scholar strives, but the contests seem to get harder every day, and the overtaxed brain too often threatens to give way altogether! And there is the *physical* struggle: the conditions of life are often so destructive to health that they render full vigour of body an unattainable thing, or, if at first preserved, inevitably and speedily lost, and then what can a man do? And, above all, there is the *spiritual* struggle, to keep the garment of the soul unspotted, and the heart pure, and the will steadfast and true to God. Ah, how difficult is all this! How often we are compelled to confess, "My feet had well-nigh slipped"! How many are there of those fallen or falling ones! 2. *And then, there are "those that be bowed down."* They do not fall, but it is with bent form and weary feet and burdened spirit that they stagger on as they best can. How frequent are the cries and complaints of such bowed-down ones heard in these Psalms (see Ps. xlii., etc.)!

II. SEE WHAT THE LORD DOES FOR THEM. 1. *He upholdeth the falling ones.* Illustration: the woman taken in adultery (John viii.; Luke vii. 37, etc.). He does this by, as in these cases, gracious words; or through human ministries of sympathy and help; or by the kindly ordering of his providence; or, and yet more, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit shedding abroad in our hearts the love of God. 2. *He raiseth up them that are bowed down.* (Luke xiii. 16.) The world says that the weakest must go to the wall; but the Lord's thoughts concerning them are far otherwise. And so, also, have been and are his deeds. The saints on earth and in heaven attest this.

III. WHEREFORE GOD THUS DEALS WITH THEM. Because God is love. So he wins trophies of his grace; and his most devoted servants, and successful workers; and thus he encourages all men to trust in him.

IV. IN WHAT WAY SHOULD WE RESPOND? By rendering heartfelt praise; by imitating his example; by turning to and trusting him for ourselves; by making known his grace.—S. C.

Ver. 16.—*The opening of God's hand.* We are wont to admire much in our fellow-men the open hand, the free, generous impartation of what we have to those who have not. It is by no means too common a sight, but a very pleasant one when it can be seen. Close-fistedness is much more the rule than open-handedness. But God is the God of the open hand; the bounteous Benefactor of all, of good and bad alike. And not alone the love of God is shown, but his power likewise. With what toil and stress do we accomplish our works! what strain of effort we put forth! But God has but to open his hand: he speaks, and it is done; he commands, and, etc. All the processes and products of nature are but the opening of his hand; thus simply, and with the august and Divine spontaneity of omnipotence, he supplies and satisfies the innumerable, varied, ever-recurring, and vast necessities of all his creatures.

I. HOW ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND THIS? Certainly the broad declarations of this verse need explanation. Hence we remark: 1. *That the desires which God will thus satisfy do not mean all desires.* Those of the wicked God does not satisfy. He may at times seem to; but ask the wicked themselves whether even then they are satisfied. They are not, and never can be. And there are many foolish and mistaken desires of good men which God does not satisfy; it would be ill for us if he did. 2. *But they are the desires which he himself purposed that they should be satisfied.* He created them, and designs that they should be met; they belong both to the body and the soul; they have to do with time, and with eternity likewise. 3. *The universality of the text must not be insisted on even for these.* For it declares only what is the general order of God's dealings with his creatures; it is his rule, but that rule has many exceptions. The lower and lesser purpose of satisfying our desires may have to give way to one that is higher and greater. This is the meaning of all the afflictions of the righteous. 4. *Nevertheless, the rule holds good.* God does open his hand, etc. We are apt so to gaze on the exceptions as to lose sight of the rule; this is wrong and hurtful every way. 5. *And God acts in varied ways, not in any one way only.* For all creatures other than man he ministers directly to their need; but for man he employs our own faculties, and thus only indirectly are our desires satisfied.

II. WHAT IS ITS PROOF? Many think in their hearts, and some openly say, that it is their own efforts that secure to them the satisfaction of their desires. God does not give to them their daily bread—they earn it; man is his own provider. Hence they demur to such declarations as in this verse. But a little reflection will show the fallacy of such thoughts; for: 1. *Does not God provide both the tools—powers of mind and body—with which we work, and the material on which we work?* Hence, were there only our work, where would our satisfied desires be? And the energy, too, the living force without which we could not work at all—is not this also from God? What a mere fraction of all that needs to be done is that which we do! 2. *And were it much greater, what would that be in view of the magnitude, variety, and urgency of need that meets us on every hand?* If God did not do as is here said, what could man do? How idle, then, is it to attribute to any other than God the supply of all our wants!

III. WHAT DOES IT SAY TO US? Very much indeed; God help us to give heed! And: 1. *"Bless ye the Lord, praise him and magnify him for ever."* That surely is the first claim which this truth makes upon us. 2. *"Oh, put thy trust in the Lord."* Does not that word come to us from all these bounties of our God? 3. *"If God thus cares for my body, will he not much more care for my soul?"* Will he thus minister to the short-lived, material nature, and neglect or forget the eternal and spiritual? It is impossible. 4. *What must the abominableness of sin be that compels a God so gracious to inflict on us, because of it, so great and awful distresses?* Not for a little thing would man have to suffer as we see he has. 5. *If the opening of his hand be so blessed for us, what must be the result of the shedding of the blood of his well-beloved Son?* Let us not be content with the lower gifts, as too many are, but seek those highest ones which are the purchase of the blood of Christ. 6. *Let us be open-handed ourselves.* (Altered and abridged from A. Fuller.)—S. C.

Ver. 20.—*Preservation and destruction.* One or other of these lies before us all; the Bible gives no hint of a third condition or destiny. How important, therefore, to know whither we are tending, and what awaits us at the hand of God!

I. THE TRUTH HERE DECLARED. 1. *As to those that love God.* He will preserve

them. He does this: (1) In the order of his providence. It is generally well with those that love him. (2) In their spiritual history it is certainly true (see Rom. viii., at end). (3) In his eternal kingdom. No harm can reach them there. 2. *As to the wicked.* He will destroy them. (1) Now and again we see such doom come upon individual transgressors. History recounts the destruction of nations, and their sin has ever been their destroyer. Where are the great empires of olden time? (2) But often and often, blessed be his Name! he destroys the wicked by destroying their wickedness, turning their hearts to himself. The King's arrows are sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies. (3) But God's final doom on the ungodly is what is mainly meant in this Scripture—that awful sentence of “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord,” which must come on all those who will not allow that God should separate them from their sin. And this is no arbitrary sentence; for note—

II. THE NEEDS-BE FOR IT. 1. *In the preservation of those that love God.* It is so for the Lord's own sake; his love could not otherwise be satisfied, nor his promises fulfilled. And for the world's sake; they who love the Lord are the salt of the earth, and are his witnesses to men. And for their own sake, that they may be eternally blessed. 2. *In the destruction of the wicked.* If it be only a temporal destruction, it is needed for the vindication of the Divine Law; for the reformation of the guilty (cf. 1 Cor. xi. 32); for witness to men that verily there is a God who judgeth. And if the destruction be other than temporal, it is still necessary, for how else can heaven be heaven? Earth is the sad place it too often is only because of the presence of sin. Is sin, then, to have place in heaven, as it will if the wicked come there?

III. ITS WORD OF HOLY COUNSEL. 1. *Pray:* for so is our will strengthened to choose the right and refuse the wrong. 2. *Act:* break away from wickedness and commit yourself on the side of God. 3. *Trust:* day by day, yea, continually, give yourself up “to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless,” etc.

“Help, Lord, that we may come
To thy saints' happy home,
Where a thousand years
As one day appears;
Nor go
Where one day appears
As a thousand years,
In woo.”

(Arndt.)

S. C.

Ver. 4.—*The praise of succeeding generations.* In the old times kings forwarded their despatches by running footmen, of whom there were relays (see Job ix. 25; Jer. li. 31; 2 Chron. xxx. 6—10; Esth. iii. 13—15). The statutes, ordinances, etc., of the Bible are the despatches of the great King. The generations, as they succeed each other, are the running footmen. The despatches are words of love and mercy. The runners read and publish as they advance.

I. THIS WORK OF PRESERVING AND HANDING DOWN THE TRUTH IS AMONGST THE VERY FIRST RELIGIOUS DUTIES THAT CONCERNED THE MIND AND HEART OF MAN. 1. Oral teaching. A patriarch's household (Gen. xviii. 19). It was a divinely enforced duty (Deut. vi.; Isa. xxxviii. 19). 2. Presently the pen of the historian, etc., employed. Moses, Samuel, etc.

II. THIS WORK IS NO LESS IMPORTANT THAN ANCIENT. 1. Human happiness involved (Ps. lxxviii. 1—8). 2. Glory of God advanced. 3. Hence Providence has, at different times, raised up supplementary aid to ensure its performance. To the father of each family was added the prophet, scribe, etc.; and to these, in modern times, various organizations.

III. THIS WORK, SO ANCIENT AND IMPORTANT, IS AN EVER-PRESENT DUTY. 1. It belongs to the present generation, no less than to those of the past. 2. The world's progress in morality is built up by the workers of all ages. We must lay a stone or two. We owe it to the past.

IV. THIS WORK, BEING RELIGIOUS, HAS TO OVERCOME GREAT DIFFICULTIES. 1. Various phases of scepticism. 2. Folly in the heart of children. 3. Home influence often bad.

V. THIS WORK REQUIRES SPECIAL QUALIFICATIONS IN THE WORKER. Not so much mental as moral. 1. Love of God and Christ (John xxi. 15). 2. Love of the truth. 3. Love of souls.

VI. THE WORK IS ACCOMPANIED BY SPECIAL ENCOURAGEMENTS. 1. The promises of God. 2. The help of God. 3. The improved moral tone of society. 4. The glorious future present to the eye of faith. (After Gray.)—R. T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*God's greatness is goodness.* "God's 'majesty' is his inherent greatness; his 'glory' is the manifestation of that majesty; and its 'splendour' in the brightness of this manifestation is seen by the eyes of men." "God declares his almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity. The contemplation of simple majesty breathes awe; the sense of graciousness in majesty adds to it the glow of thankfulness." "If philosophy is to be believed, our world is but an outlying corner of creation; bearing, perhaps, as small proportion to the great universe as a single grain bears to all the sands of the seashore, or the small quivering leaf to the foliage of a boundless forest. Yet even within this earth's narrow limit, how vast the work of Providence! how soon is the mind lost in contemplating it! How great, then, must the Creator of all be, if his works are so great! Truly 'his greatness is unsearchable'" (Guthrie).

I. THE OPPRESSION OF THE MERE SENSE OF POWER. Only an overwhelming feeling attends the working of the great forces of nature, in tempest, flood, earthquake, etc. Only a crushing humiliation follows on the masterful workings of great conquerors—Alexander, Attila, Napoleon, etc. And oftentimes the almightiness of God is so presented, the majesty of his creation, his control, his judgments, that the mind and heart of man are simply crushed before him. See the sentiment we have in relation to giants, who are nothing but embodiments of physical power. There is no rest for man in God if all we can know of God is that he is almighty, "none can stay his hand." Illustrate by the slavish submission of Islāmism before a God conceived as absolute power only.

II. THE RESTFULNESS OF A SENSE OF GOODNESS BEHIND POWER. Illustrate by the different feeling we have toward the giant when we see him tenderly toying and playing with a helpless babe. There is a character behind the power, which puts limitations on, and quality into, the acts of power. The giant is *good*. It is thus with God. We find no rest in the mighty things he has done, or does, until we see that love to us, and planning for our good, tones, qualifies, and directs all the forthputtings of his power.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The slowness of the Divine anger.* "Slow to anger, and of great mercy." In former homilies it has been shown that the term "anger" can only be applied to God with extreme caution and precision. Anger is a part of the possibilities belonging to man as a moral being. He would not be a man if he *could* not be angry. Anger is the proper response which man makes to a certain class of related circumstances. And as man is made in the image of God, we must think that everything essential to man has its answering essential in God. Then there must be the possibility of anger in God. But man is suffering from the influence of wilfulness and sin, continued through long generations. And one of the most decided influences has been a loosening of control over the possibilities of anger, so that a man responds too quickly, and anger degenerates into passion. Such anger must never be associated with God, who must never be thought of as losing self-control under any pressure of outward circumstances. Then he is "slow to anger."

I. THE SLOWNESS OF DIVINE ANGER IS MAN'S OPPORTUNITY. The type of man's anger is Cain, who, in a moment of passion, slew his brother, and gave that brother no opportunity of putting things straight. God waits, and in that waiting-time man gets his opportunity of recovery and repentance. He has the chance of "coming to himself." It may never be thought that God's slowness is the sign of his indifference. He feels responsively quicker than man does, but action on feeling is subject to judgment, and delayed by compassion. The slowness is *mercy*. The history of God's ancient people provides abundant illustrations of the opportunities given by the delaying of Divine anger.

II. THE SLOWNESS OF DIVINE ANGER IS MAN'S PERSUASION. There is something

in man which instantly convicts him of his wrong-doing, and as instantly fills him with fear of God's anger. When that anger is held in, the man wonders. If he is a bad man, it leads him to presume. If he is a good man, it becomes to him a persuasion. It reveals to him God's anxiety about him. He feels to be in God's thought and patience, and he is moved to recover himself from that wrong state of mind and heart which brought on him the Divine anger.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*Recognizing God's universal goodness.* "We who recognize the loving-kindness, as well as the power of God, in what may seem the harsher and more forbidding agencies of Nature, ought not to be weary and faint in our minds if over our warm human life the same kind pitying hand should sometimes cause his snow of disappointment to fall like wool, and cast forth his ice of adversity like morsels, knowing that even by these unlikely means shall ultimately be given to us, too, as to Nature, the beauty of Sharon and the excellency of Carmel" (Hugh Macmillan). "The sun does not shine for a few trees and flowers, but for the wide world's joy. The lonely pine on the mountain-top waves its sombre boughs, and cries, 'Thou art my sun.' And the little meadow violet lifts its cup of blue, and whispers with its perfumed breath, 'Thou art my sun.' So God sits, effulgent in heaven, not for a favoured few, but for the universe of life; and there is no creature so poor or so low that he may not look up with childlike confidence and say, 'My Father, thou art mine'" (Ward Beecher). Our Lord taught concerning the heavenly Father, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

I. GOD'S UNIVERSAL GOODNESS IS NOT THE APPEARANCE OF THINGS. From man's point of view the world is full of things that he cannot call good. And he often wonders why God made things as they are. How can he call calamities and disasters, bloodshed and war, pain and death, signs of Divine goodness? He can only see the appearance; and with that limited vision it is wholly impossible for man to realize the universal goodness of God. And in moral spheres he is equally puzzled. Crime constantly goes undetected and unpunished. The wicked succeed and the righteous fail. How can God be good to all when so many live lives of misery?

II. GOD'S UNIVERSAL GOODNESS IS THE FACT OF THINGS. But it can only be seen from proper points of view, and with the properly cleared vision. God's world is not a *material*, it is a *moral* world, and a material only for the sake of the moral. God's universal goodness is clearly seen in the measure in which we can apprehend God's *moral end* in everything that he does and permits.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*Praising and blessing.* Matthew Henry indicates the distinction between these terms, and the appropriateness with which each is used. "All God's *works* shall *praise* him. They all minister to us matter for praise, and so praise him according to their capacity; even those that refuse to give him honour he will get himself honour upon. But his *saints* (beloved ones) do *bless* him, not only as they have peculiar blessings from him, which other creatures have not, but as they praise him actively, while his other works praise him only objectively. They bless him, for they collect the rent or tribute of praise from the inferior creatures, and pay it into the treasury above. All God's works do *praise* him, as the beautiful building praises the builder, or the well-drawn picture praises the artist; but the saints *bless* him as the children of prudent tender parents rise up and call them blessed. Of all God's works, his saints, the workmanship of his grace, the firstfruits of his creatures, have most reason to bless him."

I. PRAISING IS COMMON TO ALL BEING. Because all being is *creation*, and has its satisfaction in being what it was designed to be, and doing what it was designed to do. We must distinguish between what creation does, and what the poetic and the pious soul thinks of creation as doing. It is true that (perhaps) everything, animate and inanimate, has in it the capacity of sound; and its sound may be its voice of praise. But the praise is what *man hears in his soul*. It is the voice of nature translated by man. So marvellous, so perfect, and so mutually adapted, are all the creations of God, that every existing thing can be conceived of as praising God for its very being, because it finds pleasure in being.

II. BLESSING IS SPECIAL TO MAN. Because it indicates the intellectual apprehensions,

and the heart-feelings, of a living moral being; one who can reason, feel, and bear relations. To bless a person is to recognize gratefully something which that person has done *for us*, and done as a sign of his love to us. And it is thus that we bless God. It is our recognition not of common good, but of special interventions, arrangements, and adaptations *for us*; and these as signs and proofs of his gracious and loving personal feeling toward us.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*God's everlasting kingdom.* "What is infinite in greatness must be infinite in duration." "Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all eternities." On the door of the old mosque in Damascus, which was once a Christian church, but for twelve centuries has ranked among the holiest of the Mohammedan sanctuaries, are inscribed these memorable words: "Thy kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations." It is evident that the psalmist is endeavouring to find the most comprehensive and expressive of all terms to associate with God's kingdom and we must therefore notice the all-inclusiveness of this term, "everlasting."

I. GOD'S KINGDOM IS SPIRITUAL. It is not the kingdom of things, created things, of which the psalmist writes. It is God's kingdom of men, and man is essentially a *spiritual* being. The glory of an earthly king is not material possessions, but the loving service of free-willed peoples. God's kingdom is the rule of God's will over men's wills. And so we pray, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done." It is a sublime thought of God that he is the spiritual Being ruling over spiritual beings. "King of saints, the holy."

II. GOD'S KINGDOM IS ALL-HALLOWING. It can never be identified with any earthly kingdom. It covers and includes them all. It is as absolutely universal as the spiritual being man; and is consistent with, but independent of, all the varieties of forms in which men organize themselves into nations, and arrange governmental conditions. God's kingdom must not be confused with his *Church*, unless we make the Church coextensive with the kingdom. Every man, being a spiritual man, is a member of God's spiritual kingdom. Everything for him depends on what sort of a member he is.

III. GOD'S KINGDOM IS PERMANENT. It belongs to all generations, because the generations repeat spiritual beings, and God rules such, as long as, and wherever, they exist. The permanence of the kingdom is simply the *necessity* of it. It is not possible for us to conceive of any disintegrating forces that can possibly affect it.—R. T.

Ver. 15.—*The universal dependence and expectation.* "Man is master. But there is a great deal in this world besides man. Nature takes a thousand darlings to her bosom. Every evening motherly Darkness puts to bed myriads of unnamed children of the sod, of the leaf, of the tree, bush, moss, and stone. Every morn she sends again to awaken her brood, and troops them forth to their dewy breakfast. We sometimes get nearer to God in proportion as we get far from men. These neglected treasures of Nature are a book of Divine things, and if we do not read, the Creator does" (Ward Beecher). It is full of a sweet significance that the same word should be used concerning God that we use to express the anxiety and pressure under which we so often groan. The Apostle Peter says, "Casting all your *care* upon him, for he *careth* for you." God cares for his possessions and his family, even as we care for ours. But how complex, vast, and wonderful his possessions and family are! and how sublime must be his care!

I. GOD'S CARE OF HIS CREATURES SEEN IN ADJUSTMENTS. All his creatures are put in their proper places, and kept in their proper places. The distribution of animate life, and the adjustment of creature to environment, and ministry of each creature where it is put, keep up, for thoughtful minds, unceasing wonder at God's ever-watchful care.

II. GOD'S CARE OF HIS CREATURES SEEN IN LIMITATIONS. This point is not often presented. In order to be effective, the reproductive power in vegetable and animal life is bound to be so full and strong that there comes to be everywhere danger of over-production. Illustrate by the devastation wrought by rabbits when their growth is exempt from limitations. How seldom we think of God's goodness and care in

keeping everything limited to strict efficiency; and providing destructive agencies to keep growths within safe bounds!

III. GOD'S CARE OF HIS CREATURES IS SEEN IN PROVIDINGS. This brings to us very familiar considerations. But point may be gained by dealing with some sample cases: *e.g.* the goat of the summer evening; caddis-worm; or those insects that are unpleasant to us; dangerous serpents, etc. God "gives to them all their meat in due season."—R. T.

Ver. 17.—*The absoluteness of the Divine righteousness.* "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and gracious in all his works." This is not the impression *every man* has of God; it is not the impression even the good man has of God *at all times*. It is the good man's thought of God when he is at his best; raised by holy emotion above himself. He can say, "The Lord is righteous in all his ways"—

I. WHEN HE TRIES TO READ THE HISTORY OF THE PAST. The story of the ages is kept for us in order that we may find in it what God has been, and therefore what God is. History as a series of facts is but a poor affair. The philosophy of history is its interest, and the Divine philosophy of history (God in history) is the supreme interest of it. But it is difficult work, because man can never *fully* take the Divine standpoint about anything. He is always obliged to get his faith to help his judgment. And yet, what is ever coming out more and more clearly to the devout student is the righteousness of God's ways. He sees how God has made things come right.

II. WHEN HE TRIES TO READ THE MYSTERIES OF THE PRESENT. This is always perplexing work, because of the disturbing influence of feeling and prejudice. God's ways are not always what we like, and then it is very easy to say that they are not right. The good man has constantly to fall back upon his absolute knowledge of what God is, and upon his deep, experimental conviction of God's righteous goodness, in order to undo the tangle in which things seem to have got, and to put things into an order and relation that bring to view the Divine righteousness.

III. WHEN HE TRIES TO READ GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HIMSELF. Under previous divisions we have had in mind the *macrocosm*, the whole world of things and people. Now we have in mind the *microcosm*, the limited sphere of the individual life. And the personal element so seriously influences a man that it takes a whole long life before an adequate impression of the absolute righteousness of God can be gained. And yet it is there, in every man's life. To see it, and live in the joy of it, is *heaven*.—R. T.

Vers. 1—21.—*God's greatness, goodness, and glory.* "Every one who repeats the Tehillah of David thrice a day, may be sure that he is a child of the world to come."

I. GOD'S GREATNESS. (Vers. 1—6.) 1. *Unsearchable.* (Ver. 3.) No searching can reach its bottom (Isa. xl. 28; Job xi. 7). 2. *It is, nevertheless, being continually revealed in history.* (Ver. 4.) One generation declares it to another, through all the successive ages. 3. *That which is so great and manifest cannot but be spoken of and honoured.* (Vers. 5, 6.) The eternally great things of God, revealed to our consciousness, cannot be regarded in silence.

II. THE GOODNESS OR LOVE OF GOD. (Vers. 7—10.) 1. *It is full of compassionate tenderness towards the needy and sinful.* (Ver. 8.) "Wrath is only the background of his nature, which he reluctantly, and only after long waiting, lets loose against those who spurn his great mercy." 2. *God's righteousness and love embrace all his creatures, whatever their character.* (Vers. 7, 9.) All must praise God; but the saints will bless God with their grateful love.

III. THE GLORY OF GOD'S KINGDOM. (Vers. 11—13.) 1. *It is a kingdom of power and majesty.* God will at length accomplish all his will and all his purpose. 2. *It is an everlasting universal kingdom.* (Ver. 13.) All things in heaven and on earth, and throughout the whole universe, shall for ever and ever reflect and accomplish the infinite plan and purpose of God.

IV. THE GLORY OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE. (Vers. 14—21.) 1. *He supports the weak and falling.* (Ver. 14.) 2. *He provides for the wants of all beings, great and small.* (Vers. 15, 16.) 3. *He is righteous and holy in all his gifts.* (Ver. 17.) 4. *He is near to all who truly pray, and will accomplish their salvation.* (Vers. 18—20.)—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXLVI.

THE psalter ends with a cluster of "Hallelujah Psalms," five in number, all of them both beginning and ending with the phrase. In the Hebrew none of them has any "title;" but it is generally considered that the Septuagint title of the majority—*Ἀγγέλων καὶ Ζεφυλίων*—embodies a true tradition, and that they are the "Songs of the Return from the Captivity," added to the Psalter by the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah. They form a portion of the daily morning service of the Jews. Ps. cxlvi. praises God as the only true Helper. Metrically, it falls into two portions—a short opening strophe of four verses (vers. 1—4), and a second longer strophe of six verses (vers. 5—10), setting forth the blessedness of those who take God for their Help.

Ver. 1.—Praise ye the Lord (comp. on Ps. cxi. 1). Praise the Lord, O my soul (see Ps. ciii. 1, 2; civ. 1, which only differ in the verb used—"bless" for "praise").

Ver. 2.—While I live will I praise the Lord. Nearly identical with Ps. civ. 33a. It is our duty towards God to be always praising him, if not with the lips, at any rate with the heart. I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being. Identical with Ps. civ. 33b.

Ver. 3.—Put not your trust in princes (comp. Ps. cxviii. 10). Israel was always apt to trust in human rather than Divine help. Now it was Egypt (Isa. xxx. 2; xxxvi. 6), now Assyria (2 Kings xvi. 7), now their own kings or nobles. At the time of the return from the Captivity, too much was expected from Zerubbabel and the other "princes." Nor in the son of man. The Prayer-book paraphrase, "nor in any child of man," brings out the sense. Confidence in human aid of whatever kind is forbidden. In whom there is no help; or, "that hath no saving power" (חֲסִידוֹת).

Ver. 4.—His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; or, "when his breath goes forth"—i.e. when he breathes his last—"he returns to his earth," i.e. to the earth of which he was made (Gen. ii. 7, 19). In that very day his thoughts perish. All his schemes and projects (*eshthonoth*, a word not occurring elsewhere) come to an end—are nipped in the bud—perish. For weak is he, and not to be depended on.

Ver. 5.—Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his Help. "God of Jacob" is

a favourite expression in the later psalms, where it almost supersedes the phrase, "God of Israel" (see Ps. lxxvi. 6; lxxxii. 1, 4; lxxxiv. 8; xciv. 7; cxiv. 7; cxxxii. 2, 5; and the present passage). It is rare in the historical books and in the prophets. Whose hope is in the Lord his God (comp. Ps. xxii. 9; xxxix. 7; lxii. 5; lxxi. 5, etc.).

Ver. 6.—Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is. Who is, therefore, an omnipotent Help, the very opposite of "the son of man, in whom is no help" at all (ver. 3). Which keepeth truth for ever; i.e. who keeps all his promises, and has promised his help to all such as call upon him faithfully (Ps. cxlv. 18).

Ver. 7.—Which executeth judgment for the oppressed (comp. Ps. ciii. 6, "The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed"). Israel's history was an ample comment on this text. Which giveth food to the hungry (comp. Ps. cxlv. 15, 16, and the comment *ad loc.*). The Lord looseth the prisoners. Either captive nations, as Israel; or individuals, as Jeremiah from his dungeon (Jer. xxxvii. 16, 17), Daniel from the lions' den (Dan. vi. 23), Peter from his prison-house (Acts xii. 7—10), and the like. Deliverance from the bands of sin may also be intended.

Ver. 8.—The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind (comp. Isa. xxxv. 5). The spiritually blind would seem to be meant, rather than the physically blind, since there is no record of any restoration of physical sight in the Old Testament. The Lord raiseth them that are bowed down (see Ps. cxlv. 14). "Bowed down," i.e., under the hand of oppressors. The Lord loveth the righteous. This lies at the root of all, and shows that the various deliverances spoken of in vers. 7—9 are to be understood as deliverances of the righteous out of their troubles.

Ver. 9.—The Lord preserveth the strangers. God's goodness leads him not only to protect the righteous, but also to lend his special help to the weak and afflicted classes. "The stranger, the fatherless, and the widow" are constantly mentioned in the Old Testament as peculiar objects of the Divine care (Exod. xxii. 21, 22; Lev. xix. 33, 34; Deut. x. 18; Job xxix. 12; Ps. lxxxii. 3; Isa. i. 28; Jer. vii. 6, etc.). He relieveth the fatherless and widow; or, "upholdeth" (see the Revised Version). But the way of the wicked he turneth upside down (comp. Ps. cxlv. 20). His merciful protection of his saints leads him to overthrow the goings of the wicked, who are their enemies.

Ver. 10.—The Lord shall reign for ever (comp. *Pss.* x. 16; cxlv. 13). Even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. On the restoration of Israel to its own land, Jehovah becomes emphatically once more “the God

of Zion” (see *Zech.* ii. 10; viii. 3). And this he remains “to all generations,” since the Church of Christ is now the true Zion (*Heb.* xii. 22). Praise ye the Lord (see ver. 1).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*Three fulfilments.* There are three ways in which these verses (or most of them) have been or are fulfilled.

I. IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE. In God’s dealing with his people Israel. 1. Israel found, again and again, that it was not in human alliances, but in the living God, that its true help was found (vers. 3—5). Princes and powers proved to be but broken reeds; but while Jehovah was sought and served, everything was secure. 2. Israel in captivity found its true hope and help in the living God. Though they were strangers in Babylon, yet they were not unkindly treated, and some of them rose to high places in the kingdom (ver. 9). Afflicted with “judicial blindness,” they gained enlightenment in the land of exile, and learned truth there (respecting the Divine unity) which they never lost (ver. 8). God’s word of promise was fulfilled, and he proved himself to be the Lord of truth and faithfulness, and the Lord of all power and might (ver. 6). God “lifted up” their hearts when “bowed down;” he gave them the precious hope of restoration; he opened the prison door and set the captives free (ver. 7). Thus he executed judgment for the oppressed (ver. 7), as he had done more strikingly when Israel groaned under the bondage and hardships of Egypt.

II. IN THE LIFE AND WORK OF JESUS CHRIST. In the course of his ministry our Lord wrought these wonders, conferred these very blessings with a kind and bountiful hand. He fed the hungry in their need (*Matt.* xiv., xv.). He set free the poor lepers who were bound fast by stern prohibitions, and let them return to their own home, and released those who were enslaved still more sadly by demoniac possession. He opened the eyes of those who had lost their sight, or were actually born blind. He raised up the prostrate paralytic, and straightened with gentle hand the woman that was so “bowed down that she could in no wise lift herself up” (*Matt.* ix.; *Luke* xiii.). He showed kindness to “the stranger,” to the Samaritan leper, to the Syro-phenician woman. He was most gracious to those who were “bowed down” under the weight of social hatred and contempt; he “raised” the publican and sinner, and gave them a place by his side in his kingdom.

III. IN OUR OWN SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE. The Lord Jesus Christ now, by the means of his sacred truth and by the power of his Divine Spirit, does “greater things than those” at which men marvelled when he lived on earth. 1. He satisfies the hungry and thirsty souls with heavenly wisdom. We earnestly, perhaps intensely, crave the truth which, try how we may, we cannot discover by our own efforts—the truth about our God and ourselves, and the way to life eternal. He who is himself “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” can and does minister to our hungering hearts, and gives us the bread of which he that eats never hungers more. 2. He breaks the bonds of those who have been bound down; he looseth the prisoners—those enslaved by vice and sin, held fast in the cords of their own iniquity, needing a Divine hand to release them (*John* viii. 36). 3. He enlightens our understanding, he illumines our soul, so that we see that to which we had been blind before—our own sinfulness, the freedom and fullness of the grace of God, the blessedness of his salvation, the liberty of loving service. 4. He gives rest and peace to the burdened spirit. We have been “bowed down” under the weight of conscious guilt; but in Jesus Christ we have peace—deep, true, lasting; the peace of God—Christ’s own peace (*Rom.* v. 1; *Phil.* iv. 7; *John* xiv. 27). 5. He offers his friendship to the obedient; he “loveth the righteous.” We are his friends if we keep his commandments; he “will love us and manifest himself to us if we keep his Word.”

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 4.—*Thoughts that perish.* It has been remarked that whilst in so large a part of the Bible we have the history of the Church, in the Psalms we have the voice of the Church. And a very varied voice it is—varied as are the vicissitudes and manifold experiences of the people of God. But here, at the close, the tremulous tones of sorrow and distress, of fear and anxiety, and of piteous pleading, which we have so often met with, are all hushed, and instead, we have one jubilant note of praise—at eventide there is light. It is with this Book of Psalms as it is with those who love it most, that both for it and them there is this bright and glad some ending. But it is for them only. Here, in the words which are before us, a very different termination is contemplated. The enemies of God and of his people are spoken of; and concerning them and their utter extinction, the psalmist declares that not only do they die—their “breath goeth forth”—but their bodies crumble into dust—“he returneth to his earth”—and even their very thoughts perish. They may have boasted loudly of what they would do—have breathed out threatening and slaughter; but death comes, and in that very day their thoughts perish. Now, in considering this declaration, let us—

I. EXPLAIN ITS MEANING. 1. *It tells of men's thoughts.* Thoughts are the rulers and real governors of men. The power of thought is man's noblest faculty, and its results are more far-reaching than that of all his other powers. By it he is distinguished from, and raised above, all the rest of the creation of God; and upon the use of this faculty depend his character and condition now, and his eternal destiny beyond the grave. 2. *But it is said that men's thoughts perish.* This is not true of all thoughts of men, for many of them do not perish, but live with a vigour and vitality, after the death of him in whom they originated, far greater than ever they possessed during his lifetime. And this has to be said even of many of those thoughts which it were well for men that they should perish; for embodied in books, imprinted on the hearts and nature of children, transmitted from one generation to another, it is all too plain that evil thoughts may live on, and work wide mischief, though the men whose minds first conceived them have long passed away. Happy would it have been for us if their thoughts had perished with them; but they have not, and in a very real and awful sense, “he that is unholy is unholy still, and he that is filthy is filthy still.” And assuredly good thoughts do not perish. What is the Bible, but the record of holy and precious thoughts, which have by no means perished, and which are fruitful of good now, perhaps, more than at any previous period since they were given to the minds of the holy men of old who spake or wrote them down? And what do we not owe to the recorded or remembered thoughts of good men now no more? How the deep convictions of such men, expressed not only in words, but in their lives, have influenced those who have come after them, even to many generations! It is, therefore, certain that all men's thoughts do not perish in that very day on which they die. But our text is true of all unembodied thoughts. Like as it was needful for God to become incarnate if men were to fully know him, or, indeed, to know him at all, so those spiritual products of our minds—our thoughts—must take form and substance, body and shape, if they are to have any influence upon ourselves or others. And they do this in many ways. They are seen in character. “As a man thinketh . . . so is he;” so that we can reason back from a man's character to the nature of his thoughts. And in the character of others. Now, a man's children reveal not seldom what he is; what his main thoughts have been are shown by the impress they have left on them, and this both for good and evil. And they are heard or read in his words—in a man's letters, or books, or discourse—and thus their influence is made permanent. And in deeds. These stereotype thought, and make for it an abiding power. Now, such thoughts do not perish with a man's earthly life; they continue, and often increase in power. But all other thoughts perish—all such as are merely thoughts, and have never been embodied in character, or word, or deed. And there are a vast number of these. Mere purposes and intentions that remain such. The psalmist is comforting himself with the reflection that the wild, cruel purposes of the foes of God's people will all come to nought when those who have formed them die. And for the blessing of the Church of God, what a host of these thoughts have perished! And so, too, with good intentions, if they are not acted on. The road to hell is paved with such. Death comes, and “in that very day,” etc.

II. ILLUSTRATE ITS TRUTH. The endeavours against Israel in Egypt. The destruction of Sennacherib. Haman's wrath and discomfiture. Deliverances of the Church in the age of the martyrs, through the death of persecuting emperors. Destruction of the Armada, etc. And there have been illustrations also on the side of those who had cherished good purposes, but put off fulfilling them. Felix, who said to St. Paul, "Go thy way, and at a more convenient season," etc. Herod, who heard John the Baptist gladly, but ended by putting him to death. And the sad but large army of the waverers and unready ones, who are found in every rank and order of society, in the Church and in the world, in public positions and in such as are obscure. All these furnish proof and illustration of our text. And there was that rich fool to whom God said, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee," etc. (Luke xii. 16, etc.).

III. POINT OUT ITS LESSONS. They are such as these: 1. *Of thankfulness*; that God so puts an end to the evil purposes of evil men. 2. *Of diligence*. "What thy hand findeth to do," etc. Have done with the halting, wavering, fruitless thinkings, and do what God would have thee do; and at once, lest thy thoughts perish with thee. 3. Seek to *have thy mind filled with thoughts that will not perish*, but that shall live and bless thee and many more besides. 4. *Commit thine heart into God's keeping*; "for out of it are the issues of life." 5. By surrender to Christ *hasten the day when all thine evil thoughts shall perish from out of thy mind*, and Christ's thoughts shall take their place.—S. O.

Vers. 5—10.—*The happiness of him that hath the God of Jacob for his Help and Hope.* These verses are a statement of the solid reasons of that happiness.

I. THE LORD'S INFINITE POWER. (Ver. 6.) He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, "the sea, and all that therein is." He is the mighty God, and infinite in power.

II. HIS ETERNAL TRUTH. He is faithful to his Word; he "keepeth truth for ever." None ever trusted in him and found his Word to fail. Contrast this with human help.

III. HIS BOUNDLESS COMPASSION. See what an array of poor, helpless, and miserable ones are here enumerated as the special objects of his goodness. 1. *The oppressed*. (Ver. 7.) For them, when none else can or will, he executeth judgment, and avenges them of their adversaries. 2. *The hungry, the starving poor*; to them he giveth food. 3. *The prisoner*; those immured in the tyrant's dungeon, or shut up in rigid captivity. 4. *The blind*. In all ages, in the lands of the Bible, blindness was a calamity as common as it was terrible; to give them sight was, therefore, one of the chiefest mercies of God, and declared his bounty and goodness as great indeed. 5. *The bowed down*. What a vast company of these human experience has ever furnished! The burden of care, the weight of responsibility, the crushing power of sorrow,—these are ever at work to recruit the ranks of the bowed down. But it is the Lord's special office—an office to the fulfilment of which not only the psalmist here, but myriads of God's people in all ages, bear their testimony, to raise up them that be bowed down (Luke xiii. 10—17). 6. *The strangers*. In our day, in Christian lands, the stranger is not so forlorn a being as he undoubtedly was in the days of the psalmist. Then, to live on the other side of a river flowing between one territory and another, made a man a rival, a foe, as the very etymology of the word "rival" tells, and bound you to treat him as your deadly enemy. Hence, for a man to be a stranger in a strange land was to be exposed to all manner of insult and wrong, and to be in continual peril of life itself. Israel had been such a stranger, and knew all the miseries of such a lot; but he here bears his testimony that "the Lord preserveth the strangers." 7. *The desolate by bereavement*. The fatherless and the widow are selected as types of the most desolate of all. Remember the parable of the importunate widow as showing the peril of oppression on the part of cruel adversaries, and of neglect and injustice on the part of a corrupt and unscrupulous judge. If God did not interfere for these desolate ones, none other would. But "he relievoth," etc. Such is the compassion of the Lord our God; and when a man knows this, not merely by hearing of it, but by actual experience, how can he keep from rendering praise to the Lord? The very stones would cry out if he were silent.

IV. HIS PERFECT RIGHTEOUSNESS. Hence it is that he executeth judgment for the oppressed. He will not suffer wrong to prevail; but "the way of the wicked he turneth

upside down," for "the Lord loveth the righteous." It is delightful to think of the compassion of God; but even that would not so stir our hearts were it not that it is all based on righteousness. Man's great longing is for justice—right between man and man—but as yet he has never fully attained to it; and he never will until the righteous Lord, who loveth the righteous, is recognized and rejoiced in as our Lord and King. But even here and now God gives us to see his righteousness; for have we not read and heard of and seen, and that again and again, "the way of the wicked" turned "upside down"? Here, again, is another full-flowing fountain of praise.

V. HIS PERPETUAL REIGN. (Ver. 10.) Even could we attain, as one day we shall, to the joy of witnessing the Lord's righteous, loving, and holy rule thoroughly and universally established, his kingdom actually come, and his "will done on earth, even as," etc.; yet, if it were but a passing and temporary dominion, destined after a while to come to an end, how that would sadden all our hearts, and silence the praise that would otherwise rise perennially towards God the Lord! But "the Lord shall reign for ever . . . unto all generations." Well, therefore, may we, and will we, praise the Lord.—S. C.

Ver. 5.—*"The God of Jacob."* There is true blessedness in the service of God. Listen to the oft-repeated declaration of joy in God with which these psalms are full. "As the hart panteth," etc.—such is the constant theme. And the like declaration is found throughout the Old Testament. And in the New Testament likewise. If we had a Book of Psalms in this, as in the former part of the Scriptures, we should find that the joy of God's people in him was realized in no less degree, and sung of in no less exalted strains. For we have the record of Christ's servants, who, though mournful, were yet always rejoicing. We see SS. Paul and Silas in their dark prison cell at Philippi, and we hear the psalms in which they sang aloud their praises unto God at that midnight hour, amid all the pain and outward misery of their lot. And we read St. Paul's letters, written during his imprisonment at Rome—such as that to the Church at Philippi, the key-note of which is joy. And we clearly gather from all this that the service of God was no less blessed in the days of the New Testament than it was in those of the Old. And we find our Lord beginning his first great sermon with the eight-times-repeated declaration of blessedness for his followers. And when in the depths of his own sorrow, when the shadow of the cross enshrouded him, and its darkness was such as could be felt, even then he told of his joy, and prayed that his disciples might share therein. And the universal consciousness of men attests that God is the soul's true Solace and Strength; the widespread profession of religion in our day is but the confession of the human heart of its need of God; man's weak, wayward will too often hinders from full obedience to what conscience declares, but it has not hindered nor destroyed the declaration itself. The young ruler went away sorrowful, but his sorrow was the confession of the blessedness he had lost. But his conduct, and that of those numerous ones who cannot bring themselves altogether to reject God's call, alike show the conviction within them that, as our text declares, "happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his Help," etc. But if those who never heartily act upon it nevertheless have this conviction, how much more deeply is it felt by those who yield to it, and who seek and find that God whose service is ever blessed! But here the happiness of God's service is especially connected with the fact that God is the God of Jacob, and that the Lord was his God. The reason of this was because—

I. THE GOD OF JACOB IS ONE WHO COMES NEAR TO US, SO THAT WE MAY KNOW HIM. It was so with Jacob. See in his history how often God came near to him—at Bethel, when serving with Laban; at Peniel; and at yet other times and places; so that there is left upon our minds the conviction that it was the continual privilege of Jacob to enjoy this communion with God. God was Jacob's God because he was thus willing to come near to Jacob, and to be known by him as his God. Now, such knowledge of God as this must minister to the happiness of a man. Where should we be, in the midst of all the bewildering confusion of affairs, as it seems to us, unless we had the faith of God? What a cage of wild beasts this world would quickly become were the faith of God to disappear from men's minds! In times of ease and prosperity, when men have more than heart can wish, and fare sumptuously every day, they may imagine that they can do without God; and, so far as any acknowledgment of him on their parts is concerned, they do deny him altogether. But in the dark hours of life,

and when heart and flesh fail—as sooner or later they will—then the need of God is felt and confessed as it ought always to have been; then it is seen that “happy is he that hath the God,” etc. And it is seen by him who hath such Help not in dark hours only, but at all times. Who can tell the quiet of mind, the holy strength, the calm patience, the unquenchable hope, the unfaltering trust, that are begotten of this most blessed Help? And as he was willing to reveal himself to Jacob, so will he to us; and in Jesus Christ our Lord he has revealed himself, and promised to be with us always. “God made us for himself, and our heart has no rest until it finds rest in him.”

II. NOT ONLY MAY WE KNOW HIM, BUT HE IS ONE WHO KNOWS US. “He knoweth the way that I take.” With what constant interest does God appear to have watched over all the way along which Jacob had to go! When Jacob did not think God was near him, he was so, as at Bethel. And at the end of his life he tells of God as “the God who fed me all my life long . . . the Angel which redeemed me from all evil.” He was not to Jacob, he need not be to us, any mere abstract, far-away Being, but *one* God. It is true of us who trust him that he interests himself in our concerns. In all that affects his people he takes a living and a loving interest—not alone in their religious life, but in their secular, business, everyday life as well. Do let us believe this. We are very apt to forget it, if not question and almost deny it. But God is called the God of Jacob for this very reason, that we may joyfully know him as the God who careth for us at all times.

III. AND BECAUSE JACOB SO REPRESENTS US ALL. God is often spoken of as the God of Abraham and of Isaac. And so he was; but they lived on so lofty a plane—were, especially Abraham, such heroes of faith, that we, poor, feeble, imperfect, stumbling, falling people that we are, fail to get much consolation out of that name. But when we are told that he is the God of Jacob, then we come to see that he is just the God such as we all need. We want a God who will be gracious, and will not cast us off and throw us over because of our sins. He will punish us for them, as he did Jacob, and hold us down to the punishment until we will let the sin go; but he will not cast us off. No; he is the God of Jacob, and we are all of us far more Jacobs than we are Abrahams. And he will ever keep before us bright hope. All along through the weary way that the patriarch had to take he was cheered by the promise of God which he had received at Bethel. He never forgot it; it shone like a beacon-light before him, and its good cheer never left him. The opened heavens, the throne of God, the ladder uniting earth and heaven, the angels ascending and descending,—this vision, ratified with repeated promise, was the mainstay of his soul, and enabled him to go forward on the way God had appointed for him.

IV. AND IT IS *THUS* GOD DEALS WITH US. We have “the hope set before us,” and, “looking unto Jesus,” we are strong to run the race set before us. And meanwhile we have given to us blessed instalments of what hereafter we shall abundantly receive. We have, or may have, the sense of God’s forgiveness, the blessedness of the pure in heart, the joy of God’s presence, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; and each of these precious gifts serves but to confirm and intensify our hope. But the all-important question is—Have we the God of Jacob for our Help? We may not have, but yet we may have, very much that is good and fair. God may fill your veins with health, your coffers with gold, your rooms with all things of beauty, and your whole life with comfort and outward ease. “But you are like in such case to those trees which in the winter-time are called Christmas-trees. One feels a kind of pang at the first sight of such a tree. No doubt it is beautiful in its way, with the little lights twinkling among the branches, and the sweet gifts of affection hanging from every spray. But the tree itself—are you not sorry for it? Rooted no longer, growing no more. No more circulation of the living sap, no more sweet discoursing by its means between air and soil, between soil and air. The last waves of its life are sinking, and the more you hang upon it and the more you gather round it, the faster it will die” (Dr. A. Raleigh). And if our hope be not rooted in the God of Jacob, we are like one of those trees. Loaded, it may be, with all manner of pleasant things, and surrounded with affection, but dying all the while. Let it not be so with us, for it need not.—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*The vanity of human trusts.* “Rely not even on pious princes, they are but men, and many princes will be arrayed against you; but trust God. This sentiment

was naturally awakened by the circumstances of the period of return from the Captivity, to which these psalms belong." "This psalm was evidently composed for a time of great national depression, when the community, sick of dependence on the favour of foreign princes, turned more and more to the thought of the eternal righteousness and faithfulness of Jehovah."

"Oh, how wretched
Is that poor man that hangs on princes' favours!"

"The word employed, *n'dibim*, means primarily free-will givers or benefactors, so that it is not the capriciousness of earthly potentates that is in view, but their inability, willing or not, to render substantial assistance."

I. THIS IS THE LESSON WHICH THE RACE HAS TO LEARN. In the light of it may be read the story of humanity. That story begins with the safety and innocence of free-willed, voluntary *dependence*. It passes into the peril and disaster of *self-reliance*. Ages unfold a thousand forms in which man vainly tries to remedy the disaster into which he has brought himself by relying on the aid of his fellow-man. The universal hopelessness of such reliance, however tried, will bring round the race at last to the safety and virtue of full and entire and obedient trust in God.

II. THIS IS THE LESSON WHICH THE INDIVIDUAL HAS TO LEARN. It is the lesson to be learned in every life that is lived; and yet some never seem to learn it. The more marked instances of the untrustworthiness of man, which sometimes bring about our material ruin, are but prominent and impressive illustrations of an insufficiency which belongs to humanity, and is found in some degree affecting every form of human relation and alliance. Measures of trust in men are permissible, and bring much of the restfulness and joy of life; but absolute trust in man is never safe. Even from our dearest and best friends of earth we learn to turn to God, and find in him, and in him alone, our soul's refuge and rest.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—"*The God of Jacob.*" It is suggestive that *Jacob* should be thus singled out, and God should be presented in the special relations that he bore to that particular patriarch. God is the God of Abraham and of Isaac; but while there is much to be learned of God from his relations to *them*, there was—and in an unusual sense there was for the returned exiles—something special to learn about God from his relations with *Jacob*. The point of interest seems to lie in these contrasts.

I. ABRAHAM AND ISAAC LIVED, ON THE WHOLE, RESTFUL, QUIET LIVES; JACOB LIVED A LIFE OF STRAIN AND CHANGE. The impression left on us by the lives of Abraham and Isaac is that of peaceful careers. Their movements were quiet tribal migrations, and the troubles they passed through were only family experiences and neighbourly quarrellings. From them we learn what God is in relation to the *usual* and *common-place* in human experience. But Jacob was a man who was tossed about from the beginning to the end of his days. A quiet, home-loving man, who was never permitted to be quiet. He had a life full of stern experiences; the strain was on him right up to life's close. We cannot wonder that the returned exiles, who found they had entered upon a very hard experience, should think of Jacob, and comfort themselves by recalling what God had been to him. The "*God of Jacob*" is the *God of the chequered life*.

II. ABRAHAM AND ISAAC HAD, ON THE WHOLE, GOOD NATURAL DISPOSITIONS; JACOB HAD A TAIN OF EVIL IN HIS NATURAL DISPOSITION. God is the God of those who are born amiable, as Samuel was; and the most beautiful flowers of character are those in which grace is triumphant in sanctified amiability. And yet most of us turn anxiously to inquire what God was to Jacob, who was not born amiable, who carried from his mother a guileful, grasping, and over self-reliant taint of evil. God could be the God of *Jacob*. True, a man with such a disposition will make for himself a hard, stern life. And it is well for him not to have that easy life which would only nourish his evil. But God is in full and direct relations with the man in whom principle is struggling for mastery over frailty. But that just describes *Jacob*, and may just describe us.—R. T.

Vers. 6—8.—*Satisfaction in the activity of God.* Herein is a marked contrast

between Jehovah, the God of revelation, and all the gods which men have of themselves created. Man always imagines his supreme God as quiescent, impassive, eternally still. Revelation presents to us God as ceaselessly active, never still, everywhere working. All creation, involving sustenance, involves the constant energy and enterprise of God. Brahma is the infinitely silent one. The figures of a Buddha embody the perfection of listlessness and indifference. The Lord Jesus Christ gave us our primal and essential thought of God when he said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

I. MAN IS SURROUNDED WITH THE ACTIVITIES OF EVIL. More than surrounded, for there is the more serious activity of evil *within* him. What has to be taken into full account is that evil is a ceaselessly and energetically active force. That truth is embodied for us in the description of evil as "a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour." It is on account of that activity that we are bidden to "watch." When men sleep, the enemy is active, and goes sowing tares in their fields. One thing often surprises men. Temptation takes them at unawares; sometimes in their times of conscious strength, sometimes when they are unconscious of their weakness. Morning, noon, and night we have to take account of ever-active evil.

II. MAN NEEDS THE ASSURANCE OF THE SUPERIOR ACTIVITY OF GOD. Illustrate by the way in which this need was felt by Persians, and met by Zoroaster, who taught the superior activity of Ormuzd over Ahriman—a superior activity which assured a continuous as well as a final triumph. This psalm brings on us an answering impression of the activity of our good God. And it is an activity (1) in the sphere of the things that affect man, and (2) in man himself. For it is the chief charm of the activity of God that we may think of it as the sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit, who "dwelleth with us and in us."—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*Types of the helpless.* The stranger, the widow, and the orphan are constantly presented in the Law as objects of compassion and beneficence. "God obtains right for the oppressed, gives bread to the hungry, and consequently proves himself to be the Succourer of those who suffer wrong without doing wrong, and the Provider for those who look for their daily bread from his gracious hand."

I. THE ORPHAN IS THE COMMON TYPE OF THE HELPLESS IN ALL LANDS. Before powers of self-help are developed, he is deprived of both the father who earns for him, and the mother who cares for him. The God of the helpless is at once revealed when he is called the "Father of the fatherless," and when it is said, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

II. FOR THE WIDOW AS A TYPE OF THE HELPLESS, IT IS NECESSARY TO THINK OF THE WIDOWS OF EASTERN LANDS. Illustrations may be taken from India. There the widow is not allowed to marry again; she is unable to work for her living, and would not be permitted to do so if she could; and, worse than all, at home she is only tolerated, for her husband's death is regarded as a judgment on some sin of hers. It is of the tenderest significance that God is called the "Judge of the widow," and that he is represented as saying, "Let the widows trust in me."

III. THE STRANGER IS AN EASTERN TYPE OF HELPLESSNESS. Modern civilization has destroyed personal concern for the welfare of strangers. It has provided its hotels and institutions, and shifted on to public bodies its individual concern. But in the East the stranger arriving at any place was freely offered hospitality; every home was open to him. He was recognized as temporarily helpless, because for the time away from home and friends.

Think, then, how the good man is influenced by these three types of helplessness. And from the good man rise to think of God as moved by the pitiful sight of the widow, the hopeless outlooking of the orphan, and the anxious inquiring of the desolate stranger. They, and all helpless ones, may be sure of two things: 1. God will help them to help themselves. 2. God will help them when they cannot help themselves. "Friend of the friendless and the faint."—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*Divine judgment in the confusion of plans.* "Turneth upside down," or "bends aside." "The Divine providence, when the wicked man has laid out his plans, and looks as it were along a plain and level road of prosperity, bends the

prosperous course aside, makes the path crooked instead of straight, full of trouble and calamity instead of prosperous and sure." "That which happens in the course of God's providence, and as the inevitable result of his righteous laws, is usually ascribed in Scripture to his immediate agency." "Turneth upside down." "He fills it with crooked places; he reverses it, sets it down, upsets it. That which the man aimed at he misses, and he secures that for himself which he would gladly have avoided. The wicked man's way is in itself a turning of things upside down morally, and the Lord makes it so to him providentially. Everything goes wrong with him who goes wrong" (C. H. S.).

I. PLANS MADE WITHOUT GOD WILL HAVE, SOONER OR LATER, TO TAKE GOD INTO ACCOUNT. The honest truth is that man can never safely make any plans without taking God, and God's relation to things, into consideration. And yet this must be acknowledged as a truthful description of the wicked man—"God is not in all his thoughts." But all man can ever do is, strong-willedly persist in putting God out of consideration. And God may respond by leaving him alone for a while. But the man cannot keep up his self-willedness long, and God will not keep aloof for ever. When God puts himself into consideration, man's schemes are confused, and man's plans fall about him in ruins. Man proposes; God disposes.

II. GOD WILL SURELY OVERRIDE ALL MAN'S SELF-WILLED PLANS IN THE LONG RUN. Asaph and the psalmists of his class are full of fretfulness because the plans of the wicked seem to succeed. "He bringeth wicked devices to pass." But Asaph goes into the sanctuary of God, and then he understands their end. Wait but a while. God is sure to "arise and shake terribly the earth," and shake down the most apparently stable erections of self-willedness.—R. T.

Vers. 1—10.—*God alone worthy of trust.* "Bears evident traces of belonging to the post-Exile literature; and the words of vers. 7—9 are certainly no inapt expression of the feelings which would naturally be called forth at a time immediately subsequent to the return from the Captivity."

I. EVEN THE MIGHTIEST OF MANKIND ARE UNWORTHY OF TRUST. 1. *They cannot save in our greatest extremities.* "In whom is no help." From want of ability and often from want of will. 2. *The plans and projects of man soon come to an end.* (Ver. 4.) His purposes perish, and he passes away. The masters of one age are deposed by those who come after them, and their systems are exploded.

II. THOSE ONLY ARE HAPPY WHO TRUST IN JEHOVAH. (Vers. 5—10.) 1. *God is the almighty Creator.* (Ver. 6.) Of the heavens, the earth, the sun, and all living things. This is *power*, spiritual and physical. 2. *God unchangeably adheres to the fulfilment of his promises.* (Ver. 6.) "Keepeth truth for ever." Men easily change their mind, and do not keep their word. 3. *He obtains right for the oppressed.* (Ver. 7.) Cannot allow unrighteous men a final triumph over the weak and unprotected. Succours those who suffer wrong without doing wrong. 4. *Provides daily bread for the poor and needy.* (Ver. 7.) God is a *bountiful* God, "who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." 5. *Is beneficent and gracious, as the Ruler of men.* (Vers. 7—9.) "Looseth the prisoners" (Isa. lxi. 1). "Openeth the eyes of the blind"—both of the mind and the body. "Raiseth up the fallen, and upholds the fainting." "He loveth the righteous," but he is tender towards all the naturally defenceless—the *strangers*, the *widow*, and the *fatherless*. 6. *God's kingdom endureth for ever.* (Ver. 10.) The eternal duration of his kingdom is the guarantee for its future glorious completion, and for the ultimate victories of love.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXLVII.

THIS psalm is generally assigned to the time of the dedication of the city wall (Neh. xii. 27—43), when the gate-towers had been set up, and the gates and bars

put in their places (see ver. 13; and comp. Neh. vii. 1—3). It is, more manifestly than any of the others, a Return joy-song (vers. 2, 12—14). Its delicate appreciation of the grandeur and beauty of nature, and of God's closeness to nature (vers. 4, 8, 9, 14,

16—18), is almost peculiar to it. Metrically, it seems to divide into three stanzas or strophes—one of six (vers. 1—6), one of five (vers. 7—11), and one of nine verses (vers. 12—20).

Ver. 1.—Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God (comp. Ps. xcii. 1). For it is pleasant (see Ps. cxxxv. 3). And praise is comely; rather, *becoming*, or *seemly*—suitable, that is, to such a Being as we know God to be.

Ver. 2.—The Lord doth build up Jerusalem. The rebuilding of Jerusalem after the return from the Babylonish captivity covered a space of above ninety years, from B.C. 538 till B.C. 445. First the temple was built (n.c. 538—515); then the city; finally, the walls and the gates (B.C. 445). It was in connection with this last portion of the building that the present psalm seems to have been written. **He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.** The exiles returned gradually—some with Zerubbabel (B.C. 538); some with Ezra, in B.C. 457; others, doubtless, with Nehemiah, in B.C. 445; and again in B.C. 434.

Ver. 3.—He healeth the broken in heart (comp. Ps. li. 17; Isa. lvii. 15). Israel in exile was broken-hearted, wretched, miserable (see Ps. cxxxvii. 1—4; Isa. lxiv. 6—12). Their restoration to their own land “healed” them. And bindeth up their wounds (comp. Isa. lxi. 1, “He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted”).

Ver. 4.—He telleth the number of the stars. Nothing escapes God’s knowledge. He knew the number of the exiles, and the place and name of each, just as he knows the number of the stars and their names (comp. Isa. xl. 26). **He calleth them all by their names** (see Job ix. 9; Isa., *l.c.*).

Ver. 5.—Great is our Lord, and of great power; or, “mighty in strength” (comp. Nah. i. 3). His understanding is infinite. He is at once omnipotent and omniscient.

Ver. 6.—The Lord lifteth up the meek (comp. Ps. cxlv. 14; cxlvi. 8). **He casteth the wicked down to the ground** (comp. Ps. cxlvi. 9, and the comment *ad loc.*).

Ver. 7.—Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving. God is not only to be praised for his greatness (ver. 5), but also to be thanked for his loving-kindness (vers. 2, 3, 8, 9). **Sing praise upon the harp unto our God.** The glad sound of the harp should accompany his praises.

Ver. 8.—Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth. In the parched and sultry East “clouds” and “rain” are a boon that we of the temperate West can scarcely appreciate. The cruel heat of the solar rays in a clear

sky for weeks or months together causes a longing of the intensest kind for shade and moisture. Man and beast alike rejoice when the time of the autumn rains draws near, and the cloudless blue of the summer heaven gives place to a sky that is grey and overcast (comp. Job xxxviii. 25—41; Ps. civ. 13). **Who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.** The “mountains,” and even the plains of Palestine, are, with rare exceptions, completely burnt up at the close of summer, and show no verdure, but merely an arid sapless, brown or buff vegetation. When the “former rain” begins, a great change begins. Tender green blades of grass at once sprout up, and in a little time the whole country shows a tinge of verdure.

Ver. 9.—He giveth to the beast his food (comp. Ps. civ. 27; cxlv. 15, 16). The constant supplies of their own proper food to all classes of animals are among the principal proofs of God’s power and goodness. And to the young ravens which cry. Even the unclean raven, with his harsh croak and inelegant form, is not neglected (comp. Luke xii. 24, “God feedeth them”).

Ver. 10.—Hedelighteth not in the strength of the horse. In a certain sense, God no doubt “delights” in the glory and excellency of all his creatures; but their physical endowments do not give him the sensible pleasure which he derives from the moral qualities of his rational creation (see ver. 11). The negation is not absolute, but relative (compare “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice”). **He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man; i.e. in his strength and swiftness.**

Ver. 11.—The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him (comp. Ps. cxlix. 4). The “fear” intended is, of course, that which includes trust and love (see the next clause). **In those that hope in his mercy; or, “that wait for his loving-kindness.”**

Ver. 12.—Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem. The other exhortations to praise in the psalm are general (vers. 1, 7); now a special call is made on Jerusalem to give him praise, since Jerusalem has lately experienced special mercies (vers. 13, 14). **Praise thy God, O Zion** (comp. Ps. cxlvi. 10).

Ver. 13.—For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates. The strength of gates in the ancient world depended wholly upon their bars, which were generally strong beams of wood passed across from side to side of the gateway, about midway up the gate, having their ends inserted into strong iron hooks or clamps, which were let into the stonework of the walls. The “bars” of the gates of Jerusalem are mentioned in Nehemiah repeatedly (ch. iii. 3, 6, 13, 14

15; vii. 3). He hath blessed thy children within thee. Under Nehemiah's government, when he had firmly established it, Israel enjoyed a period of repose and of great prosperity, which, at the date of the psalm, was probably just commencing.

Ver. 14.—*He maketh peace in thy borders.* The completion of the walls and gates of Jerusalem brought to an end the troubles caused by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, and established general peace and tranquillity in Israel. And filleth thee with the finest of the wheat; literally, *with the fat of wheat*; i.e. wheat in abundance and of good quality. The prosperity of Nehemiah's time appears in Neh. x. 28—39; xii. 44—47; xiii. 12—15.

Ver. 15.—*He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth.* Heavy crops, good harvests, abundant food, result from God's providential ordering of his world, to which he gives commands that are obeyed instantly, since his word runneth very swiftly.

Ver. 16.—*He giveth snow like wool.* The loveliness of new-fallen snow has evidently been felt by the psalmist, to whom it has seemed like a spotless robe of whitest wool spread upon the earth. Snow, though rare in Palestine, does occasionally fall, and is said to "cover the streets of Jerusalem two winters out of three. It generally comes in small quantities; but there are sometimes very snowy winters." In 1879, for instance, snow lay in Jerusalem to a depth of seventeen inches (Geikie, 'The Holy Land and the Bible,' vol. ii. p. 58). He scattereth the hoar-frost like ashes. The metaphor is less appropriate, and was selected, probably, on account of the near resemblance of the two words, *kēphor* and *kāēpher*.

Ver. 17.—*He casteth forth his ice like morsels*; or, "like crumbs;" i.e. in profusion, as men feed birds. The "ice" intended would seem to be that of hail-stones. Who can stand before his cold?

Though the thermometer rarely shows more than six or seven degrees of frost in Palestine, yet the Oriental is as much chilled by such a temperature as the Englishman by one twenty degrees lower. He shivers in his light attire, and is very reluctant to leave the shelter of his house or tent.

Ver. 18.—*He sendeth out his word, and melteth them* (comp. ver. 15). God has only to "speak the word," and all trace of winter disappears—hoar-frost, hail, snow, melt away, and the atmosphere is once more soft and genial. He causeth his wind to blow. The change usually comes with a change of wind, which, as with ourselves, is commonly cold from the north and east, warm from the west and south. And the waters flow. A thaw sets in, and soon all the watercourses are full of rushing streams.

Ver. 19.—*He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel.* Beyond and above all the physical blessings which God bestows on man are the gifts of spiritual enlightenment and direction. These also Israel may count on receiving from him, who has already given them a written revelation—"statutes and judgments"—while he also enlightens and directs them from time to time by his prophets.

Ver. 20.—*He hath not dealt so with any nation.* Though the Word of God, to a certain extent, "lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John i. 9), yet this light of nature is not to be compared to the revelation vouchsafed to Israel. Israel was God's "peculiar people," and had peculiar privileges, which involved special responsibilities. And as for his judgments, they (i.e. the nations) have not known them (comp. Amos iii. 2, "You only have I known out of all the families of the earth: therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities"). Praise ye the Lord (comp. ver. 1).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—11.—*Foundation-truths.* We are summoned by the psalmist to praise God; we are told that praise is "pleasant" and "comely" (ver. 1); it is an act which is congenial and fitting, because the God we worship is one who is worthy of all the homage we can pay him; he is "greatly to be praised" (Ps. cxlv. 3). The grounds on which we are invited to bless God are very familiar, but they are very sound and strong; we can never dwell too much upon them.

I. HIS INFINITY IN UNDERSTANDING. (Ver. 5.) "There is no searching of his understanding" (Isa. xl. 28; see Rom. xi. 33—36). When we consider what must be the understanding of him who created and who sustains this marvellous framework of nature, who guides and upholds all things throughout the vast universe, every smallest thing as well as the greatest being subject to him and dependent upon him, we get some faint idea of the absolute boundlessness of the Divine wisdom.

II. HIS ALMIGHTINESS. "Of great power" (ver 5).

III. HIS BENEFICENCE. (Vers. 8, 9.) It would be a terrible thing, indeed, for all created beings if almighty power were under the control of malevolence, or even of selfishness. We see what happens when exceptional human power is directed by unscrupulousness; we see what suffering, what desolation, is the result. We are so familiar with the thought of God's goodness that we are not much affected by it; but we ought to be profoundly stirred by the truth that omnipotence, exercised everywhere in God's vast domain, through every sphere, is put forth to feed, to clothe, to shelter, to help, to relieve, to brighten, to bless.

IV. HIS CONDESCENSION. (Ver. 4.) God "humbles himself to behold" every particular star that shines in the heavens, every single event that happens on the earth, every individual human soul that thinks, that feels, that struggles, that endures. Christ "callesth his own sheep by name" (John x. 3). He not only cares generally for his flock, but particularly for each member of it.

V. HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Ver. 6.) Those who are content to accept his ruling, and to take cheerfully the humblest sphere he has assigned them, he "lifts up;" to them he gives honour, satisfaction, joy, life. The meek are made to "inherit the land" (Matt. v. 5), to spend peaceful, happy, useful days. But the wicked that exalt themselves unjustly and unscrupulously, he "casteth to the ground." God makes pride, violence, vice, to lead downwards, and to end in shame.

VI. HIS TENDERNESS. (Ver. 3.) When our spirit is very sorely wounded, when our heart bleeds after some specially hard blow, then we shrink from the rough handling of conventional condolence; we feel that we cannot bear the touch of any hand but the gentlest of all. There is often the truest kindness in silent sympathy, for speech would be hurtful, and make the wound bleed again. Only Christ can help us then. He can render us the ministry we need—can heal the broken heart, and bind up its wounds. There are deep places through which, now and again, we have to pass, of which it has been truly said, "That is a mighty baptism, and only Christ can go down with us into those waters." But he can, and he does. His Divine tenderness "soothes our sorrows, and heals our wounds."

VII. HIS GOOD PLEASURE. (Vers. 10, 11.) God's regard is not given to any of those outward and visible things, in beholding which we take pleasure, and on which we rely for safety; his regard is granted to the human spirit that is reverently turned to him in lowly worship, to the heart that is trusting in his promised mercy. The Divine Saviour is not approving the Church that is boasting of its wealth, or its numbers, or the compactness of its organization; he is well pleased with the little company of souls that are realizing his presence, having true fellowship with him, sharing his suffering and sacrifice, leaning on his Word.

VIII. HIS SALVATION AND RESTORATION. (Ver. 2.) He who brought back the exiles from Babylon, redeeming them from servitude and dishonour, and who "built up" Jerusalem, is the God who now brings home to himself those that have been afar off; and is he who now builds up his Church in the face of its enemies.

Vers. 12—20.—*National well-being.* Piety and patriotism, that go so well together and were so intimately bound together in the mind of the Jews, are here very closely associated. We, too, are convinced that the future of our country will be determined by its faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the Lord whom it professes to serve. There are four features of national well-being here.

I. SECURITY. (Ver. 13.) "He hath strengthened the bars of thy gates." Jerusalem was surrounded by its protecting walls (Neh. ii. 12), and its citizens could work in safety and rest in peace. In our island home, which has known no shadow of fear of invasion for eighty years, we cannot realize how great a blessing is freedom from that great national evil, or from the dread of it. The thought hardly enters into our minds. But we have, if we would think about it, all the more occasion for gratitude that we abide in such continuous safety and security; we have "peace in our borders."

II. PROSPERITY. (Vers. 14—18.) The wealth of a country depends very largely on the industry, the frugality, and the forethought of its people. If they do not carefully, systematically, and (we may add) scientifically cultivate its fields, spare and plant its trees, penetrate its mines and its waters, save their resources for renewed fertilization

and for enterprise of various kinds, the country will, in these times of competition more especially, certainly decline. But its prosperity also depends on the bounties of Divine providence: on the fall of rain and snow; on the regular return of the seasons in their order; on the cold winds of winter, and the warm airs of summer; on the pulverising frosts and the ripening sunshine. It is the bountiful hand of Heaven that gives the rich harvest, and fills the garners with the "finest of the wheat."

III. HOMES AND HOME-LIFE. "He hath blessed thy children within thee" (ver. 13). No product of field or mine can be compared with that of the homes of the people. Happy is the nation that dwells in homes of purity, peace, love, piety!

IV. RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGE. (Vers. 19, 20.) The distinguishing blessing of Israel was its knowledge of the true God, and its consequent training in all personal, domestic, and social virtues. The people of Israel were acquainted with the "word," and therefore with the will of God, and their life was, to some large extent in their better days, ordered according to his "statutes" and "judgments." In their worship, in their pursuits, and in their homes, they rejoiced before the Lord, and they walked in his ways. This is the crowning blessing. Perhaps we may think that we in this country may adopt the language of the psalmist, and apply it to ourselves: "he hath not dealt so with any nation." That might be the exaggeration of a complacent patriotism, but would it not rather be the right feeling of a grateful piety? With all our sacred edifices, our Christian ministry, our evangelizing and philanthropic institutions (healing, preserving, remedial), our educational advantages, our preservation of the seventh day as a day of rest and worship, have we not received, and do we not retain, a measure of privilege which calls for intense gratitude, which also lays us under very serious obligation? For, from those to whom much is given much will be required; "exalted to heaven" in privilege, let us see that we are not "cast down to hell" in condemnation for not availing ourselves of it, and "knowing the day of our visitation."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*In praise of praise.* This psalm carries on and gloriously sustains the great Hallel of adoring gratitude and glad thanksgiving with which the Book of Psalms ends. This first verse contains a threefold laudation of the Lord's praise.

I. BECAUSE "IT IS GOOD." And this is most true. 1. In reference to God. For it ministers pleasure to him. Do not the experiences of many a parental heart bear witness to this truth? Are not we delighted with the loving utterances of our children, by which they testify their heart's affection towards us? It may be but the prattle of childish lips, or the lisping of such as are hardly more than babes, but it is delightful all the same; and our children's affection, when it has become older and more thoughtful,—what would our homes be without it? And right sure are we that our poor praise delights the Lord to whom it is rendered; he recognizes in it that response to his own love, for which all love, and emphatically his, cannot but crave. And it is good in his sight, further, because it wins him glory from men.

II. BECAUSE "IT IS PLEASANT."

III. BECAUSE "IT IS COMELY."—S. O.

Ver. 1.—*The pleasantness of praise.* When the poet Carpani inquired of his friend Haydn how it happened that his church music was always so cheerful, the great composer made the following reply: "I cannot make it otherwise; I write according to the thought I feel. When I think upon God, my heart is so full of joy that the notes dance and leap, as it were, from my pen, and since God has given me a cheerful heart, it will be pardoned me that I praise him with a cheerful spirit." Religious life and relations are often wrongly toned through the influence of the strange sentiment that what is acceptable to God must be a strain and trial to us. This strange sentiment rests on the mistaken idea that matter itself is evil, and, as man is material, his work is, at every cost, to master and crush the material element. This is at the root of Hinduism and Buddhism; it inspires the hermit; it fills nunneries and monasteries; and it explains the bodily austerities of good men, such as Henry Martyn, who walked about

with pebbles in his shoes, as if to make himself miserable and so make himself acceptable to God. This notion is far more widespread, and far more mischievous, than is usually recognized. Constantly we find good people suspecting themselves of insincerity, or quite sure that something dreadful is going to happen, if they find themselves happy, and really enjoying their religious duties and exercises.

I. TO FEEL THE PLEASANTNESS OF PRAISE IS A SIGN OF CHERISHING RIGHT THOUGHTS OF GOD. What he recognizes is the *good* of his creatures, and that includes their *happiness*. And this characteristic of God is in no way affected by the fact that man has sinned. God is still anxious for his happiness, and helps him out of the bondage of sin that he may be happy. Long faces, miserable tones, depressing anticipations, and exaggerated and constant wailings about sin, do not honour or please God. He wants even his sinful children to find and feel the *pleasantness* of the praise they offer to him. It is *comely* to enjoy our religion.

II. TO FEEL THE PLEASANTNESS OF PRAISE IS A SIGN OF CHERISHING RIGHT THOUGHTS CONCERNING OURSELVES. There are times when a man ought to cherish a due sense of his sinfulness and sin, but to be always wailing over it nourishes formality and insincerity. A man is a sinner, but he is a child of God nevertheless, and does well to remember his sonship oftener than his sin.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*God's help for the suffering ones.* "It takes a brave soul to bear all this so grandly," said a tender-hearted doctor, stooping over his suffering patient. She lifted her heavy eyelids, and, looking into the doctor's face, replied, "It is not the brave soul at all; God does it all for me." "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." The second clause of this sentence may but repeat the first with a slight variety, according to the Hebrew fashion of composition which we have had several times to observe. But we may meditatively recognize a distinction between the clauses, referring the first to the heart-sphere, and the second to the bodily.

I. MAN'S SUFFERINGS BELONG TO TWO SPHERES. Answering to man as a dual being. He *is* a spirit. He *has* a body. So he has the possibility of suffering in the spirit that he *is*, and in the body that he *has*. Bodily wounds bring before us the whole sphere of sufferings which relate to the bodily organization and relations. It may be true that bodily pain directly affects the spirit, but it is equally true, if more subtle, that pain in the spirit affects the body. Still we can keep the two separate in thought. What an accumulation and variety of pains and woes can affect the human body! How tempted we are to think that these are the supreme woes! They are not. The broken heart is the woe of woes. The distresses of the spirit are the supreme distresses. Afflict a man's body, and body-sphere, even as Job was afflicted, the man does not know what suffering is until he suffers in his *soul*. This is impressively seen on Calvary, where was the very height of bodily woe. There we see the transcendent woe of the suffering *soul*.

II. GOD'S HELP BELONGS TO THE TWO SPHERES. "Who forgiveth all our iniquities, and healeth all our diseases;" "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." This is no less true, because for his healings in the bodily sphere God uses agencies that we can recognize. He uses agencies also for his healings in the spirit-sphere, though they often are such as we *cannot* recognize. Even when we are willing to pray to God for the healing of our bodily pains, we are mournfully unwilling—or it may be we do not think it right—to seek God's help in our suffering mental and spiritual states. God for our *woes of feeling* we all but very imperfectly realize.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The Lord's ways with the meek.* This term often means "the afflicted." This word "meek" has several distinct meanings as used in the Word of God, but its root-idea seems to be "lowly feeling about ourselves." This associates with both "humility" and "disinterestedness." Sometimes the bad side of the word comes into view, and it expresses the feeling of the crushed man, who has become heartless, spiritless, who is broken down, who has wholly lost his energy; who, like David in his time of distress, wails out his faithless fear, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul!" There is something of that heartlessness and hopelessness indicated in this text.

I. THE LORD IS NOT ALTOGETHER INDIFFERENT TO THEM. He might be. They must be to him somewhat as the wayside beggar is to us. How often we pass him by with utter indifference! and when we have any feeling at all, it is only a revulsion from the miserable object. Yet when we think of it, that state of mind distresses us. We cannot be really good; for if we were, no form of humiliation or distress would fail to touch us with the tenderest pity. God cannot be indifferent to the meek.

II. THE LORD DOES NOT PITY THEM, AND STAND ASIDE. As the priest and Levite did when they came and looked on the stripped and wounded sufferer. Too often man pities, and does nothing; comforting himself with the thought that he pitied, and so was evidently tender and sensitive in feeling. Situations presented in novels excite our pity, but they do us no moral good, because we have no chance of putting our pity into helpful action. We could have no heart-rest in God, if all we could be sure about him was that he pitied us.

III. THE LORD GRACIOUSLY HELPS THOSE WHOM HE PITIES. As did the good Samaritan, spending himself to relieve the man whose distress awakened his pitiful feeling. The help God gives is put into a word which precisely matches the word "meek." He *upholdeth*. The crushed, humbled, heartless man is in danger of falling and fainting. He can hardly hold himself up. So precisely what he needs is steady-ing, upholding, everlasting arms put about him until he can feel his feet, recover his strength, find life flow freely again, and smile into God's watching face the smile of recovered hope.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*God's care of the mountain grasses.* The following extract from Hugh Macmillan's 'Bible Teaching in Nature' suggests both sermon-topic and illustration, and the peculiarities noticed are fresh and unfamiliar: "The mountain grasses grow spontaneously; they require no culture but such as the rain and the sunshine of heaven supply. They obtain their nourishment directly from the inorganic soil, and are independent of organic materials. Nowhere is the grass so green and vigorous as on the beautiful slopes of lawn-like pasture high up on the Alps, radiant with the glory of wild flowers, and ever musical with the hum of grasshoppers, and the tinkling of cattle-bells. Innumerable cows and goats browse upon them; the peasants spend the summer months in making cheese and hay from them for winter consumption in the valleys. This exhausting system of husbandry has been carried on during untold centuries; no one thinks of manuring the Alpine pastures; and yet no deficiency has been observed in their fertility, though the soil is but a thin covering spread over the naked rocks. It may be regarded as a part of the same wise and gracious arrangement of Providence that the insects which devour the grasses on the Kuh and Schaf Alpen, the pasturages of the cows and sheep, are kept in check by a predominance of carnivorous insects. In all the mountain meadows, it has been ascertained that the species of carnivorous are at least four times as numerous as the species of herb-eating insects. Thus, in the absence of birds, which are rare in Switzerland, the pastures are preserved from a terrible scourge. To one not aware of this check, it may seem surprising how the verdure of the Alpine pastures should be so rich and luxuriant, considering the immense development of insect-life. The grass, whenever the sun shines, is literally swarming with them—butterflies of gayest hues, and beetles of brightest iridescence; and the air is filled with their loud murmurs. I remember well the vivid feeling of God's gracious providence which possessed me when passing over the Wengern Alp, at the foot of the Jung Frau, and seeing, wherever I rested on the green turf, the balance of nature so wonderfully preserved between the herb which is for man's food, and the moth before which he is crushed. Were the herbivorous insects allowed to multiply to their full extent, in such favourable circumstances as the warmth of the air and the verdure of the earth in Switzerland produce, the rich pastures which now yield abundant food for upwards of a million and a half of cattle would speedily become bare and leafless deserts. Not only in their power of growing without cultivation, but also in the peculiarities of their structure, the mountain grasses proclaim the hand of God. Many of them are viviparous. Instead of producing flowers and seeds, as the grasses in the tranquil valleys do, the young plants spring from them perfectly formed. They cling round the stem, and form a kind of blossom. In this state they remain until the parent stalk withers and falls prostrate on the

ground, when they immediately strike root and form independent grasses. This is a remarkable adaptation to circumstances; for it is manifest that were seeds, instead of living plants, developed in the ears of the mountain grasses, they would be useless in the stormy region where they grow. They would be blown away, far from the places they were intended to clothe, to spots foreign to their nature and habits, and thus the species would speedily perish." Ruskin says, "Look up to the higher hills, where the waves of green roll silently into long inlets among the shadows of the pines, and we may perhaps know the meaning of those quiet words of Ps. cxlvii. 8."—R. T.

Vers. 16, 17.—*The lessons of the winter.* "What can be lovelier than the glittering jewels with which the hoar-frost bedizens every leaf and spray of the woodland? Or the translucent azure of the glacier crevasses with their long pendants of lustrous ice? There are beautiful things in winter as well as in summer; and we need the cold, unearthly splendours of the one as much as the glowing, living charms of the other to educate our sense of God's greatness in his works. But beauty is everywhere in nature the flower of utility; and in the realms of frost this quality is most strikingly displayed" (Hugh Macmillan). There is a short, but sharp winter-time in the Holy Land, extending from the middle of December to the middle of February. There are severe winds from the north and north-east, with heavy rains and frosts. Kings often had "winter houses." Even the seasons God has made to fit in with man's highest needs. Winter is the stillness and re-rooting of the year. It is as truly a busy time as any other time of the year, but the activities go on in secret, underground. So in man's religious life. He needs re-rooting times. Seasons when activity must give place to culture, in preparation for further and higher activities. Times of stillness, sickness, trouble, are the great winter-times for soul-rooting. The actual winter-time is a time of great opportunities for our religious life. 1. It may be a time of personal soul-culture. 2. It may be a time of intellectual nourishment. 3. It may be a time of social intercourse. 4. It may be a time of Christian work. It is the Church's best time for work. When telling what the Lord Jesus did in Solomon's porch, John says, "It was winter." He did not suffer himself to be unduly affected by outward conditions, or hindered in his work by them. In winter he was still "about his Father's business." He mastered the cold to carry out good plans. Winter is, for us, full of temptations to self-indulgence. Are we mastering the temptations, and winning our winters for God?—R. T.

Ver. 16.—*The mission of the frost and the snow.* "He wraps the earth in snow as in a warm white woollen garment, and scatters the frost so that the trees, etc., appear as if powdered with (wood) ashes blown about by the wind." The rain, the frost, and the snow are all forms of moisture. Winter is God's time for putting things to rights. Three things especially want renewing and replenishing—the earth, the air, the water, and to do this replenishing is the mission of the frost, the snow, and the rain. But everything that God does is beautiful as well as useful; and so we find the hoar-frost makes an exquisite silvery world; the snow hangs in festoons of wonderful glistening whiteness; and the rain makes the lovely cascades leap from crag to crag down the hillsides. We think now chiefly of their usefulness. The frost breaks up the ground, checks the too abundant growth of insect-life, and keeps the air cool to check vegetation, and make the sap in the trees wait for its due time. The snow penetrates the soil, and nourishes it both with warmth and moisture; and it carries to the ground some of the chemical elements it needs to fit it for its new year's work. And the rain refills the secret springs whence our fresh water comes, and washes down from the hillsides new soil with which to fertilize the valleys. God does grandly in his winter-time what we see the farmer doing in his little way—ploughing, manuring, hedging, ditching, road-repairing, etc.; getting ready for summer's life and growth. And the frost and the snow may carry this as their message to our hearts concerning God's dealings with us. "We have apparently very severe and hard things to do for God; but we try to do them cheerfully, and we try to do them well, and, after all, they are really very kind things, only the *gracious* severities of the infinite love."—R. T.

Vers. 1—6.—*Jehovah the infinitely Mighty and Omniscient One, in the creation and*

in the human world, worthy, therefore, of all praise and worship. "Celebrates God's almighty and gracious rule over his people, and over the world of nature, but mingles with this a special commemoration of his goodness in bringing back his people from their captivity, and rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem."

I. GOD IS ALMIGHTY IN THE WORK OF THE MATERIAL UNIVERSE. 1. *He created the heavenly worlds.* (Isa. xl. 26.) 2. *He has a perfect knowledge of them.* (Ver. 4.) He knows all the innumerable multitude: "teloth the number of the stars." And knows each one of them in particular: "and calleth them all by their names." "Not one faileth." God is great in power, and great in knowledge; "there is no searching of his understanding." The inference from all this is only suggested, not stated.

II. GOD IS ALL-GOOD AS WELL AS ALMIGHTY AND OMNISCIENT. (Vers. 2, 3, 6.) He must know and be able to succour human woe to whom it is an easy thing to create and count and guide the stars. 1. *He can recover from slavery and restore to freedom.* (Ver. 2.) Those who have been taken captive, and dispersed abroad. Slaves are those fit for slavery. 2. *He can restore men from the depths of suffering and despair.* (Ver. 3.) The broken in heart, and most deeply wounded. 3. *God's justice is perfect in its retributive work.* (Ver. 6.) He exalts the righteous above their afflictions, and casts down the prosperous wicked.—S.

Vers. 7—11.—*God worthy of praise.* "A fresh burst of praise because of God's Fatherly care, as shown in his provision for the wants of the cattle and the fowls of the air. And as he feeds the ravens, which have neither storehouse nor barn, but only cry to him for their food, so amongst men his delight is not in those who trust in their own strength and swiftness, but in those who look to him, and put their trust in his goodness." God is to be praised—

I. BECAUSE HE PROVIDES FOR THE FERTILITY OF THE MATERIAL WORLD. Clouds temper the heat of the sun as well as pour forth rain to fertilize the earth, and make it productive of food for man and beast. The chain of connection between God and man bountifully set forth in Hos. ii. 21, 22, "I will hear the heavens," etc.

II. BECAUSE OF HIS BOUNTY TOWARDS ALL ORDERS OF THE ANIMAL CREATION. Grass upon the mountains where the herds and flocks feed, and which the plough and labours of man cannot reach. God is the Shepherd of all inferior as well as superior life. The young ravens, which are forsaken and cast off by their mothers very early, unconsciously cry to him for food, and are fed. The great and the small equally provided for by his bountiful, universal care.

III. THOUGH GOD IS THE SOURCE OF ALL STRENGTH, HE HAS ONLY AN INFERIOR PLEASURE IN PHYSICAL STRENGTH. (Ver. 10.) "The strength of the hills is his also;" "Strong in power; not one faileth." He must delight in power of all kinds, intellectual and moral, as we do. But neither for himself nor for man is mere strength his chief delight.

IV. GOD'S GLORY IS IN DISPENSING HELP TO THOSE WHO TRUST AND HOPE IN HIM. His delight is in goodness. Gives confidence and courage to those who fear him. Gives strength and riches to those who hope for his loving-kindness. Gives to them his mercy.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXLVIII.

THIS psalm has been well called "the joy-song of creation." Israel, having received a signal manifestation of the Divine power (ver. 14), calls on all things in heaven and earth to praise Jehovah. In respect of heaven, commencement is made with the angels, from whom the writer descends to

the sun and moon, the stars, the spacious firmament, and the clouds that float in it and above it (vers. 2—4). In respect of earth, the writer begins with the lowest parts—the deep sea, and the monsters dwelling therein—whence he makes a sudden ascent to the highest parts—the atmosphere and the manifestations peculiar to it—lightning, hail, snow, vapour, stormy

wind; hence he again comes back to solid earth—mountains, hills, trees, beasts, creeping things, and flying fowl (vers. 7—10). Lastly, the discourse touches on man, and calls on him to join in the chorus of jubilation (vers. 11—13). Professor Cheyne remarks that "in this psalm and in the *De Profundis* we seem to touch the opposite ends of the gamut of emotion." In the one we have the dirge of the Church; in the other, its "Hallelujah Chorus." Metrically, two strophes of six verses each (vers. 1—6, 7—12) are followed by one of two (vers. 13, 14), assigning the motive for the entire psalm.

Ver. 1.—Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens; *i.e.* beginning at the heavens, making them the primary source from which the praises are to be drawn (comp. ver. 7). **Praise him in the heights; in excelsis** (Vulgate). In the upper regions, or the most exalted regions of his creation.

Ver. 2.—Praise ye him, all his angels (comp. Ps. ciii. 20, 21). As the angels occupy the first rank in creation, and have the most to praise God for, they are fitly called upon to commence the song of jubilation. The praises of God must form their chief occupation through all eternity. **Praise ye him, all his hosts; rather, all his host.** In the "host of God" are included beings of inferior rank to angels—"ministers of his that do his pleasure" (Ps. ciii. 21).

Ver. 3.—Praise ye him, sun and moon. Objects of worship to most heathen nations, but here called upon to join in the chorus of praise to God. **Praise him, all ye stars of light; i.e.** ye brilliant stars, that light up the heaven at night.

Ver. 4.—Praise him, ye heavens of heavens; i.e. "ye highest heavens" (comp. Deut. x. 14; 1 Kings viii. 27; Ps. lxxviii. 33). **And ye waters that be above the heavens** (comp. Gen. i. 7). The clouds are probably intended.

Ver. 5.—Let them praise the Name of the Lord. Frequent changes of person, when no doubt can arise as to the meaning, are a sort of Hebrew idiom. They give liveliness and variety. For he commanded, and they were created (Gen. i. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 15, etc.). All creation sprang into being at the word of God (Ps. xxxiii. 8).

Ver. 6.—He hath also established them for ever and ever (comp. Ps. lxxxix. 37). The expression, "for ever and ever," must not be pressed. It means "for all time"—while heaven and earth endure—but does not imply an absolute perpetuity. **He hath**

made a decree which shall not pass; rather, which shall not pass away (see the Revised Version; and comp. Gen. viii. 22; Jer. xxxi. 35, 36; xxxiii. 25).

Ver. 7.—Praise the Lord from the earth. The counterpart of the clause in ver. 1, "Praise ye the Lord from the heavens." Earth must join with heaven in the praise of God. **Ye dragons; or, "ye sea-monsters"** (comp. Ps. lxxiv. 13, where the same word is used). Hengstenberg translates by "whales;" but all the greater sea-animals are probably included. **And all deeps.** The extreme "ocean depths" are meant—"lower deeps," in certain parts of what was commonly known as "the great deep" (Ps. xxxvi. 6).

Ver. 8.—Fire and hail. By "fire," in this combination, we must understand "lightning," or rather the various electrical phenomena accompanying storms in the East, which are sometimes very strange and terrible. **Snow and vapours; rather, vapour.** The mist so often accompanying snowstorms is probably the "vapour" intended. **Stormy wind fulfilling his word** (comp. Ps. cvii. 25).

Ver. 9.—Mountains, and all hills. The later psalmists are great admirers of "mountains." Perhaps the flat and monotonous Babylonian plains led them to appreciate the beauties of a landscape like that of Palestine (comp. Pss. lxxxiii. 14; cxiv. 4, 6; cxliv. 5; cxlvii. 8). **Fruitful trees; rather, fruit trees; literally, trees of fruit.** The Babylonian palms may have swept across the writer's remembrance; but probably the vine, the olive, and the fig, which were among the chief glories of Palestine, were in his mind principally. **And all cedars.** Babylonia had had no "cedars." When the exiles returned, the beauty of the cedar broke upon them as a sort of new revelation.

Ver. 10.—Beasts, and all cattle. There is a gradual ascent—from inanimate to animate things, from the "beasts" of the field to domesticated animals; from such animals to man (vers. 11, 12). **Creeping things** (comp. Gen. i. 24, 25, 30; Ps. civ. 25). **And flying fowl; literally, bird of wing.** The intention is to include, under a few heads, all animate creation.

Ver. 11.—Kings of the earth, and all people; rather, all peoples; or, all nations. Princes, and all judges of the earth. "Kings," "princes," and "judges" represent the upper classes of society; "peoples," or "nations," all the remainder. Together, they include the whole race of mankind.

Ver. 12.—Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children. All mankind, *i.e.*, of each sex and of every age. The obligation to praise God lies upon all.

Ver. 13.—Let them praise the Name of the Lord. This is the burden of the entire psalm (see especially ver. 5, and comp. vers. 1-4, 7, and 14). For his Name alone is excellent; or, "exalted" (comp. Ps. viii. 1; Isa. xii. 4). The exaltation of God's Name is effected mainly by the praises which his rational creatures render to him. His glory is above the earth and heaven. (On God's "glory," see Ps. viii. 1; xix. 1; lvii. 5, 11; lxiii. 2; lxxxix. 17, etc.) "Earth and heaven" is an unusual phrase; the terms are commonly inverted. Here, perhaps, the order may be accounted for by the law of climax. "His glory is not only above the earth, but even above the heavens."

Ver. 14.—He also exalteth the horn of his people. Great as God is, his greatness does not separate him from his human creatures. On the contrary, it makes the

union between himself and them closer. His might enables him to confer benefits on his people—to "exalt their horn;" i.e. to increase their glory and their strength, and set them up above their enemies. The praise of all his saints. The construction is doubtful. Some regard "praise" as in apposition with "horn," and understand that God, by exalting the "horn" (power) of his saints, exalts also their "praise" or "renown." Others imagine an ellipse, and translate, "Praise belongs to all his saints" (Kay); or, "Seemly is praise for all his saints" (Cheyne). Even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. The "children of Israel" are nearer to God than others, since he has taken them to himself as his own peculiar people, and both "draws nigh" to them (Ps. lxi. 1), and draws them near to him (Jer. xxx. 21). Praise ye the Lord (comp. ver. 1).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1-14.—*The tribute of creation.* The psalmist writes in a very jubilant strain; his mood is that of exultation. The sunshine of prosperity is on his path, and consequently the spirit of sacred joy is in his heart, and words of praise upon his lips. He calls upon the whole universe to pay its tribute of praise to Jehovah. This includes—

I. THE HEAVENLY INTELLIGENCES. (Ver. 2.) It is in full accord with all that we read in both the Old and the New Testament that we think of the angels of God of every rank and order (Col. i. 16) as uniting in the high offices of adoration and thanksgiving. They, with their loftier intelligence, their nearer access, and their larger experience of the Divine goodness, must have a deeper and fuller sense than we have of the greatness and excellency of God.

II. ALL INANIMATE CREATION. Things in heaven (vers. 3, 4), and things on earth (vers. 7-10). All these things were created by his power (ver. 5), are sustained at his word (ver. 6), are regulated and kept within their bounds by his laws (ver. 6), discharge the varied offices he has given them to fulfil (ver. 8), and thus they speak his praise. Even the fire and hail, which seem to be principally destructive, and even the stormy wind, which seems to be uncontrolled and capricious, do the Divine bidding and contribute their part in the service of nature.

III. ALL MANKIND. (Vers. 11, 12.) (1) Those who are accustomed to receive honour rather than to bestow it (ver. 11)—kings and judges of the earth; (2) those whose hearts are full of earthly hopes and loves, and whose lives are crowded with all pleasurable activities; (3) those who have tasted the sweets and enjoyed their portion of earthly life, to whom little is left but quietude and endurance; (4) those whose minds are only just opening to the thought of the spiritual and the Divine, young men and maidens, old men and children;—all mankind should look up from earth to heaven, from those about them to the Father of their spirits, and sing his praise with reverent lip. No human life is at all complete without praise; no human character deserves esteem in which reverence and gratitude do not form an essential part. But above all others, so far as our knowledge goes, are to be counted—

IV. HIS REDEEMED ONES. (Ver. 14.) Israel had been humbled; its "horn" had been degraded to the very dust; it had lost its heritage; it had dwelt in a "strange land" of servitude, far from the house and the home of God. Now it had been restored. Jerusalem had been rebuilt; its walls again surrounded it; its worship had revived; the ransomed of the Lord had returned; it was once more a people "near" to Jehovah, gathering in his house, and realizing his near presence with them. Let Israel lift up its voice of praise above every other. We, too, are God's redeemed ones. From the

bondage of sin we have been restored; we have been redeemed not with silver or gold, but "with the precious blood of Christ;" we have been brought out "into the glorious liberty of the children of God;" we have been raised up to "sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. ii. 6); we have such hopes in our heart as the psalmist sang not of; we are a people "near" in every sense to our God and Saviour, having freest access to his presence and very dear to his heart. What praise should come from our lips, from our souls, from our lives!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Nature's praise-voices.* In this psalm, as in all the poetry of the Old Testament, there is nothing of the idea of something Divine in nature, or even of a Divine voice speaking through nature; all beings are simply creatures, knowing and praising him who made them. All nature has reason to praise the Creator who called it into being, and gave it its order so fair and so established, and poetically the universe may be imagined full of adoring creatures. With the psalmist's point of view that of Wordsworth should be carefully compared. To a Hebrew the conception of a spirit in nature would have been at least germinal idolatry. What we have to keep in view, in reading the nature-psalms, is that kind of impression which high and sublime things universally make on all simple souls—on ordinary men, not on the unusual poet. In these verses the nature-things that are *above us* are wholly in the psalmist's view. And the great things of the firmament—sun, moon, stars, clouds, lightnings, etc.—produce an impression on men everywhere which is unique. The same impression is never produced by anything on the earth; not even by awe-inspiring mountains, or wild wind-driven seas. There is a quietness of impression from nature's *above* things. The movements are so restfully sublime, so steadily continuous. Nothing ever disturbs them; sun and moon and stars go on their way, no matter what happens in the earth-spheres. In all ages, and still, the impression of nature's *above* things is the impression of God. The untutored savage feels it as truly as the devout Christian. That impression made man find in the sun the presentation of God to human apprehension. But it is to be specially noticed that the impression of God which nature's *above* things bring to us, excites us to praise him. The awe it brings draw us near to him; the revelation of him that it makes to us satisfies us in him, fills us with joy in him, so that we must praise.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The permanence of natural law.* "He hath also stablished them for ever and ever." The permanence of natural law is not really any scientific discovery of modern date. It is the commonplace of thoughtful apprehension of facts in all ages. It is the basis of confidence on which man's enterprises have always rested. What is peculiar to modern times is the persistent effort to get law separated from God, to prove that law exists, but that it never had a lawgiver, and that now, for its working, there is no law-controller. Old Testament saints saw in the permanence of natural law the considerate working of the living God for the good of his creatures.

I. THE PERMANENCE OF ALL NATURAL LAWS. The truth is only true when permanence is seen to apply to the *entire sphere* of natural law. It is here that the philosopher constructs an imperfect argument. He affirms that permanence attaches to all laws that are *cognisable by the senses*. But have we any right to say that the sphere of natural law is limited to what we can, under our present conditions, and with our present faculties, apprehend? This may be tried by conceiving that we had seven senses instead of five. The other two senses would reveal to us the working of natural laws which we are wholly unable to apprehend under our present conditions. And the operation of *those* natural laws may explain what we now have to call the miraculous. And this has further to be seen: The permanence of natural law is consistent with the interworking of law; the action of one qualifying the action of another, as when by my will I raise my arm, which gravitation would pull down. The *unknown* natural laws are continually crossing and modifying the known, but always harmoniously.

II. THE PERMANENCE OF ALL MORAL LAWS. It has yet to be taken into full

account that the natural laws include the moral; and that nature can never be explained until the influence on it of God's will and man's is recognized. The moral is as natural for man as the natural is for nature; and the moral is as permanent and absolute as we can conceive the natural to be. But *all* law is in the adjustment and harmonizing of the law-controller.—R. T.

Vers. 7, 8.—*The praise-voices of nature-forces.* How poet-souls recognize the voices of nature may be illustrated by Milton's lines—

"His praise, ye winds, that from four quarters blow,
Breathe soft or loud; and wave your tops, ye pines,
With every plant, in sign of worship wave!"

What is peculiar to the psalmist is his recognizing signs of *will* in nature. He conceives of "stormy wind fulfilling his Word," voluntarily fulfilling it, and so an image of himself. It is a blending of poetic and pious feeling that thus leads man to make of nature a mirror in which he sees himself.

I. MAN PUTTING HIMSELF INTO THINGS. When we are impressed with anything in nature, we, in a sort of unconscious way, say to it, "If I were you, how should I feel, and what should I do?" And then we represent it to ourselves as actually feeling what we should feel, and doing what we should do. In this way the psalmist calls on the winds to praise God, because that is what he would do if he were the wind; and he calls on the wind to fulfil God's Word, because that is what he would do if he were the wind. This is man's interpreting of nature, which is never any more than interpreting himself in the terms of nature. But manifestly this putting of ourselves into things belongs exclusively to the poetic and the pious souls. To most men nature is but a satisfaction of artistic sensibilities: all that can be observed is the beautiful in form and colour. It is but the sublime side of this truth to say that God puts himself into nature to show himself to us, as we put ourselves into nature to show ourselves to him.

II. MAN INFLUENCING HIMSELF BY SEEING HIMSELF IN THINGS. Introspection is neither healthy nor effective. A man must put himself outside himself; must find a mirror of himself, and see himself in the mirror. And what he thus sees is always himself *as he should be*. So the projection of himself is an inspiration to himself. The psalmist sees this in the one matter of obedience. Projecting himself into the stormy wind, he is inspired to the "fulfilling of God's Word."—R. T.

Vers. 11—13.—*The leaders of the nature-choir.* The Church appears as the choir-leader of the universe. "Both sexes and all ages are summoned to the blessed service of song. Those who usually make merry together are to be devoutly joyful together; those who make up the ends of families, that is to say, the elders and the juveniles, should make the Lord their one and only End. Old men should, by their experience, teach the children to praise; and children, by their cheerfulness, should excite old men to sing. There is room for every voice at this concert; fruitful trees and maidens, cedars and young men, angels and children, old men and judges,—all may unite in this oratorio. None, indeed, can be dispensed with: for perfect psalmody we must have the whole universe aroused to worship, and all parts of creation must take their parts in devotion" (C. H. S.).

I. MAN BELONGS TO NATURE. That wondrous inbreathing through which man became a "living soul" did not separate man, or make him a distinct being from nature. This mistaken conception is too often encouraged. Man belongs to nature. His senses bear relation to this nature-sphere. He is subject to all the nature-conditions of the creatures around him. Shares pleasure and pain with them. Needs food as they do. Has the passions they have. He can lead the nature-choir as one of the choir.

II. MAN LEADS NATURE. It is in the line of modern evolution teachings to point out that man *bodily* is the crown of creation; and that man, when his possibilities are all fully developed, will be the crown of creation in the highest and most sublime sense. In praise-power man is supreme. In every choir there are leading voices; in every orchestra leading instruments. This place man occupies. As the chorus of creation

risers to God, he hears the thrilling tones of those who were made in his image and redeemed by his grace.

III. **MAN FINDS VOICE FOR NATURE.** And so puts intelligence, character, tone, heart, into it. As some exquisite solo that seems to carry to our souls all the body of orchestral sound, so man—redeemed man—finds voice for God, voice in which is pathos, praise, devotion, love, which translates for God the whole mass of praise that rises from all creation.—R. T.

Vers. 14.—*Praise inspired by personal experience.* “And he hath lifted up the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints.” The figure of the horn is a familiar one, and need not be again explained. What is noticeable here is that the supreme subject of praise for man is God’s personal dealing with him in the sphere of his moral and religious life. This we refer to as a man’s personal experience.

I. **PRaise INSPIRED BY THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF GOD’S PROVIDENCE.** In *this* man’s praise is common with the praise of all creation and all creatures. All have their being from God; all are sustained in their places in God; all have their movements directed by God; all have their wants supplied by God; all are helped to fulfil their mission by God. “All thy works praise thee, in all places of thy dominion.” And yet here man stands out in front of all creation, because he knows that he is, in his wilfulness, a disturbing element in God’s providence, and so has an altogether fuller sense of the wonder-working of a providence which can remedy and restore, as well as sustain and provide. And besides this general view, each man should have such a particular impression of God’s workings and overrulings in his actual life-experience, as would be for him the constant inspiration of fresh praise and trust. And the experiences of the *individual* may be illustrated by the experience of *God’s people* Israel, whose horn he had so often “lifted up.”

II. **PRaise INSPIRED BY THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF GOD’S GRACE.** Illustrate by John Newton, who, when reproved for his testimony and his joy in Christ, replied, “How can the old blasphemer be silent!” It is here that redeemed man passes out of the sphere of nature, and out of the sphere of ordinary humanity. God has “brought him out of the miry pit and horrible clay, and put a *new song* in his mouth.” And to him all life is but a repetition of the restorings and deliverings which is ever calling forth fresh songs to him who “redeemeth our soul from destruction.”—R. T.

Vers. 7—14.—*The Creator and his creatures.* “The psalmist calls upon the whole creation, in its two great divisions of heaven and earth, to praise God. Things with and things without life, things rational and irrational, are summoned to join the mighty chorus. The psalm is an expression of the loftiest devotion, and embraces the most comprehensive view of the relation of the creature to the Creator.”

I. **IRRATIONAL CREATURES OF THE SEA, LAND, AND AIR ARE BIDDEN INTO THE CHORUS OF PRAISE.** (Vers. 7, 10.) From the monsters of the sea to the creeping things of the earth. *All life*, in its various forms, owes itself to the creative life of God. All creatures, after their own manner, are an echo and reflection of the glory of God; and by sympathy we link them with us in the praise of God.

II. **MATERIAL THINGS PRAISE GOD BY THEIR OBEDIENCE TO THE DIVINE LAW.** (Vers. 8, 9.) “Stormy wind,” that seems far from the control of law, is really obedient to it; like all the other elements—“fire and hail, snow and vapour” (Ps. cvii. 25). All *fruitful* life, “and all cedars”—examples of majesty and beauty—testify to the power and goodness of God. All things are alive to the man of religious sympathies.

III. **ALL RANKS OF HUMAN BEINGS ARE SUMMONED TO PRAISE GOD.**

“Kings and all their subjects.
Princes and judges of the earth;
Young men and maidens,
Old men and children.”

Each rank, each class, has its own theme and reason for praise and worship.

IV. **THE GROUNDS OF PRAISE.** 1. *General.* His Name is greater, more exalted, than the heavens and the earth. 2. *Special.* God has raised his people from deep degradation, and filled them with powers and exultation. “A people near unto him.”—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM CXLIX.

A "Hallelujah Psalm," combining the praise of God for mercies already received with anticipations of future vengeance, through God's help, on heathen enemies that are still bent on persecuting God's "loving ones." The tone is that of Ps. cix., though the expressions used are less fierce. Metrically, the psalm seems to divide itself into three stanzas of three verses each (vers. 1—3, 4—6, 7—9).

Ver. 1.—Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song. A "new song" on account of a new deliverance (comp. Ps. xxxiii. 3). The deliverance may have been one of those under Nehemiah (iv. 7—23; vl. 2—16). And his praise in the congregation of saints. The psalm would seem to have been composed for a special thanksgiving service.

Ver. 2.—Let Israel rejoice in him that made him; or, "in his Maker" (comp. Ps. xcv. 6). This ground of thankfulness Israel possesses in common with all the rest of mankind; but he has also another exclusive ground—let the children of Zion be joyful in their King (comp. Judg. viii. 23; 1 Sam. viii. 7; x. 19; xii. 12, etc.). God, by covenant with Israel, had constituted himself in an especial way their King (Hos. xiii. 10).

Ver. 3.—Let them praise his Name in the dance (comp. Ps. cl. 4). (On the employment of dancing by the Hebrews as a religious exercise, and in their most solemn acts of worship, see Exod. xv. 20; 2 Sam. vi. 14—16.) Let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp. (On the *toph*, or "timbrel," see the comment upon Ps. lxxviii. 25.) It was used to accompany a hymn of rejoicing by Miriam (Exod. xv. 20), by Jephthah's daughter (Judg. xi. 34), and by David (2 Sam. vi. 5).

Ver. 4.—For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people. God had shown by the mercy, whatever it was (ver. 1), recently vouchsafed to his people, that he was well pleased with them, and might be counted on to support and sustain them. He will beautify the meek with salvation. Those who patiently submit to his chastisements God will ultimately "adorn," or "beautify," with his salvation.

Ver. 5.—Let the saints be joyful in glory.

Therefore let God's saints at the present time—his restored people, who have just had a fresh deliverance—rejoice in the "glory" that covers them—rejoice and give God thanks for it. Let them sing aloud upon their beds. Not, as in former days, weeping through the long night (Psa. vi. 6; lxxvii. 2—6), and watering their couches with their tears, but, like Paul and Silas (Acts xvi. 25), singing hymns of praise to God "at midnight" as they rest upon their beds.

Ver. 6.—Let the high praises of God be in their mouth; literally, *in their throat* (comp. Isa. lviii. 1). And a two-edged sword in their hand. Some understand this metaphorically. But the weapons of Jewish warfare in Nehemiah's time were thoroughly carnal (Neh. iv. 13, 16, 17, 18); and against adversaries such as Sanballat, Geshem, and Tobiah, a nation threatened with extermination is certainly entitled to use the sword.

Ver. 7.—To execute vengeance upon the heathen. Not private revenge, but the just vengeance which a threatened nation has, from time to time, to execute on its persecutors in self-defence. And punishments upon the people; rather, *upon the peoples*. A variant of the phrase in the preceding clause, without any serious modification of the meaning.

Ver. 8.—To bind their kings with chains. Even royal captives were thus treated in the ancient world. Assyrian and Babylonian monarchs always represent their captives, even when kings, as fettered. Nebuchadnezzar "bound Zedekiah with fetters of brass" (2 Kings xxv. 7). Parthia, and later Persia, and even Rome, followed the same practice. And their nobles with fetters of iron. On the monuments, captives below the rank of kings are not often seen "fettered." Their arms, however, are frequently tied together with a cord, and they are fastened one to another by a stout rope.

Ver. 9.—To execute upon them the judgment written. The allusion is probably to Deut. xxxii. 41, 42, where God announces the judgments that he will execute upon the oppressors of his people. This honour have all his saints; rather, *a glory is this to all his saints*. "The victories of their Lord reflect glory on all his faithful and devoted servants" (Kov). Praise ye the Lord (comp. ver. 1).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—9.—*God's pleasure in us, and ours in him.* The more particularly inviting passage is found in the fourth verse; but those before and after are also suggestive. Taking them first, and that last, we have—

I. THE CONSTANCY OF OCCASION FOR PRAISING GOD. (Ver. 1.) The "new song" of the psalmist is surely not a fresh composition, though we may well be thankful for the new hymnologist, and consider him a very valuable gift of God to the Church; but it is rather the song which rises fresh from the heart at the consciousness of some fresh mercy received at the hand of God, whether uttered in a familiar or an original strain. And if our hearts are as full of thanksgiving as our lives are crowded with blessings, we shall be always ready to sing "a new song" unto our God. "Moments come fast, but mercies are more free and fleet than they." They who are quick to see loving-kindnesses will not be long before they find a fresh reason for lifting up the heart in praise.

II. PUBLIC WORSHIP. Private and public worship are the complement of one another; neither is complete without the other. We praise God "in the congregation of saints" all the more happily and heartily because we bless him for his goodness in the home. We worship him more reverently in the home because we sing his praise with his people in the sanctuary.

III. GOD'S CLAIM ON US AS OUR CREATOR AND OUR RULER. (Ver. 2.) We cannot too often or too earnestly recall the great fact that our God called us into being, gave us our very selves, made us all that we are, with all our immeasurable capacities and possibilities. He also is the indisputable Sovereign to whom we bring our loyal allegiance, in whom, as our righteous and gracious Ruler, we rejoice.

IV. THE TRIUMPH OF THE TRUTH. (Vers. 6—9.) The psalmist saw in his vision the people of God mingling the praises of their lips with brave and strong blows from their hand dealt against their enemies and the Lord's. We see in our vision another and better warfare. We see the ministers and missionaries of the gospel assailing error and superstition with "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God;" doing battle earnestly and devotedly with all forms of sin and wrong, their one weapon being the revealed truth of God. And we see, not kings in chains and soldiers slaughtered on battle-fields, but heathen temples in decay, the ashes of old idols that have been "utterly abolished," peoples clothed and in their right mind, nations walking in the fear and love of God.

V. GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE IN US, AND OUR HOPE IN HIM. (Ver. 4.) 1. *His heritage in us.* (1) God is deeply interested in *all* his children, is concerned for their well-being, is seeking those that are afar off, is prepared to welcome them home; but while they are rebellious, obdurate, indifferent, he regards them with a Divine regret and even displeasure. (2) He is looking with deepest interest on those who are inquiring their way home to him (see Mark x. 21). (3) He receives the repenting and believing one with every sign of parental joy (see Luke xv.). (4) He is accepting the service, loving though imperfect, which his returned children are rendering him. (5) He looks with tenderness and joy on all earnest endeavours to grow in wisdom and worth, to extend his kingdom, to bless and save others. His people are his heritage, and in their service he finds a Divine pleasure. 2. *Our heritage in him.* The proud and the contentious find little satisfaction anywhere; but "the meek," who are willing to learn and to receive, are adorned or crowned with "salvation." To them are given the peace, the joy, and the hope, which the gospel of Christ confers on the humble-hearted.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The ever-repeated call for a new song.* "A new song (as in Pss. xxxiii. 3; xcvi. 1; cxliv. 9) is the old song of praise, made new by newness of heart and newness of air." "New as expressive of all the new hopes and joys of a new era; a new spring of the nation; a new youth of the Church, bursting forth into a new life."

.. A NEW SONG IS WANTED BECAUSE THERE ARE ALWAYS NEW OCCASIONS. A song

was sung by Israel, under the lead of Moses and Miriam, when the people were safely on the further shore of the Red Sea. It was well to keep that song in remembrance, and it was wisely repeated when the great deliverance was recalled. But there came occasions in the national history when *that* song was unsuitable, and a new song on the old lines had to be made. Illustrate by the song of Deborah; the songs of David on bringing up the ark; of Solomon on dedicating the temple; of the exiles on return from captivity; of the Maccabees on recovering the holy city; of Mary on receiving the visit of the angel. So in a single life there are recurring occasions when the heart is inspired to make a new song.

II. A NEW SONG MAY BE THE OLD SONG PUT IN A NEW FORM. Perhaps it would be true to say that there really is no *new* song; for man there can never be anything more than the old song put into a new form. For man's song is always a loving and grateful recognition of God's goodness. And yet how much importance attaches to the fact that the old song does get set in ever-varying forms! The old song would lose interest, would become formal; its old form would become too strait, unsuitable, repressive of feeling. The song of Moses will not always satisfy. It will need to have much more put into it, and then it will appear as the "song of Moses and the Lamb."

III. AN OLD SONG IS NEW WHEN A NEW SPIRIT IS PUT INTO IT. And that is the spirit of a man's individuality. Everything is new to me that is actually mine—a genuine expression of myself. It may be as old as the hills; it is new to me; it is the output of my feeling, the creation of my experience. It is like nothing else, for on it rests the stamp of my individuality.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The Maker of nations.* The expression seems to refer rather to the selection and constitution of Israel as the people of Jehovah than to the act of creation. By the restoration from Babylon, Israel had been appropriated anew in this special character; made or constituted a nation. It was in the restored and renewed national life that the people so greatly rejoiced.

I. GOD MAKES FAMILIES. It is well for us to see distinctly what is the Divine order for humanity. God made man in his image as a Father; gave him a helpmeet, through whom a family was to gather round him. That family was to be trained by personal influence for an independent family life, into which its members would pass; and so families would reproduce families, and by means of families the whole earth would be peopled, and the moral perfection of the entire family of God attained. This, God's ideal, man's self-will and passion have spoiled.

II. MAN-MADE NATIONS. Cowper says, "God made the country, and man made the town." It is answering fact to say, "God made the family, and man made the nation." It is full of significance that the aggregation of men for mutual protection, out of which nations and civil governments have been evolved, was a device of the sons of Cain; i.e. of those who, in some sense, had been "driven out from the presence of the Lord." It is easy to see that, had God's family idea been preserved, no schemes for mutual protection would have been necessary, no walled cities, no government, no army, no police; for brothers in a family would never think of injuring brothers, and the family feeling would also save the relations of families.

III. GOD OVERRULES THE MAKING OF NATIONS. He, in a way, accepts as facts, and uses for his purposes, the conditions in which man has set himself. He lets man have what has been called a "free experiment;" and as it pleases man to create nations, God is pleased to deal with nations as such, using them for his purposes, even as he uses individuals. And nations really are aggregations of men in which personal individualities are sunk in order to construct a composite individuality. God deals with that individuality, and uses it. We call it the "national genius."—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*God's pleasure in his people.* The peculiarity of religion is that it gives us *pleasure* in the thought of God, by removing the fear of him which is common to sinful men. This is seen in the joy-songs of the psalmists. When we cherish the thought of God, we find our hearts are incited to praise him (1) for what he is in his own glorious nature; (2) for what he is in the ordering of his gracious providences; (3) for what he is in covenant relations with his people. Whether we are finding pleasure in

the thought of God is one of the surest and best tests of our religion. In the verse before us, our joy in God and praise of God are demanded on two very sufficient and suggestive grounds.

I. GOD'S PRESENT PLEASURE IN HIS PEOPLE. That ought to be a constant pleasure and joy to us. It is not only that he cares for us—that may be but a cold consideration. It is not only that he loves us—we may feel almost lost among the many whom he loves. It is that he finds pleasure in *us*, and that necessarily involves some form of *personal relations*. But what can there possibly be in us in which God can find personal pleasure? 1. We are to him as children. 2. We are the objects of his great redemption. (Illustrate by the interest of a doctor in his patient.) 3. We may reflect his image. There is a strange pleasure in discovering our characteristic self in another person. 4. We may lean upon his grace. And there is great pleasure felt by the good man in simply being *relied on*. What gave Christ his pleasure in his disciples? Take home the thought of God's pleasurable interest in us, and then see under what obligations we lie never to spoil his pleasure, but to do all we can to increase it.

II. GOD'S FUTURE PURPOSE FOR HIS PEOPLE. His pleasure in them makes him work for them. And those for whom he works are indicated by their chief characteristic—meekness. "I will beautify the meek." For such God has: (1) Salvation in its fullest, deepest senses. (2) Help for every emergency, constant as their need, and adapted to it in its ever-varying forms. (3) Final emancipation from the evil which has been all along marring and spoiling our beauty. Illustrate how beauty returns when encroaching and enfeebling disease is at last mastered and dismissed. It is important to dwell on the point—that the salvations of God which are going on in us and for us, because he takes pleasure in us, are *adornments* to the Christian. God's grace to him and in him tends to "beautify him." It may be shown how they tend to beautify (1) his very *face*; (2) his character; and (3) his relationships. What, then, will be our beauty in the sight of God when his salvation work in us is fully complete?—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*God's pleasure in his people*. In what respects does the Lord take pleasure in his people?

I. He takes pleasure in them, inasmuch as **HE DELIGHTS IN THE EXERCISES OF THEIR GRACES TOWARDS HIM**. They all believe in him, and have faith in his Word and promises; they rely on his truth and power; they hope in his mercy; they fear his displeasure; they love his Person and Name.

II. He takes pleasure **IN THE SERVICES OF HIS PEOPLE**. They can do but little for him, and he regards their services, not with an eye to their intrinsic value in themselves, but for the sake of the willing mind from which they flow.

III. He takes pleasure **IN THE PROSPERITY OF HIS PEOPLE**. His Name is love; his nature is goodness. And can we doubt that he loves to see his people happy? Even in those dispensations which in themselves are grievous and painful, he is seeking their good, and in the end promoting their happiness. (After C. H. S.)—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Song and stroke*. "Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand." "The age when such a psalm was most likely to be produced was undoubtedly that of the Maccabees, and the coincidence between this verse and 2 Macc. xv. 27 may indicate the very series of events amid which, with hymns of praise in their throats, and a two-edged sword in their hand, the *chasidim* in battle after battle claimed and won the honour of executing vengeance on Jehovah's foes." Illustration may be taken also from Nehemiah's providing the workmen engaged on the wall with a weapon as well as a tool. But in that case the weapon was for defensive purposes only. The point here is that the sword was for active and aggressive work against the foes of God and the nation; such foes as were the Syrians in the days of the Maccabees.

I. GOD'S WORK IN THE WORLD CALLS FOR STROKE AS WELL AS SONG. It is quite true that the weapons of our warfare are "not carnal;" but they *are* weapons, and they *are* for a warfare. There is some danger of overdoing the peaceful and submissive side of the Christian religion. There are many evils, and especially those of a *private and personal* character, which can best—perhaps can only—be met and conquered by

submission. But there are other evils, and especially those of a *public* character, which must be actively dealt with in a spirit of war. For them the servant of God must have strokes—stroke upon stroke. The two injunctions can be, and must be, observed—“Resist not evil;” “Resist the devil.” The spirit of the soldier should be in every Christian. (Illustrate by F. W. Robertson of Brighton.)

II. GOD’S WORK OF “STROKE” IS NEVER RIGHTLY DONE SAVE AS WE KEEP THE SOUL OF SONG. That keeps us from a wrong *spirit* in doing what so easily arouses a bad spirit. The song in our soul shows we are only God’s servants; and it keeps us reminded that even in doing stern things we are only doing good, trying to waken song in other souls.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—*The limitation of all human vengeance.* “To execute upon them the judgment written.” “It was the thought that vengeance was the righteous retribution, written in the book of God, which made Israel glory in inflicting it.” “The psalmist probably desires to fire the broken-spirited despondency which the history shows to have weighed so heavily on the returned exiles.” Just in one thing humanity has always failed—it has overdone its vengeance. Vengeance may be duty, but whenever man tries to do that duty, his passions come in and spoil his work. Illustrate by the treatment of the conquered in Old Testament wars; by the horrors of the Roman siege of Jerusalem; by the awful scenes at the sacking of besieged cities in modern warfare. Christianity has wrought a great blessing for humanity in putting strict limitation on vengeance. And it puts as strict limitations on the vengeance which an individual man may take on a fellow-man who has wronged him. Works of fiction often present the exaggerated vengeance taken by men who are under no restraint of Christianity. The Christian limitations are twofold.

I. HUMAN VENGEANCE IS LIMITED BY THE FACT THAT THOSE ON WHOM WE TAKE IT STAND IN THE LOVE OF GOD. The Mohammedan can freely slay the “infidels” in propagating his doctrines with the sword, because in his view they are altogether out of the love of God, and these vengeance-takers think they are executing the vengeance of God. We can do nothing of the kind, for that love of God in which we live embraces every fellow of our humanity. To strike a man is to strike one whom God loves. This checks our taking vengeance.

II. HUMAN VENGEANCE IS LIMITED BY THE NECESSITY OF KEEPING IN VIEW THE WELL-BEING OF THOSE ON WHOM THE VENGEANCE IS TAKEN. The servant of God must never do anything but good to anybody. He may do seeming injury in order to reach ends of good; but he must always have in view the salvation—in the large sense—of those with whom he deals.—R. T.

Vers. 1—5.—*The voice of praise.* “Breathes the spirit of intense joy and eager hope in the period which succeeded the return from Babylon. The poet saw in their return so signal a proof of the Divine favour, that he regarded it as a pledge of a glorious future yet in store for the nation. But language like that of vers. 6—9 is no warrant for the exhibition of a similar spirit in the Christian Church.”

I. A NEW ERA IN THE LIFE OF THE NATION OR INDIVIDUAL FURNISHES NEW MATERIAL FOR PRAISE. (Ver. 1.) Escape from a miserable captivity and the return home was a new national experience, if they had not lost the spirit of freedom. How many eras in our individual life correspond to this? A long sickness recovered from, or a long habit of sin escaped from.

II. SOCIAL WORSHIP IS MOST CONGENIAL TO THE SPIRIT OF PRAISE. (Ver. 1.) The people were summoned to *rejoice in the congregation*. Enthusiasm of any kind more easily inspired in a multitude than in an individual, and more easily propagated.

III. WE ARE TO REJOICE IN OUR CREATOR AND KING AS OUR REDEEMER. (Vers. 2, 3.) Such a King will not leave them subject to alien rule, but redeem them. 1. *For God rejoices in his near relation to his people.* (Ver. 4.) Takes pleasure in his fellowship with them and in their welfare. 2. *He delights to array them in honour and glory.* To put beauty and glory upon the outcast and afflicted.

IV. THE JOY OF THE REDEEMED WILL UTTER ITSELF IN PRIVATE AS WELL AS IN PUBLIC. (Ver. 5.) “Upon their beds.” In their most restful moments they will exult in God’s favour now, and in hope for the future.—S.

EXPOSITION.

PSALM OL.

COMMENTATORS generally are agreed that this is a most noble psalm, a fit conclusion to the noble collection which here terminates. Professor Cheyne says, "Ps. cl. closes this Hallelujah group (Pss. cxlvi.—cl.) not less worthily than the whole group concludes the Psalter. It is the finale of the spiritual concert." Hengstenberg observes, "We have here a full-toned call to the praise of God, quite appropriate to the close of this psalm-cycle and of the whole Psalter." The "Four Friends" say, "With these grand words the Psalter closes." Dr. Mason Good points out, as the speciality of the psalm, that it sets before us in detail the various elements of the temple music. "The enraptured minstrel," he remarks, "now rises upon the full stretch of his pinions, and addresses himself to all the powers and faculties of his symphonious brotherhood; to the enchantment of flowing numbers, and the overwhelming ecstasy of an harmonious peal, poured forth in all its strength, from pipe and string and shell of every kind, each, with devotional rivalry, striving to surpass each in pealing forth his praise, from whom they derive breath, vibration, and sound." No psalm rises more grandly from verse to verse, or terminates in a nobler or grander climax, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."

Ver. 1.—Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary. This is the right rendering, and not that of the Prayer-book Version, "Praise God in his holiness." Israel is called upon to give God praise in his holy temple. Praise him in the firmament of his power; *i.e.* in the broad expanse of heaven, the sign and seat of his power.

Ver. 2.—Praise him for his mighty acts; *i.e.* for the great acts of his providence, especially for his deliverances of Israel. Praise him according to his excellent greatness; rather, his abounding greatness (Kay); or, his manifold greatness (Cheyne).

Ver. 3.—Praise him with the sound of the trumpet. (On the use of the trumpet in Divine service, see Lev. xxiii. 24; xxv. 9; Num. x. 10; 2 Sam. vi. 15; 1 Chron. xiii. 8; xv. 24; xvi. 6; 2 Chron. v. 12, 13; vii. 6; xix. 27; Pss. lxxxi. 3; xcvi. 6.) Praise him with the psalter and harp (comp. Psa. lvii. 8; lxxxi. 2; cviii. 2; 1 Chron. xv. 16; 2 Chron. v. 12, etc.).

Ver. 4.—Praise him with the timbrel and dance (comp. Psa. cxlix. 3). Praise him with stringed instruments and organs; literally, with strings and pipe. "Organs" are, of course, out of the question. The "pipe" intended is probably the double pipe so often represented on the monuments of Egypt, Assyria, and Phœnicia.

Ver. 5.—Praise him upon the loud cymbals; praise him upon the high-sounding cymbals. "We can hardly," says Professor Cheyne, "venture to distinguish two kinds of cymbals on the ground of these two epithets." The mention of "cymbals" is reserved to the last, as being the instrument of music most expressive of joy and jubilation. It completes the musical climax, as ver. 6 completes the ideal one.

Ver. 6.—Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord; literally, the whole of breath (comp. Rev. v. 13, "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever;" see also Psa. cxlviii. 7, 10—12). Praise ye the Lord. "As the life of the faithful, and the history of the Church, so also the Psalter, with all its ories from the depths, runs out in a hallelujah" (Hengstenberg).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Hallelujah: our life a psalm.* There is no distinctive truth taught here; each verse gives utterance to that which has been sung before (see especially Psa. cxlviii.). But the strain of the psalm is that of an earnest summons to make the praise of God the prevailing note of our life. Let life be charged and crowned with praise. 1. If regularly at the sanctuary, *there* in order that it may be offered elsewhere, everywhere. 2. If on the sabbath day, *then* that it may be presented every day. 3. If with trumpet and cymbal, *thus* that it may be sounded on every instrument that can make music unto the Lord. 4. If rendered for his "mighty acts" especially, it is not to be withheld for his daily and hourly loving-kindnesses. 5. Praise

should, in its fulness and sweetness and heartiness on our part, answer to "the abundance of his greatness"—"his excellent greatness" (ver. 2). 6. Praise should proceed from every lip, from every life (ver. 6); from the youngest who is old enough to lisp his Name, and from the oldest who has strength enough left to make mention of his grace; from the sick on their couch as they anticipate the time when there will be "no more pain;" from the bereaved as they realize all that their departed friends were to them through years of health and service, and as they look forward to the glad day of reunion, and from the strong and active in the midst of the strife of life; from those who study, and from those who "labour, working with their hands;" from those who rule, and from those who serve. A life of praise is a life of holy fragrance, acceptable to God and well-pleasing to man. It is excellent in itself, and it is promotive and prophetic of the time when "the whole earth shall be filled with his glory."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—Places to praise God in. "This psalm is a rapture. The poet-prophet is full of inspiration and enthusiasm." Lamartine says, "In this closing psalm we see the almost inarticulate enthusiasm of the lyric poet; so rapidly do the words press to his lips, floating upwards towards God, their Source, like the smoke of a great fire of the soul wafted by the tempest." "In former times, when the casting of church-bells was more of a religious ceremony, this psalm was chanted by the brethren of the guild, as they stood ranged around the furnace, while the molten metal was prepared to be let off into the mould ready to receive it."

I. THE SANCTUARY. Not "his holiness," as in the Prayer-book Version, nor merely "his temple;" but the whole earth, as the sphere in which he has displayed his power and his grace. It is quite true that praise is to be offered in those buildings which are set apart for God's worship; but we must always regard them as representative of God's great temple of nature and of human history. The old tabernacle represented wandering Israel as the dwelling-place of God. The temple, later on, represented the organized nation as the dwelling-place of God. But such localization and limitations only represented and taught the truth that the whole earth is the sanctuary of God. In tabernacle, temple, church, whole earth, where God is, God's praise must be sounded forth. He says, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me."

II. THE FIRMAMENT OF HIS POWER. This is usually taken to mean "heaven," but it is more in accordance with Hebrew repetition to see in it another figure for what is called the "sanctuary." "Firmament" simply means sphere. Every place becomes a holy place if God's power is put forth in it; then the whole earth, and the entire range of history, become a sanctuary in which God's praise is properly called forth. If we are to praise God in the spheres in which he has put forth his power and grace, we shall have to be praising him everywhere.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—Things to praise God for. For "excellent greatness," read "muchness of greatness." Praise is to be offered in recognition both of God's inherent power, and of its manifestation in mighty acts.

I. PRAISE IS CALLED FOR BY DIVINE POWER. He who knows God knows him through a series of mighty, wonderful acts, interventions, provisions, deliverances, punishings, all of which produce overwhelming impressions of almighty power. Illustration may be taken from (1) the Divine creations; (2) the Divine maintainings; (3) the Divine redemptions. Divine power is seen in God's ordering and controlling the gigantic forces of nature and the lawless wilfulness of man. Modern artistic and poetic feeling, perhaps responding to the revelations of the microscope, can find Divine power in the gentle and the minute; but Hebrew genius dealt almost exclusively with the august, tremendous, and awful in nature; so *power* in God was the thing most impressed on the Hebrew mind as the inspiration of praise. And still a necessary ground of entire confidence in God is a conviction of his absolute and unquestionable almightiness everywhere, and in relation to everything. We praise him because we feel sure that our God is mightier than the mightiest.

II. PRAISE IS CALLED FOR BY DIVINE CHARACTER BEHIND POWER. "Excellent

greatness." An adjective is applied which directs us to moral quality. God must never be thought of as we think of giants. We are altogether absorbed by thinking of their bodily size and strength; it does not matter to us whether they have either mental faculty or moral character. Some think of God as a mere embodiment of august and awful power. He is not known aright, nor can he be praised aright, until the character inspiring the exercise of his power is apprehended. Then we realize that he stands *in relation to us*, and for his gracious relations we praise him in the highest.—R. T.

Vers. 3, 4.—*Instruments to praise God with.* Bishop Wordsworth notes that all kinds of faculty are engaged in the work of praise. The breath is employed in blowing the trumpet; the fingers are used in striking the strings of the psaltery and the harp; the whole hand is exerted in beating the timbrel; the feet move in the dance. The introduction of various musical instruments, as well as choirs of human voices, into the regular worship of the tabernacle and temple, is traceable to the time and probably to the personal influence of David. "David did so much for the public worship of God in that he brought it so near to men; he gave it so much interest to them; and he lifted it out of mere *duty* into *pleasure* by adding the features of music and of song." It is interesting, but only a matter of curiosity, to identify and describe the different instruments mentioned here. We need only see that they include all the musical instruments—wind, string, and clanging. The point to fix attention on is that, when a man wants to praise God, he may bring into his service every kind of power that he possesses, and every agency through which he can find expression for his power.

I. ALL KINDS OF INSTRUMENTS MAY BE USED IN PRAISE. Only sentiment ever puts limitations on the instruments that may be used for Divine worship. Sentiment imagines some kinds to be more solemn and reverent than others. Curiously, those which some regard as specially solemn, *e.g.* the organ, are wholly repudiated by others (the Scotch). No instrument is *in itself* unsuitable. The kind of use man makes of it, and the kind of associations man causes to gather round it, may make an instrument unsuitable. In this matter the good sense of Christian people must decide.

II. THE PRAISE IS NOT IN THE INSTRUMENT, BUT IN WHAT THE MAN EXPRESSES THROUGH THE INSTRUMENT. With our temptation to rest in things, we need this reminder for every age. The praise is in the man's soul. And the most exquisite musical expression is worthless as praise if it is *soulless*.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Persons and things that should unite in God's praise.* "It is difficult to conceive how any man who believes in God can need to be reminded of the duty of praise. In every age and country the adoration of the Supreme Being has risen with the illumination of the human mind, and borne a very exact proportion to its restoration in the Divine image." "Our whole life should speak forth our thankfulness." "Let all the breath [*i.e.* the entirety of animate creation] praise Jehovah." If a comprehensive view of God be taken, and it is seen that "his tender mercies are over all his works," and that "the eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their meat in due season," this call to the entire animate creation to join man in his praise will become to us more than poetry and sentiment. It is to be noticed that the Hebrew poet had no glimpse of the idea of Wordsworth, that a living soul animates the inanimate creation. The Hebrew limits his call to creatures that have breath and can make sounds; and of this great choir man is the leader. They may be likened to the great band of musicians in a chorus, who never utter an articulate sound, yet are in perfect harmony with the singers whose intelligent voices lead the chorus. "As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there."

I. EVERYTHING AND EVERYBODY OUGHT TO PRAISE GOD. Ought to harmoniously unite in praising God. And this is only possible when each does what he can, and does it in the best way he can. The grand song of redeemed nature and man is well given in Pollok's 'Course of Time,' pp. 189—191.

II. WE OUGHT TO PRAISE GOD. For the last exclamation, "Praise ye the Lord!" should be taken as a personal call and application. It can never be enough to us that praise is being offered. Nor can it be enough to offer formal praise with ours. It must be *our* praise—our soul-praise, and our praise at its best.—R. T.

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