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Title: The Expositor's Bible: The Psalms, Vol. 1

Author: Alexander Maclaren

Editor: Sir W. Robertson Nicoll

Release date: March 31, 2013 [eBook #42445]
Most recently updated: October 23, 2024

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/42445

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE: THE PSALMS, VOL. 1 ***

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE

[Pg i]

EDITED BY THE REV.

SIR W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A., LL.D.

Editor of "The Expositor," etc.

THE PSALMS

BY

A. MACLAREN, D.D.

VOLUME 1.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

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A. MACLAREN, D.D.

VOLUME 1.
PSALMS I.—XXXVIII.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

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Printed by Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ld., London and Aylesbury.

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PREFACE.

A volume which appears in "The Expositor's Bible" should obviously, first of all, be expository. I have tried to conform to that requirement, and have therefore found it necessary to leave questions of date and authorship all but untouched. They could not be adequately discussed in conjunction with Exposition. I venture to think that the deepest and most precious elements in the Psalms are very slightly affected by the answers to these questions, and that expository treatment of the bulk of the Psalter may be separated from critical, without condemning the former to incompleteness. If I have erred in thus restricting the scope of this volume, I have done so after due consideration; and am not without hope that the restriction may commend itself to some readers.

A. McL.

MANCHESTER, *Dec*. 1892.

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PSALM I.

1 Happy the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked,
And has not stood in the way of sinners,
And in the session of scorners has not sat.
2 But in the law of Jehovah [is] his delight,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
3 And he is like a tree planted by the runnels of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season,
And whose leafage does not fade,
And all which he does he prosperously accomplishes.

4 Not so are the wicked,
But like chaff which the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
6 For Jehovah knows the righteous,
And the way of the wicked shall perish.

The Psalter may be regarded as the heart's echo to the speech of God, the manifold music of its wind-swept strings as God's breath sweeps across them. Law and Prophecy are the two main elements of that speech, and the first two psalms, as a double prelude to the book, answer to these, the former setting forth the blessedness of loving and keeping the law, and the latter celebrating the enthronement of Messiah. Jewish tradition says that they were originally one, and a well-attested reading of Acts xiii. 33 quotes "Thou art my Son" as part of "the first Psalm." The diversity of subject makes original unity improbable, but possibly our present first Psalm was prefixed, unnumbered.

Its theme, the blessedness of keeping the law, is enforced by the juxtaposition of two sharply contrasted pictures, one in bright light, another in deep shadow, and each heightening the other. Ebal and Gerizim face one another.

The character and fate of the lover of the law are sketched in vv. 1-3, and that of the "wicked" in vv. 4-6.

"How abundantly is that word Blessed multiplied in the Book of Psalms! The book seems to be made out of that word, and the foundation raised upon that word, for it is the first word of the book. But in all the book there is not one Woe" (Donne).

It is usually taken as an exclamation, but may equally well be a simple affirmation, and declares a universal truth even more strongly, if so regarded. The characteristics which thus bring blessedness are first described negatively, and that order is significant. As long as there is so much evil in the world, and society is what it is, godliness must be largely negative, and its possessors "a people whose laws are different from all people that be on earth." Live fish swim against the stream; dead ones go with it.

The tender graces of the devout soul will not flourish unless there be a wall of close-knit and unparticipating opposition round them, to keep off nipping blasts. The negative clauses present a climax, notwithstanding the unquestionable correctness of one of the grounds on which that has been denied—namely, the practical equivalence of "wicked" and "sinner."

Increasing closeness and permanence of association are obvious in the progress from *walking* to *standing* and from standing to *sitting*. Increasing boldness in evil is marked by the progress from *counsel* to *way*, or course [Pg 3] of life, and thence to *scoffing*. Evil purposes come out in deeds, and deeds are formularised at last in bitter speech. Some men scoff because they have already sinned. The tongue is blackened and made sore by poison in the system. Therefore goodness will avoid the smallest conformity with evil, as knowing that if the hem of the dress or the tips of the hair be caught in the cruel wheels, the whole body will be drawn in. But these negative characteristics are valuable mainly for their efficacy in contributing to the positive, as the wall round a young plantation is there for the sake of what grows behind it. On the other hand, these positive characteristics, and eminently that chief one of a higher love, are the only basis for useful abstinence. Mere conventional, negative virtue is of little power or worth unless it flow from a strong set of the soul in another direction.

"So did not I" is good and noble when we can go on to say, as Nehemiah did, "because of the fear of God." The true way of floating rubbish out is to pour water in. Delight in the law will deliver from delight in the counsel of the wicked. As the negative, so the positive begins with the inward man. The main thing about all men is the direction of their "delight." Where do tastes run? what pleases them most? and where are they most at ease? Deeds will follow the current of desires, and be right if the hidden man of the heart be right. To the psalmist, that law was revealed by Pentateuch and prophets; but the delight in it, in which he recognises the germ of godliness, is the coincidence of will and inclination with the declared will of God, however declared. In effect, he reduces perfection to the same elements as the other psalmist who sang, "I delight to do Thy will, yea, Thy law is within my heart." The secret of blessedness is self-renunciation,— [Pg 4]

> "A love to lose my will in His,
> And by that loss be free."

Thoughts which are sweet will be familiar.

The command to Joshua is the instinct of the devout man. In the distractions and activities of the busy day the law beloved will be with him, illuminating his path and shaping his acts. In hours of rest it will solace weariness and renew strength. That habit of patient, protracted brooding on the revelation of God's will needs to be cultivated. Men live meanly because they live so fast. Religion lacks depth and volume because it is not fed by hidden springs.

The good man's character being thus all condensed into one trait, the psalm next gathers his blessedness up in one image. The tree is an eloquent figure to Orientals, who knew water as the one requisite to turn desert into garden. Such a life as has been sketched will be rooted and steadfast. "Planted" is expressed by a word which suggests fixity. The good man's life is deeply anchored, and so rides out storms. It goes down through superficial fleeting things to that Eternal Will, and so stands unmoved and upright when winds howl. Scotch firs lift massive, corrugated boles, and thrust out wide, gnarled branches clothed in steadfast green, and look as if they could face any tempest, but their roots run laterally among the surface gravel, and therefore they go down before blasts which feeble saplings, that strike theirs vertically, meet unharmed.

Such a life is fed and refreshed. The law of the Lord is at once soil and stream. In the one aspect fastening a life to it gives stability; in the other, freshening and means of growth. Truly loved, that Will becomes, in [Pg 5] its manifold expressions, as the divided irrigation channels through which a great river is brought to the roots of

each plant. If men do not find it life-giving as rivers of water in a dry place, it is because they do not delight in it. Opposed, it is burdensome and harsh; accepted, this sweet image tells what it becomes—the true good, the only thing that really nourishes and reinvigorates. The disciples came back to Jesus, whom they had left too wearied and faint to go with them to the city, and found Him fresh and strong. Their wonder was answered by, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me."

Such a life is vigorous and productive. It would be artificial straining to assign definite meanings to "fruit" and "leaf." All that belongs to vigorous vitality and beauty is included. These come naturally when the preceding condition is fulfilled. This stage of the psalm is the appropriate place for deeds to come into view. By loving fellowship with God and delight in His law the man is made capable of good. His virtues are growths, the outcome of life. The psalm anticipates Christ's teaching of the good tree bringing forth good fruit, and also tells how His precept of making the tree good is to be obeyed—namely, by transplanting it from the soil of self-will to that of delight in the law. How that transplanting is to be effected it does not tell. "But now being made free from sin, and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness," and the fruit of the Spirit in "whatsoever things are lovely and of good report" hangs in clusters on the life that has been shifted from the realm of darkness and rooted in Christ. The relation is more intimate still. "I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit." [Pg 6]

Such a life will be prosperous. The figure is abandoned here. The meaning is not affected whether we translate "whatsoever he doeth shall prosper," or "whatsoever ... he shall cause to succeed." That is not unconditionally true now, nor was it then, if referred to what the world calls prospering, as many a sad and questioning strain in the Psalter proves. He whose life is rooted in God will have his full share of foiled plans and abortive hopes, and will often see the fruit nipped by frost or blown green from the boughs, but still the promise is true in its inmost meaning. For what is prosperity? Does the psalmist merely mean to preach the more vulgar form of the doctrine that religion makes the best of both worlds? or are his hopes to be harmonised with experience, by giving a deeper meaning to "prosperity"? They to whom the will of God is delight can never be hurt by evil, for all that meets them expresses and serves that will, and the fellow-servants of the King do not wound one another. If a life be rooted in God and a heart delight in His law, that life will be prosperous and that heart will be at rest.

The second half of the psalm gives the dark contrast of the fruitless, rootless life (vv. 4-6). The Hebrew flashes the whole dread antithesis on the view at once by its first word, "Not so," a universal negative, which reverses every part of the preceding picture. "Wicked" is preferable to "ungodly," as the designation of the subjects. Whether we take the root idea of the word to be "restless," as most of the older and many modern commentators do, or "crooked" (Hupfeld), or "loose, flaccid" (Delitzsch), it is the opposite of "righteous," and therefore means one who lives not by the law of God, but by his own will. The psalmist has no need [Pg 7] to describe him further nor to enumerate his deeds. The fundamental trait of his character is enough. Two classes only, then, are recognised here. If a man has not God's uttered will for his governor, he goes into the category of "wicked." That sounds harsh doctrine, and not corresponding to the innumerable gradations of character actually seen. But it does correspond to facts, if they are grasped in their roots of motive and principle. If God be not the supreme delight, and His law sovereign, some other object is men's delight and aim, and that departure from God taints a life, however fair it may be. It is a plain deduction from our relations to God that lives lived irrespective of Him are sinful, whatever be their complexion otherwise.

The remainder of the psalm has three thoughts—the real nullity of such lives, their consequent disappearance in "the judgment," and the ground of both the blessedness of the one type of character and the vanishing of the other in the diverse attitude of God to each. Nothing could more vividly suggest the essential nothingness of the "wicked" than the contrast of the leafy beauty of the fruit-laden tree and the chaff, rootless, fruitless, lifeless, light, and therefore the sport of every puff of wind that blows across the elevated and open threshing floor.

Such is indeed a true picture of every life not rooted in God and drawing fertility from Him. It is rootless; for what hold-fast is there but in Him? or where shall the heart twine its tendrils if not round God's stable throne? or what basis do fleeting objects supply for him who builds elsewhere than on the enduring Rock? It [Pg 8] is fruitless; for what is fruit? There may be much activity and many results satisfying to part of man's nature and admired by others. One fruit there will be, in character elaborated. But if we ask what ought to be the products of a life, man and God being what they are in themselves and to each other, we shall not wonder if every result of godless energy is regarded by "those clear eyes and perfect judgment" of heaven as barrenness. In the light of these higher demands, achievements hymned by the world's acclamations seem

infinitely small, and many a man, rich in the apparent results of a busy and prosperous life, will find to his dismayed astonishment that he has nothing to show but unfruitful works of darkness. Chaff is fruitless because lifeless.

Its disappearance in the winnowing wind is the consequence and manifestation of its essential nullity. "Therefore" draws the conclusion of necessary transiency. Just as the winnower throws up his shovel full into the breeze, and the chaff goes fluttering out of the floor because it is light, while the wheat falls on the heap because it is solid, so the wind of judgment will one day blow and deal with each man according to his nature. It will separate them, whirling away the one, and not the other. "One shall be taken and the other left." When does this sifting take effect? The psalmist does not date it. There is a continually operative law of retribution, and there are crises of individual or national life, when the accumulated consequences of evil deeds fall on the doers. But the definite article prefixed to "judgment" seems to suggest some special "day" of separation. It is noteworthy and perhaps illuminative that John the Baptist uses the same figures of the tree and the chaff in his picture of the Messianic judgments, and that epoch may have been in the psalmist's mind. [Pg 9] Whatever the date, this he is sure of—that the wind will rise some time, and that, when it does, the wicked will be blown out of sight. When the judgment comes, the "congregation of the righteous"—that is, the true Israel within Israel, or, to speak in Christian language, the true invisible Church—will be freed from admixture of outward adherents, whose lives give the lie to their profession. Men shall be associated according to spiritual affinity, and "being let go," will "go to their own company" and "place," wherever that may be.

The ground of these diverse fates is the different attitude of God to each life. Each clause of the last verse really involves two ideas, but the pregnant brevity of style states only half of the antithesis in each, suppressing the second member in the first clause and the first member in the second clause, and so making the contrast the more striking by emphasising the cause of an unspoken consequence in the former, and the opposite consequence of an unspoken cause in the latter. "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous [therefore it shall last]. The Lord knoweth not the way of the wicked [therefore it shall perish]." The way which the Lord knows abides. "Know" is, of course, here used in its full sense of loving knowledge, care, and approval, as in "He knoweth my path" and the like sayings. The direction of the good man's life is watched, guarded, approved, and blessed by God. Therefore it will not fail to reach its goal. They who walk patiently in the paths which He has prepared will find them paths of peace, and will not tread them unaccompanied, nor ever see them diverging from the straight road to home and rest. "Commit thy way unto the Lord," [Pg 10] and let His way be thine, and He shall make thy way prosperous.

The way or course of life which God does not know perishes. A path perishes when, like some dim forest track, it dies out, leaving the traveller bewildered amid impenetrable forests, or when, like some treacherous Alpine track among rotten rocks, it crumbles beneath the tread. Every course of life but that of the man who delights in and keeps the law of the Lord comes to a fatal end, and leads to the brink of a precipice, over which the impetus of descent carries the reluctant foot. "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more till the noontide of the day. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble."

PSALM II.

1 Why do the nations muster with tumult,
And the peoples meditate vanity?
2 The kings of the earth take up their posts,
And the chieftains sit in counsel together
Against Jehovah and against His Anointed.
3 "Let us wrench off their bands,
And let us fling off from us their cords."

4 He who sits in the heavens laughs;
The Lord mocks at them.

5 Then He speaks to them in His anger-wrath,
And in His wrath-heat puts them in panic.
6 ... "And yet I, I have set my King
Upon Zion, my holy mountain."

7 I will tell of a decree:
Jehovah said unto me, My son art thou;
I have begotten thee this day.
8 Ask from me and I will give thee the nations as thine inheritance,
And as thy possession the ends of the earth.
9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron,
Like a potter's vessel shalt thou shatter them.

10 And now, O kings, be wise;
Let yourselves be warned, O judges of the earth.
11 Serve Jehovah in fear,
And rejoice in trembling.
12 Kiss the Son (?), lest He be angry, and ye perish in [your] way;
For easily may His wrath kindle.
Blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

Various unsatisfactory conjectures as to a historical basis for this magnificent lyric have been made, but none succeeds in specifying events which fit with the situation painted in it. The banded enemies are rebels, and [Ps 121] the revolt is widespread; for the "kings of the earth" is a very comprehensive, if we may not even say a universal, expression. If taken in connection with the "uttermost parts of the earth" (ver. 8), which are the King's rightful dominion, it implies a sweep of authority and a breadth of opposition quite beyond any recorded facts. Authorship and date must be left undetermined. The psalm is anonymous, like Psalm i., and is thereby marked off from the psalms which follow in Book I., and with one exception are ascribed to David. Whether these two preludes to the Psalter were set in their present place on the completion of the whole book, or were prefixed to the smaller "Davidic" collection, cannot be settled. The date of composition may have been much earlier than that of either the smaller or the larger collection.

The true basis of the psalm is not some petty revolt of subject tribes, even if such could be adduced, but Nathan's prophecy in 2 Sam. vii., which sets forth the dignity and dominion of the King of Israel as God's son and representative. The poet-prophet of our psalm may have lived after many monarchs had borne the title, but failed to realise the ideal there outlined, and the imperfect shadows may have helped to lift his thoughts to the reality. His grand poem may be called an idealising of the monarch of Israel, but it is an idealising which expected realisation. The psalm is prophecy as well as poetry; and whether it had contemporaneous persons and events as a starting-point or not, its theme is a real person, fully possessing the prerogatives and wielding the dominion which Nathan had declared to be God's gift to the King of Israel.

The psalm falls into four strophes of three verses each, in the first three of which the reader is made spectator [Ps 121] and auditor of vividly painted scenes, while in the last the psalmist exhorts the rebels to return to allegiance.

In the first strophe (vv. 1-3) the conspiracy of banded rebels is set before us with extraordinary force. The singer does not delay to tell what he sees, but breaks into a question of astonished indignation as to what *can* be the cause of it all. Then, in a series of swift clauses, of which the vivid movement cannot be preserved in a translation, he lets us see what had so moved him. The masses of the "nations" are hurrying tumultuously to the mustering-place; the "peoples" are meditating revolt, which is smitingly stigmatised in anticipation as "vanity." But it is no mere uprising of the common herd; "the kings of the earth" take their stand as in battle-array, and the men of mark and influence lay their heads together, pressing close to one another on the divan as they plot. All classes and orders are united in revolt, and hurry and eagerness mark their action and throb in the words. The rule against which the revolt is directed is that of "Jehovah and His Anointed." That is one rule, not two,—the dominion of Jehovah exercised through the Messiah. The psalmist had grasped firmly the conception that God's visible rule is wielded by Messiah, so that rebellion against one is rebellion against both. Their "bands" are the same. Pure monotheist as the psalmist was, he had the thought of a king so closely associated with Jehovah, that he could name them in one breath as, in some sense, sharers of the same throne and struck at by the same revolt. The foundation of such a conception was given in the designation of [Ps 141]

the Davidic monarch as God's vicegerent and representative, but its full justification is the relation of the historic Christ to the Father whose throne He shares in glory.

That eloquent "why" may include both the ideas of "for what reason?" and "to what purpose?" Opposition to that King, whether by communities or individuals, is unreasonable. Every rising of a human will against the rule which it is blessedness to accept is absurd, and hopelessly incapable of justification. The question, so understood, is unanswerable by the rebels or by any one else. The one mystery of mysteries is that a finite will should be able to lift itself against the Infinite Will, and be willing to use its power. In the other aspect, the question, like that pregnant "vanity," implies the failure of all rebellion. Plot and strive, conspire and muster, as men may, all is vanity and striving of wind. It is destined to break down from the beginning. It is as hopeless as if the stars were to combine to abolish gravitation. That dominion does not depend on man's acceptance of it, and he can no more throw it off by opposition than he can fling a somersault into space and so get away from earth. When we can vote ourselves out of submission to physical law, we may plot or fight ourselves out of subjection to the reign of Jehovah and of His Anointed.

All the self-will in the world does not alter the fact that the authority of Christ is sovereign over human wills. We cannot get away from it; but we can either lovingly embrace it, and then it is our life, or we can set ourselves against it, like an obstinate ox planting its feet and standing stock-still, and then the goad is driven deep and draws blood.

The metaphor of bands and cords is taken from the fastenings of the yoke on a draught bullock. One can [Pg 151] scarcely miss the lovely contrast of this truculent exhortation to rebellion with the gracious summons "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." The "bands" are already on our necks in a very real sense, for we are all under Christ's authority, and opposition is rebellion, not the effort to prevent a yoke being imposed, but to shake off one already laid on. But yet the consent of our own wills is called for, and thereby we take the yoke, which is a stay rather than a fetter, and bear the burden which bears up those who bear it.

Psalm i. set side by side in sharp contrast the godly and the godless. Here a still more striking transition is made in the second strophe (vv. 4-6), which changes the scene to heaven. The lower half of the picture is all eager motion and strained effort; the upper is full of Divine calm. Hot with hatred, flushed with defiant self-confidence and busy with plots, the rebels hurry together like swarming ants on their hillock. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." That representation of the seated God contrasts grandly with the stir on earth. He needs not to rise from His throned tranquillity, but regards undisturbed the disturbances of earth. The thought embodied is like that expressed in the Egyptian statues of gods carved out of the side of a mountain, "moulded in colossal calm," with their mighty hands laid in their laps and their wide-opened eyes gazing down on the little ways of the men creeping about their feet.

And what shall we say of that daring and awful image of the laughter of God? The attribution of such action to Him is so bold that no danger of misunderstanding it is possible. It sends us at once to look for its [Pg 152] translation, which probably lies in the thought of the essential ludicrousness of opposition, which is discerned in heaven to be so utterly groundless and hopeless as to be absurd. "When He came nigh and beheld the city, He wept over it." The two pictures are not incapable of being reconciled. The Christ who wept over sinners is the fullest revelation of the heart of God, and the laughter of the psalm is consistent with the tears of Jesus as He stood on Olivet, and looked across the glen to the Temple glittering in the morning sun.

God's laughter passes into the utterance of His wrath at the time determined by Him. The silence is broken by His voice, and the motionless form flashes into action. One movement is enough to "vex" the enemies and fling them into panic, as a flock of birds put to flight by the lifting of an arm. There is a point, known to God alone, when He perceives that the fulness of time has come, and the opposition must be ended. By long-drawn-out, gentle patience He has sought to win to obedience (though that side of His dealings is not presented in this psalm), but the moment arrives when in world-wide catastrophes or crushing blows on individuals sleeping retribution wakes at the right moment, determined by considerations inappreciable by us: "Then does He speak in His wrath."

The last verse of this strophe is parallel with the last of the preceding, being, like it, the dramatically introduced speech of the actor in the previous verses. The revolters' mutual encouragement is directly answered by the sovereign word of God, which discloses the reason for the futility of their attempts. The "I" of ver. 6 is emphatic. On one side is that majestic "I have set my King"; on the other a world of rebels. They [Pg 153] may put their shoulders to the throne of the Anointed to overthrow it; but what of that? God's hand holds it

firm, whatever forces press on it. All enmity of banded or of single wills breaks against and is dashed by it into ineffectual spray.

Another speaker is next heard, the Anointed King, who, in the third strophe (vv. 7-9), bears witness to Himself and claims universal dominion as His by a Divine decree. "Thou art my son; to-day have I begotten thee." So runs the first part of the decree. The allusion to Nathan's words to David is clear. In them the prophet spoke of the succession of David's descendants, the king as a collective person, so to speak. The psalmist, knowing how incompletely any or all of these had fulfilled the words which were the patent of their kingship, repeats them in confident faith as certain to be accomplished in the Messiah-king, who fills the future for him with a great light of hope. He knew not the historic person in whom the word has to be fulfilled, but it is difficult to resist the conclusion that he had before him the prospect of a king living as a man, the heir of the promises. Now, this idea of sonship, as belonging to the monarch, is much better illustrated by the fact that Israel, the nation, was so named, than by the boasts of Gentile dynasties to be sons of Zeus or Ra. The relationship is moral and spiritual, involving Divine care and love and appointment to office, and demanding human obedience and use of dignity for God. It is to be observed that in our psalm the day of the King's self-attestation is the day of His being "begotten." The point of time referred to is not the beginning of personal existence, but of investiture with royalty. With accurate insight, then, into the meaning of the words, the New Testament takes them as fulfilled in the Resurrection (Acts xiii. 33; Rom. i. 4). In it, as [Ps 181] the first step in the process which was completed in the Ascension, the manhood of Jesus was lifted above the limitations and weaknesses of earth, and began to rise to the throne. The day of His resurrection was, as it were, the day of the birth of His humanity into royal glory.

Built upon this exaltation to royalty and sonship follows the promise of universal dominion. Surely the expectation of "the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession" bursts the bonds of the tiny Jewish kingdom! The wildest national pride could scarcely have dreamed that the narrow strip of seaboard, whose inhabitants never entered on any wide schemes of conquest, should expand into a universal monarchy, stretching even farther than the giant empires on either side. If such were the psalmist's expectations, they were never even approximately fulfilled; but the reference of the glowing words to Messiah's kingdom is in accordance with the current of prophetic hopes, and need cause no hesitation to those who believe in prophecy at all.

Universal dominion is God's gift to Messiah. Even while putting His foot on the step of the throne, Jesus said, "All power is *given* unto me." This dominion is founded not on His essential divinity, but on His suffering and sacrifice. His rule is the rule of God in Him, for He is the highest form of the Divine self-revelation, and whoso trusts, loves, and obeys Christ, trusts, loves, and obeys God in Him. The psalmist did not know in how much more profound a sense than he attached to his words they were true. They had an intelligible, great, and true meaning for him. They have a greater for us.

The Divine voice foretells victory over opposition and destruction to opposers. The sceptre is of iron, though [Ps 191] the hand that holds it once grasped the reed. The word rendered "break" may also be translated, with a different set of vowels, "shepherd," and is so rendered by the LXX. (which Rev. ii. 27, etc., follows) and by some other versions. But, in view of the parallelism of the next clause, "break" is to be preferred. The truth of Christ's destructive energy is too often forgotten, and, when remembered, is too often thrown forward into another world. The history of this world ever since the Resurrection has been but a record of conquered antagonism to Him. The stone cut out without hands has dashed against the images of clay and silver and gold and broken them all. The Gospel of Christ is the great solvent of institutions not based upon itself. Its work is

> "To cast the kingdoms old
> Into another mould."

Destructive work has still to be done, and its most terrible energy is to be displayed in the future, when all opposition shall be withered into nothingness by the brightness of His presence. There are two kinds of breaking: a merciful one, when His love shatters our pride and breaks into penitence the earthen vessels of our hearts; and a terrible one, when the weight of His sceptre crushes, and His hand casts down in shivers "vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction."

We have listened to three voices, and now, in vv. 10-12, the poet speaks in solemn exhortation: "Be wise now, ye kings." The "now" is argumentative, not temporal. It means "since things are so." The kings addressed are the rebel monarchs whose power seems so puny measured against that of "my King." But not only these are [Ps 201] addressed, but all possessors of power and influence. Open-eyed consideration of the facts is true wisdom.

The maddest thing a man can do is to shut his eyes to them and steel his heart against their instruction. This pleading invitation to calm reflection is the purpose of all the preceding. To draw rebels to loyalty, which is life, is the meaning of all appeals to terror. God and His prophet desire that the conviction of the futility of rebellion with a poor "ten thousand" against "the king of twenty thousands" should lead to "sending an embassage" to sue for peace. The facts are before men, that they may be warned and wise.

The exhortation which follows in vv. 11, 12 points to the conduct which will be dictated by wise reception of instruction. So far as regards ver. 11 there is little difficulty. The exhortation to "serve Jehovah with fear and rejoice with trembling" points to obedience founded on awe of God's majesty,—the fear which love does not cast out, but perfect; and to the gladness which blends with reverence, but is not darkened by it. To love and cleave to God, to feel the silent awe of His greatness and holiness giving dignity and solemnity to our gladness, and from this inmost heaven of contemplation to come down to a life of practical obedience—this is God's command and man's blessedness.

The close connection between Jehovah and Messiah in the preceding sections, in each of which the dominion of the latter is treated as that of the former and rebellion as against both at once, renders it extremely improbable that there should be no reference to the King in this closing hortatory strophe. The view-point of the psalm, if consistently retained throughout, requires something equivalent to the exhortation to "kiss the [Ps 2]
Son" in token of fealty, to follow, "serve Jehovah." But the rendering "Son" is impossible. The word so translated is *Bar*, which is the Aramaic for *son*, but is not found in that sense in the Old Testament except in the Aramaic of Ezra and Daniel and in Prov. xxxi. 2, a chapter which has in other respects a distinct Aramaic tinge. No good reason appears for the supposition that the singer here went out of his way to employ a foreign word instead of the usual *Ben*. But it is probably impossible to make any good and certain rendering of the existing text. The LXX. and Targum agree in rendering, "Take hold of instruction," which probably implies another reading of Hebrew text. None of the various proposed translations—*e.g.*, *Worship purely, Worship the chosen One*—are without objection; and, on the whole, the supposition of textual corruption seems best. The conjectural emendations of Grätz, *Hold fast by warning*, or reproof; Cheyne's alternative ones, *Seek ye His face* ("Book of Psalms," adopted from Brüll) or *Put on [again] His bonds* ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 351, adopted from Lagarde), and Hupfeld's (in his translation) *Cleave to Him*, obliterate the reference to the King, which seems needful in this section, as has been pointed out, and depart from the well-established meaning of the verb—namely, "kiss." These two considerations seem to require that a noun referring to Messiah, and grammatically object of the verb, should stand in the place occupied by *Son*. The Messianic reference of the psalm remains undimmed by the uncertainty of the meaning of this clause.

The transition from the representative of Jehovah to Jehovah Himself, which takes place in the next clause, is in accordance with the close union between them which has marked the whole psalm. It is henceforth [Pg 22]
Jehovah only who appears till the close. But the anger which is destructive, and which may easily flash out like flames from a furnace mouth, is excited by opposition to Messiah's kingdom, and the exclusive mention of Jehovah in these closing clauses makes the picture of the anger the more terrible.

But since the disclosure of the danger of perishing "in [or as to] the way" or course of rebellious conduct is part of an exhortation, the purpose of which is that the threatened flash of wrath may never need to shoot forth, the psalmist will not close without setting forth the blessed alternative. The sweet benediction of the close bends round to the opening words of the companion psalm of prelude, and thus identifies the man who delights in the law of Jehovah with him who submits to the kingdom of God's Anointed. The expression "put their trust" literally means to take refuge in. The act of trust cannot be more beautifully or forcibly described than as the flight of the soul to God. They who take shelter in God need fear no kindling anger. They who yield to the King are they who take refuge in Jehovah; and such never know aught of His kingdom but its blessings, nor experience any flame of His wrath, but only the happy glow of His love.

[Pg 23]

PSALM III.

1 Jehovah, how many are my oppressors!
  Many are rising against me.

2 Many are saying to my soul,
There is no salvation for him in God. Selah.

3 And yet Thou, Jehovah, art a shield round me;
My glory, and the lifter up of my head.
4 With my voice to Jehovah I cry aloud,
And He answers me from His holy mountain. Selah.

5 I laid myself down and slept;
I awaked; for Jehovah upholds me.
6 I am not afraid of ten thousands of people,
Who round about have set themselves against me.

7 Arise, Jehovah; save me, my God:
For Thou hast smitten all my enemies [on] the cheek-bone;
The teeth of the wicked Thou hast broken.
8 To Jehovah belongs salvation:
Upon Thy people be Thy blessing. Selah.

Another pair of psalms follows the two of the Introduction. They are closely connected linguistically, structurally, and in subject. The one is a morning, the other an evening hymn, and possibly they are placed at the beginning of the earliest psalter for that reason. Ewald and Hitzig accept the Davidic authorship, though the latter shifts the period in David's life at which they were composed to the mutiny of his men at Ziklag (1 Sam. xxx.). Cheyne thinks that "you will find no situation which corresponds to these psalms," though you "search the story of David's life from end to end." He takes the whole of the Psalms from iii. to xvii., excepting viii., xv., xvi., as a group, "the heart utterances of the Church amidst some bitter persecution"—namely, "the period when faithful Israelites were so sorely oppressed both by traitors in their midst and by Persian tyrants" ("Orig. of Psalt.," pp. 226, 227). But correspondences of the two psalms with David's situation will strike many readers as being at least as close as that which is sought to be established with the "spiritual kernel of the nation during the Persian domination," and the absence of more specific reference is surely not unnatural in devout song, however strange it would be in prosaic narrative. We do not look for mention of the actual facts which wring the poet's soul and were peculiar to him, but are content with his expression of his religious emotions, which are common to all devout souls. Who expects Cowper to describe his aberrations of intellect in the "Olney Hymns"? But who cannot trace the connection of his pathetic strains with his sad lot? If ever a seeming reference to facts is pointed out in a so-called Davidic psalm, it is brushed aside as "prosaic," but the absence of such is, notwithstanding, urged as an argument against the authorship. Surely that is inconsistent.

This psalm falls into four strophes, three of which are marked by Selah. In the first (vv. 1, 2) the psalmist recounts his enemies. If we regard this as a morning psalm, it is touchingly true to experience that the first waking thought should be the renewed inrush of the trouble which sleep had for a time dammed back. His enemies are many, and they taunt him as forsaken of God. Surely it is a strong thing to say that there is no correspondence here with David's situation during Absalom's revolt. It was no partial conspiracy, but practically the nation had risen against him, "ut totidem fere haberet hostes quot subditos" (Calvin).

Shimei's foul tongue spoke the general mind: "The Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom" (2 Sam. xvi. 8). There had been sin enough in the king's recent past to give colour to the interpretation of his present calamity as the sign of his being forsaken of God. The conviction that such was the fact would swell the rebel ranks. The multitude has delight in helping to drown a sinking man who has been prosperous. The taunt went deep, for the Hebrew has "to my soul," as if the cruel scoff cut like a knife to the very centre of his personality, and wounded all the more because it gave utterance to his own fears. "The Lord hath bidden him," said David about Shimei's curses. But the psalmist is finding refuge from fears and foes even in telling how many there are, since he begins his complaint with "Jehovah." Without that word the exclamations of this first strophe are the voice of cowardice or despair. With it they are calmed into the appeal of trust.

The Selah which parts the first from the second strophe is probably a direction for an instrumental interlude while the singer pauses.

The second strophe (vv. 3, 4) is the utterance of faith, based on experience, laying hold of Jehovah as defence. By an effort of will the psalmist rises from the contemplation of surrounding enemies to that of the encircling Jehovah. In the thickest of danger and dread there is a power of choice left a man as to what shall be the object of thought, whether the stormy sea or the outstretched hand of the Christ. This harassed man flings himself out of the coil of troubles round about him and looks up to God. He sees in Him precisely what he needs most at the moment, for in that infinite nature is fulness corresponding to all emptiness of ours. "A shield around me," as He had promised to be to Abraham in his peril; "my glory," at a time when calumny and shame were wrapping him about and his kingdom seemed gone; "the lifter up of my head," sunk as it is both in sadness and calamity, since Jehovah can both cheer his spirit and restore his dignity. And how comes this sudden burst of confidence to lighten the complaining soul? Ver. 4 tells. Experience has taught him that as often as he cries to Jehovah he is heard. The tenses in ver. 4 express a habitual act and a constant result. Not once or twice, but as his wont, he prays, and Jehovah answers. The normal relation between him and Jehovah is that of frank communion; and since it has long been so and is so now, even the pressure of present disaster does not make faith falter. It is hard to begin to trust when in the grip of calamity, but feet accustomed to the road to God can find it in the dark. There may be an allusion to David's absence from sanctuary and ark in ver. 4. The expectation of being answered "from His holy hill" gains in pathetic force when the lovely scene of submissive sacrifice in which he sent back the Ark is recalled (2 Sam. xv. 25). Though he be far from the place of prayer, and feeling the pain of absence, the singer's faith is not so tied to form as to falter in the assurance that his prayer is heard. Jehovah is shield, glory, and strengthener to the man who cries to Him, and it is by means of such crying that the heart wins the certitude that He is all these. Again the instruments sound and the singer pauses. [Ps 3:4]

The third strophe (vv. 5, 6) beautifully expresses the tranquil courage which comes from trust. Since sleeping and safe waking again in ordinary circumstances is no such striking proof of Divine help that one in the psalmist's situation would be induced to think especially of it and to found his confidence on it, the view is to be taken that the psalmist in ver. 5 is contemplating the experience which he has just made in his present situation. "Surrounded by enemies, he was quite safe under God's protection and exposed to no peril even in the night" (Riehm, in Hupfeld *in loc*.). Surely correspondence with David's circumstances may be traced here. His little band had no fortress in Mahanaim, and Ahithophel's counsel to attack them by night was so natural that the possibility must have been present to the king. But another night had come and gone in safety, disturbed by no shout of an enemy. The nocturnal danger had passed, and day was again brightening. [Ps 3:5]

They were safe because the Keeper of Israel had kept them. It is difficult to fit this verse into the theory that here the persecuted Israelitish Church is speaking, but it suits the situation pointed to in the superscription. To lie down and sleep in such circumstances was itself an act of faith, and a sign of the quiet heart which faith gives. Like Christ on the hard wooden "pillow" during the storm, or like Peter sleeping an infant's sleep the night before his purposed execution, this man can shut his eyes and quiet himself to slumber, though "ten thousands have set themselves against him." They ring him round, but cannot reach him through his shield. Ver. 6 rises to bold defiance, the result of the experience in ver. 5. How different the tone of reference to the swarms of the enemy here and in ver. 1! There the psalmist was counting them and cowering before them; here their very number is an element in his triumphant confidence. Courage comes from thinking of the one Divine Ally, before whom myriads of enemies are nothing. One man with God to back him is always in the majority. Such courage, based on such experience and faith, is most modest and reasonable, but it is not won without an effort of will, which refuses to fear, and fixes a trustful gaze not on peril, but on the protector. "I will not be afraid" speaks of resolve and of temptations to fear, which it repels, and from "the nettle danger plucks the flower" *trust* and the fruit *safety*. Selah does not follow here. The tone of the strophe is that of lowly confidence, which is less congruous with an instrumental interlude than are the more agitated preceding strophes. The last strophe, too, is closely connected with the third, since faith bracing itself against fear glides naturally into prayer. [Ps 3:6]

The final strophe (vv. 7, 8) gives the culmination of faith in prayer. "Arise, Jehovah," is quoted from the ancient invocation (Num. x. 35), and expresses in strongly anthropomorphic form the desire for some interposition of Divine power. Fearlessness is not so complete that the psalmist is beyond the need of praying. He is courageous because he knows that God will help, but he knows, too, that God's help depends on his prayer. The courage which does not pray is foolish, and will break down into panic; that which fears enough to cry "Arise, Jehovah," will be vindicated by victory. This prayer is built on experience, as the preceding confidence was. The enemies are now, according to a very frequent figure in the Psalter, compared to wild beasts. Smiting on the cheek is usually a symbol of insult, but here is better taken in close connection with the following "breaking the teeth." By a daring image Jehovah is represented as dealing the beasts of [Ps 3:7]

prey, who prowl round the psalmist with open mouth, the buffets which shatter their jaws and dislodge their teeth, thus making them powerless to harm him. So it has been in the past, and that past is a plea that so it will be now. God will be but doing as He has done, if now He "arise." If He is to be true to Himself, and not to stultify His past deliverances, He must save his suppliant now. Such is the logic of faith, which is only valid on the supposition that God's resources and purpose are inexhaustible and unchangeable. The whole ends with confident anticipation of an answer. "Salvation belongeth unto Jehovah." The full spiritual meaning of that salvation was not yet developed. Literally, the word means "breadth," and so, by a metaphor common to many languages, deliverance as an act, and well-being or prosperity as a state. Deliverance from his enemies is the psalmist's main idea in the word here. It "belongs to Jehovah," since its bestowal is His act. Thus the psalmist's last utterance of trust traverses the scoff which wounded him so much (ver. 2), but in a form which beautifully combines affiance and humility, since it triumphantly asserts that salvation is in God's power, and silently implies that what is thus God's "to will and do" shall certainly be His suppliant's to enjoy. [Pg 29]

Intensely personal as the psalm is, it is the prayer of a king; and rebels as the bulk of the people are ("ten thousands of the people"), they are still God's. Therefore all are included in the scope of his pitying prayer. In other psalms evil is invoked on evil-doers, but here hate is met by love, and the self-absorption of sorrow counteracted by wide sympathy. It is a lower exemplification of the same spirit which breathed from the lips of the greater King the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

[Pg 30]

PSALM IV.

1 When I cry answer me, O God of my righteousness; Thou hast in straits made space for me:
  Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.
2 Sons of men! how long shall my glory be mocked, [in that] ye love vanity,
  [And] seek after a lie? Selah.
3 But know that Jehovah has set apart as His own him whom He favours:
  Jehovah hears when I cry to Him.
4 Stand in awe, and sin not:
  Speak in your hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah.
5 Sacrifice sacrifices of righteousness,
  And trust on Jehovah.
6 Many are saying, Who will let us see good?
  Lift Thou upon us the light of Thy face, O Jehovah.
7 Thou hast given gladness in my heart,
  More than in the time of their corn and their wine [when] they abound.
8 In peace will I lie down and at once sleep:
  For Thou, Jehovah, in [my] loneliness, makest me dwell in safety.

Psalms iii. and iv. are a pair. They are similar in expression (*my glory, there be many which say, I laid me down and slept*), in the psalmist's situation, and in structure (as indicated by the *Selahs*). But they need not be cotemporaneous, nor need the superscription of Psalm iii. be extended to Psalm iv. Their tone is different, the fourth having little reference to the personal danger so acutely felt in Psalm iii., and being mainly a gentle, earnest remonstrance with antagonists, seeking to win them to a better mind. The strophical division into four parts of two verses each, as marked by the Selahs, is imperfectly carried out, as in Psalm iii., and does not correspond with the logical division—a phenomenon which occurs not infrequently in the Psalter, as in all poetry, where the surging thought or emotion overleaps its bounds. Dividing according to the form, we have four strophes, of which the first two are marked by Selah; dividing by the flow of thought, we have three parts of unequal length—prayer (ver. 1), remonstrance (vv. 2-5), communion and prayer (vv. 6-8). [Pg 31]

The cry for an answer by deed is based on the name and on the past acts of God. Grammatically, it would be possible and regular to render "my God of righteousness," *i.e.*, "my righteous God"; but the pronoun is best attached to "righteousness" only, as the consideration that God is righteous is less relevant than that He is the source of the psalmist's righteousness. Since He is so, He may be expected to vindicate it by answering prayer by deliverance. He who feels that all good in himself comes from God may be quite sure that, sooner

or later, and by some means or other, God will witness to His own work. To the psalmist nothing was so incredible as that God should not take care of what He had planted, or let the springing crop be trodden down or rooted up. The Old Testament takes prosperity as the Divine attestation of righteousness; and though they who worship the Man of Sorrows have new light thrown on the meaning of that conception, the substance of it remains true for ever. The compellation "God of my righteousness" is still mighty with God. The second ground of the prayer is laid in the past deeds of God. Whether the clause "Thou hast in straits made space for me" be taken relatively or not, it appeals to former deliverances as reasons for man's prayer and for God's act. [DPu 32]
In many languages trouble and deliverance are symbolised by narrowness and breadth. Compression is oppression. Closely hemmed in by crowds or by frowning rocks, freedom of movement is impossible and breathing is difficult. But out in the open, one expatiates, and a clear horizon means an ample sky.

The strophe division keeps together the prayer and the beginning of the remonstrance to opponents, and does so in order to emphasise the eloquent, sharp juxtaposition of God and the "sons of men." The phrase is usually employed to mean persons of position, but here the contrast between the varying height of men's molehills is not so much in view as that between them all and the loftiness of God. The lips which by prayer have been purged and cured of quivering can speak to foes without being much abashed by their dignity or their hatred. But the very slight reference to the psalmist's own share in the hostility of these "sons of men" is noticeable. It is their false relation to God which is prominent throughout the remonstrance; and that being so, "my glory," in ver. 2, is probably to be taken, as in iii. 3, as a designation of God. It is usually understood to mean either personal or official dignity, but the suggested interpretation is more in keeping with the tone of the psalm. The enemies were really flouting God and turning that great name in which the singer gloried into a jest. They were not therefore idolaters, but practical heathen in Israel, and their "vanity" and "lies" were their schemes doomed to fail and their blasphemies. These two verses bring most vividly into view the contrast between the psalmist clinging to his helping God and the knot of opponents hatching their plans which are sure to fail.

The Selah indicates a pause in the song, as if to underscore the question "How long?" and let it soak into the [DPu 33]
hearts of the foes, and then, in vv. 3 and 4, the remonstrating voice presses on them the great truth which has sprung anew in the singer's soul in answer to his prayer, and beseeches them to let it stay their course and still their tumult. By "the godly" is meant, of course the psalmist. He is sure that he belongs to God and is set apart, so that no real evil can touch him; but does he build this confidence on his own character or on Jehovah's grace? The answer depends on the meaning of the pregnant word rendered "godly," which here occurs for the first time in the Psalter. So far as its form is concerned, it may be either active, one who shows *chesed* (lovingkindness or favour), or passive, one to whom it is shown. But the usage in the Psalter seems to decide in favour of the passive meaning, which is also more in accordance with the general biblical view, which traces all man's hopes and blessings, not to his attitude to God, but to God's to him, and regards man's love to God as a derivative, "Amati amamus, amantes amplius meremur amari" (Bern). Out of His own deep heart of love Jehovah has poured His lovingkindness on the psalmist, as he thrillingly feels, and He will take care that His treasure is not lost; therefore this conviction, which has flamed up anew since the moment before when he prayed, brings with it the assurance that He "hears when I cry," as he had just asked Him to do. The slight emendation, adopted by Cheyne from Grätz and others, is tempting, but unnecessary. He would read, with a small change which would bring this verse into parallelism with xxxi. 22, "See how passing great lovingkindness Jehovah hath shown me"; but the present text is preferable, inasmuch as what we should expect to be urged upon the enemies is not outward facts, but some truth of faith neglected by them. On such [DPu 34]
a truth the singer rests his own confidence; such a truth he lays, like a cold hand, on the hot brows of the plotters, and bids them pause and ponder. Believed, it would fill them with awe, and set in a lurid light the sinfulness of their assault on him. Clearly the rendering "Be ye angry" instead of "Stand in awe" gives a less worthy meaning, and mars the picture of the progressive conversion of the enemy into a devout worshipper, of which the first stage is the recognition of the truth in ver. 3; the second is the awestruck dropping of the weapons, and the third is the silent reflection in the calm and solitude of night. The psalm being an evening song, the reference to "your bed" is the more natural; but "speak in your hearts"—what? The new fact which you have learned from my lips. Say it quietly to yourselves then, when forgotten truths blaze on the waking eye, like phosphorescent writing in the dark, and the nobler self makes its voice heard. "Speak ... and be silent," says the psalmist, for such meditation will end the busy plots against him, and in a wider application "that dread voice," heard in the awed spirit, "shrinks the streams" of passion and earthly desires, which otherwise brawl and roar there. Another strain of the "stringed instruments" makes that silence, as it were, audible, and then the remonstrance goes on once more.

It rises higher now, exhorting to positive godliness, and that in the two forms of offering "sacrifices of righteousness," which here simply means those which are prescribed or which are offered with right dispositions, and of trusting in Jehovah—the two aspects of true religion, which outwardly is worship and inwardly is trust. The poet who could meet hate with no weapon but these earnest pleadings had learned a [Pg 37] better lesson than "the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love," and anticipated "bless them which curse you." The teacher who thus outlined the stages of the way back to God as recognition of His relation to the godly, solitary meditation thereon, forsaking of sin and hushing of the Spirit thereby, and finally worship and trust, knew the discipline for rebellious souls.

Ver. 6 seems at first sight to belong more closely to what follows than to what precedes, and is taken by those who hold the Davidic authorship as addressed to his followers beginning to despond. But it may be the continuance of the address to the enemies, carrying on the exhortation to trust. The sudden appearance of the plural "us" suggests that the psalmist associates himself with the persons whom he has been addressing, and, while he glances at the vain cries of the "many," would make himself the mouthpiece of the nascent faith which he hopes may follow his beseechings. The cry of *the many* would, in that case, have a general reference to the universal desire for "good," and would pathetically echo the hopelessness which must needs mingle with it, so long as the heart does not know who is the only good. The passionate weariness of the question, holding a negation in itself, is wonderfully contrasted with the calm prayer. The eyes fail for want of seeing the yearned-for blessing; but if Jehovah lifts the light of His face upon us, as He will certainly do in answer to prayer, "in His light we shall see light." Every good, however various, is sphered in Him. All colours are smelted into the perfect white and glory of His face.

There is no Selah after ver. 6, but, as in iii. 6, one is due, though omitted. [Pg 36]

Vv. 7 and 8 are separated from ver. 6 by their purely personal reference. The psalmist returns to the tone of his prayer in ver. 1, only that petition has given place, as it should do, to possession and confident thankfulness. The many ask, Who?; he prays, "Lord." They have vague desires after God; he knows what he needs and wants. Therefore in the brightness of that Face shining on him his heart is glad. The mirth of harvest and vintage is exuberant, but it is poor beside the deep, still blessedness which trickles round the heart that craves most the light of Jehovah's countenance. That craving is joy and the fruition is bliss. The psalmist here touches the bottom, the foundation fact on which every life that is not vanity must be based, and which verifies itself in every life that is so based. Strange and tragic that men should forget it and love vanity which mocks them, and, though won, still leaves them looking wearily round the horizon for any glimmer of good! The glad heart possessing Jehovah can, on the other hand, lay itself down in peace and sleep, though foes stand round. The last words of the psalm flow restfully like a lullaby. The expression of confidence gains much if "alone" be taken as referring to the psalmist. Solitary as he is, ringed round by hostility as he may be, Jehovah's presence makes him safe, and being thus safe, he is secure and confidant. So he shuts his eyes in peace, though he may be lying in the open, beneath the stars, without defences or sentries. The Face brings light in darkness, gladness in want, enlargement in straits, safety in peril, and any and every good that any and every man needs.

[Pg 37]

PSALM V.

1 Give ear to my words, Jehovah;
  Consider my meditation.
2 Listen to the voice of my crying, my King and my God,
  For to Thee do I make supplication.
3 Jehovah, in the morning Thou shalt hear my voice;
  In the morning will I order my [prayer] to Thee and keep watch.

4 For not a God delighting in wickedness art Thou;
  Evil cannot sojourn with Thee.
5 Fools cannot stand before Thine eyes;
  Thou hatest all workers of iniquity.

6 Thou destroyest the speakers of falsehood;
The man of blood and deceit Jehovah loathes.
7 But I, in the multitude of Thy loving-kindness I dare come into Thy house;
I dare fall prostrate before Thy holy temple in Thy fear.

8 Jehovah, lead me in Thy righteousness, because of them that are spies on me;
Make Thy way level before me.
9 For in his mouth is nothing trustworthy;
Their inward part is destruction;
An open grave is their throat;
Their tongue they smooth.

10 Hold them guilty, Jehovah: let them fall by their own schemes;
In the multitude of their transgressions strike them down, for they have rebelled against Thee.
11 Then shall all those who take refuge in Thee be glad;
For ever shall they shout for joy, since Thou dost shelter them;
And they that love Thy name shall exult in Thee.
12 For Thou dost bless the righteous;
Jehovah, as with a shield, with favour dost Thou compass him about.

The reference to the temple in ver. 7 is not conclusive against the Davidic authorship of this psalm, since the same word is applied in 1 Sam. i. 9 and iii. 3 to the house of God in Shiloh. It means a palace, and may well be used for any structure, even if a hair tent, in which God dwelt. No doubt it is oftenest used for the Solomonic temple, but it does not necessarily refer to it. Its use here, then, cannot be urged as fatal to the correctness of the superscription. At the same time, it does create a certain presumption against it. But there is nothing in the psalm to determine its date, and its worth is quite independent of its authorship. The psalmist is surrounded by foes, and seeks access to God. These are constant features of the religious life, and their expression here fits as closely to the present time as to any past. [Ps 381]

The psalm falls into two main parts: vv. 1-7 and 8-12. The former division deals with the inner side of the devout life, its access to God, to whom sinful men cannot approach, the latter with the outward side, the conduct, "the way" in which the psalmist seeks to be led, and in which sinful men come to ruin because they will not walk. Naturally the inward comes first, for communion with God in the secret place of the Most High must precede all walking in His way and all blessed experience of His protection, with the joy that springs from it. These two halves of the psalm are arranged in inverted parallelism, the first verse of the second part (ver. 8) corresponding to the last verse of the first (ver. 7) and being, like it, purely personal; vv. 9 and 10 corresponding similarly to vv. 4-6 and, like them, painting the character and fate of evil-doers; and, finally, vv. 11, 12, answering to vv. 1-3 and representing the blessedness of the devout soul, as in the one case led and protected by God and therefore glad, and in the other abiding in His presence. The whole is a prayerful meditation on the inexhaustible theme of the contrasted blessedness of the righteous and misery of the sinner as shown in the two great halves of life: the inward of communion and the outward of action. [Ps 391]

In the first part (vv. 1-7) the central thought is that of access to God's presence, as the desire and purpose of the psalmist (1-3), as barred to evil-doers (4-6), and as permitted to, and embraced as his chief blessing by, the singer (7). The petition to be heard in vv. 1 and 2 passes into confidence that he is heard in ver. 3. There is no shade of sadness nor trace of struggle with doubt in this prayer, which is all sunny and fresh, like the morning sky, through which it ascends to God. "Consider [or Understand] my meditation"—the brooding, silent thought is spread before God, who knows unspoken desires, and "understands thoughts afar off." The contrast between "understanding the meditation" and "hearkening to the voice of my cry" is scarcely unintentional, and gives vividness to the picture of the musing psalmist, in whom, as he muses, the fire burns, and he speaks with his tongue, in a "cry" as loud as the silence from which it issued had been deep. Meditations that do not pass into cries and cries which are not preceded by meditations are alike imperfect. The invocation "my King" is full of meaning if the singer be David, who thus recognises the delegated character of his own royalty; but whoever wrote the psalm, that expression equally witnesses to his firm grasp of the true theocratic idea.

Noteworthy is the intensely personal tone of the invocation in both its clauses, as in the whole of these first verses, in every clause of which "my" or "I" occurs. The poet is alone with God and seeking to clasp still closer the guiding hand, to draw still nearer to the sweet and awful presence where is rest. The invocation [Ps 401]

holds a plea in itself. He who says, "My King and my God," urges the relation, brought about by God's love and accepted by man's faith, as a ground for the hearing of his petition. And so prayer passes into swift assurance; and with a new turn in thought, marked by the repetition of the name "Jehovah" (ver. 3), he speaks his confidence and his resolve. "In the morning" is best taken literally, whether we suppose the psalm to have been composed for a morning song or no. Apparently the compilers of the first Psalter placed it next to Psalm iv., which they regarded as an evening hymn, for this reason. "I will lay me down and sleep" is beautifully followed by "In the morning shalt Thou hear my voice." The order of clauses in ver. 3 is significant in its apparent breach of strict sequence, by which God's hearing is made to precede the psalmist's praying. It is the order dictated by confidence, and it is the order in which the thoughts rise in the trustful heart. He who is sure that God will hear will therefore address himself to speak. First comes the confidence, and then the resolve. There are prayers wrung from men by sore need, and in which doubt causes faltering, but the happier, serener experience is like that of this singer. He resolves to "order" his prayer, using there the word employed for the priest's work in preparing the materials for the morning sacrifice. Thus he compares his prayer to it, and stands at the same level as the writer of Psalm iv., with whose command to "offer the sacrifices of righteousness" this thought again presents a parallel.

A psalmist who has grasped the idea that the true sacrifice is prayer is not likely to have missed the cognate thought that the "house of the Lord," of which he will presently speak, is something other than any material [Ps41]
shrine. But to offer the sacrifice is not all which he rejoices to resolve. He will "keep watch," as Habakkuk said that he would do, on his watch-tower; and that can only mean that he will be on the outlook for the answer to his prayer, or, if we may retain the allusion to sacrifice, for the downward flash of the Divine fire, which tells his prayer's acceptance. Many a prayer is offered, and no eyes afterwards turned to heaven to watch for the answer, and perhaps some answers sent are like water spilled on the ground, for want of such observance.

The confidence and resolve ground themselves on God's holiness, through which the necessary condition of approach to Him comes to be purity—a conviction which finds expression in all religions, but is nowhere so vividly conceived or construed as demanding such stainless inward whiteness as in the Psalter. The "for" of ver. 4 would naturally have heralded a statement of the psalmist's grounds for expecting that he would be welcomed in his approach, but the turn of thought, which postpones that, and first regards God's holiness as shutting out the impure, is profoundly significant. "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness" means more than the simple "Thou hast not pleasure" would do; it argues from the character of God, and glances at some of the foul deities whose nostrils snuff up sensual impurity as acceptable sacrifice. The one idea of absolute contrariety between God and evil is put in a rich variety of shapes in vv. 4-6, which first deal with it negatively in three clauses (*not a God*; *not dwell*; *not stand in Thy sight*) and then positively in other three (*hatest*; *shalt destroy*; *abhorreth*). "Evil shall not sojourn with Thee." The verb is to be taken in its full [Ps42]
meaning of sojourning as a guest-friend, who has the right to hospitality and defence. It thus constitutes the antithesis to ver. 7. Clearly the sojourning does not mean access to the temple, but abiding with God. The barriers are of the same nature as the communion which they hinder, and something far deeper is meant than outward access to any visible shrine. No one sojourned in the temple. In like manner, the "standing in Thy sight" is a figure drawn from courts, reminding us of "my King" in ver. 2 and suggesting the impossibility of evil or its doers approaching the Divine throne.

But there is more than a negative side to the relation between God and evil, which the psalm goes on to paint in sombre colours, for God not only does not delight in sin, but hates it with a hatred like the physical loathing of some disgusting thing, and will gather all His alienation into one fatal lightning bolt. Such thoughts do not exhaust the truth as to the Divine relation to sin. They did not exhaust the psalmist's knowledge of that relation, and still less do they exhaust ours, but they are parts of the truth to-day as much as then, and nothing in Christ's revelation has antiquated them.

The psalmist's vocabulary is full of synonyms for sin, which witness to the profound consciousness of it which law and ritual had evoked in devout hearts. First, he speaks of it in the abstract, as "wickedness" and "evil." Then he passes to individuals, of whom he singles out two pairs, the first a more comprehensive and the second a more specific designation. The former pair are "the foolish" and "workers of iniquity." The word for "foolish" is usually translated by the moderns "arrogant," but the parallelism with the general expression [Ps43]
"workers of iniquity" rather favours a less special meaning, such as Hupfeld's "fools" or the LXX.'s "transgressors." Only in the last pair are special forms of evil mentioned, and the two selected are significant of the psalmist's own experience. *Liars* and *men of blood and craft* are his instances of the sort of sinners most abominable to God. That specification surely witnesses to his own sufferings from such.

In ver. 7 the psalmist comes back to the personal reference, contrasting his own access to God with the separation of evil-doers from His presence. But he does not assert that he has the right of entrance because he is pure. Very strikingly he finds the ground of his right of entry to the palace in God's "multitude of mercy," not in his own innocence. Answering to "in Thy righteousness" is "in Thy fear." The one phrase expresses God's disposition to man which makes access possible, the other man's disposition to God which makes worship acceptable. "In the multitude of Thy mercy" and "in Thy fear," taken together, set forth the conditions of approach. Having regard to ver. 4, it seems impossible to restrict the meaning of "Thy house" to the material sanctuary. It is rather a symbol of communion, protection, and friendship. Does the meaning pass into the narrower sense of outward worship in the material "temple" in the second clause? It may be fairly taken as doing so (Hupfeld). But it may be maintained that the whole verse refers to the spiritual realities of prayer and fellowship, and not at all to the externalities of worship, which are used as symbols, just as in ver. 3 prayer is symbolised by the morning sacrifice. But probably it is better to suppose that the psalmist's faith, though not tied to form, was fed by form, and that symbol and reality, the outward and the inward worship, [Ps 44] the access to the temple and the approach of the silent soul to God, are fused in his psalm as they tended to be in his experience. Thus the first part of the psalm ends with the psalmist prostrate (for so the word for "worship" means) before the palace sanctuary of his King and God. It has thus far taught the conditions of approach to God, and given a concrete embodiment of them in the progress of the singer's thoughts from petition to assurance and from resolve to accomplishment.

The second part may be taken as his prayer when in the temple, whether that be the outward sanctuary or no. It is likewise a further carrying out of the contrast of the condition of the wicked and of the lovers of God, expressed in terms applying to outward life rather than to worship. It falls into three parts: the personal prayer for guidance in life, the contemplation of evil-doers, and the vehement prayer for their destruction, corresponding to vv. 4-6, and the contrasted prayer for the righteous, among whom he implies his own inclusion.

The whole of the devout man's desires for himself are summed up in that prayer for guidance. All which the soul needs is included in these two: access to God in the depths of still prostration before His throne as the all-sufficient good for the inner life; guidance, as by a shepherd, on a plain path, chosen not by self-will but by God, for the outward. He who has received the former in any degree will in the same measure have the latter. To dwell in God's house is to desire His guidance as the chief good. "In Thy righteousness" is capable of two meanings: it may either designate the path by which the psalmist desired to be led, or the [Ps 45] divine attribute to which he appealed. The latter meaning, which is substantially equivalent to "because Thou art righteous," is made more probable by the other instances in the psalm of a similar use of "in" (*in the multitude of Thy mercy*; *in Thy fear*; *in the multitude of their transgressions*). His righteousness is manifested in leading those who seek for His guidance (compare Psalm xxv. 8; xxxi. 1, etc.). Then comes the only trace in the psalm of the presence of enemies, because of whom the singer prays for guidance. It is not so much that he fears falling into their hands as that he dreads lest, if left to himself, he may take some step which will give them occasion for malicious joy in his fall or his calamity. Wherever a man is earnestly God-fearing, many eyes watch him, and gleam with base delight if they see him stumble. The psalmist, whether David or another, had that cross to carry, like every thorough-going adherent of the religious ideal (or of any lofty ideal, for that matter); and his prayer shows how heavy it was, since thoughts of it mingled with even his longings for righteousness. "Plain" does not mean *obvious*, but *level*, and may possibly include both freedom from stumbling-blocks ("Lead us not into temptation") and from calamities, but the prevalent tone of the psalm points rather to the former. He who knows his own weaknesses may legitimately shrink from snares and occasions to fall, even though, knowing the wisdom of his Guide and the help that waits on his steps, he may "count it all joy" when he encounters them.

The picture of the evil-doers in ver. 9 is introduced, as in ver. 4, with a "for." The sinners here are evidently the *enemies* of the previous verse. Their sins are those of speech; and the force of the rapid clauses of the [Ps 46] picture betrays how recently and sorely the psalmist had smarted from lies, flatteries, slanders, and all the rest of the weapons of smooth and bitter tongues. He complains that there is no faithfulness or steadfastness in "his mouth"—a distributive singular, which immediately passes into the plural—nothing there that a man can rely on, but all treacherous. "Their inward part is destruction." The other rendering, "engulfing ruin" or "a yawning gulf," is picturesque; but *destruction* is more commonly the meaning of the word and yields a vigorous sense here. They plot inwardly the ruin of the men whom they flatter. The figure is bold. Down to this pit of destruction is a way like an open sepulchre, the throat expanded in the act of speech; and the falsely smoothed tongue is like a slippery approach to the descent (so Jennings and Lowe). Such figures strike Western minds as violent, but are natural to the East. The shuddering sense of the deadly power of

words is a marked characteristic of the Psalter. Nothing stirs psalmists to deeper indignation than "God's great gift of speech abused," and this generation would be all the better for relearning the lesson.

The psalmist is "in the sanctuary," and there "understands their end," and breaks into prayer which is also prophecy. The vindication of such prayers for the destruction of evil-doers is that they are not the expressions of personal enmity ("They have rebelled against Thee"), and that they correspond to one side of the Divine character and acts, which was prominent in the Old Testament epoch of revelation, and is not superseded by the New. But they do belong to that lower level; and to hesitate to admit their imperfection from the Christian point of view is to neglect the plain teaching of our Lord, who built His law of the kingdom on the declared [Pg 47] relative imperfection of the ethics of the Old. Terrible indeed are the prayers here. *Hold them guilty*—that is, probably, treat them as such by punishing; *let them fall*; *thrust them out*—from Thy presence, if they have ventured thither, or out into the darkness of death. Let us be thankful that we dare not pray such prayers, but let us not forget that for the psalmist not to have prayed them would have indicated, not that he had anticipated the tenderness of the Gospel, but that he had failed to learn the lesson of the law and was basely tolerant of baseness.

But we come into the sunshine again at the close, and hear the contrasted prayer, which thrills with gladness and hope. "When the wicked perish there is shouting." The servants of God, relieved from the incubus and beholding the fall of evil, lift up their praises. The order in which the designations of these servants occur is very noteworthy. It is surely not accidental that we have them first described as "those that trust in Thee," then as "all them that love Thy name," and finally as "the righteous." What is this sequence but an anticipation of the evangelical order? The root of all is trust, then love, then righteousness. Love follows trust. "We have known and believed the love which God hath to us." Righteousness follows trust and love, inasmuch as by faith the new life enters the heart and inasmuch as love supplies the great motive for keeping the commandments. So root, stem, and flower are here, wrapped up, as it were, in a seed, which unfolds into full growth in the New Testament. The literal meaning of the word rendered "put their trust" is "flee as to a refuge," and that beautifully expresses the very essence of the act of faith; while the same metaphor is carried [Pg 48] on in "defendest," which literally means *coverest*. The fugitive who shelters in God is covered by the shadow of His wing. Faith, love, and righteousness are the conditions of the purest joy. Trust is joy; love is joy; obedience to a loved law is joy. And round him who thus, in his deepest self, dwells in God's house and in his daily life walks, with these angels for his companions, on God's path, which by choice he has made his own, there is ever cast the broad buckler of God's favour. He is safe from all evil on whom God looks with love, and he on whom God so looks is he whose heart dwells in God's house and whose feet "travel on life's common way in cheerful godliness."

PSALM VI.

1 Jehovah, not in Thine anger do Thou correct me,
And not in Thy hot wrath do Thou chastise me.
2 Be gracious to me, Jehovah, for I am withered away;
Heal me, Jehovah, for my bones are dismayed:
3 And my soul is sorely dismayed;
And Thou, Jehovah—how long?

4 Return, Jehovah, deliver my soul;
Save me for the sake of Thy loving-kindness.
5 For in death there is no remembrance of Thee;
In Sheol who gives thee thanks?

6 I am wearied out with my groaning;
Every night I make my bed swim;
With my tears I melt away my couch.
7 My eye is wasted with trouble;

It is aged because of all my oppressors.

8 Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity,
For Jehovah has heard the voice of my weeping.
9 Jehovah has heard my supplication;
Jehovah will accept my prayer.
10 Ashamed and sore dismayed shall be all my enemies;
They shall turn back, shall be ashamed in a moment.

The theme and progress of thought in this psalm are very common, especially in those attributed to David. A soul compassed by enemies, whose hate has all but sapped the life out of it, "catches at God's skirts and prays," and thence wins confidence which anticipates deliverance and victory. There are numerous variations of this *leitmotif*, and each of the psalms which embody it has its own beauty, its own discords resolved into its own harmonies. The representation of the trouble of spirit as producing wasting of the body is also frequent, and is apparently not to be taken as metaphor, though not to be pressed, as if the psalmist were at once struck with the two calamities of hostility and disease, but the latter is simply the result of the former, and will disappear with it. It is needless to look for a historical occasion of the psalm, but to an ear that knows the tones of sorrow, or to a heart that has itself uttered them, the supposition that in these pathetic cries we hear only a representative Israelite bewailing the national ruin sounds singularly artificial. If ever the throb of personal anguish found tears and a voice, it does so in this psalm. Whoever wrote it wrote with his blood. There are in it no obvious references to events in the recorded life of David, and hence the ascription of it to him must rest on something else than the interpretation of the psalm. The very absence of such allusions is a fact to be dealt with by those who deny the accuracy of the attribution of authorship. But, however that question may be settled, the worth of this little plaintive cry depends on quite other considerations than the discovery of the name of the singer or the nature of his sorrow. It is a transcript of a perennial experience, a guide for a road which all feet have to travel. Its stream runs turbid and broken at first, but calms and clears as it flows. It has four curves or windings, which can scarcely be called strophes without making too artificial a framework for such a simple and spontaneous gush of feeling. Still the transitions are clear enough.

[Ps. 51]

In vv. 1-3 we have a cluster of sharp, short cries to God for help, which all mean the same thing. In each of these the great name of Jehovah is repeated, and in each the plea urged is simply the sore need of the suppliant. These are no "vain repetitions," which are pressed out of a soul by the grip of the rack; and it is not "taking the name of the Lord in vain" when four times in three short verses the passionate cry for help is winged with it as the arrow with its feather. Two thoughts fill the psalmist's consciousness, or rather one thought—the Lord—and one feeling—his pains. In ver. 1 the Hebrew makes "in Thine anger" and "in Thine hot wrath" emphatic by setting these two phrases between the negative and the verb: "Not in Thine anger rebuke me; not in Thy heat chasten me." He is willing to submit to both rebuke and chastisement; but he shrinks appalled from that form of either which tends to destruction, not to betterment. There are chastisements in tenderness, which express God's love, and there are others which manifest His alienation and wrath. This psalmist did not think that all Divine retribution was intended for reformation. To him there was such a thing as wrath which slew. Jeremiah has the same distinction (x. 24), and the parallel has been made an argument for the later date of the psalm. Cheyne and others assume that Jeremiah is the original, but that is simple conjecture, and the prophet's conspicuous fondness for quotations from older authors makes the supposition more probable that the psalm is the earlier. Resignation and shrinking blend in that cry, in which a heart conscious of evil confesses as well as implores, recognises the justice and yet deprecates the utmost severity of the blow. He who asks, "Not in Thine anger rebuke me," thereby submits to *loving* chastisement.

[Ps. 51]

Then follow in vv. 2 and 3 three short petitions, which are as much cries of pain as prayers, and as much prayers as cries of pain. In the two former the prayer is put first, and its plea second; in the last the order is reversed, and so the whole is, as it were, enclosed in a circlet of prayer. Two words make the petition in each clause, "Have mercy on me, Jehovah" (tastelessly corrected by Grätz into "Revive me"), and "Heal me, Jehovah." The third petition is daring and pregnant in its incompleteness. In that emphatic "And Thou, Jehovah," the psalmist looks up, with almost reproach in his gaze, to the infinite Personality which seems so unaccountably passive. The hours that bring pain are leaden-footed, and their moments each seem an eternity. The most patient sufferer may cry, "How long?" and God will not mistake the voice of pain for that of impatience. This threefold prayer, with its triple invocation, has a triple plea, which is all substantially one. His misery fills the psalmist's soul, and he believes that God will feel for him. He does not at first appeal to God's revealed character, except in so far as the plaintive reiteration of the Divine name carries such an appeal, but he spreads out his own wretchedness, and he who does that has faith in God's pity. "I am withered

away," like a faded flower. "My bones are vexed";—the physical effects of his calamity, "bones" being put for the whole body, and regarded as the seat of sensibility, as is frequently the usage. "Vexed" is too weak a rendering. The idea is that of the utmost consternation. Not only the body, but the soul, partakes in the dismay. The "soul" is even more shaken than the "bones"; that is to say, mental agitation rather than physical disease (and the latter as the result of the former) troubles the psalmist. We can scarcely fail to remember the [Ps 53] added sanctity which these plaintive words have received, since they were used by the Prince of sufferers when all but in sight of the cross.

The next turn of thought includes vv. 4, 5, and is remarkable for the new pleas on which it rests the triple prayer, "Return; deliver; save." God is His own motive, and His self-revelation in act must always be self-consistent. Therefore the plea is presented, "for Thy loving-kindness' sake." It beseeches Him to be what He is, and to show Himself as still being what He had always been. The second plea is striking both in its view of the condition of the dead and in its use of that view as an argument with God. Like many other psalmists, the writer thinks of Sheol as the common gathering-place of the departed, a dim region where they live a poor shadowy life, inactive, joyless, and all but godless, inasmuch as praise, service, and fellowship with Him have ceased.

That view is equally compatible with the belief in a resurrection and the denial of it, for it assumes continued individual consciousness. It is the prevailing tone in the Psalter and in Job and Ecclesiastes. But in some psalms, which embody the highest rapture of inward and mystical devotion, the sense of present union with God bears up the psalmist into the sunlight of the assurance that against such a union death can have no power, and we see the hope of immortality in the very act of dawning on the devout soul. May we not say that the subjective experience of the reality of communion with God now is still the path by which the certainty of its perpetuity in a future life is reached? The objective proof in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is verified by this experience. The psalmists had not the former, but, having the latter, they attained to at all [Ps 54] events occasional confidence in a blessed life beyond. But the tone of such triumphant glimpses as xvi. 10, xvii. 15, xlix. 15, lxxiii. 24, is of a higher mood than that of this and other psalms, which probably represent the usual view of devout Hebrews.

The fact, as it appeared to those at the then stage of revelation, that remembrance and praise of God were impossible in Sheol, is urged as a plea. That implies the psalmist's belief that God cared for men's praise—a thought which may be so put as to make Him an almighty Selfishness, but which in its true aspect is the direct inference from the faith that He is infinite Love. It is the same sweet thought of Him which Browning has when he makes God say, "I miss my little human praise." God's joy in men's praise is joy in men's love and in their recognition of His love.

The third turn of feeling is in vv. 6 and 7. The sense of his own pains which, in the two previous parts of the psalm, had been contending with the thought of God, masters the psalmist in these dreary verses, in which the absence of the name of God is noteworthy as expressive of his absorption in brooding over his misery. The vehemence of the manifestations of sorrow and the frankness of the record of these manifestations in the song are characteristic of the emotional, demonstrative Eastern temperament, and strike our more reticent dispositions as excessive. But however expressed in unfamiliar terms, the emotion which wails in these sad verses is only too familiar to men of all temperaments. All sad hearts are tempted to shut out God and to look only at their griefs. There is a strange pleasure in turning round the knife in the wound and recounting the tokens of misery. This man feels some ease in telling how he had exhausted his strength with groaning and [Ps 55] worn away the sleepless night with weeping. Night is ever the nurse of heavy thought, and stings burn again then. The hyperbolical expressions that he had set his bed afloat with his tears and "melted" it (as the word means) are matched by the other hyperboles which follow, describing the effect of this unmeasured weeping on his eyes. He had wept them away, and they were bleared and dim like those of an old man. The cause of this passion of weeping is next expressed, in plain words, which connect this turn of the thought with the next verses, and seem to explain the previously mentioned physical pains as either metaphorical or consequent on the hostility of "mine adversaries."

But even while thus his spirit is bitterly burying itself in his sorrows the sudden certainty of the answer to his prayer flashes on him. "Sometimes a light surprises," as Cowper, who too well knew what it was to be worn with groaning, has sung. That swift conviction witnesses its origin in a Divine inspiration by its very suddenness. Nothing has changed in circumstances, but everything has changed in aspect. Wonder and exultation throb in the threefold assurance that the prayer is heard. In the two former clauses the "hearing" is regarded as a present act; in the latter the "receiving" is looked for in the future. The process, which is usually

treated as one simple act, is here analysed. "God has heard; therefore God will receive"—*i.e.*, answer—"my weeping prayer." Whence came that confidence but from the breath of God on the troubled spirit? "The peace of God" is ever the reward of submissive prayer. In this confidence a man can front the close-knit ring of enemies, of whatever sort they be, and bid them back. Their triumphant dismissal is a vivid way of [Pg 56] expressing the certainty of their departure, with their murderous hate unslaked and baulked. "Mine enemies" are "workers of iniquity." That is a daring assumption, made still more remarkable by the previous confession that the psalmist's sorrow was God's rebuke and chastening. But a man has the right to believe that his cause is God's in the measure in which he makes God's cause his. In the confidence of prayer heard, the psalmist can see "things that are not as though they were," and, though no change has passed on the beleaguering hosts, triumphs in their sure rout and retreat. Very significantly does he predict in ver. 10 the same fate for them which he had bewailed as his own. The "dismay" which had afflicted his soul shall pass to them ("sore vexed"). Since God "returns" (ver. 4), the enemy will have to "return" in baffled abandonment of their plans, and be "ashamed" at the failure of their cruel hopes. And all this will come as suddenly as the glad conviction had started up in the troubled heart of the singer. His outward life shall be as swiftly rescued as his inward has been. One gleam of God's presence in his soul had lit its darkness, and turned tears into sparkling homes of the rainbow; one flash of that same presence in his outward life shall scatter all his foes with like swiftness.

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PSALM VII.

1 Jehovah, my God, in Thee I take refuge;
Save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me,
2 Lest like a lion he tear my soul, breaking it while there is no deliverer.
3 Jehovah, my God, if I have done this,
If there is iniquity in my hands,
4 If I have repaid evil to him who was at peace with me—
Nay, I have delivered him that was my enemy causelessly—
5 May the enemy chase my soul and overtake it, and trample my life to the ground!
And may he lay my honour in the dust! Selah.

6 Arise, Jehovah, in Thine anger;
Lift up Thyself against the ragings of my adversaries,
And awake for me: judgment Thou hast appointed.
7 And let a gathering of peoples stand round Thee,
And above it sit Thou on high.
8 Jehovah will judge the peoples;
Do me right, Jehovah, according to my righteousness and according to my innocence [that is] upon me.
9 Let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and establish Thou the righteous,
For a Trier of hearts and reins is God the righteous.
10 My shield is upon God,
The Saviour of the upright-hearted.

11 God is a righteous Judge,
And a God who is angry every day.
12 If [a man] turn not, He will sharpen His sword;
His bow He has bent, and made it ready.
13 And at him He has aimed deadly weapons;
His arrows He will kindle into flaming darts.
14 See! he is in labour with wickedness;
Yea, he is pregnant with mischief, and gives birth to a lie. [Pg 58]
15 A pit has he sunk, and dug it out;
And he will fall into the hole he is making.
16 His mischief shall come back on his own head,

And upon his own skull shall his violence come down.

17 I will thank Jehovah according to His righteousness,
And sing with the harp to the name of Jehovah most high.

This is the only psalm with the title "Shiggaion." The word occurs only here and in Hab. iii. 1, where it stands in the plural, and with the preposition "upon," as if it designated instruments. The meaning is unknown, and commentators, who do not like to say so, have much ado to find one. The root is a verb, "to wander," and the explanation is common that the word describes the disconnected character of the psalm, which is full of swiftly succeeding emotions rather than of sequent thoughts. But there is no such exceptional discontinuity as to explain the title. It may refer to the character of the musical accompaniment rather than to that of the words. The authorities are all at sea, the LXX. shirking the difficulty by rendering "psalm," others giving "error" or "ignorance," with allusion to David's repentance after cutting off Saul's skirt or to Saul's repentance of his persecuting David. The later Jewish writers quoted by Neubauer ("Studia Biblic.," ii. 36, *sq*.) guess at most various meanings, such as "love and pleasure," "occupation with music," "affliction," "humility," while others, again, explain it as the name of a musical instrument. Clearly the antiquity of the title is proved by this unintelligibility. If we turn to the other part of it, we find further evidence of age and of independence. Who was "Cush, a Benjamite"? He is not mentioned elsewhere. The author of the title, then, had access to some sources for David's life other than the Biblical records; and, as Hupfeld acknowledges, we have here [Ps 50] evidence of ancient ascription of authorship which "has more weight than most of the others." Cush has been supposed to be Shimei or Saul himself, and to have been so called because of his swarthy complexion (Cush meaning an African) or as a jest, because of his personal beauty. Cheyne, following Krochmal, would correct into "because of [Mordecai] the son of Kish, a Benjamite," and finds in this entirely conjectural and violent emendation an "attestation that the psalm was very early regarded as a work of the Persian age" ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 229). But there is really no reason of weight for denying the Davidic authorship, as Ewald, Hitzig, Hupfeld, and Riehm allow; and there is much in 1 Sam. xxiv.-xxvi. correspondent with the situation and emotions of the psalmist here, such as, *e.g*., the protestations of innocence, the calumnies launched at him, and the call on God to judge. The tone of the psalm is high and courageous, in remarkable contrast to the depression of spirit in the former psalm, up out of which the singer had to pray himself. Here, on the contrary, he fronts the enemy, lion-like though he be, without a quiver. It is the courage of innocence and of trust. Psalm vi. wailed like some soft flute; Psalm vii. peals like the trumpet of judgment, and there is triumph in the note. The whole may be divided into three parts, of which the close of the first is marked by the Selah at the end of ver. 5; and the second includes vv. 6-10. Thus we have the appeal of innocence for help (vv. 1-5), the cry for more than help—namely, definite judgment (vv. 6-10)—and the vision of judgment (vv. 11-17).

The first section has two main thoughts: the cry for help and the protestation of innocence. It is in accordance with the bold triumphant tone of the psalm that its first words are a profession of faith in Jehovah. It is well to [Ps 40] look *to* God before looking *at* dangers and foes. He who begins with trust can go on to think of the fiercest antagonism without dismay. Many of the psalms ascribed to David begin thus, but it is no mere stereotyped formula. Each represents a new act of faith, in the presence of a new danger. The word for "put trust" here is very illuminative and graphic, meaning properly the act of fleeing to a refuge. It is sometimes blended with the image of a sheltering rock, sometimes with the still tenderer one of a mother-bird, as when Ruth "came to trust under the wings of Jehovah," and in many other places. The very essence of the act of faith is better expressed by that metaphor than by much subtle exposition. Its blessedness as bringing security and warm shelter and tenderness more than maternal is wrapped up in the sweet and instructive figure. The many enemies are, as it were, embodied in one, on whom the psalmist concentrates his thoughts as the most formidable and fierce. The metaphor of the lion is common in the psalms attributed to David, and is, at all events, natural in the mouth of a shepherd king, who had taken a lion by the beard. He is quite aware of his peril, if God does not help him, but he is so sure of his safety, since he trusts, that he can contemplate the enemy's power unmoved, like a man standing within arm's length of the lion's open jaws, but with a strong grating between. This is the blessing of true faith, not the oblivion of dangers, but the calm fronting of them because our refuge is in God.

Indignant repelling of slander follows the first burst of triumphant trust (vv. 3-5). Apparently "the words of Cush" were calumnies poisoning Saul's suspicious nature, such as David refers to in 1 Sam. xxiv. 9: [1 Sa 61] "Wherefore hearkenest thou to men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?" The emphatic and enigmatic *This* in ver. 3 is unintelligible, unless it refers to some slander freshly coined, the base malice of which stirs its object into flashing anger and vehement self-vindication. The special point of the falsehood is plain from the repudiation. He had been charged with attempting to injure one who was at peace with him.

That is exactly what "men's words" charged on David, "saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt" (1 Samuel, as above). "If there be iniquity in my hands" is very like "See that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee"; "Thou huntest after my soul to take it" (1 Samuel) is also like our ver. 1: "them that pursue me," and ver. 5: "let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it." The specific form of this protestation of innocence finds no explanation in the now favourite view of the sufferer in the psalm as being the righteous nation. The clause which is usually treated as a parenthesis in ver. 4, and translated, as in the R.V., "I have delivered him that without cause was mine adversary," is needlessly taken by Delitzsch and others as a continuation of the hypothetical clauses, and rendered, with a change in the meaning of the verb, "And if I have despoiled him," etc.; but it is better taken as above and referred to the incident in the cave when David spared Saul's life. What meaning would that clause have with the national reference? The metaphor of a wild beast in chase of its prey colours the vehement declaration in ver. 5 of readiness to suffer if guilty. We see the swift pursuit, the victim overtaken and trampled to death. There may also be an echo of the Song of Miriam (Exod. xv. 9): "The enemy said, I will pursue; I will overtake." To lay my glory in the dust" is equivalent to "bring down my soul to the dust of death." Man's glory is his "soul." Thus, nobly throbbing with conscious innocence and fronting unmerited hate, the rush of words stops, to let the musical accompaniment blare on, for a while, as if defiant and confident. [Ps 63]

The second section of the psalm (vv. 6-10) is a cry for the coming of the Divine Judge. The previous prayer was content with deliverance, but this takes a bolder flight, and asks for the manifestation of the punitive activity of God on the enemies, who, as usually, are identified with "evil-doers." The grand metaphors in "Arise," "Lift up Thyself," "Awake," mean substantially the same thing. The long periods during which evil works and flaunts with impunity are the times when God sits as if passive and, in a figure still more daring, as if asleep. When His destructive power flashed into act, and some long-tolerated iniquity was smitten at a blow, the Hebrew singers saw therein God springing to His feet or awaking to judgment. Such long stretches of patient permission of evil and of swift punishment are repeated through the ages, and individual lives have them in miniature. The great judgments of nations and the small ones of single men embody the same principles, just as the tiniest crystal has the same angles and lines of cleavage as the greatest of its kind. So this psalmist has penetrated to a true discernment of the relations of the small and the great, when he links his own vindication by the judicial act of God with the pomp and splendour of a world-wide judgment, and bases his prayer for the former on the Divine purpose to effect the latter. The sequence, "The Lord ministereth judgment to the peoples"—therefore—"judge me, O Lord," does not imply that the "me" is the nation, but simply indicates as the ground of the individual hope of a vindicating judgment the Divine fact, of which history had given him ample proof and faith gave him still fuller evidence, that God, though He sometimes seemed to sleep, did indeed judge the nations. The prerogative of the poet, and still more, the instinct of the inspired spirit, is to see the law of the greatest exemplified in the small and to bring every triviality of personal life into contact with God and His government. The somewhat harsh construction of the last clause of ver. 6 begins the transition from the prayer for the smaller to the assurance of the greater judgment which is its basis, and similarly the first clause of ver. 8 closes the picture of that wider act, and the next clause returns to the prayer. This picture, thus embedded in the heart of the supplication, is majestic in its few broad strokes. First comes the appointment of judgment, then the assembling of the "peoples," which here may, perhaps, have the narrower meaning of the "tribes," since "congregation" is the word used for them in their national assembly, and would scarcely be employed for the collection of Gentile nations. But whether the concourse be all Israel or all nations, they are gathered in silent expectance as in a great judgment-hall. Then enters the Judge. If we retain the usual reading and rendering of ver. 7 *b*, the act of judgment is passed over in silence, and the poet beholds God, the judgment finished, soaring above the awe-struck multitudes, in triumphant return to the repose of His heavenly throne. But the slight emendation of the text, needed to yield the meaning "Sit Thou above it," is worthy of consideration. In either case, the picture closes with the repeated assurance of the Divine judgment of the peoples, and (ver. 8) the prayer begins again. The emphatic assertion of innocence must be taken in connection with the slanders already repudiated. The matter in hand is the evils charged on the psalmist, for which he was being chased as if by lions, the judgment craved is the chastisement of his persecutors, and the innocence professed is simply the innocence which they calumniated. The words have no bearing at all on the psalmist's general relation to the Divine law, nor is there any need to have recourse to the hypothesis that the speaker is the "righteous nation." It is much more difficult to vindicate a member of that remnant from the charge of overestimating the extent and quality of even the righteous nation's obedience, if he meant to allege, as that interpretation would make him do, that the nation was pure in life and heart, than it is to vindicate the single psalmist vehemently protesting his innocence of the charges for which he was hunted. Cheyne confesses (Commentary *in loc*.) that the [Ps 64]

"psalmist's view may seem too rose-coloured," which is another way of acknowledging that the interpretation of the protestation as the voice of the nation is at variance with the facts of its condition.

The accents require ver. 9 *a* to be rendered "Let wickedness make an end of the wicked," but that introduces an irrelevant thought of the suicidal nature of evil. It may be significant that the psalmist's prayer is not for the destruction of the wicked, but of their wickedness. Such annihilation of evil is the great end of God's judgment, and its consequence will be the establishment of the righteous. Again the prayer strengthens itself by the thought of God as righteous and as trying the hearts and reins (the seat of feeling). In the presence of rampant and all but triumphant evil, a man needs to feed hopes of its overthrow that would else seem vainest dreams, by gazing on the righteousness and searching power of God. Very beautifully does the order of the words in ver. 9 suggest the kindred of the good man with God by closing each division of the verse with "righteous." A righteous man has a claim on a righteous God. Most naturally then the prayer ends with the calm confidence of ver. 10: "My shield is upon God." He Himself bears the defence of the psalmist. This confidence he has won by his prayer, and in it he ceases to be a suppliant and becomes a seer. IPs 651

The last section (ver. 11 to end) is a vision of the judgment prayed for, and may be supposed to be addressed to the enemy. If so, the hunted man towers above them, and becomes a rebuker. The character of God underlies the fact of judgment, as it had encouraged the prayer for it. What he had said to himself when his hope drooped, he now, as a prophet, peals out to men as making retribution sure: "God is a righteous Judge, yea a God that hath indignation every day." The absence of an object specified for the indignation makes its inevitable flow wherever there is evil the more vividly certain. If He is such, then of course follows the destruction of every one who "turns not." Retribution is set forth with solemn vigour under four figures. First, God is as an armed enemy sharpening His sword in preparation for action, a work of time which in the Hebrew is represented as in process, and bending His bow, which is the work of a moment, and in the Hebrew is represented as a completed act. Another second, and the arrow will whizz. Not only is the bow bent, but (ver. 11) the deadly arrows are aimed, and not only aimed, but continuously fed with flame. The Hebrew puts "At him" (the wicked) emphatically at the beginning of the verse, and uses the form of the verb which implies completed action for the "aiming" and that which implies incomplete for "making" the arrows burn. So the stern picture is drawn of God as in the moment before the outburst of His punitive energy—the sword sharpened, the bow bent, the arrows fitted, the burning stuff being smeared on their tips. What will happen when all this preparation blazes into action? IPs 661

The next figure in ver. 14 insists on the automatic action of evil in bringing punishment. It is the Old Testament version of "Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death." The evil-doer is boldly represented as "travailing with iniquity," and that metaphor is broken up into the two parts "He hath conceived mischief" and "He hath brought forth falsehood." The "falsehood," which is the thing actually produced, is so called, not because it deceives others, but because it mocks its producer with false hopes and never fulfils his purposes. This is but the highly metaphorical way of saying that a sinner never does what he means to do, but that the end of all his plans is disappointment. The law of the universe condemns him to feed on ashes and to make and trust in lies.

A third figure brings out more fully the idea implied in "falsehood," namely, the failure of evil to accomplish its doer's purpose. Crafty attempts to trap others have an ugly habit of snaring their contriver. The irony of fortune tumbles the hunter into the pitfall dug by him for his prey. The fourth figure (ver. 16) represents the incidence of his evil on the evil-doer as being certain as the fall of a stone thrown straight up, which will infallibly come back in the line of its ascent. Retribution is as sure as gravitation, especially if there is an Unseen Hand above, which adds impetus and direction to the falling weight. All these metaphors, dealing with the "natural" consequences of evil, are adduced as guarantees of *God's* judgment, whence it is clear both that the psalmist is thinking not of some final future judgment, but of the continuous one of daily providence, and that he made no sharp line of demarcation between the supernatural and the natural. The qualities of things and the play of natural events are God's working. IPs 671

So the end of all is thanksgiving. A stern but not selfish nor unworthy thankfulness follows judgment, with praise which is not inconsistent with tears of pity, even as the act of judgment which calls it forth is not inconsistent with Divine love. The vindication of God's righteousness is worthily hymned by the choral thanksgivings of all who love righteousness. By judgment Jehovah makes Himself known as "most high," supreme over all creatures; and hence the music of thanksgiving celebrates Him under that name. The title "Elyon" here employed is regarded by Cheyne and others as a sign of late date, but the use of it seems rather a matter of poetic style than of chronology. Melchizedek, Balaam, and the king of Babylon (Isa. xiv. 14) use

it; it occurs in Daniel, but, with these exceptions, is confined to poetical passages, and cannot be made out to be a mark of late date, except by assuming the point in question—namely, the late date of the poetry, principally nineteen psalms, in which it occurs.

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PSALM VIII.

1 Jehovah, our Lord,
How glorious is Thy name in all the earth!
Who hast set Thy glory upon the heavens.
2 Out of the mouth of children and sucklings hast Thou founded a strength,
Because of Thine adversaries,
To still the enemy and the revengeful.

3 When I gaze on Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers,
Moon and stars, which Thou hast established,
4 What is frail man, that Thou rememberest him,
And the son of man, that Thou visitest him?
5 For Thou didst let him fall but little short of God,
And crownedst him with glory and honour.
6 Thou madest him ruler over the works of Thy hands;
Thou hast put all things under his feet,
7 Sheep and oxen, all of them,
And likewise beasts of the field,
8 Fowl of the heavens and fishes of the sea,
Whatever traverses the paths of the seas.

9 Jehovah, our Lord, how glorious is Thy name in all the earth!

The exclamation which begins and ends this psalm, enclosing it as a jewel in a setting, determines its theme as being neither the nightly heaven, with all its stars, nor the dignity of man, but the name of the Lord as proclaimed by both. The Biblical contemplation of nature and man starts from and ends in God. The main thought of the psalm is the superiority of the revelation in man's nature and place to that in the vault of heaven. The very smallness of man makes the revelation of God in His dealings with him great. In his insignificance is lodged a Divine spark, and, lowly as is his head as he stands beneath the midnight sky blazing with inaccessible lights, it is crowned with a halo which reflects God's glory more brightly than does their lustre. That one idea is the theme of both parts of the psalm. In the former (vv. 1, 2) it is briefly stated; in the latter (vv. 3-8) it is wrought out in detail. The movement of thought is by expansion rather than progress.

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The name of the Lord is His character as made known. The psalmist looks beyond Israel, the recipient of a fuller manifestation, and, with adoring wonder, sees far-flashing through all the earth, as if written in light, the splendour of that name. The universal revelation in the depths of the sparkling heavens and the special one by which Israel can say, "our Lord," are both recognised. The very abruptness of the exclamation in ver. 1 tells that it is the end of long, silent contemplation, which overflows at last in speech. The remainder of ver. 1 and ver. 2 present the two forms of Divine manifestation which it is the main purpose of the psalm to contrast, and which effect the world-wide diffusion of the glory of the Name. These are the apocalypse in the nightly heavens and the witness from the mouth of babes and sucklings. As to the former, there is some difficulty in the text as it stands; and there may be a question also as to the connection with the preceding burst of praise. The word rendered "hast set" is an imperative, which introduces an incongruous thought, since the psalm proceeds on the conviction that God has already done what such a reading would be asking Him to do. The simplest solution is to suppose a textual corruption, and to make the slight change required for the rendering of the A.V. and R.V. God's name is glorious in all the earth, first, because He has set His glory upon the heavens, which stretch their solemn magnificence above every land. It is His glory of which theirs is the shimmering reflection, visible to every eye upturned from "this dim spot which men call earth."

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May we attach significance to the difference between "Thy name" and "Thy glory"? Possibly there is a hint of the relative inferiority even of the heavenly proclamation, inasmuch as, while it rays out "glory," the lustre of power and infinitude, it is only on earth that that revelation becomes the utterance of the Name, since here are hearts and minds to interpret.

The relative at the beginning of the last clause of ver. 1 seems to require that the initial exclamation should not be isolated, as it is in the last verse; but, in any case, the two methods of revelation must be taken in the closest connection, and brought into line as parallel media of revelation.

Ver. 2 gives the second of these. The sudden drop from the glories of the heavens to the babble and prattle of infancy and childhood is most impressive, and gives extraordinary force to the paradox that the latter's witness is more powerful to silence gainsayers than that of the former. This conviction is expressed in a noble metaphor, which is blurred by the rendering "strength." The word here rather means *a strength* in the old use of the term—that is, a stronghold or fortress—and the image, somewhat more daring than colder Western taste finds permissible, is that, out of such frail material as children's speech, God builds a tower of strength, which, like some border castle, will bridle and still the restless enemy. There seems no sufficient reason for [1Ps 71] taking "children and sucklings" in any but its natural meaning, however the reference to lowly believers may accord with the spirit of the psalm. The children's voices are taken as a type of feeble instruments, which are yet strong enough to silence the enemy. Childhood, "with no language but a cry," is, if rightly regarded in its source, its budding possibilities, its dependence, its growth, a more potent witness to a more wondrous name than are all the stars. In like manner, man is man's clearest revelation of God. The more lowly he is, the more lofty his testimony. What are all His servants' words but the babbling of children who "do not know half the deep things they speak"? God's strongest fortress is built of weakest stones. The rendering of the LXX., which is that used by our Lord in the Temple when He claimed the children's shrill hosannas as perfected praise, is an explanation rather than a translation, and as such is quite in the line of the psalmist's meaning. To find in the "children and sucklings" a reference either to the humble believers in Israel or to the nation as a whole, and in the "enemy and the vengeful man" hostile nations, introduces thoughts alien to the universality of the psalm, which deals with humanity as a whole and with the great revelations wide as humanity. If the two parts of the psalm are to be kept together, the theme of the compendious first portion must be the same as that of the second, namely, the glory of God as revealed by nature and man, but most chiefly by the latter, notwithstanding and even by his comparative feebleness.

The second part (vv. 3-8) expands the theme of the first. The nightly sky is more overwhelming than the bare blue vault of day. Light conceals and darkness unveils the solemn glories. The silent depths, the inaccessible [1Ps 72] splendours, spoke to this psalmist, as they do to all sensitive souls, of man's relative insignificance, but they spoke also of the God whose hand had fashioned them, and the thought of Him carried with it the assurance of His care for so small a creature, and therefore changed the aspect of his insignificance. To an ear deaf to the witness of the heavens to their Maker, the only voice which sounds from their crushing magnificence is one which counsels unmitigated despair, insists on man's nothingness, and mocks his aspirations. If we stop with "What is man?" the answer is, A fleeting nothing. The magnitude, the duration, the multitudes of these awful suns and stars dwarf him. Modern astronomy has so far increased the impression that it has landed many minds in blank unbelief that God has visited so small a speck as earth, and abundant ridicule has been poured on the arrogance which dreams that such stupendous events, as the Christian revelation asserts, have been transacted on earth for man. If we begin with man, certainly his insignificance makes it supremely absurd to suppose him thus distinguished; but if we begin at the other end, the supposition takes a new appearance of probability. If there is a God, and men are His creatures, it is supremely unlikely that He should not have a care of them. Nothing can be more absurd than the supposition of a dumb God, who has never spoken to such a being as man. The psalmist gives full weight to man's smallness, his frailty, and his lowly origin, for his exclamation, "What is man?" means, "How little is he!" and he uses the words which connote frailty and mortality, and emphasise the fact of birth as if in contrast with "the work of Thy fingers"; but all these points only enhance the wonderfulness of what is to the poet an axiom—that God has personal [1Ps 73] relations with His creature. "Thou art mindful of him" refers to God's thought, "Thou visitest him" to His acts of loving care; and both point to God's universal beneficence, not to His special revelation. The bitter parody in Job vii. 17, 18, takes the truth by the other handle, and makes the personal relations those of a rigid inspector on the one hand and a creature not worth being so strict with on the other. Mindfulness is only watchfulness for slips, and visiting means penal visitation. So the same fact may be the source of thankful wonder or of almost blasphemous murmuring.

Vv. 5-8 draw out the consequences of God's loving regard, which has made the insignificance of man the medium of a nobler manifestation of the Divine name than streams from all the stars. There is no allusion here to sin; and its absence has led to the assertion that this psalmist knew nothing of a fall, and was not in harmony with the prevalent Old Testament tone as to the condition of humanity. But surely the contemplation of the ideal manhood, as it came from God's hand, does not need to be darkened by the shadows of the actual. The picture of man as God made him is the only theme which concerns the psalmist; and he paints it with colours drawn from the Genesis account, which tells of the fall as well as the creation of man.

The picture contains three elements: man is Deiform, crowned with glory and honour, and lord of the creatures on earth. The rendering "than the angels" in the A.V. comes from the LXX., but though defensible, is less probable than the more lofty conception contained in "than God," which is vindicated, not only by lexical considerations, but as embodying an allusion to the original creation "in the image of God." What then [Pg 74] is the "little" which marks man's inferiority? It is mainly that the spirit, which is God's image, is confined in and limited by flesh, and subject to death. The distance from the apex of creation to the Creator must ever be infinite; but man is so far above the non-sentient, though mighty, stars and the creatures which share earth with him, by reason of his being made in the Divine image—*i.e.*, having consciousness, will, and reason—that the distance is foreshortened. The gulf between man and matter is greater than that between man and God. The moral separation caused by sin is not in the psalmist's mind. Thus man is invested with some reflection of God's glory, and wears this as a crown. He is king on earth.

The enumeration of his subjects follows, in language reminding again of the Genesis narrative. The catalogue begins with those nearest to him, the long-tamed domestic animals, and of these the most submissive (sheep) first; it then passes to the untamed animals, whose home is "the field" or uncultivated land, and from them goes to the heights and depths, where the free fowls of the air and fish of the sea and all the mysterious monsters that may roam the hidden ways of that unknown ocean dwell. The power of taming and disciplining some, the right to use all, belong to man, but his subjects have their rights and their king his limits of power and his duties.

Such then is man, as God meant him to be. Such a being is a more glorious revelation of the Name than all stars and systems. Looked at in regard to his duration, his years are a handbreadth before these shining ancients of days that have seen his generations fret their little hour and sink into silence; looked at in contrast [Pg 75] with their magnitude and numbers numberless, he is but an atom, and his dwelling-place a speck. Science increases the knowledge of his insignificance, but perhaps not the impression of it made on a quiet heart by the simple sight of the heavens. But besides the merely scientific view, and the merely poetic, and the grimly Agnostic, there is the other, the religious, and it is as valid to-day as ever. To it the heavens are the work of God's finger, and their glories are His, set there by Him. That being so, man's littleness magnifies the name, because it enhances the condescending love of God, which has greatened the littleness by such nearness of care and such gifts of dignity. The reflection of His glory which blazes in the heavens is less bright than that which gleams in the crown of glory and honour on man's lowly yet lofty head. The "babe and suckling" of creation has a mouth from which the strength of perfected praise issues and makes a bulwark against all gainsayers.

The use made of this psalm in the Epistle to the Hebrews proceeds on the understanding that it describes ideal humanity. Where, then, says the writer of the epistle, shall we look for the realisation of that ideal? Do not the grand words sound liker irony than truth? Is this poor creature that crawls about the world, its slave, discrowned and sure to die, the Man whom the psalmist saw? No. Then was the fair vision a baseless fabric, and is there nothing to be looked for but a dreary continuance of such abortions dragging out their futile being through hopeless generations? No; the promise shall be fulfilled for humanity, because it has been fulfilled in one Man: the Man Christ Jesus. He is the realised ideal, and in Him is a life which will be [Pg 76] communicated to all who trust and obey Him, and they, too, will become all that God meant man to be. The psalm was not intended as a prophecy, but every clear vision of God's purpose is a prophecy, for none of His purposes remain unfulfilled. It was not intended as a picture of the Christ, but it is so; for He, and He alone, is the Man who answers to that fair Divine Ideal, and He will make all His people partakers of His royalty and perfect manhood.

So the psalm ends, as it began, with adoring wonder, and proclaims this as the result of the twofold witness which it has so nobly set forth: that God's name shines glorious through all the earth, and every eye may see its lustre.

PSALM IX.

1 (א) I will thank Jehovah with my whole heart;
I will recount all Thy wonders.
2 I will be glad and exult in Thee;
I will sing Thy name, Most High,

3 (ב) Because mine enemies turn back;
They stumble and perish at Thy presence.
4 For Thou hast upheld my right and my suit;
Thou didst seat Thyself on Thy throne, judging righteously.

5 (ג) Thou hast rebuked the nations, Thou hast destroyed the wicked;
Thou hast blotted out their name for ever and aye.
6 The enemy—they are ended, [they are] desolations for ever,
And [their] cities hast Thou rooted out; perished is their memory.

7 (ה) They [are perished], but Jehovah shall sit throned for ever;
He hath prepared His throne for judgment.
8 And He—He shall judge the world in righteousness;
He shall deal judgment to the peoples in equity.

9 (ו) And Jehovah shall be a lofty stronghold for the crushed,
A lofty stronghold in times of extremity.
10 And they who know Thy name will put trust in Thee,
For Thou hast not forsaken them that seek Thee, Jehovah.

11 (ז) Sing with the harp to Jehovah, sitting throned in Zion;
Declare among the peoples His doings.
12 For He that makes inquisition for blood has remembered them;
He has not forgotten the cry of the humble.

13 (ח) Have mercy on me, Jehovah;
Look on my affliction from my haters,
Thou who liftest me up from the gates of death
14 To the end that I may recount all Thy praises.
In the gates of the daughter of Zion,
I will rejoice in Thy salvation. [Pg 78]

15 (ט) The nations are sunk in the pit they made;
In the net which they spread their foot is caught.
16 Jehovah makes Himself known; judgment hath He done,
Snaring the wicked by the work of his own hands. Higgaion; Selah.

17 (י) The wicked shall return to Sheol,
All the nations who forget God
18 For not for ever shall the needy be forgotten,
Nor the expectation of the afflicted perish for aye.

19 (ק) Arise, Jehovah: let not man grow strong;
Let the nations be judged before Thy presence.
20 Appoint, Jehovah, terrors for them;
Let the nations come to know that they are men.

Psalms vii. and ix. are connected by the recurrence of the two thoughts of God as the Judge of nations and the wicked falling into the pit which he digged. Probably the original arrangement of the Psalter put these two next each other, and Psalm viii. was inserted later.

Psalm ix. is imperfectly acrostic. It falls into strains of two verses each, which are marked by sequence of thought as well as by the acrostic arrangement. The first begins with Aleph, the second with Beth, and so on, the second verse of each pair not being counted in the scheme. The fourth letter is missing, and ver. 7, which should begin with it, begins with the sixth. But a textual correction, which is desirable on other grounds, makes the fifth letter (He) the initial of ver. 7, and then the regular sequence is kept up till ver. 19, which should begin with the soft K, but takes instead the guttural Q. What has become of the rest of the alphabet? Part of it is found in Psalm x., where the first verse begins with the L, which should follow the regular K for ver. 19. But there is no more trace of acrostic structure in x. till ver. 12, which resumes it with the Q which has already appeared out of place in ix. 19; and it goes on to the end of the alphabet, with only the irregularity that the R strain (x. 14) has but one verse. Verses with the missing letters would just about occupy the space of the non-acrostic verses in Psalm x., and the suggestion is obvious that the latter are part of some other psalm which has been substituted for the original; but there are links of connection between the non-acrostic and acrostic portions of Psalm x., which make that hypothesis difficult. The resemblances between the two psalms as they stand are close, and the dissimilarities not less obvious. The psalmist's enemies are different. In the former they are foreign, in the latter domestic. Psalm ix. rings with triumph; Psalm x. is in a minor key. The former celebrates a judgment as accomplished which the latter almost despairingly longs to see begun. On the whole, the two were most probably never formally one, but are a closely connected pair. [Ps 79]

There is nothing to discredit the Davidic authorship. The singer's enemies are "nations," and the destruction of these foreign foes is equivalent to "maintaining his cause." That would be language natural in the mouth of a king, and there were foreign wars enough in David's reign to supply appropriate occasions for such a song. The psalm falls into two parts, vv. 1-12 and 13 to end, of which the second substantially repeats the main thoughts of the first, but with a significant difference. In the first part the sequence is praise and its occasion (Aleph and Beth verses, 1-4), triumphant recounting of accomplished judgment (Gimel verses, 5, 6), confident expectation of future wider judgment (amended He and Vav pairs, vv. 7-10), and a final call to praise (vii. 12). Thus set, as it were, in a circlet of praise, are experience of past and consequent confidence of future deliverance. The second part gives the same order, only, instead of praise, it has prayer for its beginning and end, the two central portions remaining the same as in part I. The Cheth pair (vv. 13, 14) is prayer, the deliverance not being perfected, though some foes have fallen; the past act of accomplished judgment is again celebrated in the Teth pair (vv. 15, 16), followed, as before, by the triumphant confidence of future complete crushing of enemies (Yod strain, vv. 17, 18); and all closes with prayer (Qoph pair, vv. 19, 20). Thus the same thoughts are twice dwelt on; and the different use made of them is the explanation of the repetition, which strikes a cursory reader as needless. The diamond is turned a little in the hand, and a differently tinted beam flashes from its facet. [Ps 80]

In the first pair of verses, the song rushes out like some river breaking through a dam and flashing as it hurries on its course. Each short clause begins with Aleph; each makes the same fervid resolve. Wholehearted praise is sincere, and all the singer's being is fused into it. "All Thy marvellous works" include the great deliverances of the past, with which a living sense of God's working associates those of the present, as one in character and source. To-day is as full of God to this man as the sacred yesterdays of national history, and his deliverances as wonderful as those of old. But high above the joy in God's work is the joy in Himself to which it leads, and "Thy name, O thou Most High," is the ground of all pure delight and the theme of all worthy praise.

The second stanza (Beth, vv. 3, 4) is best taken as giving the ground of praise. Render in close connection with preceding "*because* mine enemies turn back; they stumble and perish at [or from] Thy presence." God's face blazes out on the foe, and they turn and flee from the field, but in their flight they stumble, and, like fugitives, once fallen can rise no more. The underlying picture is of a battle-field and a disastrous rout. It is God's coming into action that scatters the enemy, as ver. 4 tells by its "for." When He took His seat on the throne (of judgment rather than of royalty), they fled; and that act of assuming judicial activity was the maintaining of the psalmist's cause. [Ps 81]

The third pair of verses (Gimel, 5, 6) dwells on the grand picture of judgment, and specifies for the first time the enemies as "the nations" or "heathen," thus showing that the psalmist is not a private individual, and probably implying that the whole psalm is a hymn of victory, in which the heat of battle still glows, but

which writes no name on the trophy but that of God. The metaphor of a judgment-seat is exchanged for a triumphant description of the destructions fallen on the land of the enemy, in all which God alone is recognised as the actor. "Thou hast rebuked"; and just as His creative word was all-powerful, so His destructive word sweeps its objects into nothingness. There is a grand and solemn sequence in that "Thou hast rebuked; ... Thou hast destroyed." His breath has made; His breath can unmake. In ver. 6 the rendering to be preferred is substantially that of the R.V.: "The enemy are ended, [they are] ruins for ever, and cities hast Thou rooted out; perished is their memory." To take "enemy" as a vocative breaks the continuity of the address to God, and brings in an irrelevant reference to the former conquests of the foe ("Thou hast destroyed cities") which is much more forcible if regarded as descriptive of God's destruction of his cities. "Their memory" refers to the enemy, not to the cities. Utter, perpetual ruin, so complete that the very name is forgotten, has fallen on the foe. [Ps. 82]

In the fourth pair of verses a slight emendation of the text is approved of by most critics. The last word of ver. 6 is the pronoun "they," which, though possible in such a position, is awkward. If it is transferred to the beginning of ver. 7, and it is further supposed that "are perished" has dropped out, as might easily be the case, from the verb having just occurred in the singular, a staking antithesis is gained: "They perish, but Jehovah shall sit," etc. Further, the pair of verses then begins with the fifth letter; and the only irregularity in the acrostic arrangement till ver. 19 is the omission of the fourth letter: Daleth. A very significant change in tenses takes place at this point. Hitherto the verbs have been perfects, implying a finished act; that is to say, hitherto the psalm has been dealing with facts of recent but completed experience. Now the verbs change to imperfects or futures, and continue so till ver. 12; that is to say, "experience doth attain to something of prophetic strain," and passes into confidence for the future. That confidence is cast in the mould supplied by the deliverance on which it is founded. The smaller act of judgment, which maintained the psalmist's cause, expands into a world-wide judgment in righteousness, for which the preparations are already made. "He hath prepared His throne for judgment" is the only perfect in the series. This is the true point of view from which to regard the less comprehensive acts of judgment thinly sown through history, when God has arisen to smite some hoary iniquity or some godless conqueror. Such acts are premonitions of the future, and every "day of the Lord" is a miniature of that final *dies iræ*. The psalmist probably was rather thinking of other acts of judgment which would free him and his people from hostile nations, but his hope was built on the great truth that all such acts are prophecies of others like them, and it is a legitimate extension of the same principle to view them all in relation to the last and greatest of the series. [Ps. 83]

The fifth pair (Vav stanza, vv. 9, 10) turns to the glad contemplation of the purpose of all the pomp and terror of the judgment thus hoped for. The Judge is seated on high, and His elevation makes a "lofty stronghold" for the crushed or downtrodden.

The rare word rendered "extremity" in ver. 9 occurs only here and in x. 1. It means a cutting off, *i.e.*, of hope of deliverance. The notion of distress intensified to despair is conveyed. God's judgments show that even in such extremity He is an inexpugnable defence, like some hill fortress, inaccessible to any foe. A further result of judgment is the (growing) trust of devout souls (ver. 10). To "know Thy name" is here equivalent to learning God's character as made known by His acts, especially by the judgments anticipated. For such knowledge some measure of devout trust is required, but further knowledge deepens trust. The best teacher of faith is experience; and, on the other hand, the condition of such experience is faith. The action of knowledge and of trust is reciprocal. That trust is reinforced by the renewed evidence, afforded by the judgments, that Jehovah does not desert them that seek Him. To "seek Him" is to long for Him, to look for His help in trouble, to turn with desire and obedience to Him in daily life; and anything is possible rather than that He should not disclose and give Himself to such search. Trust and seeking, fruition and desire, the repose of the soul on God and its longing after God, are inseparable. They are but varying aspects of the one thing. When a finite spirit cleaves to the infinite God, there must be longing as an element in all possession and possession as an element in all longing; and both will be fed by contemplation of the self-revealing acts which are the syllables of His name. [Ps. 84]

Section 6, the last of the first part (Zayin, vv. 11, 12), circles round to section 1, and calls on all trusters and seekers to be a chorus to the solo of praise therein. The ground of the praise is the same past act which has been already set forth as that of the psalmist's thanksgiving, as is shown by the recurrence here of perfect tenses (*hath remembered*; *hath not forgotten*). The designation of God as "dwelling" in Zion is perhaps better rendered, with allusion to the same word in ver. 7, "sitteth." His seat had been there from the time that the Ark was brought thither. That earthly throne was the type of His heavenly seat, and from Zion He is conceived as executing judgment. The world-wide destination of Israel's knowledge of God inspires the call

to "show forth His doings" to "the peoples." The "nations" are not merely the objects of destructive wrath, but are to be summoned to share in the blessing of knowing His mighty acts. The psalmist may not have been able to harmonise these two points of view as to Israel's relation to the Gentile world, but both thoughts vibrate in his song. The designation of God as "making inquisition for blood" thinks of Him as the Goel, or Avenger. To seek means here to demand back as one who had entrusted property to another who had destroyed it would do, thence to demand compensation or satisfaction, and thus finally comes to mean to avenge or punish (so Hupfeld, Delitzsch, etc.). "The poor" or "meek" (R.V. and margin) whose cry is heard are the devout portion of the Jewish people, who are often spoken of in the Psalms and elsewhere as a class. [Ps 85]

The second part of the psalm begins with ver. 13. The prayer in that verse is the only trace of trouble in the psalm. The rest is triumph and exultation. This, at first sight discordant, note has sorely exercised commentators; and the violent solution that the whole Cheth stanza (vv. 13, 14) should be regarded as "the cry of the meek," quoted by the psalmist, and therefore be put in inverted commas (though adopted by Delitzsch and Cheyne), is artificial and cold. If the view of the structure of the psalm given above is adopted, there is little difficulty in the connection. The victory has been completed over certain enemies, but there remain others; and the time for praise unmingled with petition has not yet come for the psalmist, as it never comes for any of us in this life. Quatre Bras is won, but Waterloo has to be fought to-morrow. The prayer takes account of the dangers still threatening, but it only glances at these, and then once more turns to look with hope on the accomplished deliverance. The thought of how God had lifted the suppliant up from the very gates of death heartens him to pray for all further mercy needed. Death is the lord of a gloomy prison-house, the gates of which open inwards only and permit no egress. On its very threshold the psalmist had stood. But God had lifted him thence, and the remembrance wings his prayer. "The gates of the daughter of Zion" are in sharp, happy contrast with the frowning portals of death. A city's gates are the place of cheery life, stir, gossip, business. Anything proclaimed there flies far. There the psalmist resolves that he will tell his story of rescue, which he believes was granted that it might be told. God's purpose in blessing men is that they may open their lips to proclaim the blessings and so bring others to share in them. God's end is the spread of His name, not for any good to Him, but because to know it is life to us. [Ps 86]

The Teth pair (vv. 15, 16) repeats the thoughts of the Gimel stanza (5, 6), recurring to the same significant perfects and dwelling on the new thought that the destruction of the enemy was self-caused. As in Psalm vii., the familiar figure of the pitfall catching the hunter expresses the truth that all evil, and especially malice, recoils on its contriver. A companion illustration is added of the fowler's (or hunter's) foot being caught in his own snare. Ver. 16 presents the other view of retribution, which was the only one in vv. 5, 6, namely that it is a Divine act. It is God who executes judgment, and who "snareth the wicked," though it be "the work of his own hands" which weaves the snare. Both views are needed for the complete truth. This close of the retrospect of deliverance which is the main motive of the psalm is appropriately marked by the musical direction "Higgaion. Selah," which calls for a strain of instrumental music to fill the pause of the song and to mark the rapture of triumph in accomplished deliverance.

The Yod stanza (vv. 17, 18), like the He and Vav stanzas (vv. 7-10), passes to confidence for the future. The correspondence is very close, but the two verses of this stanza represent the four of the earlier ones; thus ver. 17 answers to vv. 7 and 8, while ver. 18 is the representative of vv. 9 and 10. In ver. 17 the "return to Sheol" is equivalent to destruction. In one view, men who cease to be may be regarded as going back to original nothingness, as in Psalm xc. 3. Sheol is not here a place of punishment, but is the dreary dwelling of the dead, from the gates of which the psalmist had been brought up. Reduction to nothingness and yet a shadowy, dim life or death-in-life will certainly be the end of the wicked. The psalmist's experience in his past deliverance entitles him to generalise thus. To forget God is the sure way to be forgotten. The reason for the certain destruction of the nations who forget God and for the psalmist's assurance of it is (ver. 18) the confidence he has that "the needy shall not always be forgotten." That confidence corresponds precisely to vv. 9, 10, and also looks back to the "hath remembered" and "not forgotten" of ver. 12. They who remember God are remembered by Him; and their being remembered—*i.e.*, by deliverance—necessitates the wicked's being forgotten, and those who are forgotten by God perish. The second clause of ver. 18 echoes the other solemn word of doom from vv. 3-6. There the fate of the evil-doers was set forth as "perishing"; their very memory was to "perish." But the "expectation of the poor shall not perish." Apparently fragile and to the eye of sense unsubstantial as a soap-bubble, the devout man's hope is more solid than the most solid-seeming realities, and will outlast them all. [Ps 87]

The final stanza (vv. 19, 20) does not take Kaph as it should do, but Qoph. Hence some critics suspect that this pair of verses has been added by another hand, but the continuity of sense is plain, and is against this [Ps 88]

supposition. The psalmist was not so bound to his form but that he could vary it, as here. The prayer of this concluding stanza circles round to the prayer in ver. 13, as has been noticed, and so completes the whole psalm symmetrically. The personal element in ver. 13 has passed away; and the prayer is general, just as the solo of praise in ver. 1 broadened into the call for a chorus of voices in ver. 12. The scope of the prayer is the very judgment which the previous stanza has contemplated as certain. The devout man's desires are moulded on God's promises, and his prayers echo these. "Let not mortal man grow strong," or rather "vaunt his strength." The word for *man* here connotes weakness. How ridiculous for him, being such as he is, to swell and swagger as if strong, and how certain his boasted strength is to shrivel like a leaf in the fire, if God should come forth, roused to action by his boasting! Ver. 20 closes the prayer with the cry that some awe-inspiring act of Divine justice may be flashed before the "nations," in order to force the conviction of their own weakness home to them. "Set terror for them," the word *terror* meaning not the emotion, but the object which produces it, namely an act of judgment such as the whole psalm has had in view. Its purpose is not destruction, but conviction, the wholesome consciousness of weakness, out of which may spring the recognition of their own folly and of God's strength to bless. So the two parts of the psalm end with the thought that the "nations" may yet come to know the name of God, the one calling upon those who have experienced His deliverance to "declare among the peoples His doings," the other praying God to teach by chastisement what nations who forget Him have failed to learn from mercies.

PSALM X.

1 (ל) Why, Jehovah, dost Thou stand far off?
  Why veilest [Thine eyes] in times of extremity?
2 Through the pride of the wicked the afflicted is burned away;
  They are taken in the plots which these have devised.

3 For the wicked boasts of his soul's desire,
  And the rapacious man renounces, contemns, Jehovah.
4 The wicked, by (lit., according to) the uplifting of his nostrils, [says,] He will not inquire;
  There is no God, is all his thought.

5 His ways are stable at all times;
  High above [him] are Thy judgments, remote from before him;
  His adversaries—he snorts at them.

6 He says in his heart, I shall not be moved;
  To generation after generation, [I am he] who never falls into adversity.
7 Of cursing his mouth is full, and deceits, and oppression;
  Under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.

8 He couches in the hiding-places of the villages;
  In secret he slays the innocent;
  His eyes watch the helpless.

9 He lies in wait in secret, like a lion in his lair;
  He lies in wait to seize the afflicted;
  He seizes the afflicted, dragging him in his net.

10 He crouches, he bows down,
  And there falls into his strong [claws] the helpless.
11 He says in his heart, God forgets;
  He hides His face, He will not ever see it.

12 (ק) Rise! Jehovah, God! lift up Thy hand!

Forget not the afflicted.
13 Wherefore does the wicked blaspheme God,
[And] say in his heart, Thou wilt not inquire? [Pg 90]

14 (ר) Thou hast seen, for Thou, Thou dost behold mischief and trouble, to take it into Thy hand;
To Thee the helpless leaves himself;
The orphan, Thou, Thou hast been his Helper.

15 (ש) Break the arm of the wicked;
As for the evil man, inquire for his wickedness [till] Thou find none.
16 Jehovah is King for ever and aye;
The nations are perished out of the land.

17 (ת) The desire of the meek Thou hast heard, Jehovah;
Thou wilt prepare their heart, wilt make Thine ear attentive
18 To do judgment for the orphan and downtrodden;
Terrible no more shall the man of the earth be.

Psalms ix. and x. are alike in their imperfectly acrostic structure, the occurrence of certain phrases—*e.g.*, the very uncommon expression for "times of trouble" (ix. 9; x. 1), "Arise, O Lord" (ix. 19; x. 12)—and the references to the nations' judgment. But the differences are so great that the hypothesis of their original unity is hard to accept. As already remarked, the enemies are different. The tone of the one psalm is jubilant thanksgiving for victory won and judgment effected; that of the other is passionate portraiture of a rampant foe and cries for a judgment yet unmanifested. They are a pair, though why the psalmist should have bound together two songs of which the unlikenesses are at least as great as the likenesses it is not easy to discover. The circumstances of his day may have brought the cruelty of domestic robbers close upon the heels of foreign foes, as is often the case, but that is mere conjecture.

The acrostic structure is continued into Psalm x., as if the last stanza of ix. had begun with the regular Kaph instead of the cognate Qoph; but it then disappears till ver. 12, from which point it continues to the end of the [Pg 91] psalm, with the anomaly that one of the four stanzas has but one verse: the unusually long verse 14. These four stanzas are allotted to the four last letters of the alphabet. Six letters are thus omitted, to which twelve verses should belong. The nine non-acrostic verses (3-11) are by some supposed to be substituted for the missing twelve, but there are too many verbal allusions to them in the subsequent part of the psalm to admit of their being regarded as later than it. Why, then, the break in the acrostic structure? It is noticeable that the (acrostic) psalm ix. is wholly addressed to God, and that the parts of x. which are addressed to Him are likewise acrostic, the section vv. 3-11 being the vivid description of the "wicked," for deliverance from whom the psalmist prays. The difference of theme may be the solution of the difference of form, which was intended to mark off the prayer stanzas and to suggest, by the very continuity of the alphabetical scheme and the allowance made for the letters which do not appear, the calm flow of devotion and persistency of prayer throughout the parenthesis of oppression. The description of the "wicked" is as a black rock damming the river, but it flows on beneath and emerges beyond.

The psalm falls into two parts after the introductory verse of petition and remonstrance: vv. 3-11, the grim picture of the enemy of the "poor"; and vv. 12-18, the cry for deliverance and judgment.

The first stanza (vv. 1, 2) gives in its passionate cry a general picture of the situation, which is entirely different from that of Psalm ix. The two opposite characters, whose relations occupy so much of these early psalms, "the wicked" and "the poor," are, as usual, hunter and hunted, and God is passive, as if far away, and [Pg 92] hiding His eyes. The voice of complaining but devout remonstrance is singularly like the voice of arrogant godlessness (vv. 4-11), but the fact which brings false security to the one moves the other to prayer. The boldness and the submissiveness of devotion are both throbbing in that "Why?" and beneath it lies the entreaty to break this apparent apathy. Ver. 2 spreads the facts of the situation before God. "Through the pride of the wicked the afflicted is burned," *i.e.*, with anguish, *pride* being the fierce fire and *burning* being a vigorous expression for anguish, or possibly for destruction. The ambiguous next clause may either have "the wicked" or "the poor" for its subject. If the former (R. V.), it is a prayer that the retribution which has been already spoken of in Psalm ix. may fall, but the context rather suggests the other construction, carrying on the description of the sufferings of the poor, with an easy change to the plural, since the singular is a collective. This, then, being how things stand, the natural flow of thought would be the continuance of the prayer; but

the reference to the enemy sets the psalmist on fire, and he "burns" in another fashion, flaming out into a passionate portraiture of the wicked, which is marked as an interruption to the current of his song by the cessation of the acrostic arrangement.

The picture is drawn with extraordinary energy, and describes first the character (vv. 3-6) and then the conduct of the wicked. The style reflects the vehemence of the psalmist's abhorrence, being full of gnarled phrases and harsh constructions. As with a merciless scalpel the inner heart of the man is laid open. Observe the recurrence of "saith," "thoughts," and "saith in his heart." But first comes a feature of character which is open and palpable. He "boasts of his soul's desire." What is especially flagrant in that? The usual explanation is that he is not ashamed of his shameful lusts, but glories in them, or that he boasts of succeeding in all that he desires. But what will a good man do with his heart's desires? Ver. 7 tells us, namely breathe them to God; and therefore to boast of them instead is the outward expression of godless self-confidence and resolve to consult inclination and not God. The word rendered *boast* has the two significations of *pray* and *boast*, and the use of it here, in the worse one, is parallel with the use of *bless* or *renounce* in the next clause. The wicked is also "rapacious," for "covetous" is too weak. He grasps all that he can reach by fair or foul means. Such a man in effect and by his very selfish greed "renounces, contemns God." He may be a worshipper; but his "blessing" is like a parting salutation, dismissing Him to whom it is addressed. There is no need to suppose that conscious apostacy is meant. Rather the psalmist is laying bare the under-meaning of the earth-bound man's life, and in effect anticipates Christ's "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" and Paul's "covetousness which is idolatry." [Ps 93]

The next trait of character is practical atheism and denial of Divine retribution. The Hebrew is rough and elliptical, but the A.V. misses its point, which the R.V. gives by the introduction of "saith." "The pride of his countenance" is literally "the elevation of his nose." Translate those upturned nostrils into words, and they mean that God will not require (seek, in the sense of punish). But a God who does not punish is a dim shape, through which the empty sky is seen, and the denial (or forgetfulness) of God's retributive judgment is equivalent to denying that there is a God at all. [Ps 94]

Thus armed, the wicked is in fancied security. "His ways are firm"—*i.e.*, he prospers—and, in the very madness of arrogance, he scoffs at God's judgments as too high up to be seen. His scoff is a truth, for how can eyes glued to earth see the solemn lights that move in the heavens? Purblind men say, We do not see them, and mean, They are not; but all that their speech proves is their own blindness. Defiant of God, he is truculent to men, and "snorts contempt at his enemies." "In his heart he says, I shall not be moved." The same words express the sane confidence of the devout soul and the foolish presumption of the man of the earth; but the one says, "because He is at my right hand," and the other trusts in himself. "To all generations I shall not be in adversity" (R.V.). The Hebrew is gnarled and obscure; and attempts to amend the text have been made (compare Cheyne, Grätz *in loc*.), but needlessly. The confidence has become almost insane, and has lost sight altogether of the brevity of life. "His inward thought is that he shall continue for ever" (Psalm xlix.). "Pride stifles reason. The language of the heart cannot be translated into spoken words without seeming exaggeration" (Cheyne). He who can be so blind to facts as to find no God may well carry his blindness a step further and wink hard enough to see no death, or may live as if he did not.

Following the disclosure of the inner springs of life in the secret thoughts comes, in vv. 7-10, the outcome of these in word and deed. When the wicked "lets the rank tongue blossom into speech," the product is affronts to God and maledictions, lies, mischiefs, for men. These stuff the mouth full, and lie under the tongue as sweet morsels for the perverted taste or as stored there, ready to be shot out. The deeds match the words. The vivid picture of a prowling lion seems to begin in ver. 8, though it is sometimes taken as the unmetaphorical description of the wicked man's crime. The stealthy couching of the beast of prey, hiding among the cover round the unwalled village or poorly sheltered fold, the eyes gleaming out of the darkness and steadfastly fixed on the victim with a baleful light in them, belong to the figure, which is abruptly changed in one clause (ver. 9 *c*) into that of a hunter with his net, and then is resumed and completed in ver. 10, where the R.V. is, on the whole, to be preferred—"He croucheth; he boweth down"—as resuming the figure at the point where it had been interrupted and finishing it in the next clause, with the helpless victim fallen into the grip of the strong claws. With great emphasis the picture is rounded off (ver. 11) with the repetition of the secret thought of God's forgetfulness, which underlies the cruel oppression. [Ps 95]

This whole section indicates a lawless condition in which open violence, robbery, and murder were common. In Hosea's vigorous language, "blood touched blood," the splashes being so numerous that they met, and the land was red with them. There is no reason to suppose that the picture is ideal or exaggerated. Where in the

turbulent annals of Israel it is to be placed must remain uncertain; but that it is a transcript of bitter experience is obvious, and the aspect which it presents should be kept in view as a corrective of the tendency to idealise the moral condition of Israel, which at no time was free from dark stains, and which offered only too many epochs of disorganisation in which the dark picture of the psalm could have been photographed from life.

The phrases for the victims in this section are noteworthy: "the innocent"; "the helpless"; "the poor." Of these the first and last are frequent, and the meaning obvious. There is a doubt whether the last should be regarded as the designation of outward condition or of disposition, *i.e*. whether "meek" or "poor" is the idea. There are two cognate words in Hebrew, one of which means one who is bowed down, *i.e*. by outward troubles, and the other one who bows himself down, *i.e*. is meek. The margin of the Hebrew Bible is fond of correcting these words when they occur in the text and substituting the one for the other, but arbitrarily; and it is doubtful whether in actual usage there is any real distinction between them. "Helpless" is a word only found in this psalm (vv. 8, 10, 14), which has received various explanations, but is probably derived from a root meaning *to be black*, and hence comes to mean *miserable*, *hapless*, or the like. All the designations refer to a class—namely, the devout minority, the true Israel within Israel—and hence the plurals in vv. 10, 12, and 17. [Pg 96]

The second part of the psalm (ver. 12 to end) is the prayer, forced from the heart of the persecuted remnant, God's little flock in the midst of wolves. No trace of individual reference appears in it, nor any breath of passion or vengeance, such as is found in some of the psalms of persecution; but it glows with indignation at the blasphemies which are, for the moment, triumphant, and cries aloud to God for a judicial act which shall shatter the dream that He does not see and will not requite. That impious boast, far more than the personal incidence of sufferings, moves the prayer. As regards its form, the reappearance of the acrostic arrangement is significant, as is the repetition of the prayer and letter of ix. 19, which binds the two psalms together. The acrostic reappears with the direct address to God. The seven verses of the prayer are divided by it into four groups, one of which is abnormal as containing but one verse, the unusual length of which, however, somewhat compensates for the irregularity (ver. 14). The progress of thought in them follows the logic of emotional prayer rather than of the understanding. First, there are a vehement cry for God's intervention and a complaint of His mysterious apparent apathy. The familiar figure for the Divine flashing forth of judgment, "Arise, O Lord," is intensified by the other cry that He would "lift His hand." A God who has risen from His restful throne and raised His arm is ready to bring it down with a shattering blow; but before it falls the psalmist spreads in God's sight the lies of the scornful men. They had said (ver. 11) that He forgot; the prayer pleads that He would not forget. Their confidence was that He did not see nor would requite; the psalmist is bold to ask the reason for the apparent facts which permit such a thought. The deepest reverence will question God in a fashion which would be daring, if it were not instinct with the assurance of the clearness of His Divine knowledge of evil and of the worthiness of the reasons for its impunity. "Wherefore doest Thou thus?" may be insolence or faith. Next, the prayer centres itself on the facts of faith, which sense does not grasp (ver. 14). The specific acts of oppression which force out the psalmist's cry are certainly "seen" by God, for it is His very nature to look on all such ("Thou" in ver. 14 is emphatic); and faith argues from the character to the acts of God and from the general relation of all sin towards Him to that which at present afflicts the meek. But is God's gaze on the evil an idle look? No; He sees, and the sight moves Him to act. Such is the force of "to take it into Thy hand," which expresses the purpose and issue of the beholding. What He sees He "takes in hand," as we say, with a similar colloquialism. If a man believes these things about God, it will follow of course that he will leave himself in God's hand, that uplifted hand which prayer has moved. So ver. 14 is like a great picture in two compartments, as Raphael's Transfiguration. Above is God, risen with lifted arm, beholding and ready to strike; beneath is the helpless man, appealing to God by the very act of "leaving" himself to Him. That absolute reliance has an all-prevalent voice which reaches the Divine heart, as surely as her child's wail the mother's; and wherever it is exercised the truth of faith which the past has established becomes a truth of experience freshly confirmed. The form of the sentence in the Hebrew (the substantive verb with a participle, "Thou hast been helping") gives prominence to the continuousness of the action: It has always been Thy way, and it is so still. Of course "fatherless" here is tantamount to the "hapless," or poor, of the rest of the psalm. [Pg 97] [Pg 98]

Then at last comes the cry for the descent of God's uplifted hand (vv. 15, 16). It is not invoked to destroy, but simply to "break the arm" of, the wicked, *i.e*. to make him powerless for mischief, as a swordsman with a shattered arm is. One blow from God's hand lames, and the arm hangs useless. The impious denial of the Divine retribution still affects the psalmist with horror; and he returns to it in the second clause of ver. 15, in which he prays that God would "seek out"—*i.e*., require and requite, so as to abolish and make utterly non-existent—the wicked man's wickedness. The yearning of every heart that beats in sympathy with and [Pg 99]

devotion to God, especially when it is tortured by evil experienced or beheld flourishing unsmitten, is for its annihilation. There is no prayer here for the destruction of the doer; but the reduction to nothingness of his evil is the worthy aspiration of all the good, and they who have no sympathy with such a cry as this have either small experience of evil, or a feeble realisation of its character.

The psalmist was heartened to pray his prayer, because "the nations are perished out of His land." Does that point back to the great instance of exterminating justice in the destruction of the Canaanites? It may do so, but it is rather to be taken as referring to the victories celebrated in the companion psalm. Note the recurrence of the words "nations" and "perished," which are drawn from it. The connection between the two psalms is thus witnessed, and the deliverance from foreign enemies, which is the theme of Psalm ix., is urged as a plea with God and taken as a ground of confidence by the psalmist himself for the completion of the deliverance by making domestic oppressors powerless. This lofty height of faith is preserved in the closing stanza, in which the agitation of the first part and the yearning of the second are calmed into serene assurance that the *Ecclesia pressa* has not cried nor ever can cry in vain. Into the praying, trusting heart "the peace of God, which passeth understanding," steals, and the answer is certified to faith long before it is manifest to sense. To pray and immediately to feel the thrilling consciousness, "Thou hast heard," is given to those who pray in faith. The wicked makes a boast of his "desire"; the humble makes a prayer of it, and so has it fulfilled. [Pg 100] Desires which can be translated into petitions will be converted into fruition. If the heart is humble, that Divine breath will be breathed over and into it which will prepare it to desire only what accords with God's will, and the prepared heart will always find God's ear open. The cry of the *hapless*, which has been put into their lips by God himself, is the appointed prerequisite of the manifestations of Divine judgment which will relieve the earth of the incubus of "the man of the earth." "Shall not God avenge His own elect, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." The prayer of the humble, like a whisper amid the avalanches, has power to start the swift, white destruction on its downward path; and when once that gliding mass has way on it, nothing which it smites can stand.

PSALM XI.

1 In Jehovah have I taken refuge;
  How say ye to my soul,
  Flee to the mountain as a bird?
2 For lo, the wicked bend the bow,
  They make ready their arrow upon the string,
  To shoot in the dark at those who are upright of heart.
3 For the foundations are being destroyed;
  The righteous—what hath he achieved?

4 Jehovah in His holy palace, Jehovah, whose throne is in heaven—
  His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men.
5 Jehovah trieth the righteous,
  But the wicked and lover of violence His soul hateth.
6 May He rain upon the wicked snares;
  Fire and brimstone and a burning wind be the portion of their cup!
7 For Jehovah is righteous: righteous deeds He loveth;
  The upright shall behold His face.

The correctness of the superscription is, in the present case, defended by Ewald and Hitzig. Delitzsch refers the psalm to the eve of Absalom's conspiracy, while other supporters of the Davidic authorship prefer the Sauline persecution. The situation as described in the psalm corresponds sufficiently well to either of these periods, in both of which David was surrounded by stealthy hostility and counselled by prudence to flight. But there are no definite marks of date in the psalm itself; and all that is certain is its many affinities with the other psalms of the group which Cheyne calls the "persecution psalms," including iii.-vii., ix.-xiv., xvii. [Pg 102] These resemblances make a common authorship probable.

The structure of the psalm is simple and striking. There are two vividly contrasted halves; the first gives the suggestions of timid counsellors who see only along the low levels of earth, the second the brave answer of faith which looks up into heaven.

In the first part (vv. 1-3) the psalmist begins with an utterance of faith, which makes him recoil with wonder and aversion from the cowardly, well-meant counsels of his friends. "In Jehovah have I taken refuge"—a profession of faith which in Psalm vii. 1 was laid as the basis of prayer for deliverance and is here the ground for steadfastly remaining where he stands. The metaphor of flight to a stronghold, which is in the word for trust, obviously colours the context, for what can be more absurd than that he who has sought and found shelter in God Himself should listen to the whisperings of his own heart or to the advice of friends and hurry to some other hiding-place? "He that believeth shall not make haste," and, even when the floods come, shall not need to seek in wild hurry for an asylum above the rising waters. Safe in God, the psalmist wonders why such counsel should be given, and his question expresses its irrationality and his rejection of it. But these timid voices spoke to his "soul," and the speakers are undefined. Is he apostrophising his own lower nature? Have we here a good man's dialogue with himself? Were there two voices in him: the voice of sense, which spoke to the soul, and that of the soul, which spoke authoritatively to sense? Calvin finds here the mention of *spirituales luctas*; and whether there were actual counsellors of flight or no, no doubt prudence and fear said to and in his soul, "Flee." If we might venture to suppose that the double thought of the oneness of the psalmist's personality and the manifoldness of his faculties was in his mind, we should have an explanation of the strange fluctuation between singulars and plurals in ver. 1 *b*. "Flee" is plural, but is addressed to a singular subject: "my soul"; "your" is also plural, and "bird" singular. The Hebrew marginal correction smooths away the first anomaly by reading the singular imperative, but that leaves the anomaly in "your." The LXX. and other old versions had apparently a slightly different text, which got rid of that anomaly by reading (with the addition of one letter and a change in the division of words), "Flee to the mountain as a bird"; and that is probably the best solution of the difficulty. One can scarcely fail to recall the comparison of David to a partridge hunted on the mountains. Cheyne finds in the plurals a proof that "it is the Church within the Jewish nation of which the poet thinks." The timid counsel is enforced by two considerations: the danger of remaining a mark for the stealthy foe and the nobler thought of the hopelessness of resistance, and therefore the quixotism of sacrificing one's self in a prolongation of it. [Ps 101]

The same figure employed in Psalm vii. 12 of God's judgments on the wicked is here used of the wicked's artillery against the righteous. The peril is imminent, for the bows are bent, and the arrows already fitted to the string. In midnight darkness the assault will be made (compare lxiv. 3, 4). The appeal to the instinct of self-preservation is reinforced by the consideration (ver. 3) of the impotence of efforts to check the general anarchy. The particle at the beginning of the verse is best taken as in the same sense as at the beginning of ver. 2, thus introducing a second co-ordinate reason for the counsel. The translation of it as hypothetical or temporal (if or when) rather weakens the urgency of ver. 3 as a motive for flight. The probably exaggerated fears of the advisers, who are still speaking, are expressed in two short, breathless sentences: "The foundations [of society] are being torn down; the righteous—what has he achieved?" or possibly, "What can he do?" In either case, the implication is, Why wage a hopeless conflict any longer at the peril of life? All is lost; the wise thing to do is to run. It is obvious that this description of the dissolution of the foundations of the social order is either the exaggeration of fear, or poetic generalisation from an individual case (David's), or refers the psalm to some time of anarchy, when things were much worse than even in the time of Saul or Absalom. [Ps 104]

All these suggestions may well represent the voice of our own fears, the whispers of sense and sloth, which ever dwell on and exaggerate the perils in the road of duty, and bid us abandon resistance to prevailing evils as useless and betake ourselves to the repose and security of some tempting nest far away from strife. But such counsels are always base, and though they be the result of "prudence," are short-sighted, and leave out precisely the determining factor in the calculation. The enemy may have fitted his arrows to the string, but there is another bow bent which will be drawn before his (Psalm vii. 12). The foundations are not being destroyed, however many and strong the arms that are trying to dig them up. The righteous has done much, and can do more, though his work seem wasted. Self-preservation is not a man's first duty; flight is his last. Better and wiser and infinitely nobler to stand a mark for the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" and to stop at our post, though we fall there, better infinitely to toil on, even when toil seems vain, than cowardly to keep a whole skin at the cost of a wounded conscience or despairingly to fling up work, because the ground is hard and the growth of the seed imperceptible. Prudent advices, when the prudence is only inspired by sense, are generally foolish; and the only reasonable attitude is obstinate hopefulness and brave adherence to duty. [Ps 105]

So the psalm turns, in its second part, from these creeping counsels, which see but half the field of vision, and that the lower, to soar and gaze on the upper half. "God is in heaven; all's right with the world," and with the good men who are trying to help to make it right. The poet opposes to the picture drawn by fear the vision of the opened heaven and the throned Jehovah. In ver. 4 the former part is not to be taken as a separate affirmation: "The Lord is," etc., but "Jehovah" is a nominative absolute, and the weight of the sentence falls on the last clause. The "holy palace" in which Jehovah is beheld enthroned is not on earth, as the parallelism of the clauses shows. To the eyes that have seen that vision and before which it ever burns, all earthly sorrows and dangers seem small. There is the true asylum of the hunted soul; that is the mountain to which it is wise to flee. If the faint-hearted had seen that sight, their timid counsels would have caught a new tone. They are preposterous to him who does see it. For not only does he behold Jehovah enthroned, but he sees Him scrutinising all men's acts. We bring the eyelids close when minutely examining any small thing. So God is by a bold figure represented as doing, and the word for "beholds" has *to divide* as its root idea, and hence implies a keen discriminating gaze. As fire tries metal, so He tries men. And the result of the trial is twofold, as is described in the two clauses of ver. 5, which each require to be completed from the other: "The Lord trieth the righteous (and finding him approved, loveth), but the wicked" (He trieth, and finding him base metal), His soul "hateth." In the former clause the process of trial is mentioned, and its result omitted; in the latter the process is omitted, and the result described. The strong anthropomorphism which attributes a "soul" to God and "hatred" to His soul is not to be slurred over as due to the imperfection of Hebrew ideas of the Divine nature. There is necessarily in the Divine nature an aversion to evil and to the man who has so completely given himself over to it as to "love" it. Such perverted love can only have turned to it that side of the Divine character which in gravity of disapprobation and recoil from evil answers to what we call hate, but neither desires to harm nor is perturbed by passion. The New Testament is as emphatic as the Old in asserting the reality of "the wrath of God." But there are limitation and imperfection in this psalm in that it does not transcend the point of view which regards man's conduct as determining God's attitude. Retribution, not forgiveness nor the possibility of changing the moral bias of character, is its conception of the relations of man and God.

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The Divine estimate, which in ver. 5 is the result of God's trial of the two classes, is carried forward in vv. 6 and 7 to its twofold issues. But the form of ver. 6 is that of a wish, not of a prediction; and here again we encounter the tone which, after all allowances, must be regarded as the result of the lower stage of revelation on which the psalmist stood, even though personal revenge need not be ascribed to him. In the terrible picture of the judgment poured down from the open heavens into which the singer has been gazing, there is a reproduction of the destruction of the cities of the plain, the fate of which stands in the Old Testament as the specimen and prophecy of all subsequent acts of judgment. But the rain from heaven is conceived as consisting of "snares," which is a strangely incongruous idea. Such mingled metaphors are less distasteful to Hebrew poets than to Western critics; and the various expedients to smooth this one away, such as altering the text and neglecting the accents and reading "coals of fire," are unnecessary sacrifices to correctness of style. Delitzsch thinks that the "snares" are "a whole discharge of lassoes," *i.e.* lightnings, the zigzag course of which may be compared to a "noose thrown down from above"! The purpose of the snares is to hold fast the victims so that they cannot escape the fiery rain—a terrible picture, the very incongruity of figure heightening the grim effect. The division of the verse according to the accents parts the snares from the actual components of the fatal shower, and makes the second half of the verse an independent clause, which is probably to be taken, like the former clause, as a wish: "Fire and brimstone and a burning wind [Zornhauch, Hupfeld] be the portion of their cup," again an incongruity making the representation more dreadful. What a draught—flaming brimstone and a hot blast as of the simoom! The tremendous metaphor suggests awful reality.

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But the double judgment of ver. 5 has a gentler side, and the reason for the tempest of wrath is likewise that for the blessed hope of the upright, as the "for" of ver. 7 teaches. "Jehovah is righteous." That is the rock foundation for the indomitable faith of the Psalter in the certain ultimate triumph of patient, afflicted righteousness. Because God in His own character is so, He must love righteous acts—His own and men's. The latter seems to be the meaning here, where the fate of men is the subject in hand. The Divine "love" is here contrasted with both the wicked man's "love" of "violence" and God's "hate" (ver. 5), and is the foundation of the final confidence, "The upright shall behold His face." The converse rendering, "His countenance doth behold the upright" (A.V.), is grammatically permissible, but would be flat, tautological—since ver. 4 has already said so—and inappropriate to the close, where a statement as to the upright, antithetical to that as to the wicked, is needed. God looks on the upright, as has been said; and the upright shall gaze on Him, here and now in the communion of that faith which is a better kind of sight and hereafter

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in the vision of heaven, which the psalmist was on the verge of anticipating. That mutual gaze is blessedness. They who, looking up, behold Jehovah are brave to front all foes and to keep calm hearts in the midst of alarms. Hope burns like a pillar of fire in them when it is gone out in others; and to all the suggestions of their own timidity or of others they have the answer, "In the Lord have I put my trust; how say ye to my soul, Flee?" "Here I stand; I can do no otherwise. God help me. Amen."

PSALM XII.

1 Save, Jehovah, for the godly ceases,
  For the trusty have vanished from the sons of men.
2 They speak vanity every man with his neighbour;
  [With] smooth lip and a heart and a heart do they speak.

3 May Jehovah cut off all smooth lips,
  The tongue that speaks proud things,
4 That says, To our tongues we give strength: our lips are our own (lit. with us);
  Who is lord to us?

5 For the oppression of the afflicted, for the sighing of the needy,
  Now I will arise, saith Jehovah; I will set him in the safety he pants for.
6 The words of Jehovah are pure words,
  Silver tried in a furnace [and flowing down] to the ground, purified seven times.

7 Thou, Jehovah, shalt guard them;
  Thou shalt preserve him from this generation for ever.
8 All around the wicked swagger,
  When vileness is set on high among the sons of men.

One penalty of living near God is keen pain from low lives. The ears that hear God's word cannot but be stunned and hurt by the babble of empty speech. This psalm is profoundly melancholy, but without trace of personal affliction. The psalmist is not sad for himself, but sick of the clatter of godless tongues, in which he discerns the outcome of godless lives. His plaint wakes echoes in hearts touched by the love of God and the visions of man's true life. It passes through four clearly marked stages, each consisting of two verses: despondent contemplation of the flood of corrupt talk which seems to submerge all (1, 2); a passionate prayer for Divine intervention, wrung from the psalmist by the miserable spectacle (3, 4); the answer to that cry from the voice of God, with the rapturous response of the psalmist to it (5, 6); and the confidence built on the Divine word, which rectifies the too despondent complaint at the beginning, but is still shaded by the facts which stare him in the face (7, 8).

The cry for help (*Save*, LXX.) abruptly beginning the psalm tells of the sharp pain from which it comes. The psalmist has been brooding over the black outlook till his overcharged heart relieves itself in this single-worded prayer. As he looks round he sees no exceptions to the prevailing evil. Like Elijah, he thinks that he is left alone, and love to God and men and reliableness and truth are vanished with their representatives. No doubt in all such despondent thoughts about the rarity of Christian charity and of transparent truthfulness there is an element of exaggeration, which in the present case is, as we shall see, corrected by the process of God-taught meditation. But the clearer the insight into what society should be, the sadder the estimate of what it is. Roseate pictures of it augur ill for the ideal which their painters have. It is better to be too sensitive to evils than to be contented with them. Unless the passionate conviction of the psalmist has burned itself into us, we shall but languidly work to set things right. Heroes and reformers have all begun with "exaggerated estimates" of corruption. The judgment formed of the moral state of this or of any generation depends on the clearness with which we grasp as a standard the ideal realised in Jesus Christ and on the closeness of our communion with God.

As in Psalm v., sins of speech are singled out, and of these "vanity" and "smooth lips with a heart and a heart" are taken as typical. As in Eph. iv. 25, the guilt of falsehood is deduced from the bond of neighbourliness, which it rends. The sin, to which a "high civilisation" is especially prone, of saying pleasant things without meaning them, seems to this moralist as grave as to most men it seems slight. Is the psalmist right or wrong in taking speech for an even more clear index of corruption than deeds? What would he have said if he had been among us, when the press has augmented the power of the tongue, and floods of "vanity," not only in the form of actual lies, but of inane trivialities and nothings of personal gossip, are poured over the whole nation? Surely, if his canon is right, there is something rotten in the state of this land; and the Babel around may well make good men sad and wise men despondent.

Shall we venture to follow the psalmist in the second turn of his thoughts (vv. 3, 4), where the verb at the beginning is best taken as an optative and rendered, "May Jehovah cut off"? The deepest meaning of his desire every true man will take for his own, namely the cessation of the sin; but the more we live in the spirit of Jesus, the more we shall cherish the hope that that may be accomplished by winning the sinner. Better to have the tongue touched with a live coal from the altar than cut out. In the one case there is only a mute, in the other an instrument for God's praise. But the impatience of evil and the certainty that God can subdue it, which make the very nerve of the prayer, should belong to Christians yet more than to the psalmist. [PA 142] A new phase of sinful speech appears as provoking judgment even more than the former did. The combination of flattery and boastfulness is not rare, discordant as they seem; but the special description of the "proud things" spoken is that they are denials of responsibility to God or man for the use of lips and tongue. Insolence has gone far when it has formulated itself into definite statements. Twenty men will act on the principle for one who will put it into words. The conscious adoption and cynical avowal of it are a mark of defiance of God. "To our tongues we give strength"—an obscure expression which may be taken in various shades of meaning, *e.g.* as = We have power over, or = Through, or as to, our tongues we are strong, or = We will give effect to our words. Possibly it stands as the foundation of the daring defiance in the last clause of the verse, and asserts that the speaker is the author of his power of speech and therefore responsible to none for its use. "Our lips are with us" may be a further development of the same godless thought. "With us" is usually taken to mean "our allies," or confederates, but signifies rather "in our possession, to do as we will with them." "Who is lord over us?" There speaks godless insolence shaking off dependence, and asserting shamelessly licence of speech and life, unhindered by obligations to God and His law.

With dramatic swiftness the scene changes in the next pair of verses (5, 6). That deep voice, which silences all the loud bluster, as the lion's roar hushes the midnight cries of lesser creatures, speaks in the waiting soul of the psalmist. Like Hezekiah with Sennacherib's letter, he spreads before the Lord the "words with which they reproach Thee," and, like Hezekiah, he has immediate answer. The inward assurance that God will arise [PE 143] is won by prayer at once, and changes the whole aspect of the facts which as yet remain unchanged. The situation does not seem so desperate when we know that God is moving. Whatever delay may intervene before the actual Divine act, there is none before the assurance of it calms the soul. Many wintry days may have to be faced, but a breath of spring has been in the air, and hope revives. The twofold reason which rouses the Divine activity is very strikingly put first in ver. 5. Not merely the "oppression or spoiling of the meek," but that conjoined with the "sighing of the needy," bring God into the field. Not affliction alone, but affliction which impels to prayer, moves Him to "stir up His strength." "Now will I arise." That solemn "now" marks the crisis, or turning-point, when long forbearance ends and the crash of retribution begins. It is like the whirr of the clock that precedes the striking. The swiftly following blow will ring out the old evil. The purpose of God's intervention is the safety of the afflicted who have sighed to Him; but while that is clear, the condensed language of ver. 5 is extremely obscure. The A.V.'s rendering, "I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him," requires a too liberal use of supplemental words to eke out the sense; and the rendering of the R.V. (margin), "the safety he panteth for," is most congruous with the run of the sentence and of the thought. What has just been described as a sigh is now, with equal naturalness, figured as a pant of eager desire. The former is the expression of the weight of the affliction, the latter of yearning to escape from it. The latter is vain waste of breath unless accompanied with the former, which is also a prayer; but if so [DR 144] accompanied, the desire of the humble soul is the prophecy of its own fulfilment: and the measure of the Divine deliverance is regulated by His servant's longing. He will always, sooner or later, get "the safety for which he pants." Faith determines the extent of God's gift.

The listening psalmist rapturously responds in ver. 6 to God's great word. That word stands, with strong force of contrast, side by side with the arrogant chatter of irresponsible frivolity, and sounds majestic by the side of the shrill feebleness of the defiance. Now the psalmist lifts his voice in trustful acceptance of the oracle.

The general sense of ver. 6 is clear, and the metaphor which compares God's words to refined silver is familiar, but the precise meaning of the words rendered "in a furnace on the earth" (R.V.) is doubtful. The word for "furnace" occurs only here, and has consequently been explained in very different ways, is omitted altogether by the LXX., and supposed by Cheyne to be a remnant of an ancient gloss. But the meaning of furnace or crucible is fairly made out and appropriate. But what does "tried in a furnace to the earth" mean? The "on the earth" of the R.V. is scarcely in accordance with the use of the preposition "to," and the best course is to adopt a supplement and read "tried in a furnace [and running down] to the earth." The sparkling stream of molten silver as, free from dross, it runs from the melting-pot to the mould on the ground, is a beautiful figure of the word of God, clear of all the impurities of men's words, which the psalm has been bewailing and raining down on the world. God's words are a silver shower, precious and bright.

The last turn of the psalm builds hope on the pure words just heard from heaven. When God speaks a promise, faith repeats it as a certitude and prophesies in the line of the revelation. "Thou shalt" is man's answer to God's "I will." In the strength of the Divine word, the despondency of the opening strain is brightened. The godly and faithful shall not "cease from among the children of men," since God will keep them; and His keeping shall preserve them. "This generation" describes a class rather than an epoch. It means the vain talkers who have been sketched in such dark colours in the earlier part of the psalm. These are "the children of men" among whom the meek and needy are to live, not failing before them because God holds them up. This hope is for the militant Church, whose lot is to stand for God amidst wide-flowing evil, which may swell and rage against the band of faithful ones, but cannot sweep them away. Not of victory which annihilates opposition, but of charmed lives invulnerable in conflict, is the psalmist's confidence. There is no more lamenting of the extinction of good men and their goodness, neither is there triumphant anticipation of present extinction of bad men and their badness, but both are to grow together till the harvest.

[Ps 115]

But even the pure words which promise safety and wake the response of faith do not wholly scatter the clouds. The psalm recurs very pathetically at its close to the tone of its beginning. Notice the repetition of "the children of men" which links ver. 8 with ver. 1. If the fear that the faithful should fail is soothed by God's promise heard by the psalmist sounding in his soul, the hard fact of dominant evil is not altered thereby. That "vileness is set on high among the sons of men" is the description of a world turned upside down. Beggars are on horseback, and princes walking. The despicable is honoured, and corruption is a recommendation to high position. There have been such epochs of moral dissolution; and there is always a drift in that direction, which is only checked by the influence of the "faithful." If "vileness is set on high among the sons of men," it is because the sons of men prefer it to the stern purity of goodness. A corrupt people will crown corrupt men and put them aloft. The average goodness of the community is generally fairly represented by its heroes, rulers, and persons to whom influence is given; and when such topsy-turvydom as the rule of the worst is in fashion, "the wicked walk on every side." Impunity breeds arrogance; and they swagger and swell, knowing that they are protected. Impunity multiplies the number; and on every side they swarm, like vermin in a dirty house. But even when such an outlook saddens, the soul that has been in the secret place of the Most High and has heard the words of His mouth will not fall into pessimistic despondency, nor think that the faithful fail, because the wicked strut. When tempted to wail, "I, even I only, am left," such a soul will listen to the still small voice that tells of seven thousands of God's hidden ones, and will be of good cheer, as knowing that God's men can never cease so long as God continues.

[Ps 116]

PSALM XIII.

1 For how long, Jehovah, wilt Thou forget me for ever?
  For how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?
2 For how long shall I brood on schemes (*i.e.*, of deliverance) in my soul,
  Trouble in my heart by day?
  For how long shall my foe lift himself above me?

3 Look hither, answer me, Jehovah, my God;
  Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the death,

4 Lest my foe say, I have overcome him,
And oppressors exult when I am moved.

5 But as for me, in Thy mercy have I trusted;
Let my heart exult in Thy salvation:
6 I will sing to Jehovah, for He has dealt bountifully with me.

This little psalm begins in agitation, and ends in calm. The waves run high at first, but swiftly sink to rest, and at last lie peacefully glinting in sunshine. It falls into three strophes, of which the first (vv. 1, 2) is the complaint of endurance strained almost to giving way; the second (vv. 3, 4) is prayer which feeds fainting faith; and the third (vv. 5, 6, which are one in the Hebrew) is the voice of confidence, which, in the midst of trouble, makes future deliverance and praise a present experience.

However true it is that sorrow is "but for a moment," it seems to last for an eternity. Sad hours are leaden-footed, and joyful ones winged. If sorrows passed to our consciousness as quickly as joys, or joys lingered as long as sorrows, life would be less weary. That reiterated "How long?" betrays how weary it was to the [Ps 13:1] psalmist. Very significant is the progress of thought in the fourfold questioning plaint, which turns first to God, then to himself, then to the enemy. The root of his sorrow is that God seems to have forgotten him; therefore his soul is full of plans for relief, and the enemy seems to be lifted above him. The "sorrow of the world" begins with the visible evil, and stops with the inward pain; the sorrow which betakes itself first to God, and thinks last of the foe, has trust embedded in its depths, and may unblamed use words which sound like impatience. If the psalmist had not held fast by his confidence, he would not have appealed to God. So the "illogical" combination in his first cry of "How long?" and "for ever" is not to be smoothed away, but represents vividly, because unconsciously, the conflict in his soul from the mingling of the assurance that God's seeming forgetfulness must have an end and the dread that it might have none. Luther, who had trodden the dark places, understood the meaning of the cry, and puts it beautifully when he says that here "hope itself despairs, and despair yet hopes, and only that unspeakable groaning is audible with which the Holy Spirit, who moves over the waters covered with darkness, intercedes for us." The psalmist is tempted to forget the confidence expressed in Psalm ix. 18 and to sink to the denial animating the wicked in Psalms x., xi. The heart wrung by troubles finds little consolation in the mere intellectual belief in a Divine omniscience. An idle remembrance which does not lead to actual help is a poor stay for such a time. No doubt the psalmist knew that forgetfulness was impossible to God; but a God who, though He remembered, did nothing for, His servant, was not enough for him, nor is He for any of us. Heart and flesh cry out for *active* remembrance; [Ps 10:1] and, however clear the creed, the tendency of long-continued misery will be to tempt to the feeling that the sufferer is forgotten. It takes much grace to cling fast to the belief that He thinks of the poor suppliant whose cry for deliverance is unanswered. The natural inference is one or other of the psalmist's two here: God has forgotten or has hidden His face in indifference or displeasure. The Evangelist's profound "therefore" is the corrective of the psalmist's temptation: "Jesus loved" the three sad ones at Bethany; "when therefore He heard that he was sick, He abode still two days in the place where He was."

Left alone, without God's help, what can a man do but think and think, plan and scheme to weariness all night and carry a heavy heart as he sees by daylight how futile his plans are? Probably "by night" should be supplied in ver. 2 *a*; and the picture of the gnawing cares and busy thoughts which banish sleep and of the fresh burst of sorrow on each new morning appeals only too well to all sad souls. A brother laments across the centuries, and his long-silent wail is as the voice of our own griefs. The immediate visible occasion of trouble appears only in the last of the fourfold cries. God's apparent forgetfulness and the psalmist's own subjective agitations are more prominent than the "enemy" who "lifts himself above him." His arrogant airs and oppression would soon vanish if God would arise. The insight which places him last in order is taught by faith. The soul stands between God and the external world, with all its possible calamities; and if the relation with God is right, and help is flowing unbrokenly from Him, the relation to the world will quickly come right, [Ps 13:2] and the soul be lifted high above the foe, however lofty he be or think himself.

The agitation of the first strophe is somewhat stilled in the second, in which the stream of prayer runs clear without such foam, as the impatient questions of the first part. It falls into four clauses, which have an approximate correspondence to those of strophe 1. "Look hither, answer me, Jehovah, my God." The first petition corresponds to the hiding of God's face, and perhaps the second, by the law of inverted parallelism, may correspond to the *forgetting*, but in any case the noticeable thing is the swift decisiveness of spring with which the psalmist's faith reaches firm ground here. Mark the implied belief that God's look is not an otiose gaze, but brings immediate act answering the prayer; mark the absence of copula between the verbs, giving

force to the prayer and swiftness to the sequence of Divine acts; mark the outgoing of the psalmist's faith in the addition to the name "Jehovah" (as in ver. 1), of the personal "my God," with all the sweet and reverent appeal hived in the address. The third petition, "Lighten mine eyes," is not for illumination of vision, but for renewed strength. Dying eyes are glazed; a sick man's are heavy and dull. Returning health brightens them. So here the figure of sickness threatening to become death stands for trouble, or possibly the "enemy" is a real foe seeking the life, as will be the most natural interpretation if the Davidic origin is maintained. To "sleep death" is a forcible compressed expression, which is only attenuated by being completed. The prayer rests upon the profound conviction that Jehovah is the fountain of life, and that only by His continual pouring of fresh vitality into a man can any eyes be kept from death. The brightest must be replenished from His [Pg 121] hand, or they fail and become dim; the dimmest can be brightened by His gift of vigorous health. As in the first strophe the psalmist passed from God to self, and thence to enemies, so he does in the second. His prayer addresses God; its pleas regard, first, himself, and, second, his foe. How is the preventing of the enemy's triumph in his being stronger than the psalmist and of his malicious joy over the latter's misfortune an argument with God to help? It is the plea, so familiar in the Psalter and to devout hearts, that God's honour is identified with His servant's deliverance, a true thought, and one that may reverently be entertained by the humblest lover of God, but which needs to be carefully guarded. We must make very sure that God's cause is ours before we can be sure that ours is His; we must be very completely living for His honour before we dare assume that His honour is involved in our continuing to live. As Calvin says, "Cum eo nobis communis erit hæc precatio, si sub Dei imperio et auspiciis militamus."

The storm has all rolled away in the third strophe, in which faith has triumphed over doubt and anticipates the fulfilment of its prayer. It begins with an emphatic opposition of the psalmist's personality to the foe: "But as for me"—however they may rage—"I have trusted in Thy mercy." Because he has thus trusted, therefore he is sure that that mercy will work for him salvation or deliverance from his present peril. Anything is possible rather than that the appeal of faith to God's heart of love should not be answered. Whoever can say, I have trusted, has the right to say, I shall rejoice. It was but a moment ago that this man had asked, How long shall I have sorrow in my heart? and now the sad heart is flooded with sudden gladness. Such is the magic of faith, [Pg 122] which can see an unrisen light in the thickest darkness, and hear the birds singing amongst the branches even while the trees are bare and the air silent. How significant the contrast of the two rejoicings set side by side: the adversaries' when the good man is "moved"; the good man's when God's salvation establishes him in his place! The closing strain reaches forward to deliverance not yet accomplished, and, by the prerogative of trust, calls things that are not as though they were. "He has dealt bountifully with me"; so says the psalmist who had begun with "How long?" No external change has taken place; but his complaint and prayer have helped him to tighten his grasp of God, and have transported him into the certain future of deliverance and praise. He who can thus say, "I will sing," when the hoped-for mercy has wrought salvation, is not far off singing even while it tarries. The sure anticipation of triumph is triumph. The sad minor of "How long?" if coming from faithful lips, passes into a jubilant key, which heralds the full gladness of the yet future songs of deliverance.

PSALM XIV.

1 The fool says in his heart, There is no God;
They corrupt; they make abominable their doings;
There is no one doing good.

2 Jehovah looketh down from heaven upon the sons of men
To see if there is any having discernment,
Seeking after God.

3 They are all turned aside: together they are become putrid;
There is no one doing good,
There is not even one.

4 Do they not know, all the workers of iniquity,
  Who devour my people [as] they devour bread?
  On Jehovah they do not call.

5 There they feared a [great] fear,
  For God is in the righteous generation.

6 The counsel of the afflicted ye would put to shame,
  For God is his refuge.

7 Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!
  When Jehovah brings back the captivity of His people,
  May Jacob exult, may Israel be glad!

This psalm springs from the same situation as Psalms x. and xii. It has several points of likeness to both. It resembles the former in its attribution to "the fool" of the heart-speech, "There is no God," and the latter in its use of the phrases "sons of men" and "generation" as ethical terms and in its thought of a Divine interference as the source of safety for the righteous. We have thus three psalms closely connected, but separated from each other by Psalms xi. and xiii. Now it is observable that these three have no personal references, and that [Ps 104] the two which part them have. It would appear that the five are arranged on the principle of alternating a general complaint of the evil of the times with a more personal pleading of an individual sufferer. It is also noticeable that these five psalms—a little group of wailing and sighs—are marked off from the cognate psalms iii.-vii. and xvi., xvii., by two (Psalms viii. and xv.) in an entirely different tone. A second recast of this psalm appears in the Elohistic Book (Psalm liii.), the characteristics of which will be dealt with there. This is probably the original.

The structure of the psalm is simple, but is not carried out completely. It should consist of seven verses each having three clauses, and so having stamped on it the sacred numbers 3 and 7, but vv. 5 and 6 each want a clause, and are the more vehement from their brevity.

The heavy fact of wide-spread corruption presses on the psalmist, and starts a train of thought which begins with a sad picture of the deluge of evil, rises to a vision of God's judgment of and on it, triumphs in the prospect of the sudden panic which shall shake the souls of the "workers of iniquity" when they see that God is with the righteous, and ends with a sigh for the coming of that time. The staple of the poem is but the familiar contrast of a corrupt world and a righteous God who judges, but it is cast into very dramatic and vivid form here.

We listen first (ver. 1) to the psalmist's judgment of his generation. Probably it was very unlike the rosy hues in which a heart less in contact with God and the unseen would have painted the condition of things. Eras of great culture and material prosperity may have a very seamy side, which eyes accustomed to the light of God [Ps 125] cannot fail to see. The root of the evil lay, as the psalmist believed, in a practical denial of God; and whoever thus denied Him was "a fool." It does not need formulated atheism in order to say in one's heart, "There is no God." Practical denial or neglect of His working in the world, rather than a creed of negation, is in the psalmist's mind. In effect, we say that there is no God when we shut Him up in a far-off heaven, and never think of Him as concerned in our affairs. To strip Him of His justice and rob Him of His control is the part of a fool. For the Biblical conception of folly is moral perversity rather than intellectual feebleness, and whoever is morally and religiously wrong cannot be in reality intellectually right.

The practical denial of God lies at the root of two forms of evil. Positively, "they have made their doings corrupt and abominable"—rotten in themselves and sickening and loathsome to pure hearts and to God. Negatively, they do no good things. That is the dreary estimate of his cotemporaries forced on this sad-hearted singer, because he himself had so thrillingly felt God's touch and had therefore been smitten with loathing of men's low ways and with a passion for goodness. "Sursum corda" is the only consolation for such hearts.

So the next wave of thought (ver. 2) brings into his consciousness the solemn contrast between the godless noise and activity of earth and the silent gaze of God, that marks it all. The strong anthropomorphism of the vivid picture recalls the stories of the Deluge, of Babel, and of Sodom, and casts an emotional hue over the abstract thought of the Divine omniscience and observance. The purpose of the Divine quest is set forth with [Ps 126] deep insight, as being the finding of even one good, devout man. It is the anticipation of Christ's tender word

to the Samaritan that "the Father seeketh such to worship Him." God's heart yearns to find hearts that turn to Him; He seeks those who seek Him; they who seek Him, and only they, are "wise." Other Scriptures present other reasons for that gaze of God from heaven, but this one in the midst of its solemnity is gracious with revelation of Divine desires.

What is to be the issue of the strongly contrasted situation in these two verses: beneath, a world full of godless lawlessness; above, a fixed eye piercing to the discernment of the inmost nature of actions and characters? Ver. 3 answers. We may almost venture to say that it shows a disappointed God, so sharply does it put the difference between what He desired to see and what He did see. The psalmist's sad estimate is repeated as the result of the Divine search. But it is also increased in emphasis and in compass. For "the whole" (race) is the subject. Universality is insisted on in each clause; "all," "together," "not one," and strong metaphors are used to describe the condition of humanity. It is "turned aside," *i.e.*, from the way of Jehovah; it is become putrid, like a rotting carcase, is rank, and smells to heaven. There is a sad cadence in that "no, not one," as of a hope long cherished and reluctantly abandoned, not without some tinge of wonder at the barren results of such a search. This stern indictment is quoted by St. Paul in Romans as confirmation of his thesis of universal sinfulness; and, however the psalmist had the wickedness of Israel in the foreground of his consciousness, his language is studiously wide and meant to include all "the sons of men."

But this baffled quest cannot be the end. If Jehovah seeks in vain for goodness on earth, earth cannot go on for ever in godless riot. Therefore, with eloquent abruptness, the voice from heaven crashes in upon the "fools" in the full career of their folly. The thunder rolls from a clear sky. God speaks in ver. 4. The three clauses of the Divine rebuke roughly correspond with those of ver. 1 in so far as the first points to ignorance as the root of wrong-doing, the second charges positive sin, and the third refers to negative evil. "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" The question has almost a tone of surprise, as if even Omniscience found matter of wonder in men's mysterious love of evil. Jesus "marvelled" at some men's "unbelief"; and certainly sin is the most inexplicable thing in the world, and might almost astonish God as well as heaven and earth. The meaning of the word "know" here is best learned from ver. 1. "Not to know" is the same thing as to be "a fool." That ignorance, which is moral perversity as well as intellectual blindness, needs not to have a special object stated. Its thick veil hides all real knowledge of God, duty, and consequences from men. It makes evil-doing possible. If the evil-doer could have flashed before him the realities of things, his hand would stay its crime. It is not true that all sin can be resolved into ignorance, but it is true that criminal ignorance is necessary to make sin possible. A bull shuts its eyes when it charges. Men who do wrong are blind in one eye at least, for, if they saw at the moment what they probably know well enough, sin would be impossible.

This explanation of the words seems more congruous with ver. 1 than that of others, "made to know," *i.e.* by experience to rue.

Ver. 4 *b* is obscure from its compressed brevity "Eating my people, they eat bread." The A.V. and R.V. take their introduction of the "as" of comparison from the old translations. The Hebrew has no term of comparison, but it is not unusual to omit the formal term in rapid and emotional speech, and the picture of the appetite with which a hungry man devours his food may well stand for the relish with which the oppressors swallowed up the innocent. There seems no need for the ingenuities which have been applied to the interpretation of the clause, nor for departing, with Cheyne, from the division of the verse according to the accents. The positive sins of the oppressors, of which we have heard so much in the connected psalms, are here concentrated in their cruel plundering of "my people," by which the whole strain of the psalm leads us to understand the devout kernel of Israel, in contrast with the mass of "men of the earth" in the nation, and not the nation as a whole in contrast with heathen enemies.

The Divine indictment is completed by "They call not on Jehovah." Practical atheism is, of course, prayerless. That negation makes a dreary silence in the noisiest life, and is in one aspect the crown, and in another the foundation, of all evil-doing.

The thunder-peal of the Divine voice strikes a sudden panic into the hosts of evil. "There they feared a fear." The psalmist conceives the scene and its locality. He does not say "there" when he means "then," but he pictures the terror seizing the oppressors where they stood when the Divine thunder rolled above their heads; and with him, as with us, "on the spot" implies "at the moment." The epoch of such panic is left vague. Whensoever in any man's experience that solemn voice sounds, conscience wakes fear. The revelation by any means of a God who sees evil and judges it makes cowards of us all. Probably the psalmist thought of some speedily impending act of judgment; but his juxtaposition of the two facts, the audible voice of God and the

swift terror that shakes the heart, contains an eternal truth, which men who whisper in their hearts, "There is no God," need to ponder.

This verse 5 is the first of the two shorter verses of our psalm, containing only two clauses instead of the regular three; but it does not therefore follow that anything has dropped out. Rather the framework is sufficiently elastic to allow of such variation according to the contents, and the shorter verse is not without a certain increase of vigour, derived from the sharp opposition of its two clauses. On the one hand is the terror of the sinner occasioned by and contrasted with the discovery which stands on the other that God is in the righteous generation. The psalmist sets before himself and us the two camps: the panic-stricken and confused mass of enemies ready to break into flight and the little flock of the "righteous generation," at peace in the midst of trouble and foes because God is in the midst of them. No added clause could heighten the effect of that contrast, which is like that of the host of Israel walking in light and safety on one side of the fiery pillar and the army of Pharaoh groping in darkness and dread on the other. The permanent relations of God to the two sorts of men who are found in every generation and community are set forth in that strongly marked contrast.

In ver. 6 the psalmist himself addresses the oppressors, with triumphant confidence born of his previous [Pg 130] contemplations. The first clause might be a question, but is more probably a taunting affirmation: "You would frustrate the plans of the afflicted"—and you could not—"for Jehovah is his refuge." Here again the briefer sentence brings out the eloquent contrast. The malicious foe, seeking to thwart the poor man's plans, is thwarted. His desire is unaccomplished; and there is but one explanation of the impotence of the mighty and the powerfulness of the weak, namely that Jehovah is the stronghold of His saints. Not by reason of his own wit or power does the afflicted baffle the oppressor, but by reason of the strength and inaccessibleness of his hiding-place. "The conies are a feeble folk, but they make their houses in the rocks," where nothing that has not wings can get at them.

So, finally, the whole course of thought gathers itself up in the prayer that the salvation of Israel—the true Israel apparently—were come out of Zion, God's dwelling, from which He comes forth in His delivering power. The salvation longed for is that just described. The voice of the oppressed handful of good men in an evil generation is heard in this closing prayer. It is encouraged by the visions which have passed before the psalmist. The assurance that God will intervene is the very life-breath of the cry to Him that He would. Because we know that He will deliver, therefore we find it in our hearts to pray that He would deliver. The revelation of His gracious purposes animates the longings for their realisation. Such a sigh of desire has no sadness in its longing and no doubt in its expectation. It basks in the light of an unrisen sun, and feels beforehand the gladness of the future joys "when the Lord shall bring again the captivity of His people."

This last verse is by some regarded as a liturgical addition to the psalm; but ver. 6 cannot be the original [Pg 131] close, and it is scarcely probable that some other ending has been put aside to make room for this. Besides, the prayer of ver. 7 coheres very naturally with the rest of the psalm, if only we take that phrase "turns the captivity" in the sense which it admittedly bears in Job xlii. 10 and Ezek. xvi. 53, namely that of deliverance from misfortune. Thus almost all modern interpreters understand the words, and even those who most strongly hold the late date of the psalm do not find here any reference to the historical bondage. The devout kernel of the nation is suffering from oppressors, and that may well be called a captivity. For a good man the present condition of society is bondage, as many a devout soul has felt since the psalmist did. But there is a dawning hope of a better day of freedom, the liberty of the glory of the children of God; and the gladness of the ransomed captives may be in some degree anticipated even now. The psalmist was thinking only of some intervention on the field of history, and we are not to read loftier hopes into his song. But it is as impossible for Christians not to entertain, as it was for him to grasp firmly, the last, mightiest hope of a last, utter deliverance from all evil and of an eternal and perfect joy.

[Pg 132]

PSALM XV.

1 Jehovah, who can be guest in Thy tent?
  Who can dwell in Thy holy hill?

2 The man walking blamelessly, and doing righteousness,
And speaking truth with his heart.

3 He has not slander on his tongue,
He does not harm to his comrade,
And reproach he does not lay on his neighbour.

4 A reprobate is despised in his eyes,
But the fearers of Jehovah he honours;
He swears to his own hurt, and will not change.

5 His silver he does not give at usury,
And a bribe against the innocent he does not take;
He that does these things shall not be moved for ever.

The ideal worshipper of Jehovah is painted in this psalm in a few broad outlines. Zion is holy because God's "tent" is there. This is the only hint of date given by the psalm; and all that can be said is that, if that consecration of Thy hill was recent, the poet would naturally ponder all the more deeply the question of who were fit to dwell in the new solemnities of the abode of Jehovah. The tone of the psalm, then, accords with the circumstances of the time when David brought the ark to Jerusalem; but more than this cannot be affirmed. Much more important are its two main points: the conception of the guests of Jehovah and the statement of the ethical qualifications of these.

As to structure, the psalm is simple. It has, first, the general question and answer in two verses of two clauses each (vv. 1, 2). Then the general description of the guest of God is expanded in three verses of three clauses each, the last of which closes with an assurance of stability, which varies and heightens the idea of dwelling in the tent of Jehovah. [Ps 133]

It is no mere poetic apostrophe with which the psalmist's question is prefaced. He does thereby consult the Master of the house as to the terms on which He extends hospitality, which terms it is His right to prescribe. He brings to his own view and to his readers' all that lies in the name of Jehovah, the covenant name, and all that is meant by "holiness," and thence draws the answer to his question, which is none the less Jehovah's answer because it springs in the psalmist's heart and is spoken by his lips. The character of the God determines the character of the worshipper. The roots of ethics are in religion. The Old Testament ideal of the righteous man flows from its revelation of the righteous God. Not men's own fancies, but insight gained by communion with God and docile inquiry of Him, will reliably tell what manner of men they are who can abide in His light.

The thought, expressed so forcibly in the question of the psalm, that men may be God's guests, is a very deep and tender one, common to a considerable number of psalms (v. 5, xxvii. 4, lxxxiv. 5, etc.). The word translated "abide" in the A.V. and "sojourn" in the R.V. originally implied a transient residence as a stranger, but when applied to men's relations to God, it does not always preserve the idea of transiency (see, for instance, lxi. 4: "I will dwell in Thy tent *for ever*"); and the idea of protection is the most prominent. The stranger who took refuge in the tent even of the wild Beduin was safe, much more the happy man who crept under the folds of the tent of Jehovah. If the holy hill of Zion were not immediately mentioned, one might be tempted to think that the tent here was only used as a metaphor; but the juxtaposition of the two things seems to set the allusion to the dwelling-place of the Ark on its hill beyond question. In the gracious hospitality of the antique world, a guest was sheltered from all harm; his person was inviolable, his wants all met. So the guest of Jehovah is safe, can claim asylum from every foe and a share in all the bountiful provision of His abode. Taken accurately, the two verbs in ver. 1 differ in that the first implies transient and the second permanent abode; but that difference is not in the psalmist's mind, and the two phrases mean the same thing, with only the difference that the former brings out his conception of the rights of the guest. Clearly, then, the psalmist's question by no means refers only to an outward approach to an outward tabernacle; but we see here the symbol in the very act of melting into the deep spiritual reality signified. The singer has been educated by the husks of ritual to pass beyond these, and has learned that there is a better dwelling-place for Jehovah, and therefore for himself, than that pitched on Zion and frequented by impure and pure alike. [Ps 134]

Ver. 2 sums the qualifications of Jehovah's guest in one comprehensive demand, that he should walk uprightly, and then analyses that requirement into the two of righteous deeds and truthful speech. The verbs are in the participial form, which emphasises the notion of habitual action. The general answer is expanded in the three following verses, which each contain three clauses, and take up the two points of ver. 2 in inverted [IPs 135] order, although perhaps not with absolute accuracy of arrangement. The participial construction is in them changed for finite verbs. Ver. 2 sketches the figure in outline, and the rest of the psalm adds clause on clause of description as if the man stood before the psalmist's vision. Habits are described as acts.

The first outstanding characteristic of this ideal is that it deals entirely with duties to men, and the second is that it is almost wholly negative. Moral qualities of the most obvious kind, and such as can be tested in daily life and are cultivated by rigid abstinence from prevailing evils, and not any recondite and impalpable refinements of conduct, still less any peculiar emotions of souls raised high above the dusty levels of common life, are the qualifications for dwelling, a guarded guest, in that great pavilion. Such a stress laid on homely duties, which the universal conscience recognises, is characteristic of the ethics of the Old Testament as a whole and of the Psalter in particular, and is exemplified in the lives of its saints and heroes. They "come eating and drinking," sharing in domestic joys and civic duties; and however high their aspirations and vows may soar, they have always their feet firmly planted on the ground and, laying the smallest duties on themselves, "tread life's common road in cheerful godliness." The Christian answer to the psalmist's question goes deeper than his, but is fatally incomplete unless it include his and lay the same stress on duties to men which all acknowledge, as that does. Lofty emotions, raptures of communion, aspirations which bring their own fulfilment, and all the experiences of the devout soul, which are sometimes apt to be divorced from plain morality, need the ballast of the psalmist's homely answer to the great question. There is something in a religion of emotion not wholly favourable to the practice of ordinary duties; and many men, good after a [IPs 136] fashion, seem to have their spiritual nature divided into water-tight and uncommunicating compartments, in one of which they keep their religion, and in the other their morality.

The stringent assertion that these two are inseparable was the great peculiarity of Judaism as compared with the old world religions, from which, as from the heathenism of to-day, the conception that religion had anything to do with conduct was absent. But it is not only heathenism that needs the reminder.

True, the ideal drawn here is not the full Christian one. It is too merely negative for that, and too entirely concerned with acts. Therein it reproduces the limitations of the earlier revelation. It scarcely touches at all the deeper forms of "love to our neighbour"; and, above all, it has no answer to the question which instinctively rises in the heart when the psalm has answered its own question. How can I attain to these qualifications? is a second interrogation, raised by the response to the first, and for its answer we have to turn to Jesus. The psalm, like the law which inspired it, is mainly negative, deals mainly with acts, and has no light to show how its requirements may be won. But it yet stands as an unantiquated statement of what a man must be who dwells in the secret place of the Most High. How he may become such a one we must learn from Him who both teaches us the way, and gives us the power, to become such as God will shelter in the safe recesses of His pavilion.

The details of the qualifications as described in the psalm are simple and homely. They relate first to right speech, which holds so prominent a place in the ethics of the Psalter. The triplets of ver. 3 probably all refer [IPs 137] to sins of the tongue. The good man has no slander on his tongue; he does not harm his companion (by word) nor heap reproach on his neighbour. These things are the staple of much common talk. What a quantity of brilliant wit and polished sarcasm would perish if this rule were observed! How dull many sparkling circles would become, and how many columns of newspapers and pages of books would be obliterated, if the censor's pencil struck out all that infringed it! Ver. 4 adds as characteristic of a righteous man that in his estimate of character he gives each his own, and judges men by no other standard than their moral worth. The reprobate may be a millionaire or a prince, but his due is contempt; the devout man may be a pauper or one of narrow culture, but his due is respect, and he gets it. "A terrible sagacity informs" the good man's heart; and he who is, in his own inmost desires, walking uprightly will not be seduced into adulation of a popular idol who is a bad man, nor turned from reverence for lowly goodness. The world will be a paradise when the churl is no more called bountiful.

Apparently the utterance of these estimates is in the psalmist's mind, and he is still thinking of speech. Neither calumny (ver. 3) nor the equally ignoble flattery of evil-doers (ver. 4) pollutes the lips of his ideal good man. If this reference to spoken estimates is allowed, the last clause of ver. 4 completes the references to the right use of speech. The obligation of speaking "truth with his heart" is pursued into a third region: that

of vows or promises. These must be conceived as not religious vows, but, in accordance with the reference of the whole psalm to duties to neighbours, as oaths made to men. They must be kept, whatever consequences may ensue. The law prohibited the substitution of another animal sacrifice for that which had been vowed (Lev. xxvii. 10); and the psalm uses the same word for "changeth," with evident allusion to the prohibition, which must therefore have been known to the psalmist. [Pg 138]

Usury and bribery were common sins, as they still are in communities on the same industrial and judicial level as that mirrored in the psalm. Capitalists who "bite" the poor (for that is the literal meaning of the words for usurious taking of interest) and judges who condemn the innocent for gain are the blood-suckers of such societies. The avoidance of such gross sin is a most elementary illustration of walking uprightly, and could only have been chosen to stand in lieu of all other neighbourly virtues in an age when these sins were deplorably common. This draft of a God-pleasing character is by no means complete even from the Old Testament ethical point of view. There are two variations of it, which add important elements: that in Psalm xxiv., which seems to have been occasioned by the same circumstances; and the noble adaptation in Isa. xxxiii. 13-16, which is probably moulded on a reminiscence of both psalms. Add to these Micah's answer to the question what God requires of man (ch. vi. 8), and we have an interesting series, exhibiting the effects of the Law on the moral judgments of devout men in Israel.

The psalmist's last word goes beyond his question, in the clear recognition that such a character as he has outlined not only dwells in Jehovah's tent, but will stand unmoved, though all the world should rock. He does not see how far onward that "for ever" may stretch, but of this he is sure: that righteousness is the one stable thing in the universe, and there may have shone before him the hope that it was possible to travel on beyond the horizon that bounds this life. "I shall be a guest in Jehovah's tent for ever," says the other psalm already quoted; "He shall never be moved," says this one. Both find their fulfilment in the great words of the Apostle who taught a completer ideal of love to men, because he had dwelt close by the perfect revelation of God's love: "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." [Pg 139]

[Pg 140]

PSALM XVI.

1 Preserve me, O God, for I take refuge in Thee
2 I have said to Jehovah, Thou art my Lord;
  Good for me there is none besides Thee.
3 As for the saints which are in the earth,
  They are the excellent, in whom is all my delight.
4 Their griefs are many who change [Jehovah] for another.
  I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood,
  And will not take their names on my lips.

5 Jehovah is my allotted portion and my cup;
  Thou art continually my lot.
6 The measuring lines have fallen for me in pleasant places,
  And my inheritance is fair to me.
7 I will bless Jehovah who has given me counsel;
  Yea, in the night seasons my reins instruct me.
8 I set Jehovah before me continually,
  Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.

9 Therefore my heart rejoices, and my glory exults;
  Yea, my flesh dwells in safety.
10 For Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol;
  Thou wilt not suffer Thy Beloved One to see the pit.
11 Thou wilt make me know the path of life;

Before Thy face is fulness of joys;
Pleasures are in Thy right hand for evermore.

The progress of thought in this psalm is striking. The singer is first a bold confessor in the face of idolatry and apostasy (vv. 1-4). Then the inward sweetness of his faith fills his soul, as is ever the reward of brave avowal, and he buries himself, bee-like in the pure delights of communion with Jehovah (vv. 5-8). Finally, on the ground of such experience, he rises to the assurance that "its very sweetness yieldeth proof" that he and it are born for undying life (vv. 9-11). The conviction of immortality is then most vividly felt, when it results from the consciousness of a present full of God. The outpourings of a pure and wholesome mystic religion in the psalm are so entirely independent of the personality and environment of the singer that there is no need to encumber the study of it with questions of date. If we accept the opinion that the conception of resurrection was the result of intercourse with Persia, we shall have to give a post-exilic date to the psalm. But even if the general adoption of that belief was historically so motived, that does not forbid our believing that select souls, living in touch with God, rose to it long before. The peaks caught the glow while the valleys were filled with mists. The tone of the last section sounds liker that of a devout soul in the very act of grasping a wonderful new thought, which God was then and there revealing to him through his present experience, than of one who was simply repeating a theological truth become familiar to all. [Psa 141]

The first turn of thought (vv. 1-4) is clear in its general purport. It is a profession of personal adherence to Jehovah and of attachment to His lovers, in the face of idol worship which had drawn away some. The brief cry for preservation at the beginning does not necessarily imply actual danger, but refers to the possible antagonism of the idol worshippers provoked by the psalmist's bold testimony. The two meanings of Martyr, a witness and a sufferer, are closely intertwined in fact. He needs to be preserved, and he has a claim to be so, for his profession of faith has brought the peril.

The remarkable expression in ver. 2 *b* is best understood as unfolding the depth of what lies in saying, My God. It means the cleaving to Him of the whole nature as the all-comprehending supply of every desire and capacity. "Good for me is none besides Thee." This is the same high strain as in the cognate Psalm lxxiii. 25, where, as here, the joy of communion is seen in the very act of creating the confidence of immortality. The purest expression of the loftiest devotion lies in these few words. The soul that speaks thus to Jehovah turns next to Jehovah's friends and then to His foes. To the former it speaks, in ver. 3, of the gnarled obscurity of which the simplest clearing up is that adopted by the R.V. This requires a very small correction of the text, the omission of one letter, (*Waw* = and) before "excellent," and the transference to the second clause of "these," which the accents append clumsily to the first. If we regard the "to" at the beginning, as the R.V. does, as marking simply reference ("as for"), the verse is an independent sentence; but it is possible to regard the influence of "I have said" as still continuing, and in that case we should have what the psalmist said to the saints, following on what he said to Jehovah, which gives unity to the whole context, and is probably best. Cheyne would expunge the first clause as a gloss crept in from the margin; and that clears the sense, though the remedy is somewhat drastic, and a fine touch is lost, "I said to Thy loved ones,—these (and not the braggarts who strut as great men) are the truly excellent, in whom is all my delight." When temptations to forsake Jehovah are many, the true worshipper has to choose his company, and his devotion to his only God will lead to penetrating insight into the unreality of many shining reputations and the modest beauty of humble lives of godliness. Eyes which have been purged to see God, by seeing Him will see through much. Hearts that have learned to love Jehovah will be quick to discern kindred hearts, and, if they have found all good in Him, will surely find purest delight in them. The solitary confessor clasps the hands of his unknown fellows. [Psa 141] [Psa 142]

With dramatic abruptness he points to the unnamed recreants from Jehovah. "Their griefs are many—they exchange (Jehovah) for another." Apparently, then, there was some tendency in Israel to idolatry, which gives energy to the psalmist's vehement vow that he will not offer their libations of blood, nor take the abhorred names of the gods they pronounced into his lips. This state of things would suit but too much of Israel's history, during which temptations to idol worship were continually present, and the bloody libations would point to such abominations of human sacrifice as we know characterised the worship of Moloch and Chemosh. Cheyne sees in the reference to these a sign of the post-exilic date of the psalm; but was there any period after the exile in which there was danger of relapse to idolatry, and was not rather a rigid monotheism the great treasure which the exiles brought back? The trait seems rather to favour an earlier date.

In the second section (vv. 5-8) the devout soul suns itself in the light of God, and tells itself how rich it is. "The portion of mine inheritance" might mean an allotted share of either food or land, but ver. 6 favours the

latter interpretation. "Cup" here is not so much an image for that which satisfies thirst, though that would be beautiful, as for that which is appointed for one to experience. Such a use of the figure is familiar, and brings [Pg 144] it into line with the other of inheritance, which is plainly the principal, as that of the cup is dropped in the following words. Every godly man has the same possession and the same prohibitions as the priests had. Like them he is landless, and instead of estates has Jehovah. They presented in mere outward fashion what is the very law of the devout life. Because God is the only true Good, the soul must have none other, and if it have forsaken all other by reason of the greater wealth of even partial possession of Him, it will be growingly rich in Him. He who has said unto the Lord, "Thou art my Lord," will with ever increasing decisiveness of choice and consciousness of sufficiency say, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance." The same figure is continued in ver. 5 *b*. "My lot" is the same idea as "my portion," and the natural flow of thought would lead us to expect that Jehovah is both. That consideration combines with the very anomalous grammatical form of the word rendered "maintainest" to recommend the slight alteration adopted by Cheyne following Dyserinck and Bickell, by which "continually" is read for it. What God is rather than what He does is filling the psalmist's happy thoughts, and the depth of his blessedness already kindles that confidence in its perpetuity which shoots up to so bright a flame in the closing verses (cf. lxxiii.). The consciousness of perfect rest in perfect satisfaction of need and desires ever follows possession of God. So the calm rapture of ver. 6 is the true utterance of the heart acquainted with God, and of it alone. One possession only bears reflection. Whatever else a man has, if he has not Jehovah for his portion, some part of himself will stand stiffly out, dissentient and unsatisfied, and hinder him from saying "My inheritance is fair to me." That verdict of [Pg 145] experience implies, as it stands in the Hebrew, subjective delight in the portion and not merely the objective worth of it. This is the peculiar pre-eminence of a God-filled life, that the Infinitely good is wholly Good to it, through all the extent of capacities and cravings. Who else can say the same? Blessed they whose delights are in God! He will ever delight them.

No wonder that the psalmist breaks into blessing; but it is deeply significant of the freedom from mere sentimental religion which characterises the highest flights of his devotion, that his special ground of blessing Jehovah is not inward peace of communion, but the wise guidance given thereby for daily difficulties. A God whose sweet sufficiency gives satisfaction for all desires and balm for every wound is much, but a God who by these very gifts makes duty plain, is more. The test of inward devotion is its bearing on common tasks. True wisdom is found in fellowship with God. Eyes which look on Him see many things more clearly. The "reins" are conceived of as the seat of the Divine voice. In Old Testament psychology they seem to stand for feelings rather than reason or conscience, and it is no mistake of the psalmist's when he thinks that through them God's counsel comes. He means much the same as we do when we say that devout instincts are of God. He will purify, ennoble and instruct even the lower propensities and emotions, so that they may be trusted to guide, when the heart is at rest in Him. "Prayer is better than sleep," says the Mohammedan call to devotion. "In the night seasons," says the psalmist, when things are more clearly seen in the dark than by day, [Pg 146] many a whisper from Jehovah steals into his ears.

The upshot of all is a firm resolve to make really his what is his. "I set Jehovah always before me"—since He is "always my lot." That effort of faith is the very life of devotion. We have any possession only while it is present to our thoughts. It is all one not to have a great estate and never to see it or think about it. True love is an intense desire for the presence of its object. God is only ours in reality when we are conscious of His nearness, and that is strange love of Him which is content to pass days without ever setting Him before itself. The effort of faith brings an ally and champion for faith, for "He is at my right hand," in so far as I set Him before me. "At my right hand,"—then I am at His left, and the left arm wears the shield, and the shield covers my head. Then He is close by my working hand, to direct its activity and to lay His own great hand on my feeble one, as the prophet did his on the wasted fingers of the sick king to give strength to draw the bow. The ally of faith secures the stability of faith. "I shall not be moved," either by the agitations of passions or by the shocks of fortune. A calm heart, which is not the same thing as a stagnant heart, is the heritage of him who has God at his side; and he who is fixed on that rock stands four-square to all the winds that blow. Foolhardy self-reliance says, I shall never be moved (x. 6), and the end of that boast is destruction. A good man, seduced by prosperity, may forget himself so far as to say it (xxx. 6), and the end of that has to be fatherly discipline, to bring him right. But to say "Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" is but to claim the blessings belonging to the possession of the only satisfying inheritance, even Jehovah Himself. [Pg 147]

The heart that expands with such blessed consciousness of possessing God can chant its triumphant song even in front of the grave. So, in his closing strain the psalmist pours out his rapturous faith that his fellowship with God abolishes death. No worthy climax to the profound consciousness of communion already expressed, nor any satisfactory progress of thought justifying the "therefore" of ver. 9, can be made

out with any explanation of the final verses, which eliminates the assurance of immortal life from them. The experiences of the devout life here are prophecies. These aspirations and enjoyments are to their possessor, not only authentic proofs "that God is and that He is the rewarder of the heart that seeks Him," but also witnesses of immortality not to be silenced. They "were not born for death," but, in their sweetness and incompleteness alike, point onwards to their own perpetuity and perfecting. If a man has been able to say and has said "My God," nothing will seem more impossible to him than that such a trifle as death should have power to choke his voice or still the outgoings of his heart towards, and its rest in, his God. Whatever may have been the current beliefs of the psalmist's time in regard to a future life, and whether his sunny confidence here abode with him in less blessed hours of less "high communion with the living God," or ebbed away, leaving him to the gloomier thoughts of other psalms, we need not try to determine. Here, at all events, we see his faith in the act of embracing the great thought, which may have been like the rising of a new sun in his sky—namely, the conviction that this his joy was joy for ever. A like depth of personal [Ps 148] experience of the sweetness of communion with God will always issue in like far-seeing assurance of its duration as unaffected by anything that touches only the physical husk of the true self. If we would be sure of immortal life, we must make the mortal a God-filled life.

The psalmist feels the glad certainty in all his complex nature, heart, soul, and flesh. All three have their portion in the joy which it brings. The foundation of the exultation of heart and soul and of the quiet rest of flesh is not so much the assurance that after death there will be life, and after the grave a resurrection, as the confidence that there will be no death at all. To "see the pit" is a synonym for experiencing death, and what is hoped for is exemption from it altogether, and a Divine hand leading him, as Enoch was led, along the high levels on a "path of life" which leads to God's right hand, without any grim descent to the dark valley below. Such an expectation may be called vain, but we must distinguish between the form and the substance of the psalmist's hope. Its essence was—unbroken and perfected communion with God, uninterrupted sense of possessing Him, and therein all delights and satisfactions. To secure these he dared to hope that for him death would be abolished. But he died, and assuredly he found that the unbroken communion for which he longed was persistent through death, and that in dying his hope that he should not die was fulfilled beyond his hope.

The correspondence between his effort of faith in ver. 8 and his final position in ver. 11 is striking. He who sets Jehovah continually before himself will, in due time, come where there are fulness of joys before God's face; and he who here, amid distractions and sorrows, has kept Jehovah at his right hand as his counsellor, [Ps 149] defender and companion, will one day stand at Jehovah's right hand, and be satisfied for evermore with the uncloying and inexhaustible pleasures that there abide.

The singer, whose clear notes thus rang above the grave, died and saw corruption. But, as the apostolic use of this psalm as a prophecy of Christ's resurrection has taught us, the apparent contradiction of his triumphal chant by the fact of his death did not prove it to be a vain dream. If there ever should be a life of absolutely unbroken communion, that would be a life in which death would be abolished. Jesus Christ is God's "Beloved" as no other is. He has conquered death as no other has. The psalm sets forth the ideal relation of the perfectly devout man to death and the future, and that ideal is a reality in Him, from whom the blessed continuity, which the psalmist was sure must belong to fellowship so close as was his with God, flows to all who unite themselves with Him. He has trodden the path of life which He shows to us, and it *is* life, at every step, even when it dips into the darkness of what men call death, whence it rises into the light of the Face which it is joy to see, and close to the loving strong Hand which holds and gives pleasures for evermore.

PSALM XVII.

1 Hear a righteous cause, Jehovah, attend to my cry;
  Give ear to my prayer from no lips of guile.
2 From Thy face let my sentence go forth;
  Thine eyes behold rightly.
3 Thou provest my heart, searchest it by night,
  Triest me by fire: Thou findest not [anything];
  Should I purpose evil, it shall not pass my mouth (?)

4 As for (During) the doings of men, by the word of Thy lips
I have kept [me from] the paths of the violent man.
5 My steps have held fast to Thy ways;
My feet have not slipped.

6 I, I call upon Thee, for Thou wilt answer me, O God;
Incline Thine ear unto me: hear my speech.
7 Magnify (Make wonderful) Thy loving-kindnesses, Thou who savest those who seek refuge
From those who rise [against them?] by Thy right hand.
8 Keep me as the pupil, the daughter of the eye;
In the shadow of Thy wing hide me
9 From the wicked, who lay me waste,
My enemies at heart, [who] ring me round.
10 Their heart they have shut up;
With their mouth they speak in arrogance.
11 In our steps, they already compass us about;
Their eyes they fix, to lay [us] on the ground.
12 He is like a lion who longs to rend,
And a young lion crouching in coverts.

13 Arise, Jehovah: meet his face: make him crouch;
Deliver my soul from the wicked [with] Thy sword,
14 From men [by] Thy hand, Jehovah, from men of the world,
[Having] their portion in [this] life, and [with] Thy hidden treasure Thou fillest their belly;
They are full of sons, and leave their overabundance to their children.
15 I, I shall in righteousness behold Thy face;
I shall be satisfied on awaking [with] Thy likeness.

[Ps 151] The investigations as to authorship and date yield the usual conflicting results. Davidic, say one school; undoubtedly post-exilic, say another, without venturing on closer definition; late in the Persian period, says Cheyne. Perhaps we may content ourselves with the modest judgment of Baethgen in his last book ("Handcommentar," 1892, p. 45): "The date of composition cannot be decided by internal indications." The background is the familiar one of causeless foes round an innocent sufferer, who flings himself into God's arms for safety, and in prayer enters into peace and hope. He is, no doubt, a representative of the *Ecclesia pressa*; but he is so just because his cry is intensely personal. The experience of one is the type for all, and a poet's prerogative is to cast his most thoroughly individual emotions into words that fit the universal heart. The psalm is called a "prayer," a title given to only four other psalms, none of which are in the First Book. It has three movements, marked by the repetition of the name of God, which does not appear elsewhere, except in the doubtful verse 14. These three are vv. 1-5, in which the cry for help is founded on a strong profession of innocence; vv. 6-12, in which it is based on a vivid description of the enemies; and vv. 13-15, in which it soars into the pure air of mystic devotion, and thence looks down on the transient prosperity of the foe and upwards, in a rapture of hope, to the face of God.

[Ps 17:1] The petition proper, in vv. 1, 2, and its ground, are both strongly marked by conscious innocence, and therefore sound strange to our ears, trained as we have been by the New Testament to deeper insight into sin. This sufferer asks God to "hear righteousness," *i.e.* his righteous cause. He pleads the *bona fides* of his prayer, the fervour of which is marked by its designation as "my *cry*," the high-pitched note usually the expression of joy, but here of sore need and strong desire. Boldly he asks for his "sentence from Thy face," and the ground of that petition is that "Thine eyes behold rightly." Was there, then, no inner baseness that should have toned down such confidence? Was this prayer not much the same as the Pharisee's in Christ's parable? The answer is partly found in the considerations that the innocence professed is specially in regard to the occasions of the psalmist's present distress, and that the acquittal by deliverance which he asks is God's testimony that as to these he was slandered and clear. But, further, the strong professions of heart-cleanness and outward obedience which follow are not so much denials of any sin as avowals of sincere devotion and honest submission of life to God's law. They are "the answer of a good conscience towards God," expressed, indeed, more absolutely than befits Christian consciousness, but having nothing in common with Pharisaic self-complacency. The modern type of religion which recoils from such professions, and contents itself with always confessing sins which it has given up hope of overcoming, would be all the better for listening to the

psalmist and aiming a little more vigorously and hopefully at being able to say, "I know nothing against myself." There is no danger in such a saying, if it be accompanied by "Yet am I not hereby justified" and by "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults."

[Ps 151]

The general drift of vv. 3-5 is clear, but the precise meaning and connection are extremely obscure. Probably the text is faulty. It has been twisted in all sorts of ways, the Masoretic accents have been disregarded, the division of verses set aside, and still no proposed rendering of parts of vv. 3, 4, is wholly satisfactory. The psalmist deals with heart, lips, feet—that is, thoughts, words, and deeds—and declares the innocence of all. But difficulties begin when we look closer. The first question is as to the meaning and connection of the word rendered in the A.V. and R.V., "I am purposed." It may be a first person singular or an infinitive used as a noun or even a noun, meaning, in both the latter cases, substantially the same, *i.e*. my thinking or my thoughts. It is connected by the accents with what follows; but in that case the preceding verb "find" is left without an object, and hence many renderings attach the word to the preceding clause, and so get "Thou shalt find no [evil] thoughts in me." This division of the clauses leaves the words rendered, by A.V. and R.V., "My mouth shall not transgress," standing alone. There is no other instance of the verb standing by itself with that meaning, nor is "mouth" clearly the subject. It may as well be the object, and the clause be, "[It] shall not pass my mouth." If that is the meaning, we have to look to the preceding word as defining what it is that is thus to be kept unuttered, and so detach it from the verb "find," as the accents do. The knot has been untied in two ways: "My [evil] purpose shall not pass," etc., or, taking the word as a verb and regarding the clause as hypothetical, "Should I think evil, it shall not pass," etc.

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Either of these renderings has the advantage of retaining the recognised meaning of the verb and of avoiding neglect of the accent. Such a rendering has been objected to as inconsistent with the previous clause, but the psalmist may be looking back to it, feeling that his partial self-knowledge makes it a bold statement, and thus far limiting it, that *if* any evil thought is found in his heart, it is sternly repressed in silence.

Obscurity continues in ver. 4. The usual rendering, "As for [or, During] the works of men, by the word of Thy mouth I have kept me," etc., is against the accents, which make the principal division of the verse fall after "lips"; but no satisfactory sense results if the accentuation is followed unless we suppose a verb implied, such as, *e.g*., *stand fast* or the like, so getting the profession of steadfastness in the words of God's lips, in face of men's self-willed doings. But this is precarious, and probably the ordinary way of cutting the knot by neglecting the accents is best. In any case the avowal of innocence passes here from thoughts and words to acts. The contrast of the psalmist's closed mouth and God's lips is significant, even if unintended. Only he who silences much that rises in his heart can hear God speaking. "I kept me from," is a very unusual meaning for the word employed, which generally signifies to *guard* or *watch*, but here seems to mean *to take heed so as to avoid*. Possibly the preposition *from*, denoted by a single letter, has fallen out before "paths." This negative avoidance precedes positive walking in God's ways, since the poet's position is amidst evil men. Goodness has to learn to say No to men, if it is ever to say Yes to God. The foot has to be forcibly plucked and vigilantly kept from foul ways before it can be planted firmly in "Thy paths." By holding fast to courses appointed by God stability is ensured. Thus the closing clause of this first part is rather an acknowledgment of the happy result of devoted cleaving to God than an assertion of self-secured steadfastness. "My feet do not slip," not so much because they are strong as because the road is good, and the Guide's word and hand ready.

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The second part repeats the prayer for help, but bases it on the double ground of God's character and acts and of the suppliant's desperate straits; and of these two the former comes first in the prayer, though the latter has impelled to the prayer. Faith may be helped to self-consciousness by the sense of danger, but when awakened it grasps God's hand first and then faces its foes. In this part of the psalm the petitions, the aspects of the Divine character and working, and the grim picture of dangers are all noteworthy. The petitions by their number and variety reveal the pressure of trouble, each new prick of fear or pain forcing a new cry and each cry recording a fresh act of faith tightening its grasp. The "I" in ver. 6 is emphatic, and may be taken as gathering up the psalmist's preceding declarations and humbly laying them before God as a plea: "*I, who thus cleave to Thy ways*, call upon Thee, and my prayer is that of faith, which is sure of answer." But that confidence does not make petition superfluous, but rather encourages it. The assurance that "Thou wilt answer" is the reason for the prayer, "Incline Thine ear." Naturally at such a moment the name of God springs to the psalmist's lips, but significantly it is not the name found in the other two parts of the psalm. There He is invoked as "Jehovah," here as "God." The variation is not merely rhetorical, but the name which connotes power is appropriate in a prayer for deliverance from peril so extreme. "Magnify [or make wonderful] Thy loving-kindnesses" is a petition containing at once a glimpse of the psalmist's danger, for escape from which

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nothing short of a wonder of power will avail, and an appeal to God's delight in magnifying His name by the display of His mercy. The prayer sounds arrogant, as if the petitioner thought himself important enough to have miracles wrought for him; but it is really most humble, for the very wonder of the loving-kindness besought is that it should be exercised for such a one. God wins honour by saving a poor man who cries to Him; and it is with deep insight into the heart of God that this man presents himself as offering an occasion, in which God must delight, to flash the glory of His loving power before dull eyes. The petitions grow in boldness as they go on, and culminate in two which occur in similar contiguity in the great Song of Moses in Deut. xxxii.: "Keep me as the pupil of Thy eye." What closeness of union with God that lovely figure implies, and what sedulous guardianship it implores! "In the shadow of Thy wings hide me." What tenderness of fostering protection that ascribes to God, and what warmth and security it asks for man! The combination and order of these two petitions may teach us that, if we are to be "kept," we must be hidden; that if these frail lives of ours are to be dear to God as the apple of His eye, they must be passed nestling close by His side. Deep, secret communion with Him is the condition of His protection of us, as another psalm, using the same image, has it: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

The aspects of the Divine character, which the psalmist employs to move God's heart and to encourage his own, are contained first in the name "God," and next in the reference to His habitual dealings with trusting [Ps 157] souls, in ver 7. From of old it has been His way to be the Saviour of such as take refuge in Him from their enemies, and His right hand has shielded them. That past is a prophecy which the psalmist grasps in faith. He has in view instances enough to warrant an induction absolutely certain. He knows the law of the Divine dealings, and is sure that anything may happen rather than that it shall fail. Was he wrong in thus characterising God? Much in his experience and in ours looks as if he were; but they who most truly understand what help or salvation truly is will most joyously dwell in the sunny clearness of this confidence, which will not be clouded for them, though their own and others' trust is not answered by what sense calls deliverance.

The eye which steadily looks on God can look calmly at dangers. It is with no failure of faith that the poet's thoughts turn to his enemies. Fears that have become prayers are already more than half conquered. The psalmist would move God to help, not himself to despair, by recounting his perils. The enemy "spoil" him or lay him waste, the word used for the ravages of invaders. They are "enemies in soul"—*i.e.*, deadly—or perhaps "against [my] soul" or life. They are pitiless and proud, closing their hearts, which prosperity has made "fat" or arrogant, against the entrance of compassion, and indulging in gasconading boasts of their own power and contemptuous scoffs at his weakness. They ring him round, watching his steps. The text has a sudden change here from singular to plural, and back again to singular, reading "*our* steps," and "They have compassed *me*," which the Hebrew margin alters to "us." The wavering between the singular and plural is accounted for by the upholders of the Davidic authorship by a reference to him and his followers, and by the [Ps 158] advocates of the theory that the speaker is the personified Israel by supposing that the mask falls for a moment, and the "me," which always means "us," gives place to the collective. Ver. 11 *b* is ambiguous in consequence of the absence of an object to the second verb. To "set the eyes" is to watch fixedly and eagerly; and the purpose of the gaze is in the next clause stated by an infinitive with a preposition, not by a participle, as in the A.V. The verb is sometimes transitive and sometimes intransitive, but the former is the better meaning here, and the omitted object is most naturally "us" or "me." The sense, then, will be that the enemies eagerly watch for an opportunity to cast down the psalmist, so as to lay him low on the earth. The intransitive meaning "to bow down" is taken by some commentators. If that is adopted (as it is by Hupfeld and others), the reference is to "our steps" in the previous clause, and the sense of the whole is that eager eyes watch for these "bowing to the ground," that is stumbling. But such a rendering is harsh, since steps are always on the ground. Baethgen ("Handcommentar"), on the strength of Num. xxi. 22, the only place where the verb occurs with the same preposition as here, and which he takes as meaning "to turn aside to field or vineyard—*i.e.*, to plunder them"—would translate, "They direct their eyes to burst into the land," and supposes the reference to be to some impending invasion. A similar variation in number to that in ver. 11 occurs in ver. 12, where the enemies are concentrated into one. The allusion is supposed to be to some one conspicuous leader—*e.g.*, Saul —but probably the change is merely an illustration of the carelessness as to such grammatical accuracy [Ps 159] characteristic of emotional Hebrew poetry. The familiar metaphor of the lurking lion may have been led up to in the poet's imagination by the preceding picture of the steadfast gaze of the enemy, like the glare of the green eyeballs flashing from the covert of a jungle.

The third part (vv. 13-15) renews the cry for deliverance, and unites the points of view of the preceding parts in inverted order, describing first the enemies and then the psalmist, but with these significant differences, the

fruits of his communion with God, that now the former are painted, not in their fierceness, but in their transitory attachments and low delights, and that the latter does not bemoan his own helplessness nor build on his own integrity, but feeds his soul on his confidence of the vision of God and the satisfaction which it will bring. The smoke clouds that rolled in the former parts have caught fire, and one clear shoot of flame aspires heavenward. He who makes his needs known to God gains for immediate answer "the peace of God, which passeth understanding," and can wait God's time for the rest. The crouching lion is still ready to spring; but the psalmist hides himself behind God, whom he asks to face the brute and make him grovel at his feet ("Make him bow down," the same word used for a lion couchant in Gen. xlix. 9 and Num. xxiv. 9). The rendering of ver. 13 *b*, "the wicked, who is Thy sword," introduces an irrelevant thought; and it is better to regard the sword as God's weapon that slays the crouching wild beast. The excessive length of ver. 14 and the entirely pleonastic "from men (by) Thy hand, O Lord," suggest textual corruption. The thought runs more smoothly, though not altogether clearly, if these words are omitted. There remains a penetrating [Pg 160] characterisation of the enemy in the sensuous limitations and mistaken aims of his godless being, which may be satiated with low delights, but never satisfied, and has to leave them all at last. He is no longer dreaded, but pitied. His prayer has cleared the psalmist's eyes and lifted him high enough to see his foes as they are. They are "men of the world," belonging, by the set of their lives, to a transitory order of things—an anticipation of New Testament language about "the children of this world." "Their portion is in [this] life," while the psalmist's is God (xvi. 5). They have chosen to have their good things in their lifetime. Hopes, desires, aims, tastes, are all confined within the narrow bounds of time and sense, than which there can be no greater folly. Such limitation will often seem to succeed, for low aims are easily reached; and God sometimes lets men have their fill of the goods at which their perverted choice clutches. But even so the choice is madness and misery, for the man, gorged with worldly good, has yet to leave it, however unwilling to loosen his hold. He cannot use his goods; and it is no comfort to him, sent away naked into darkness of death, that his descendants revel in what was his.

How different the contrasted conditions of the hunted psalmist and his enemies look when the light of such thoughts streams on them! The helpless victim towers above his persecutors, for his desires go up to Him who abides and saturates with His blessed fulness the heart that aspires to Him. Terrors vanish; foes are forgotten; every other wish is swallowed up in one, which is a confidence as well as a desire. The psalmist neither grudges, nor is perplexed by, the prosperity of the wicked. The mysteries of men's earthly lot puzzle [Pg 161] those who stand at a lower elevation; but they do not disturb the soul on these supreme heights of mystic devotion, where God is seen to be the only good, and the hungry heart is filled with Him. Assuredly the psalmist's closing expectation embodies the one contrast worth notice: that between the present gross and partial satisfactions of sense-bound lives and the calm, permanent, full delights of communion with God. But does he limit his hopes to such "hours of high communion with the living God" as may be ours, even while the foe rings us round and earth holds us down? Possibly so, but it is difficult to find a worthy meaning for "when I awake" unless it be from the sleep of death. Possibly, too, the allusion to the men of the world as "leaving their substance" makes the reference to a future beatific vision more likely. Death is to them the stripping off of their chosen portion; it is to him whose portion is God the fuller possession of all that he loves and desires. Cheyne ("Orig. of Psalt.," p. 407) regards the "awaking" as that from the "sleep" of the intermediate state by "the passing of the soul into a resurrection body." He is led to the recognition of the doctrine of the resurrection here by his theory of the late date of the psalm and the influence of Zoroastrianism on it. But it is not necessary to suppose an allusion to the resurrection. Rather the psalmist's confidence is the offspring of his profound consciousness of present communion, and we see here the very process by which a devout man, in the absence of a clear revelation of the future, reached up to a conclusion to which he was led by his experience of the inmost reality of friendship with God. The impotence of death on the relation of the devout soul to God is a postulate of faith, whether formulated as an article of faith or [Pg 162] not. Probably the psalmist had no clear conception of a future life; but certainly he had a distinct assurance of it, because he felt that the very "sweetness" of present fellowship with God "yielded proof that it was born for immortality."

[Pg 163]

PSALM XVIII.

1 Heartily do I love Thee, Jehovah, my strength!
2 Jehovah, my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
My God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
My shield and the horn of my salvation and my high tower!
3 I call upon Him who is to be praised, Jehovah;
And from mine enemies am I saved.

4 The breakers of death ringed me round,
And streams of destruction terrified me.
5 The cords of Sheol encircled me;
The snares of death fronted me.
6 In my distress I called on Jehovah,
And to my God I loudly cried;
He heard my voice from His palace-temple,
And my loud crying before Him entered His ears.

7 Then the earth rocked and reeled,
And the foundations of the mountains quivered
And rocked again, for He was wroth.
8 Smoke went up in His nostrils,
And fire from His mouth devoured;
Brands came blazing from Him.
9 And He bowed the heavens and came down,
And cloud gloom [was] below His feet.
10 And He rode upon the cherub and flew,
And came swooping on the wings of the wind.
11 He made darkness His covert, His tent round about Him,
Darkness of waters and cloud masses of the skies.
12 From the brightness before Him there passed through His cloud-masses
Hail and brands of fire.
13 And Jehovah thundered in the heavens,
And the Most High gave forth His voice. [Pg 164]
14 And He sent forth His arrows and scattered them,
And lightnings many, and flung them into panic.
15 And the beds of the waters were seen,
And the foundations of the earth bared,
At Thy rebuke, Jehovah,
At the blast of the breath of Thy nostrils.

16 He stretched from on high: He took me;
He drew me from many waters.
17 He rescued me from my strong enemy
And from my haters, because they were too mighty for me.
18 They fell on me in the day of my calamity,
But Jehovah became as a staff to me.
19 And He brought me out into a wide place;
He delivered me, because He delighted in me.

20 Jehovah treated me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands He returned [recompense] to me.
21 For I kept the ways of Jehovah,
And did not part myself by sin from my God.
22 For all His judgments were before me,
And His statutes did I not put away from me.
23 And I was without fault with Him,
And I kept myself from my iniquity.
24 Therefore Jehovah returned [recompense] to me according to my righteousness,
According to the cleanness of my hands before His eyes.

25 With the gracious man Thou showest Thyself gracious;
With the faultless man Thou showest Thyself faultless.
26 With him who purifies himself Thou showest Thyself pure,
And with the perverse Thou showest Thyself froward.
27 For Thou savest humbled people,
And eyes uplifted Thou dost bring low.

28 For Thou lightest my lamp;
Jehovah my God brightens my darkness.
29 For by Thee I run down a troop,
And through my God I spring over a rampart.
30 As for God, His way is faultless;
The word of Jehovah is tried (as by fire):
A shield is He to all who take refuge in Him.
31 For who is God but Jehovah,
And who is a rock besides our God? [Pg 165]
32 [It is] God who girded me with strength,
And made my way faultless;
33 Who made my feet like hinds' [feet],
And made me stand upon my high places;
34 Who schooled my hands for war,
So that my arms bend a bow of brass.

35 And Thou didst give me the shield of Thy salvation,
And Thy right hand upheld me,
And Thy humility made me great.
36 Thou didst broaden under me [a path for] my step,
And my ankles did not give.

37 I pursued my enemies, and overtook them;
And I did not turn till I had consumed them.
38 I shattered them, and they could not rise;
They fell beneath my feet.
39 And Thou girdedst me with might for battle;
Thou didst bring my assailants to their knees under me.
40 And my enemies Thou madest to turn their backs to me,
And my haters—I annihilated them.

41 They shrieked, and there was no helper,
To Jehovah, and He answered them not.
42 I pounded them like dust before the wind;
Like street mud I emptied them out.

43 Thou didst deliver me from the strifes of the people;
Thou didst set me for a head of the nations;
A people whom I knew not served me.
44 At the hearing of the ear they made themselves obedient to me;
The children of the foreigner came feigning to me.
45 The children of the foreigner faded away,
And came trembling from their strongholds.

46 Jehovah lives, and blessed be my rock;
And exalted be the God of my salvation,
47 The God who gave me revenges
And subdued peoples under me,
48 My deliverer from my enemies:
Yea, from my assailants Thou didst set me on high,

From the man of violence didst Thou rescue me.

49 Therefore will I give Thee thanks among the nations, Jehovah;
And to Thy name will I sing praise. [Pg 166]
50 He magnifies salvations for His king,
And works loving-kindness for His anointed,
For David and for his seed for evermore.

The description of the theophany (vv. 7-19) and that of the psalmist's God-won victories (vv. 32-46) appear to refer to the same facts, transfigured in the former case by devout imagination and presented in the latter in their actual form. These two portions make the two central masses round which the psalm is built up. They are connected by a transitional section, of which the main theme is the power of character to determine God's aspect to a man as exemplified in the singer's experience; and they are preceded and followed by an introduction and a conclusion, throbbing with gratitude and love to Jehovah, the Deliverer.

The Davidic authorship of this psalm has been admitted even by critics who are slow to recognise it. Cheyne asks, as if sure of a negative answer, "What is there in it that suggests the history of David?" ("Orig. of the Psalter," p. 205). Baethgen, who "suspects" that a Davidic psalm has been "worked over" for use in public worship, may answer the question: "The following points speak for the Davidic authorship. The poet is a military commander and king, who wages successful wars, and subdues peoples whom he hitherto did not know. There is no Israelite king to whom the expressions in question in the psalm apply so closely as is the case with David." To these points may be added the allusions to earlier trials and perils, and the distinct correspondence, in a certain warmth and inwardness of personal relation to Jehovah, with the other psalms attributed to David, as well as the pregnant use of the word *to flee to a refuge*, applied to the soul's flight to [Pg 167] God, which we find here (ver. 2) and in the psalms ascribed to him. If the clear notes of the psalm be the voice of personal experience, there is but one author possible—namely, David—and the glow and intensity of the whole make the personification theory singularly inadequate. It is much easier to believe that David used the word "temple" or "palace" for Jehovah's heavenly dwelling, than that the "I" of the psalm, with his clinging sense of possession in Jehovah, his vivid remembrance of sorrows, his protestations of integrity, his wonder at his own victories, and his triumphant praise, is not a man, but a frosty personification of the nation.

The preluding invocation in vv. 1-3 at once touches the high-water mark of Old Testament devotion, and is conspicuous among its noblest utterances. Nowhere else in Scripture is the form of the word employed which is here used for "love." It has special depth and tenderness. How far into the centre this man had penetrated, who could thus isolate and unite Jehovah and himself, and could feel that they two were alone and knit together by love! The true estimate of Jehovah's ways with a man will always lead to that resolve to love, based on the consciousness of God's love to him. Happy they who learn that lesson by retrospect; happier still if they gather it from their sorrows while these press! Love delights in addressing the beloved and heaping tender names on its object, each made more tender and blessed by that appropriating "my." It seems more accordant with the fervent tone of the psalm to regard the reiterated designations in ver. 2 as vocatives, than to take "Jehovah" and "God" as subjects and the other names as predicates. Rather the whole is one long, [Pg 168] loving accumulation of dear names, a series of invocations, in which the restful heart murmurs to itself how rich it is and is never wearied of saying, "my delight and defence." As in Psalm xvii., the name of Jehovah occurs twice, and that of God once. Each of these is expanded, as it were, by the following epithets, and the expansion becomes more extended as it advances, beginning with one member in ver. 1, having three in ver. 2 *a* and four in ver. 2 *b*. Leaving out the Divine names proper, there are seven in ver. 2, separated into two groups by the name of God. It may be observed there is a general correspondence between the two sets, each beginning with "rock" (though the word is different in the two clauses), each having the metaphor of a fortress, and "shield and horn of salvation," roughly answering to "Deliverer." The first word for *rock* is more properly *crag* or *cliff*, thus suggesting inaccessibility, and the second a *rock mass*, thus giving the notion of firmness or solidity. The shade of difference need not be pressed, but the general idea is that of safety, or by elevation above the enemy and by reason of the unchangeable strength of Jehovah. In that lofty eyrie, a man may look down on all the armies of earth, idly active on the plain. That great Rock towers unchangeable above fleeting things. The river at its base runs past, the woods nestling at its feet bud and shed their leaves, but it stands the same. David had many a time found shelter among the hills and caves of Judah and the South land, and it may not be fancy that sees reminiscences of these experiences in his song. The beautiful figure for trust embodied in the word in 2 *b* belongs to the metaphor of the rock. It is found with singular appropriateness in Psalm lvii., which the title ascribes to David "in the cave," the sides of which bent above [Pg 169] him and sheltered him, like a great pair of wings, and possibly suggested the image, "In the shadow of Thy

wings will I take refuge." The difference between "fortress" and "high tower" is slight, but the former gives more prominence to the idea of strength, and the latter to that of elevation, both concurring in the same thought as was expressed by "rock," but with the additional suggestion of Jehovah as the home of the soul. Safety, then, comes through communion. Abiding in God is seclusion from danger. "Deliverer" stands last in the first set, saying in plain words what the preceding had put in figures. "My shield and the horn of my salvation" come in the centre of the second set, in obedience to the law of variety in reiteration which the poet's artistic instincts impose. They shift the figure to that of a warrior in actual conflict. The others picture a fugitive from enemies, these a fighter. The shield is a defensive weapon; horns are offensive ones, and the combination suggests that in conflict we are safe by the interposition of God's covering power, and are armed by the same power for striking at the foe. That power ensures salvation, whether in the narrower or wider sense. Thus Jehovah is all the armour and all the refuge of His servant. To trust Him is to have His protection cast around and His power infused for conflict and victory. The end of all life's experience is to reveal Him in these characters, and they have rightly learned its lessons whose song of retrospect begins with "I will love Thee, Jehovah," and pours out at His feet all happy names expressive of His sufficiency and of the singer's rest in possessing Him. Ver. 3 is not a resolution for the future—"I will call; ... so shall I be saved"—but the summing up of experience in a great truth: "I call, ... and I am saved." It unfolds the meaning of the previous [Ps 17]0] names of God, and strikes the key-note for the magnificent sequel.

The superb idealisation of past deliverances under the figure of a theophany is prepared for by a retrospect of dangers, which still palpitates with the memory of former fears. "A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things," and a joy's crown of joy is remembering past perils. No better description of David's early life could have been given than that contained in the two vivid figures of vv. 4 and 5. If we adopt the more congruous reading of the other recension of the psalm in 2 Sam. xxii., we have in both members of ver. 4 a parallel metaphor. Instead of "sorrows" or "cords" (both of which renderings are possible for the text of the psalm here), it reads "breakers," corresponding with "floods" in the second clause. "Destruction" is better than *ungodly men* as the rendering of the unusual word "Belial." Thus the psalmist pictures himself as standing on a diminishing bit of solid ground, round which a rising flood runs strong, breaking on its crumbling narrowness. Islanded thus, he is all but lost. With swift transition he casts the picture of his distress into another metaphor. Now he is a hunted creature, surrounded and confronted by cords and snares. Sheol and Death have marked him for their prey, and are drawing their nets round him. What is left for him? One thing only. He has a voice, and he has a God. In his despair one piercing cry breaks from him; and, wonder of wonders, that thin shoot of prayer rises right into the heavenly palace-temple and the ears of God. The repetition of "I called upon the Lord" connects this with ver. 3 as the experience on which the generalisation there is based. His extremity of peril had not paralysed the psalmist's grasp of God as still "my God," [Ps 171] and his confidence is vindicated. There is an eloquent contrast between the insignificance of the cause and the stupendous grandeur of the effect: one poor man's shrill cry and a shaking earth and all the dread pomp attending an interposing God. A cupful of water poured into a hydraulic ram sets in motion power that lifts tons; the prayer of faith brings the dread magnificence of Jehovah into the field. The reading of 2 Samuel is preferable in the last clause of ver. 6, omitting the superfluous "before Him."

The phenomena of a thunderstorm are the substratum of the grand description of Jehovah's delivering self-manifestation. The garb is lofty poetry; but a definite fact lies beneath, namely some deliverance in which the psalmist saw Jehovah's coming in storm and lightning flash to destroy, and therefore to save. Faith sees more truly because more deeply than sense. What would have appeared to an ordinary looker-on as merely a remarkable escape was to its subject the manifestation of a present God. Which eye sees the "things that are,"—that which is cognisant only of a concatenation of events, or that which discerns a Person directing these? The cry of this hunted man has for first effect the kindling of the Divine "wrath," which is represented as flaming into action in the tremendous imagery of vv. 7 and 8. The description of the storm in which God comes to help the suppliant does not begin with these verses, as is commonly understood. The Divine power is not in motion yet, but is, as it were, gathering itself up for action. The complaining prayer is boldly treated as bringing to God's knowledge His servant's straits, and the knowledge as moving Him to wrath towards the enemies of one who takes shelter beneath His wings. "What have I here that my"—servant is thus bestead? [Ps 172] saith the Lord. The poet can venture to paint a picture with the pen, which the painter dare not attempt with the pencil. The anger of Jehovah is described in words of singular daring, as rising like smoke from His nostrils and pouring in fire from His lips, from which blazing brands issue. No wonder that the earth reels even to the roots of the mountains, as unable to endure that wrath! The frank anthropomorphism of the picture, of which the features are taken from the hard breathing of an angry man or animal (compare Job's crocodile in Job xli. 10-13), and the underlying conception are equally offensive to many; but as for the

former, the more "gross" the humanising of the picture, the less likely is it to be mistaken for prose fact, and the more easy to apprehend as symbol: and as for the latter, the New Testament endorses the conception of the "wrath of God," and bids us take heed lest, if we cast it away, we maim His love. This same psalm hymns Jehovah's "gentleness"; and the more deeply His love is apprehended, the more surely will His wrath be discerned as its necessary accompaniment. The dark orb and its radiant sister move round a common centre.

Thus kindled, God's wrath flashes into action, as is wonderfully painted in that great storm piece in vv. 9-15. The stages of a violent thunder tempest are painted with unsurpassable force and brevity.

First we see the low clouds: far nearer the trembling earth than the hidden blue was, and seeming to press down with leaden weight, their boding blackness is above us; but

> "Whose foot shall we see emerge,
> Whose from the straining topmost dark?"

Their low gathering is followed by the sudden rush of wind, which breaks the awful calm. In its "sound," the [Ps. 173]
psalmist hears the winnowing of mighty wings: those of the cherub on whom, as a living chariot, Jehovah sits throned. This is called "mythology." Is it not rather a poetic personification of elemental powers, which gives emphasis to their being God's instruments? The cherubim are in Scripture represented in varying forms and with different attributes. In Ezekiel they assume a composite form, due apparently to Babylonian influences; but here there is no trace of that, and the absence of such strongly supports a pre-exilic date.

Blacker grows the gloom, in which awed hearts are conscious of a present Deity shrouded behind the livid folds of the thunder-clouds, as in a tent. Down rushes the rain; the darkness is "a darkness of waters," and also "thick clouds of the skies," or "cloud masses," a mingled chaos of rain and cloud. Then lightning tears a way through the blackness, and the language becomes abrupt, like the flash. In vv. 12 and 13 the fury of the storm rages. Blinding brightness and deafening thunder-claps gleam and rattle through the broken words. Probably ver. 12 should be rendered, "From the brightness before Him there came through His clouds hail and brands of fire." Hidden in the cloudy tent is the light of Jehovah's presence, sparkles from which, flung forth by Him, pierce the solid gloom; and men call them lightnings. Then thunder rolls, the voice of the Most High. The repetition in ver. 13 of "hail and brands of fire" gives much abrupt force, and one is unwilling to part with it. The reason for omitting it from the text is the want of grammatical connection, but that is rather a reason for retaining it, as the isolated clause breaks in on the continuity of the sentence, just as the flash [Ps. 174]
shoots suddenly out of the cloud. These lightnings are God's arrows; and, as they are showered down in flights, the psalmist's enemies, unnamed since ver. 3, scatter in panic. The ideal character of the whole representation is plain from the last element in it—the description in ver. 15 of laying bare the sea's depths, as the waters were parted at the Exodus. That voice and the fierce blast from these fire-breathing nostrils have dried the streams, and the oozy bed is seen. God's "rebuke" has power to produce physical changes. The earthquake at the beginning and the empty ocean bed at the end are both somewhat outside the picture of the storm, and complete the representation of all nature as moved by the theophany.

Then comes the purpose of all the dread magnificence, strangely small except to the psalmist. Heaven and earth have been shaken, and lightnings set leaping through the sky, for nothing greater than to drag one half-drowned man from the floods. But the result of the theophany is small only in the same fashion as its cause was small. This same poor man cried, and the cry set Jehovah's activity in motion. The deliverance of a single soul may seem a small thing, but if the single soul has prayed it is no longer small, for God's good name is involved. A nation is disgraced if its meanest subject is left to die in the hands of foreign enemies, and blood and treasure are not wasted if poured out lavishly for his rescue. God cannot let a suppliant who has taken shelter in His tent be dragged thence. Therefore there is no disproportion between the theophany and the individual deliverance which is its sole result.

The psalmist lays aside the figure in vv. 17, 18, and comes to the bare fact of his deliverance from enemies, [Ps. 175]
and perhaps from one especially formidable ("my enemy," ver. 17). The prose of the whole would have been that he was in great danger and without means of averting it, but had a hair-breadth escape. But the outside of a fact is not all of it; and in this mystical life of ours poetry gets nearer the heart of things than does prose, and religion nearer than either. It is no miracle, in the narrow meaning of that word, which the psalmist sings; but his eye has seen the unseen force which moves all visible events. We may see the same apocalypse of a present Jehovah, if our eyes are purged, and our hearts pure. It is always true that the cry of a trustful soul pierces heaven and moves God; it is always true that He comes to His servant sinking and crying, "Lord, save

me; I perish." The scene on the Galilean lake when Christ's strong grasp held Peter up, because his fear struck out a spark of faith, though his faith was darkened with fear, is ever being repeated.

The note slightly touched at the close of the description of the deliverance dominates the second part of the psalm (vv. 20-31), of which the main theme is the correspondence of God's dealings with character, as illustrated in the singer's experience, and thence generalised into a law of the Divine administration. It begins with startling protestations of innocence. These are rounded into a whole by the repetition, at the beginning and end, of the same statement that God dealt with the psalmist according to his righteousness and clean-handedness. If the author is David, this voice of a good conscience must have been uttered before his great fall, after which he could, indeed, sing of forgiveness and restoring grace, but never again of integrity. [Ps 176] Unlike as the tone of these verses is to that deeper consciousness of sin which is not the least of Christ's gifts, the truth which they embody is as much a part of the Christian as of the earlier revelation. True, penitence must now mingle with conscious rectitude more abundantly than it does in this psalm; but it is still and for ever true that God deals with His servants according to their righteousness. Cherished sin separates from Him, and forces His love to leave cries for help many times unanswered, in order that, filled with the fruit of their doings, His people may have a wholesome fear of again straying from the narrow way. Unless a Christian can say, "I keep myself from mine iniquity," he has no right to look for the sunshine of God's face to gladden his eyes, nor for the strength of God's hand to pluck his feet from the net. In noble and daring words, the psalmist proclaims as a law of God's dealings his own experience generalised (vv. 25-27). It is a bold reversal of the ordinary point of view to regard man as taking the initiative and God as following his lead. And yet is not life full of solemn facts confirmatory of the truth that God is to a man what the man is to God? That is so, both subjectively and objectively. Subjectively our conceptions of God vary with our moral nature, and objectively the dealings of God are moulded according to that nature. There is such a thing as colour blindness in regard to the Divine character, whereby some men cannot see the green of faithful love or the red of wrath, but each beholds that in God which his vision fits him to see; and the many-sided dealings of God are different in their incidence upon different characters, so that the same heat melts wax and hardens clay; and further the actual dealings are accurately adapted to the state of their objects, so that each gets what he needs most: the loving [Ps 177] heart, sweet love tokens from the Divine Lover; the perverse, thwartings which come from a God "contrary" to them who are contrary to Him. "The history of the world is the judgment of the world." But the first of the designations of character in ver. 25 hints that before man's initiative had been God's; for "merciful" is the pregnant word occurring so often in the Psalter, and so impossible to translate by any one word. It means, as we have already had occasion to point out, one who is the subject of the Divine loving-kindness, and who therefore loves God in return. Here it seems rather to be taken in the sense of loving than of beloved. He who exercises this loving-kindness, whether towards God or man, shall find in God One who exercises it to him. But the word itself regards man's loving-kindness towards God as being the echo of God's, and so the very first step in determining the mutual relations is God's, and but for it there would never have been that in man which God could answer by showing Himself as loving. The contrasted dealings and characters are summed up in the familiar antithesis of ver. 27. The "afflicted" or humble are the type of God-pleasing character, since humility, such as befits dependent creatures, is the mother of all goodness, and "high looks" the master sin, and the whole drift of Providence is to lift the lowly and abase the proud.

The psalmist's swift thought vibrates throughout this part of the song between his own experience and the general truths exemplified in it. He is too full of his own deliverance to be long silent about it, and, on the other hand, is continually reminded by it of the wide sweep of the beneficent laws which have been so fruitful [Ps 178] of good to him. The most precious result of individual mercy is the vision obtained through it of the universal Lover of souls. "My God" will be widened into "our God," and "our God" will rest upon "my God," if either is spoken from the heart's depths. So in vv. 27-29 the personal element comes again to the front. The individualising name "My God" occurs in each verse, and the deliverance underlying the theophany is described in terms which prepare for the fuller celebration of victory in the last part of the psalm. God lights the psalmist's lamp, by which is meant not the continuance of his family (as the expression elsewhere means), but the preservation of his own life, with the added idea, especially in ver. 28 *b*, of prosperity. Ver. 29 tells how the lamp was kept alight, namely by the singer's victory in actual battle, in which his swift rush had overtaken the enemy, and his agile limbs had scaled their walls. The parallelism of the clauses is made more complete by the emendation adopted by Lagarde, Cheyne, Baethgen, etc., who read ver. 29 *a*, "I [can] break down a fence," but this is unnecessary. The same combination of running and climbing occurs in Joel ii. 7, and the two clauses of ver. 33 seem to repeat those of ver. 29. The swift, agile warrior, then, traces these physical powers to God, as he does more at large in later verses.

Once more, the song passes, in ver. 30, to the wider truths taught by the personal deliverance. "Our God" takes the place of "my God"; and "all who take refuge in Him" are discerned as gathering, a shadowy crowd, round the solitary psalmist, and as sharing in his blessings. The large truths of these verses are the precious fruit of distress and deliverance. Both have cleared the singer's eyes to see, and tuned his lips to sing, a God whose doings are without a flaw, whose word is like pure gold without alloy or falsehood, whose ample protection shields all who flee to its shelter, who alone is God, the fountain of strength, who stands firm for ever, the inexpugnable defence and dwelling-place of men. This burst of pure adoration echoes the tones of the glorious beginning of the psalm. Happy they who, as the result of life's experience, solve "the riddle of this painful earth," with these firm and jubilant convictions as the very foundation of their being.

The remainder of the psalm (ver. 32 to end) describes the victorious campaign of the psalmist and the establishment of his kingdom. There is difficulty in determining the tenses of the verbs in some verses, and interpreters vary between pasts and futures. The inclination of the greater number of recent commentators is to carry the historical retrospect uninterruptedly through the whole context, which, as Hupfeld acknowledges, "allerdings das bequemste ist," and those who suppose occasional futures interspersed (as the R.V. and Hupfeld) differ in the places of their introduction. "Everything here is retrospective," says Delitzsch, and certainly that view is simplest and gives unity to the whole. The name of God is never mentioned in the entire section, except as vainly invoked by the flying foe. Not till the closing doxologies does it appear again, with the frequency which marks the middle part of the psalm. A similar sparse use of it characterises the description of the theophany. In both cases there is a peculiar force given by the stream of verbs without expressed nominatives. The hurrying clauses here vividly reproduce the haste of battle, and each falls like the blow of a battle mace wielded by a strong arm. The equipment of the king for the fight (vv. 32-36), the fierce assault, flight of the foe and their utter annihilation (vv. 37-42), the extension by conquest of the singer's kingdom (vv. 43, 44), successively pass before us as we listen to the panting words with the heat of battle in them; and all rises at last into exuberant praise, which re-echoes some strains of the introductory burst of thanksgiving.

Many mythologies have told how the gods arm their champions, but the psalmist reaches a loftier height than these. He ventures to think of God as doing the humble office of bracing on his girdle, but the girdle is itself strength. God, whose own "way is perfect" (ver. 30), makes His servant's "way" in some measure like His own; and though, no doubt, the figure must be interpreted in a manner congruous with its context, as chiefly implying "perfection" in regard to the purpose in hand—namely, warfare—we need not miss the deeper truth that God's soldiers are fitted for conflict by their "ways" being conformed to God's. This man's "strength was as the strength of ten, because his heart was pure." Strength and swiftness are the two characteristics of antique heroes, and God's gift bestowed both on the psalmist. Light of foot as a deer and able to climb to the robber forts perched on crags, as a chamois would, his hands deft, and his muscular arms strong to bend the bow which others could not use, he is the ideal of a warrior of old; and all these natural powers he again ascribes to God's gift. A goddess gave Achilles his wondrous shield, but what was it to that which God binds upon this warrior's arm? As his girdle was strength, and not merely a means of strength, his shield is salvation, and not merely a means of safety. The fact that God purposes to save and does act for saving is the defence against all dangers and enemies. It is the same deep truth as the prophet expresses by making "salvation" the walls and bulwarks of the strong city where the righteous nation dwells in peace. God does not thus arm His servant and then send him out alone to fight as he can, but "Thy right hand holds me up." What assailant can beat him down, if that hand is under his armpit to support him? The beautiful rendering of the A.V., "Thy gentleness," scarcely conveys the meaning, and weakens the antithesis with the psalmist's "greatness," which is brought out by translating "Thy lowliness," or even more boldly "Thy humility." There is that in God which answers to the peculiarly human virtue of lowliness; and unless there were, man would remain small and unclothed with God-given strength. The devout soul thrills with wonder at God's stooping love, which it discerns to be the foundation of all His gifts and therefore of its blessedness. This singer saw deep into the heart of God, and anticipated the great word of the one Revealer, "I am meek and lowly in heart." But God's care for him does not merely fit him for the fight: it also orders circumstances so as to give him a free course. Having made his "feet like hinds' feet," God then prepares paths that he should walk in them. The work is only half done when the man is endowed for service or conflict; a field for his powers must be forthcoming, and God will take care that no strength given by Him lies idle for want of a wrestling ground. Sooner or later feet find the road.

Then follow six verses (37-42) full of the stir and tumult of battle. There is no necessity for the change to futures in the verbs of vv. 37, 38, which the R.V. adopts. The whole is a picture of past conflict, for which the psalmist had been equipped by God. It is a literal fight, the triumph of which still glows in the singer's heart

and flames in his vivid words. We see him in swift pursuit, pressing hard on the enemy, crushing them with his fierce onset, trampling them under foot. They break and flee, shrieking out prayers, which the pursuer has a stern joy in knowing to be fruitless. His blows fall like those of a great pestle, and crush the fleeing wretches, who are scattered by his irresistible charge, like dust whirled by the storm. The last clause of the picture of the routed foe is better given by the various reading in 2 Samuel, which requires only a very slight alteration in one letter: "I did stamp them as the mire of the streets." Such delight in the enemy's despair and destruction, such gratification at hearing their vain cries to Jehovah, are far away from Christian sentiments; and the gulf is not wholly bridged by the consideration that the psalmist felt himself to be God's anointed, and enmity to him to be treason against God. Most natural as his feelings were, perfectly consistent with the level of religion proper to the then stage of revelation, capable of being purified into that triumph in the victory of good and ruin of evil without which there is no vigorous sympathy with Christ's battle, and kindling as they do by their splendid energy and condensed rapidity an answering glow in even readers so far away from their scene as we are, they are still of "another spirit" from that which Christ has breathed into the Church, and nothing but confusion and mischief can come of slurring over the difference. The light of battle which blazes in them is not the fire which Jesus longed to kindle upon earth.

Thus far the enemies seem to have been native foes rebelling against God's anointed or, if the reference to the [Ps 18]
Sauline persecution is held by, seeking to prevent his reaching his throne. But, in the concluding verses of this part (43-45), a transition is made to victory over "strangers," *i.e.* foreign nations. "The strivings of the people" seems to point back to the war described already, while "Thou hast made me the head of the nations" refers to external conquests. In 2 Samuel the reading is "my people," which would bring out the domestic reference more strongly; but the suffix for "my" may be a defective form of writing the plural; if so, the peoples in ver. 43 *a* are the "nations" of 43 *b*. In any case the royal singer celebrates the extension of his dominion. The tenses in vv. 44, 45, which the R.V. again gives as futures (as does Hupfeld), are better regarded, like all the others, as pasts. The wider dominion is not inconsistent with Davidic origin, as his conquests were extended beyond the territory of Israel. The picture of the hasty surrender of the enemy at the very sound of the conqueror's name is graphic. "They lied unto me," as the words in ver. 44 *b* are literally, gives forcibly the feigned submission covering bitter hate. "They fade away," as if withered by the simoom, the hot blast of the psalmist's conquering power. "They come trembling [or, as 2 Samuel reads, come limping] from their strongholds."

Vv. 46 to end make a noble close to a noble hymn, in which the singer's strong wing never flags nor the rush of thought and feeling slackens. Even more absolutely than in the rest of the psalm every victory is ascribed to Jehovah. He alone acts; the psalmist is simply the recipient. To have learned by life's struggles and deliverances that Jehovah is a living God and "my Rock" is to have gathered life's best fruit. A morning of [Ps 18]
tempest has cleared into sunny calm, as it always will, if tempest drives to God. He who cries to Jehovah when the floods of destruction make him afraid will in due time have to set to his seal that Jehovah liveth. If we begin with "The Lord is my Rock," we shall end with "Blessed be my Rock." Thankfulness does not weary of reiterating acknowledgments; and so the psalmist gathers up once more the main points of the psalm in these closing strains and lays all his mass of blessings at the feet of the Giver. His deliverance from his domestic foes and his conquests over external enemies are wholly God's work, and therefore supply both impulse and material for praises which shall sound out beyond the limits of Israel. The vow to give thanks among the nations has been thought fatal to the Davidic origin of the psalm. Seeing, however, that some foreign peoples were conquered by him, there was opportunity for its fulfilment. His function to make known the name of Jehovah was the reason for his victories. David had learned the purpose of his elevation, and recognised in an extended kingdom a wider audience for his song. Therefore Paul penetrates to the heart of the psalm when he quotes ver. 49 in Rom. xv. 9 as a proof that the evangelising of the Gentiles was an Old Testament hope. The plain lesson from the psalmist's vow is that God's mercies bind, and if felt aright will joyfully impel, the receiver to spread His name as far as his voice can reach. Love is sometimes silent, but gratitude must speak. The most unmusical voice is tuned to melody by thankfulness, and they need never want a theme who can tell what the Lord has done for their soul.

The last verse of the psalm is sometimes regarded as a liturgical addition, and the mention of David [PP 185]
gratuitously supposed to be adverse to his authorship, but there is nothing unnatural in a king's mentioning himself in such a connection nor in the reference to his dynasty, which is evidently based upon the promise of perpetual dominion given through Nathan. The Christian reader knows how much more wonderful than the singer knew was the mercy granted to the king in that great promise, fulfilled in the Son of David, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and who bears God's name to all the nations.

PSALM XIX.

1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
  And the work of His hands the firmament makes known.
2 Day to day pours forth speech,
  And night to night shows knowledge.
3 There is no speech and no words;
  Not heard is their voice.
4 In all the earth their line goes forth, and in the end of the world their words;
  For the sun has He set a tent in them,
5 And he is like a bridegroom going out from his chamber;
  He rejoices like a hero to run (his) course.
6 From the end of the heavens is his going forth, and his circuit unto their ends;
  And nothing is hid from his heat.

7 The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul;
  The testimony of Jehovah is trusty, making wise the simple.
8 The precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart;
  The commandment of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eyes.
9 The fear of Jehovah is clean, standing for ever;
  The judgments of Jehovah are truth: they are righteous altogether.
10 They are more to be desired than gold and than abundant [gold] refined,
  And they are sweeter than honey and the droppings of the honeycomb.

11 Moreover, Thy servant is warned by them;
  In keeping them is reward abundant.
12 Inadvertencies who can discern?
  From hidden sins absolve me.
13 Also from presumptuous [sins] keep back Thy servant: let them not rule over me;
  Then shall I be guiltless, and I shall be absolved from great transgression. [Pg 187]
14 Accepted be the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart in Thy sight,
  Jehovah, my Rock and my Kinsman-redeemer!

Is this originally one psalm or bits of two, pieced together to suggest a comparison between the two sources of knowledge of God, which the authors did not dream of? The affirmative is strongly *main*tained, but, we may venture to say, not so strongly *sus*tained. The two parts are said to differ in style, rhythm, and subject. Certainly they do, but the difference in style accounts for the difference in structure. It is not an unheard-of phenomenon that cadence should change with theme; and if the very purpose of the song is to set forth the difference of the two witnesses to God, nothing can be more likely than such a change in measure. The two halves are said to be put together abruptly without anything to smooth the transition. So they are, and so is ver. 4 put by the side of ver. 3; and so does the last turn of thought (vv. 12-14) follow the second. Cyclopean architecture without mortar has a certain impressiveness. The abruptness is rather an argument for than against the original unity, for a compiler would have been likely to try to make some sort of glue to hold his two fragments together, while a poet, in the rush of his afflatus, would welcome the very abruptness which the manufacturer would avoid. Surely the thought that binds the whole into a unity—that *Jehovah* is *El*, and that nature and law witness to the same Divine Person, though with varying clearness—is not so strange as that we should have to find its author in some late editor unknown.

Vv. 1-6 hymn the silent declaration by the heavens. The details of exposition must first be dealt with. "Declare" and "makes known" are participles, and thus express the continuity of the acts. The substance of [Pg 188] the witness is set forth with distinct reference to its limitations, for "glory" has here no moral element, but simply means what Paul calls "eternal power and Godhead," while the Divine name of God ("El") is used in intended contrast to "Jehovah" in the second half, a *nuance* which must be obliterated if this is a conglomerate psalm. "His handiwork," in like manner, limits the revelation. The heavens by day are so marvellously unlike the heavens by night that the psalmist's imagination conjures up two long processions,

each member of which passes on the word entrusted to him to his successor—the blazing days with heaven naked but for one great light, and the still nights with all their stars. Ver. 3 has given commentators much trouble in attempting to smooth its paradox. Tastes are curiously different, for some critics think that the familiar interpretation gives a flat, prosaic meaning, while Cheyne takes the verse to be a gloss for dull readers, and exclaims, "How much the brilliant psalm fragment gains by its omission!" *De gustibus*, etc. Some of us may still feel that the psalmist's contrast of the awful silence in the depths of the sky and of the voice that speaks to opened ears thrills us with something very like the electric touch of poetry. In ver. 4 the thought of the great voices returns. "Their line" is usually explained as meaning their sphere of influence, marked out, as it were, by a measuring cord. If that rendering is adopted, ver. 4 *b* would in effect say, "Their words go as far as their realm." Or the rendering "sound" may be deduced, though somewhat precariously, from that of *line*, since a line stretched is musical. But the word is not used as meaning the string of an instrument, and the very slight conjectural emendation which gives "voice" instead of "line" has much to recommend it. In any case the teaching of the verse is plain from the last clause, namely the universality of the revelation. It is singular that the mention of the sun should come in the close of the verse; and there may be some error in the text, though the introduction of the sun here may be explained as completing the picture of the heavens, of which it is the crowning glory. Then follows the fuller delineation of his joyous energy, of his swift strength in his course, of his penetrating beams, illuminating and warming all. Why should the glowing metaphors, so natural and vigorous, of the sun coming forth from his bridal chamber and, hero-like, running his race, be taken to be traces of ancient myths now innocently reclaimed from the service of superstition? To find in these two images a proof that the first part of the psalm belongs to the post-exilic "literary revival of Hebrew mythology" is surely to lay more on them than they can bear.

The scientific contemplation of nature is wholly absent from Scripture, and the picturesque is very rare. This psalmist knew nothing about solar spectra or stellar distances, but he heard a voice from out of the else waste heavens which sounded to him as if it named God. Comte ventured to say that the heavens declare the glory of the astronomer, not of God; but, if there be an order in them, which it is a man's glory to discover, must there not be a mind behind the order, and must not the Maker have more glory than the investigator? The psalmist is protesting against stellar worship, which some of his neighbours practised. The sun was a creature, not a god; his "race" was marked out by the same hand which in depths beyond the visible heavens had pitched a "tent" for his nightly rest. We smile at the simple astronomy; the religious depth is as deep as ever. Dull ears do not hear these voices; but whether they are stopped with the clay of earthly tastes and occupations, or stuffed with scientific wadding of the most modern kind, the ears that do not hear God's name sounded from the abysses above, have failed to hear the only word which can make man feel at home in nature. Carlyle said that the sky was "a sad sicht." The sadness and awfulness are taken away when we hear the heavens telling the glory of God. The unscientific psalmist who did hear them was nearer the very heart of the mystery than the scientist who knows everything else about them but that.

With an abrupt transition which is full of poetical force, the singer turns to the praises of the better revelation of Jehovah. Nature speaks in eloquent silence of the strong God, but has no witness to His righteous will for men or His love to them which can compare with the clear utterances of His law. The rhythm changes, and in its cadence expresses the psalmist's exuberant delight in that law. In vv. 7-11 the clauses are constructed on a uniform plan, each containing a name for the law, an attribute of it, and one of its effects. The abundance of synonyms indicates familiarity and clear views of the many sides of the subject. The psalmist had often brooded on the thought of what that law was, because, loving its Giver, he must needs love the gift. So he calls it "law," or teaching, since there he found the best lessons for character and life. It was "testimony," for in it God witnessed what He is and what we should be, and so witnessed against sin; it was a body of "precepts" (statutes, A.V.) giving rich variety of directions; it was "commandment," blessedly imperative; it was "fear of the Lord," the effect being put for the cause; it was "judgments," the decisions of infinite truth concerning duty.

These synonyms have each an attribute attached, which, together, give a grand aggregate of qualities discerned by a devout heart to inhere in that law which is to so many but a restraint and a foe. It is "perfect," as containing without flaw or defect the ideal of conduct; "sure" or reliable, as worthy of being absolutely followed and certain to be completely fulfilled; "right," as prescribing the straight road to man's true goal; "pure" or bright, as being light like the sun, but of a higher quality than that material brilliance; "clean," as contrasted with the foulness bedaubing false faiths and making idol worship unutterably loathsome; "true" and "wholly righteous," as corresponding accurately to the mind of Jehovah and the facts of humanity and as being in full accordance with the justice which has its seat in the bosom of God.

The effects are summed up in the latter clauses of these verses, which stand, as it were, a little apart, and by the slight pause are made more emphatic. The rhythm rises and falls like the upspringing and sinking of a fountain. The law "restores the soul," or rather refreshes the life, as food does; it "makes the simple wise" by its sure testimony, giving practical guidance to narrow understandings and wills open to easy beguiling by sin; it "rejoices the heart," since there is no gladness equal to that of knowing and doing the will of God; it "enlightens the eyes" with brightness beyond that of the created light which rules the day. Then the relation of clauses changes slightly in ver. 9, and a second attribute takes the place of the effect. It "endures for ever," and, as we have seen, is "wholly righteous." The Old Testament law was relatively imperfect and destined to be done away, but the moral core of it abides. Being more valuable than all other treasures, there is wealth in the very desire after it more than in possessing these. Loved, it yields sweetness in comparison with which the delights of sense are bitter; done, it automatically rewards the doer. If obedience had no results except its inward consequences, it would be abundantly repaid. Every true servant of Jehovah will be willing to be warned by that voice, even though it rebuke and threaten.

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All this rapture of delight in the law contrasts with the impatience and dislike which some men entertain for it. To the disobedient that law spoils their coarse gratifications. It is as a prison in which life is wearisomely barred from delights; but they who dwell behind its fences know that these keep evils off, and that within are calm joys and pure pleasures.

The contemplation of the law cannot but lead to self-examination, and that to petition. So the psalmist passes into prayer. His shortcomings appal, for "by the law is the knowledge of sin," and he feels that beyond the sin which he knows, there is a dark region in him where foul things nestle and breed fast. "Secret faults" are those hidden, not from men, but from himself. He discovers that he has hitherto undiscovered sins. Lurking evils are most dangerous because, like aphides on the under-side of a rose leaf, they multiply so quickly unobserved; small deeds make up life, and small, unnoticed sins darken the soul. Mud in water, at the rate of a grain to a glassful, will make a lake opaque. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." Conscience needs educating; and we have to compare ourselves with the ideal of perfect life in Jesus, if we would know our faults, as young artists go over their copies in front of the masterpiece. But the psalmist knows that, servant of God though he is, he is in danger from another class of sins, and so prays to be held back from "presumptuous sins," *i.e.* wilful conscious transgressions. Such deliberate contraventions of law tend to become habitual and despotic; so the prayer follows that they may not "have dominion." But even that is not the lowest depth. Deliberate sin, which has gained the upper hand, is but too apt to end in apostacy. "Great transgression" is probably a designation for casting off the very pretence of worshipping Jehovah. That is the story of many a fall. First, some unsuspected evil habit gnaws away the substance of the life, as white ants do wood, leaving the shell apparently intact; then come sins open and palpable, and these enslave the will, becoming habits, and then follows entire abandonment of the profession of religion. It is a slippery, dark stairway, and the only safety is in not setting foot on the top step. God, and God only, can "keep us back." He will, if we cling to Him, knowing our weakness. Thus clinging, we may unblamed cherish the daring hope that we shall be "upright and innocent," since nothing less than entire deliverance from sin in all its forms and issues can correspond to the will of God concerning us and the power of God in us, nor satisfy our deepest desires.

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The closing aspiration is that Jehovah would accept the song and prayer. There is an allusion to the acceptance of a sacrifice, for the phrase "be acceptable" is frequent in connection with the sacrificial ritual. When the words of the mouth coincide with the meditation of the heart, we may hope that prayers for cleansing from, and defence against, sin, offered to Him whom our faith recognises as our "strength" and our "Redeemer," will be as a sacrifice of a sweet smell, well-pleasing to God. He best loves the law of Jehovah who lets it teach him his sin, and send him to his knees; he best appreciates the glories of the silent heavens who knows that their witness to God is but the prelude of the deeper music of the Scriptures' declaration of the heart and will of Jehovah, and who grasps Him as his "strength and his Redeemer" from all evil, whether evil of sin or evil of sorrow.

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PSALM XX.

1 Jehovah answer thee in the day of trouble,
   The name of the God of Jacob set thee on high;
2 Send thy help from the holy place,
   And from Zion hold thee up;
3 Remember all thy meal offerings,
   And thy burnt offerings may He find fat; Selah.
4 Give thee according to thy heart,
   And all thy counsel may He fulfil.

5 May we exult in thy salvation, and in the name of our God wave our standards;
   Jehovah fulfil all thy petitions!

6 Now I know that Jehovah saves His anointed;
   He will answer him from his Holy heaven, with mighty deeds of the salvation of His right hand.

7 These boast in chariots, and these in horses;
   And we—in the name of Jehovah our God we boast.
8 They—they are bowed down, and fall;
   And we—we are risen, and stand firm.
9 Jehovah, save!
   May the King hear us in the day when we call.

This is a battle song, followed by a chant of victory. They are connected in subject and probably in occasion, but fight and triumph have fallen dim to us, though we can still feel how hotly the fire once glowed. The passion of loyalty and love for the king, expressed in these psalms, fits no reign in Judah so well as the bright noonday of David's, when "whatever the king did pleased all the people." Cheyne, indeed, would bring them down to the Maccabean period, and suggests Simon Maccabæus as the ruler referred to. He has to put a little gentle pressure on "king" to contract it to fit the man of his choice, and appeals to the "good old Semitic sense" of "consul." But would not an appeal to Hebrew usage have been more satisfactory? If "king" means "king," great or small, the psalm is not post-exilic, and the Davidic date will not seem impossible. It does not seem impossible that a poet-king should have composed a national hymn praying for his own victory, which was the nation's also.

The psalm has traces of the alternation of chorus and solo. The nation or army first pours out its united prayer for victory in vv. 1-5, and is succeeded by a single voice (possibly that of the officiating priest or the king himself) in ver. 6, expressing confidence that the prayer is answered, which, again, is followed by the closing chorus of many voices throbbing with the assurance of victory before a blow is struck, and sending one more long-drawn cry to God ere battle is joined.

The prayer in vv. 1-5 breathes self-distrust and confidence in Jehovah, the temper which brings victory, not only to Israel, but to all fighters for God. Here is no boasting of former victories, nor of man's bravery and strength, nor of a captain's skill. One name is invoked. It alone rouses courage and pledges triumph. "The name of the God of Jacob set thee on high." That name is almost regarded as a person, as is often the case. Attributes and acts are ascribed to it which properly belong to the Unnameable whom it names, as if with some dim inkling that the agent of revealing a person must be a person. The name is the revealed character, which is contemplated as having existence in some sense apart from Him whose character it is. Possibly there is a reference to Gen. xxxv. 3, where Jacob speaks of "the God who answered me in the day of my distress." That ancient instance of His power to hear and help may have floated before the singer's mind as heartening faith for this day of battle. To "set on high" is a familiar natural figure for deliverance. The earthly sanctuary is Jehovah's throne; and all real help must come thence, of which help His dwelling there is a pledge. So in these two verses the extremity of need, the history of past revelation, and the special relation of Jehovah to Israel are woven into the people's prayer for their king. In vv. 3, 4, they add the incense of their intercession to his sacrifices. The background of the psalm is probably the altar on which the accustomed offerings before a battle were being presented (1 Sam. xiii. 9). The prayer for acceptance of the burnt offering is very graphic, since the word rendered "accept" is literally "esteem fat."

One wish moved the sacrificing king and the praying people. Their common desire was victory, but the people are content to be obscure, and their loyal love so clings to their monarch and leader that they only wish the fulfilment of his wishes. This unity of feeling culminates in the closing petitions in ver. 6, where

self-oblivion wishes "May we exult in thy salvation," arrogating none of the glory of victory to themselves, but ascribing all to him, and vows "In the name of our God we will wave our standards," ascribing victory to Him, its ultimate cause. An army that prays, "Jehovah fulfil all thy petitions," will be ready to obey all its captain's commands and to move in obedience to his impulse as if it were part of himself. The enthusiastic community of purpose with its chief and absolute reliance on Jehovah, with which this prayer throbs, would [Pg 198] go far towards securing victory anywhere. They should find their highest exemplification in that union between Christ and us in which all human relationships find theirs, since, in the deepest sense, they are all Messianic prophecies, and point to Him who is all the good that other men and women have partially been, and satisfies all the cravings and necessities which human relationships, however blessed, but incompletely supply.

The sacrifice has been offered; the choral prayer has gone up. Silence follows, the worshippers watching the curling smoke as it rises; and then a single voice breaks out into a burst of glad assurance that sacrifice and prayer are answered. Who speaks? The most natural answer is, "The king"; and the fact that he speaks of himself as Jehovah's anointed in the third person does not present a difficulty. What is the reference in that "now" at the beginning of ver. 6? May we venture to suppose that the king's heart swelled at the exhibition of his subjects' devotion and hailed it as a pledge of victory? The future is brought into the present by the outstretched hand of faith, for this single speaker knows that "Jehovah has saved," though no blow has yet been struck. The prayer had asked for help from Zion; the anticipation of answer looks higher: to the holier sanctuary, where Jehovah indeed dwells. The answer now waited for in sure confidence is "the mighty deeds of salvation of His right hand," some signal forthputting of Divine power scattering the foe. A whisper may start an avalanche. The prayer of the people has set Omnipotence in motion. Such assurance that petitions are heard is wont to spring in the heart that truly prays, and comes as a forerunner of fulfilment, shedding on the [Pg 199] soul the dawn of the yet unrisen sun. He has but half prayed who does not wait in silence, watching the flight of his arrow and not content to cease till the calm certainty that it has reached its aim fills his heart.

Again the many voices take up the song, responding to the confidence of the single speaker and, like him, treating the victory as already won. Looking across the field to the masses of the enemy's cavalry and chariots, forces forbidden to Israel, though employed by them in later days, the song grandly opposes to these "the name of Jehovah our God." There is a world of contempt and confidence in the juxtaposition. Chariots and horses are very terrible, especially to raw soldiers unaccustomed to their whirling onset; but the Name is mightier, as Pharaoh and his array proved by the Red Sea. This reference to the army of Israel as unequipped with cavalry and chariots is in favour of an early date, since the importation and use of both began as soon as Solomon's time. The certain issue of the fight is given in ver. 8 in a picturesque fashion, made more vigorous by the tenses which describe completed acts. When the brief struggle is over, this is what will be seen—the enemy prone, Israel risen from subjection and standing firm. Then comes a closing cry for help, which, according to the traditional division of the verse, has one very short clause and one long drawn out, like the blast of the trumpet sounding the charge. The intensity of appeal is condensed in the former clause into the one word "save" and the renewed utterance of the name, thrice referred to in this short psalm as the source at once of strength and confidence. The latter clause, as in the A.V. and R.V., transfers the title of King from the [Pg 200] earthly shadow to the true Monarch in the heavens, and thereby suggests yet another plea for help. The other division of the verse, adopted in the LXX. and by some moderns, equalises the clauses by transferring "the king" to the former ("O Lord, save the king, and answer us," etc.). But this involves a violent change from the second person imperfect in the first clause to the third person imperfect in the second. It would be intolerably clumsy to say, "Do Thou save; may He hear," and therefore the LXX. has had recourse to inserting "and" at the beginning of the second clause, which somewhat breaks the jolt, but is not in the Hebrew. The text, as it stands, yields a striking meaning, beautifully suggesting the subordinate office of the earthly monarch and appealing to the true King to defend His own army and go forth with it to the battle which is waged for His name. When we are sure that we are serving Jehovah and fighting for Him, we may be sure that we go not a warfare at our own charges nor alone.

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PSALM XXI.

1 Jehovah, in Thy strength the king rejoices,
And in Thy salvation how greatly he exults!
2 The desire of his heart Thou hast given to him,
And the request of his lips Thou hast not refused.
3 For Thou meetest him with blessings of good;
Thou settest on his head a crown of pure gold.
4 Life he asked from Thee; Thou gavest it to him,
Length of days for ever and ever.
5 Great is his glory through Thy salvation;
Honour and majesty Thou layest upon him.
6 For Thou dost set him [to be] blessings for ever,
Dost gladden him in joy with Thy face.
7 For the king trusts in Jehovah,
And in the loving-kindness of the Most High he shall not be moved.

8 Thine hand shall reach towards all thy foes;
Thy right hand shall reach all thy haters.
9 Thou shalt make them as a furnace of fire at the time of thine appearance (face);
Jehovah in His wrath shall swallow them up: fire shall devour them.
10 Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth,
And their seed from the sons of men.
11 For they cause evil to hang over thee;
They meditate mischief: they will achieve nothing.
12 For thou shalt make them turn their back,
On thy bowstrings wilt aim [arrows] at their faces.

13 Lift Thyself up, Jehovah, in Thy strength;
We will sing and harp, [praising] Thy might.

This psalm is a pendant to the preceding. There the people prayed for the king; here they give thanks for him: there they asked that his desires might be fulfilled; here they bless Jehovah, who has fulfilled them: there the battle was impending; here it has been won, though foes are still in the field: there the victory was prayed for; here it is prophesied. Who is the "king"? The superscription points to David. Conjecture has referred to Hezekiah, principally because of his miraculous recovery, which is supposed to be intended in ver. 4. Cheyne thinks of Simon Maccabæus, and sees his priestly crown in ver. 3. But there are no individualising features in the royal portrait, and it is so idealised, or rather spiritualised, that it is hard to suppose that any single monarch was before the singer's mind. The remarkable greatness and majesty of the figure will appear as we read. The whole may be cast into two parts, with a closing strain of prayer. In the first part (vv. 1-7) the people praise Jehovah for His gifts to the king; in the second (vv. 8-12) they prophesy to the king complete victory; in ver. 13 they end, as in xx., with a short petition, which, however, here is, in accordance with the tone of the whole, more jubilant than the former and less shrill. EPs 2021

The former psalm had asked for strength to be given to the king; this begins with thanks for the strength in which the king rejoices. In the former the people had anticipated triumph in the king's salvation or victory; here they celebrate his exceeding exultation in it. It was his, since he was victor, but it was Jehovah's, since He was Giver of victory. Loyal subjects share in the king's triumph, and connect it with him; but he himself traces it to God. The extraordinarily lofty language in which Jehovah's gifts are described in the subsequent verses has, no doubt, analogies in the Assyrian hymns to which Cheyne refers; but the abject reverence and partial deification which these breathe were foreign to the relations of Israel to its kings, who were not separated from their subjects by such a gulf as divided the great sovereigns of the East from theirs. The mysterious Divinity which hedges "the king" in the royal psalms is in sharp contrast with the democratic familiarity between prince and people exhibited in the history. The phenomena common to these psalms naturally suggest that "the king" whom they celebrate is rather the ideal than the real monarch. The office rather than the individual who partially fulfils its demands and possesses its endowments seems to fill the singer's canvas. But the ideal of the office is destined to be realised in the Messiah, and the psalm is in a true sense Messianic, inasmuch as, with whatever mixture of conceptions proper to the then stage of revelation, it still ascribes to the ideal king attributes which no king of Judah exhibited. The transcendant character of the gifts of Jehovah enumerated here is obvious, however the language may be pared down. First, we have the EPs 2021

striking picture of Jehovah coming forth to meet the conqueror with "blessings of goodness," as Melchizedek met Abraham with refreshments in his hands and benedictions on his lips. Victory is naturally followed by repose and enjoyment, and all are Jehovah's gift. The subsequent endowments may possibly be regarded as the details of these blessings, the fruits of the victory. Of these the first is the coronation of the conqueror, not as if he had not been king before, but as now more fully recognised as such. The supporters of the Davidic authorship refer to the crown of gold won at the capture of Rabbath of Ammon, but there is no need to seek historical basis for the representation. Then comes a signal instance of the king's closeness of intercourse [Ps 204] with Jehovah and of his receiving his heart's desire in that he asked for "life" and received "length of days for ever and ever." No doubt the strong expression for perpetuity may be paralleled in such phrases as "O king, live for ever," and others which are obviously hyperbolical and mean not perpetual, but indefinitely protracted, duration; but the great emphasis of expression here and its repetition in ver. 6 can scarcely be disposed of as mere hyperbole. If it is the ideal king who is meant, his undying life is substantially synonymous with the continuance of the dynasty which 2 Sam. vii. represents as the promise underlying the Davidic throne. The figure of the king is then brought still nearer to the light of Jehovah, and words which are consecrated to express Divine attributes are applied to him in ver. 5. "Glory," "honour and majesty," are predicated of him, not as if there were an apotheosis, as would have been possible in Assyrian or Roman flattery, but the royal recipient and the Divine Giver are clearly separated, even while the lustre raying from Jehovah is conceived of as falling in brightness upon the king. These flashing emanations of the Divine glory make their recipient "blessings for ever," which seems to include both the possession and the communication of good. An eternal fountain of blessing and himself blessed, he is cheered with joy which comes from Jehovah's face, so close is his approach and so gracious to him is that countenance. Nothing higher could be thought of than such intimacy and friendliness of access. To dwell in the blaze of that face and to find only joy therein is the crown of human blessedness (Psalm xvi. 11). Finally, the double foundation of all the king's gifts is laid in ver. 7: he trusts and Jehovah's loving-kindness gives, and therefore he stands firm, and his [Ps 205] throne endures, whatever may dash against it. These daring anticipations are too exuberant to be realised in any but One, whose victory was achieved in the hour of apparent defeat; whose conquest was both His salvation and God's; who prays knowing that He is always heard; who is King of men because He endured the cross,—and wears the crown of pure gold because He did not refuse the crown of thorns; who liveth for evermore, having been given by the Father to have life in Himself; who is the outshining of the Father's glory, and has all power granted unto Him; who is the source of all blessing to all, who dwells in the joy to which He will welcome His servants; and who Himself lived and conquered by the life of faith, and so became the first Leader of the long line of those who have trusted and therefore have stood fast. Whomsoever the psalmist saw in his vision, he has gathered into one many traits which are realised only in Jesus Christ.

The second part (vv. 8-12) is, by Hupfeld and others, taken as addressed to Jehovah; and that idea has much to recommend it, but it seems to go to wreck on the separate reference to Jehovah in ver. 9, on the harshness of applying "evil against thee" and "a mischievous device" (ver. 11) to Him, and on the absence of a sufficient link of connection between the parts if it is adopted. If, on the other hand, we suppose that the king is addressed in these verses, there is the same dramatic structure as in Psalm xx.; and the victory which has been won is now taken as a pledge of future ones. The expectation is couched in terms adapted to the horizon of the singer, and on his lips probably meant stern extermination of hostile nations. The picture is that of a [Ps 206] fierce conqueror, and we must not seek to soften the features, nor, on the other hand, to deny the prophetic inspiration of the psalmist. The task of the ideal king was to crush and root out opposition to his monarchy, which was Jehovah's. Very terrible are the judgments of his hand, which sound liker those of Jehovah than those inflicted by a man, as Hupfeld and others have felt. In ver. 8 the construction is slightly varied in the two clauses, the verb "reach" having a preposition attached in the former, and not in the latter, which difference may be reproduced by the distinction between "reach towards" and "reach." The seeking hand is stretched out after, and then it grasps, its victims. The comparison of the "fiery oven" is inexact in form, but the very negligence helps the impression of agitation and terribleness. The enemy are not likened to a furnace, but to the fuel cast into it. But the phrase rendered in A.V. "in the time of thine anger" is very remarkable, being literally "in the time of thy face." The destructive effect of Jehovah's countenance (xxxiv. 17) is here transferred to His king's, into whose face has passed, as he gazed in joy on the face of Jehovah, some of the lustre which kills where it does not gladden. Compare "everlasting destruction from the face of the Lord" (2 Thess. i. 9). The king is so completely representative of Jehovah that the destruction of the enemy is the work of the one fire of wrath common to both. The destruction extends to the whole generation of enemies, as in the ferocious warfare of old days, when a nation was wiped off the earth. The psalmist sees in the extremest vengeance the righteous and inevitable consequence of hostility condemned by the nature of the case to be futile, and yet criminal: "They cause evil to hang over thee: they meditate mischief; they will [Ps 207]

achieve nothing." Then, in ver. 12, the dread scene is completed by the picture of the flying foe and the overtaking pursuer, who first puts them to flight, and then, getting in front of them, sends his arrows full in their faces. The ideal of the king has a side of terror; and while his chosen weapon is patient love, he has other arrows in his quiver. The pictures of the destroying conqueror are taken up and surpassed in the New Testament. They do not see the whole Christ who do not see the Warrior Christ, nor have they realised all His work who slur over the solemn expectation that one day men shall call on rocks and hills to cover them from "the steady whole of the Judge's face."

As in Psalm xx., the close is a brief petition, which asks the fulfilment of the anticipations in vv. 8-12, and traces, as in ver. 1, the king's triumph to Jehovah's strength. The loyal love of the nation will take its monarch's victory as its own joy, and be glad in the manifestation thereby of Jehovah's power. That is the true voice of devotion which recognises God, not man, in all victories, and answers the forthflashing of His delivering power by the thunder of praise.

PSALM XXII.

1 My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?
[Why art Thou] afar from my help, from the words of my roar?
2 My God, I cry to Thee by day, and Thou answerest not;
And by night, but there is no rest for me.

3 Yet Thou art Holy,
Throned upon the praises of Israel.
4 In Thee our fathers trusted;
They trusted and Thou deliveredst them.
5 To Thee they cried and were delivered;
In Thee they trusted and were not put to shame.

6 But I am a worm, and not a man;
A reproach of men and despised of people.
7 All who see me mock at me;
They draw open the lips, they nod the head.
8 "Roll [thy cares] on Jehovah—let Him deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, for He delights in him."

9 Yea, Thou art He who didst draw me from the womb
Didst make me trust when on my mother's breasts.
10 Upon Thee was I thrown from birth;
From my mother's womb art Thou my God.
11 Be not far from me, for trouble is near;
For there is no helper.

12 Many bulls have surrounded me,
Strong ones of Bashan have encircled me.
13 They gape upon me with their mouth,
[Like] a lion tearing and roaring.

14 Like water I am poured out,
And all my bones are out of joint
My heart has become like wax,
Melted in the midst of my bowels.

15 My strength (palate?) is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my gums,

And Thou layest me in the dust of death.

16 For dogs have surrounded me,
A pack of evil-doers closed round me,
They pierced my hands and my feet.
17 I can count all my bones,
These—they gaze, upon me they look.
18 They divide my garments among them,
And on my vesture they cast lots.

19 But Thou, Jehovah, be not far off;
My Strength, haste to my help.
20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
My only [life] from the paw of the dog.
21 Save me from the mouth of the lion,
And from the horns of the wild oxen—Thou hast answered me.

22 I will declare Thy name to my brethren,
In the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee.
23 Ye that fear Jehovah, praise Him,
All ye the seed of Jacob, glorify Him,
And stand in awe of Him, all ye the seed of Israel.
24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted one.
And has not hid His face from him,
And when he cried has hearkened to him.
25 From Thee [comes] my praise in the great congregation;
My vows will I pay before them that fear Him.
26 The humble shall eat and be satisfied,
They shall praise Jehovah that seek Him;
Let your heart live for ever.

27 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to Jehovah.
And all the families of the nations shall bow before Thee.
28 For the kingdom is Jehovah's;
And He is ruler among the nations.
29 All the fat ones of the earth eat and bow down;
Before His face kneel all they who were going down to the dust,
And he [who] could not keep his soul alive. [Pg 210]
30 A seed shall serve Him;
And it shall be told of Jehovah unto the [next] generation.
31 They shall come and declare His righteousness
Unto a people that shall be born, that He has done [this].

Who is the sufferer whose wail is the very voice of desolation and despair, and who yet dares to believe that the tale of his sorrow will be a gospel for the world? The usual answers are given. The title ascribes the authorship to David, and is accepted by Delitzsch and others. Hengstenberg and his followers see in the picture the ideal righteous man. Others think of Hezekiah, or Jeremiah, with whose prophecies and history there are many points of connection. The most recent critics find here "the personalised Genius of Israel, or more precisely the followers of Nehemiah, including the large-hearted psalmist" (Cheyne, "Orig. of Psalt.," 264). On any theory of authorship, the startling correspondence of the details of the psalmist's sufferings with those of the Crucifixion has to be accounted for. How startling that correspondence is, both in the number and minuteness of its points, need not be insisted on. Not only does our Lord quote the first verse on the cross, and so show that the psalm was in his heart then, but the gestures and words of mockery were verbally reproduced, as Luke significantly indicates by using the LXX's word for "laugh to scorn" (ver. 7). Christ's thirst is regarded by John as the fulfilment of "scripture," which can scarcely be other than ver. 15. The physical effects of crucifixion are described in the ghastly picture of vv. 14, 15. Whatever difficulty exists in determining the true reading and meaning of the allusion to "my hands and my feet," some violence or indignity to them is intended. The peculiar detail of dividing the raiment was more than fulfilled, since the [Pg 211]

apparently parallel and synonymous clauses were resolved into two distinct acts. The recognition of these points in the psalm as prophecies is one thing; the determination of their relation to the psalmist's own experience is quite another. It is taken for granted in many quarters that every such detail in prophecy must describe the writer's own circumstances, and the supposition that they may transcend these is said to be "psychologically impossible." But it is somewhat hazardous for those who have not been subjects of prophetic inspiration to lay down canons of what is possible and impossible in it, and there are examples enough to prove that the relation of the prophets' speech to their consciousness and circumstances was singularly complex, and not to be unravelled by any such *obiter dicta* as to psychological possibilities. They were recipients of messages, and did not always understand what the "Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify." Theories which neglect that aspect of the case do not front all the facts. Certainty as to the authorship of this psalm is probably unattainable. How far its words fitted the condition of the singer must therefore remain unsettled. But that these minute and numerous correspondences are more than coincidences, it seems perverse to deny. The present writer, for one, sees shining through the shadowy personality of the psalmist the figure of the Prince of Sufferers, and believes that whether the former's plaints applied in all their particulars to him, or whether there is in them a certain "element of hyperbole" which becomes simple fact in Jesus' sufferings, the psalm is a prophecy of Him and them. In the former case the psalmist's experience, in the latter case his utterances, were divinely shaped so as to prefigure the sacred sorrows of the Man of Sorrows. [Ps 22:1]

To a reader who shares in this understanding of the psalm, it must be holy ground, to be trodden reverently and with thoughts adoringly fixed on Jesus. Cold analysis is out of place. And yet there is a distinct order even in the groans, and a manifest contrast in the two halves of the psalm (vv. 1-21 and 22-31). "Thou answerest not" is the key-note of the former; "Thou hast answered me," of the latter. The one paints the sufferings, the other the glory that should follow. Both point to Jesus: the former by the desolation which it breathes; the latter by the world-wide consequences of these solitary sufferings which it foresees.

Surely opposites were never more startlingly blended in one gush of feeling than in that plaint of mingled faith and despair, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" which by its thus addressing God clings fast to Him, and by its wondering question discloses the dreary consciousness of separation from Him. The evidence to the psalmist that he was forsaken was the apparent rejection of his prayers for deliverance; and if David be the speaker, we may suppose that the pathetic fate of his predecessor hovered before his thoughts: "I am sore distressed ... God is departed from me and answereth me no more." But, while lower degrees of this conflict of trust and despair belong to all deep religious life, and are experienced by saintly sufferers in all ages, the voice that rang through the darkness on Calvary was the cry of Him who experienced its force in supreme measure and in altogether unique manner. None but He can ask that question "Why?" with conscience void of offence. None but He have known the mortal agony of utter separation from God. None but He have clung to God with absolute trust even in the horror of great darkness. In Christ's consciousness of being forsaken by God lie elements peculiar to it alone, for the separating agent was the gathered sins of the whole world, laid on Him and accepted by Him in the perfection of His loving identification of Himself with men. Unless in that dread hour He was bearing a world's sin, there is no worthy explanation of His cry, and many a silent martyr has faced death for Him with more courage derived from Him than He manifested on His cross. [Ps 22:1]

After the introductory strophe of two verses, there come seven strophes, of which three contain 3 verses each (vv. 3-11) followed by two of 2 verses each (vv. 12-15) and these again by two with 3 verses each. Can a soul agitated as this singer's was regulate its sobs thus? Yes, if it is a singer's, and still more if it is a saint's. The fetters make the limbs move less violently, and there is soothing in the ordered expression of disordered emotion. The form is artistic not artificial; and objections to the reality of the feelings on the ground of the regularity of the form ignore the witness of the masterpieces of literature in all tongues.

The desolation rising from unanswered prayer drives to the contemplation of God's holiness and past responses to trusting men, which are in one aspect an aggravation and in another an alleviation. The psalmist partly answers his own question "Why?" and preaches to Himself that the reason cannot be in Jehovah, whose character and former deeds bind Him to answer trust by help. God's holiness is primarily His separation from, by elevation above, the creature, both in regard of His freedom from limitations and of His perfect purity. If He is thus "holy," He will not break His promise, nor change His ways with those who trust. It takes some energy of faith to believe that a silent and apparently deaf God is "holy," and the effect of the belief may either be to crush or to lift the spirit. Its first result with this psalmist seems to have been to crush, as the next strophe shows, but the more blessed consequence is won before the end. Here it is partly a plea [Ps 22:1]

urged with God, as is that beautiful bold image of God enthroned "on the praises of Israel." These praises are evoked by former acts of grace answering prayers, and of them is built a yet nobler throne than the outstretched wings of the Cherubim. The daring metaphor penetrates deeply into God's delight in men's praise, and the power of Israel's voice to exalt Him in the world. How could a God thus throned cease to give mercies like those which were perpetually commemorated thereby? The same half-wistful, half-confident retrospect is continued in the remaining verses of this strophe (vv. 4, 5), which look back to the "grey fathers'" experience. Mark the plaintive reiteration of "trust" and "deliver," the two inseparables, as the days of old attested, which had now become so sadly parted. Not more certainly the flow of water in a pipe answers the application of thirsty lips to its opening than did God's rescuing act respond to the father's trust. And now!—

The use of "Our" in reference to the fathers has been laid hold of as favouring the hypothesis that the speaker is the personified nation; but no individual member of a nation would speak of the common ancestors as "My fathers." That would mean his own family progenitors, whereas the psalmist means the Patriarchs and the earlier generations. No argument for the national theory, then, can be drawn from the phrase. Can the reference to Jesus be carried into this strophe? Assuredly it may, and it shows us how truly He associated Himself with His nation, and fed His faith by the records of the past. "He also is a son of Abraham." [Ps 21]

Such remembrances make the contrast of present sufferings and of a far-off God more bitter; and so a fresh wave of agony rolls over the psalmist's soul. He feels himself crushed and as incapable of resistance as a worm bruised in all its soft length by an armed heel. The very semblance of manhood has faded. One can scarcely fail to recall "his visage was so marred more than any man" (Isa. lii. 14), and the designation of Jehovah's servant Israel as "thou worm" (Isa. xli. 14). The taunts that wounded the psalmist so sorely have long since fallen dumb, and the wounds are all healed; but the immortal words in which he wails the pain of misapprehension and rejection are engraved for ever on the heart of the world. No suffering is more acute than that of a sensitive soul, brimming with love and eagerness to help, and met with scorn, rejection and ferocious mockery of its sacredest emotions. No man has ever felt that pang with the intensity with which Jesus felt it, for none has ever brought such wealth of longing love to be thrown back on itself, nor been so devoid of the callousness with which selfishness is shielded. His pure nature was tender as an infant's hand, and felt the keen edge of the spear as none but He can have done. They are His sorrows that are painted here, so vividly and truly that the evangelist Luke takes the very word of the LXX. version of the psalm to describe the rulers' mockery (Luke xxiii. 35). "They draw open the lips," grinning with delight or contempt; "they nod the head" in mockery and assent to the suffering inflicted; and then the savage hate bursts into irony which defiles the sacredest emotions and comes near to blaspheming God in ridiculing trust in Him. The mockers thought it exquisite sarcasm to bid Jesus roll His troubles on Jehovah, and to bid God deliver Him since He delighted in Him. How little they knew that they were thereby proclaiming Him as the Christ of prophecy, and were giving the unimpeachable testimony of enemies to His life of devout trust and His consciousness of Divine favour! "Roll (it) on God," sneered they; and the answer was, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." "Let Him deliver Him, since He delighteth in Him," they impiously cried, and they knew not that God's delight in Him was the very reason why He did not deliver Him. Because He was His Son in whom He was well pleased, "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him." The mockery of opponents brings into clear light the deepest secrets of that cross. [Ps 21]

Another wave of feeling follows in the next strophe (vv. 9-11). Backwards and forwards, from trust to complaint and from complaint to trust, rolls the troubled sea of thought, each mood evoking its opposite. Now reproach makes the psalmist tighten his grasp on God, and plead former help as a reason for present hearing. Faith turns taunts into prayers. This strophe begins with a "Yea," and, on the relationship with God which the enemies had ridiculed and which his heart knows to be true, pleads that God would not remain, as ver. 1 had wailed that He was, far off from His help. It goes back to the beginning of life, and in the mystery of birth and the dependence of infancy finds arguments with God. They are the personal application of the wide truth that God by His making us men gives us a claim on Him, that He has bound Himself by giving life to give what is needful for its development and well-being. He will not stultify Himself by making a man and then leaving him to struggle alone, as birds do with their young, as soon as they can fly. He is "a faithful Creator." May we venture to find special reference here to the mystery of the Incarnation? It is noticeable that "my mother" is emphatically mentioned, while there is no reference to a father. No doubt the cast of the thought accounts for that, but still the special agency of Divine power in the birth of Jesus gives special force to His prayer for Divine help in the life so peculiarly the result of the Divine hand. But while the plea had singular force on Christ's lips, it is valid for all men. [Ps 21]

The closing verse of this strophe takes the complaint of ver. 1 and turns it into prayer. Faith does not rest with plaintively crying "Why art Thou so far?" but pleads "Be not far"; and makes the nearness of trouble and the absence of all other help its twofold pleas. So much the psalmist has already won by his communing with God. Now he can face environing sorrows and solitary defencelessness, and feel them to be reasons for God's coming, not tokens of His distance.

We now come to two strophes of two verses each (vv. 12-15), of which the former describes the encircling foes and the latter the psalmist's failure of vital power. The metaphor of raging wild animals recurs in later verses, and is common to many psalms. Bashan was a land of pastures over which herds of half wild cattle roamed. They "have surrounded me" is a picturesque touch, drawn direct from life, as any one knows who has ever found himself in the midst of such a herd. The gaping mouth is rather characteristic of the lion than of the bull. The open jaws emit the fierce roar which precedes the fatal spring and the "ravening" on its prey. The next short strophe passes from enemies around to paint inward feebleness. All vital force has melted away; the very bones are dislocated, raging thirst has supervened. These are capable of being construed as simply strong metaphors, parallels to which may be found in other psalms; but it must not be left unnoticed that they are accurate transcripts of the physical effects of crucifixion. That torture killed by exhaustion, it stretched the body as on a rack, it was attended with agonies of thirst. It requires considerable courage to brush aside such coincidences as accidental, in obedience to a theory of interpretation. But the picture is not completed when the bodily sufferings are set forth. A mysterious attribution of them all to God closes the strophe. "Thou hast brought me to the dust of death." Then, it is God's hand that has laid all these on him. No doubt this may be, and probably was in the psalmist's thought, only a devout recognition of Providence working through calamities; but the words receive full force only by being regarded as parallel with those of Isa. liii. 10, "He hath put Him to grief." In like manner the apostolic preaching regards Christ's murderers as God's instruments. [Ps 21]

The next strophe returns to the three-verse arrangement, and blends the contents of the two preceding, dealing both with the assailing enemies and the enfeebled sufferer. The former metaphor of wild animals encircling him is repeated with variations. A baser order of foes than bulls and lions, namely a troop of cowardly curs, are snarling and snapping round him. The contemptuous figure is explained in ver. 16*b*, as meaning a mob of evildoers, and is then resumed in the next clause, which has been the subject of so much dispute. It seems plain that the Massoretic text is corrupt. "Like a lion, my hands and my feet" can only be made into sense by violent methods. The difference between the letters which yield "like a lion" and those which give "they pierced" is only in the length of the upright stroke of the final one. LXX. Vulg. Syr. translate *they dug* or *pierced*, and other ancient versions attest that they read the word as a verb. The spelling of the word is anomalous, if we take it to mean *dig*, but the irregularity is not without parallels, and may be smoothed away either by assuming an unusual form of a common verb or a rare root cognate with the more common one. The word would then mean "they dug" rather than *pierced*, but the shade of difference in meaning is not so great as to forbid the latter rendering. In any case "it is the best attested reading. It is to be understood of the gaping wounds which are inflicted on the sufferer's hands and feet, and which stare at him like holes" (Baethgen, "Hand Comment.," p. 65). "Behold my hands and my feet," said the risen Lord, and that calm word is sufficient proof that both bore the prints of nails. The words might be written over this psalm. Strange and sad that so many should look on it and not see Him! [Ps 22]

The picture of bodily sufferings has one more touch in "I can count all my bones." Emaciation would produce that effect. But so would crucifixion which extended the frame and threw the bones of the thorax into prominence. Then the sufferer turns his eyes once more to his enemies, and describes the stony gaze, protracted and unfeeling, with which they feed upon his agonies. Crucifixion was a slow process, and we recall the long hours in which the crowds sated their hatred through their eyes. [Ps 23]

It is extremely unlikely that the psalmist's garments were literally parted among his foes, and the usual explanation of the singular details in ver. 18 is that they are either a metaphor drawn from plundering the slain in battle or a proverbial expression. What reference the words had to the original speaker of them must, in our ignorance of his circumstances, remain uncertain. But they at all events depict his death as so sure that his enemies regard his dress as their perquisite. Surely this is a distinct instance of Divine guidance moulding a psalmist's words so as to fill them with a deeper meaning than the speaker knew. He who so shaped them saw the soldiers dividing the rest of the garments and gambling for the seamless cloak; and He was "the Spirit of Christ which was in" the singer.

The next strophe closes the first part with petition which, in the last words, becomes thanksgiving, and realises the answer so fervently besought. The initial complaint of God's distance is again turned into prayer, and the former metaphors of wild beasts are gathered into one long cry for deliverance from the dangerous weapons of each, the dog's paw, the lion's mouth, the wild oxen's horns. The psalmist speaks of his "soul" or life as "my only one," referring not to his isolation, but to his life as that which, once lost, could never be regained. He has but one life, therefore he clings to it, and cannot but believe that it is precious in God's eyes. And then, all at once, up shoots a clear light of joy, and he knows that he has not been speaking to a deaf or remote God, but that his cry is answered. He had been brought to the dust of death, but even thence he is [Ps. 22:1] heard and brought out with no soil of it upon him. Such suddenness and completeness of deliverance from such extremity of peril may, indeed, have been experienced by many, but receives its fullest meaning in its Messianic application. "From the horns of the wild oxen," says he, as if the phrase were still dependent, like the preceding ones, on the prayer, "deliver me." But, as he thus cries, the conviction that he is heard floods his soul, and he ends, not with a cry for help, but with that one rapturous word, "Thou hast answered me." It is like a parting burst of sunshine at the end of a day of tempest. A man already transfixed by a buffalo's horns has little hope of escape, but even thence God delivers. The psalmist did not know, but the Christian reader should not forget that the Prince of sufferers was yet more wondrously delivered from death by passing through death, and that by His victory all who cleave to Him are, in like manner, saved from the horns even while these gore them, and are then victors over death when they fall beneath its dart.

The consequences of the psalmist's deliverance are described in the last part (vv. 22-31) in language so wide that it is hard to suppose that any man could think his personal experiences so important and far-reaching. The whole congregation of Israel are to share in his thanksgiving and to learn more of God's name through him (vv. 22-6). Nor does that bound his anticipations, for they traverse the whole world and embrace all lands and ages, and contemplate that the story of his sufferings and triumph will prove a true gospel, bringing every country and generation to remember and turn to Jehovah. The exuberant language becomes but one mouth. Such consequences, so wide-spread and agelong, can follow from the story of but one life. If the sorrows of [Ps. 22:2] the preceding part can only be a description of the passion, the glories of the second can only be a vision of the universal and eternal kingdom of Christ. It is a gospel before the Gospels and an Apocalypse before Revelations.

In the first strophe (vv. 22-6) the delivered singer vows to make God's name known to His brethren. The epistle to the Hebrews quotes the vow as not only expressive of our Lord's true manhood, but as specifying its purpose. Jesus became man that men might learn to know God; and the knowledge of His name streams most brightly from the cross. The death and resurrection, the sufferings and glory of Christ open deeper regions in the character of God than even His gracious life disclosed. Rising from the dead and exalted to the throne, He has "a new song" in His immortal lips, and more to teach concerning God than He had before.

The psalm calls Israel to praise with the singer, and tells the ground of their joyful songs (vv. 23, 24). Here the absence of any reference to the relation which the New Testament reveals between these sufferings and that praise is to be noted as an instance of the gradual development of prophecy. "We are not yet on the level of Isaiah liii." (Kirkpatrick, "Psalms," 122). The close of this part speaks of a sacrifice of which "the humble shall eat and be satisfied"—"I will pay my vows"—*i.e.* the thank-offerings vowed when in trouble. The custom of feasting on the "sacrifices for peace-offering for thanksgiving" (Lev. vii. 15) is here referred to, but the ceremonial garb covers spiritual truth. The condition of partaking in this feast is humility, that poverty of spirit which knows itself to be hungry and unable to find food for itself. The consequence of partaking is [Ps. 22:3] satisfaction—a deep truth reaching far beyond the ceremonial emblem. A further result is that "your heart shall live for ever"—an unmeaning hyperbole, but in one application of the words. We penetrate to the core of the psalm in this part, when we read it in the light of Christ's words. "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed," and when we connect it with the central act of Christian worship, the Lord's Supper.

The universal and perpetual diffusion of the kingdom and knowledge of God is the theme of the closing strain (vv. 27-31). That diffusion is not definitely stated as the issue of the sufferings or deliverance, but the very fact that such a universal knowledge comes into view here requires that it should be so regarded, else the unity of the psalm is shattered. While, therefore, the ground alleged in ver. 28 for this universal recognition of God is only His universal dominion, we must suppose that the history of the singer as told to the world is the great fact which brings home to men the truth of God's government over and care for them. True, men know God apart from revelation and from the gospel, but He is to them a forgotten God, and the great influence which helps them to "remember and turn to Jehovah" is the message of the Cross and the Throne of Jesus.

The psalm had just laid down the condition of partaking in the sacrificial meal as being lowliness, and (ver. 29) it prophecies that the "fat" shall also share in it. That can only be, if they become "humble." Great and small, lofty and low must take the same place and accept the food of their souls as a meal of charity. The following words are very difficult, as the text stands. There would appear to be a contrast intended between [Pg 224] the obese self-complacency of the prosperous and proud, and the pauper-like misery of "those who are going down to the dust" and who "cannot keep their soul alive," that is, who are in such penury and wretchedness that they are all but dead. There is a place for ragged outcasts at the table side by side with the "fat on earth." Others take the words as referring to those already dead, and see here a hint that the dim regions of Sheol receive beams of the great light and some share in the great feast. The thought is beautiful, but too remote from anything else in the Old Testament to be adopted here. Various attempts at conjectural emendations and redivision of clauses have been made in order to lighten the difficulties of the verse. However attractive some of these are, the existing reading yields a not unworthy sense, and is best adhered to.

As universality in extent, so perpetuity in duration is anticipated for the story of the psalmist's deliverance and for the praise to God thence accruing. "A seed shall serve Him." That is one generation of obedient worshippers. "It shall be told of Jehovah unto the [next] generation." That is, a second, who shall receive from their progenitors, the seed that serves, the blessed story. "They ... shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born." That is, a third, which in its turn receives the good news from parents' lips. And what is the word which thus maintains itself living amid dying generations, and blesses each, and impels each to bequeath it as their best treasure to their successors? "That He hath done." Done what? With eloquent silence the psalm omits to specify. What was it that was meant by that word on the cross which, with like [Pg 225] reticence, forbore to tell of what it spoke? "He hath done." "It is finished." No one word can express all that was accomplished in that sacrifice. Eternity will not fully supply the missing word, for the consequences of that finished work go on unfolding for ever, and are for ever unfinished, because for ever increasing.

PSALM XXIII.

1 Jehovah is my Shepherd; I do not want.
2 In pastures of fresh grass He leads me;
  By waters of rest He makes me lie.
3 My soul He refreshes;
  He guides me in paths of righteousness [straight paths] for His name's sake.
4 Even if I walk in a gorge of gloom, I fear not evil, for Thou art with me;
  Thy rod and Thy staff—they comfort me.

5 Thou spreadest before me a table in presence of my foes;
  Thou anointest with oil my head: my cup is overfulness.
6 Only good and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
  And my dwelling shall be in the house of Jehovah for length of days.

The world could spare many a large book better than this sunny little psalm. It has dried many tears and supplied the mould into which many hearts have poured their peaceful faith. To suppose that the speaker is the personified nation chills the whole. The tone is too intense not to be the outcome of personal experience, however admissible the application to the nation may be as secondary. No doubt Jehovah is the Shepherd of Israel in several Asaphite psalms and in Jeremiah; but, notwithstanding great authorities, I cannot persuade myself that the voice which comes so straight to the heart did not come from the heart of a brother speaking across the centuries his own personal emotions, which are universal just because they are individual. It is the pure utterance of personal trust in Jehovah, darkened by no fears or complaints and so perfectly at rest that it [Pg 227] has nothing more to ask. For the time desire is stilled in satisfaction. One tone, and that the most blessed which can sound in a life, is heard through the whole. It is the psalm of quiet trust, undisturbed even by its joy, which is quiet too. The fire glows, but does not flame or crackle. The one thought is expanded in two kindred images: that of the shepherd and that of the host. The same ideas are substantially repeated under both forms. The lovely series of vivid pictures, each but a clause long, but clear-cut in that small compass,

like the fine work incised on a gem, combines with the depth and simplicity of the religious emotion expressed, to lay this sweet psalm on all hearts.

Vv. 1-4 present the realities of the devout life under the image of the Divine Shepherd and His lamb.

The comparison of rulers to shepherds is familiar to many tongues, and could scarcely fail to occur to a pastoral people like the Jews, nor is the application to Jehovah's relation to the people so recondite that we need to relegate the psalms in which it occurs to a late era in the national history. The psalmist lovingly lingers on the image, and draws out the various aspects of the shepherd's care and of the flock's travels, with a ripeness and calmness which suggests that we listen to a much-experienced man. The sequence in which the successive pictures occur is noteworthy. Guidance to refreshment comes first, and is described in ver. 2, in words which fall as softly as the gentle streams of which they speak. The noontide is fierce, and the land lies baking in the sun-blaze; but deep down in some wady runs a brook, and along its course the herbage is bright with perpetual moisture, and among the lush grass are cool lairs where the footsore, panting flock may crouch. [IPs 228] The shepherd's tenderness is beautifully hinted at in the two verbs: he "leads," not drives, but in Eastern wise precedes and so draws the trustful sheep; he "makes me to lie down," taking care that the sheep shall stretch weary limbs in full enjoyment of repose. God thus guides to rest and lays to rest the soul that follows Him. Why does the psalmist begin with this aspect of life? Because it is fittest to express the shepherd's care, and because it is, after all, the predominant aspect to the devout heart. Life is full of trial and effort, but it is an unusually rainy region where rain falls on more than half the days of the year. We live so much more vividly and fully in the moments of agony or crisis that they seem to fill more space than they really do. But they are only moments, and the periods of continued peaceful possession of blessings are measured by years. But the sweet words of the psalm are not to be confined to material good. The psalmist does not tell us whether he is thinking more of the outer or of the inner life, but both are in his mind, and while his confidence is only partially warranted by the facts of the former, it is unlimitedly true in regard to the latter. In that application of the words the significance of the priority given to the pastures of fresh springing grass and the waters of repose is plain, for there the rest of trust and the drinking of living water must precede all walking in paths of righteousness.

Food and drink and rest refresh fainting powers, and this reinvigoration is meant by "restoring my soul" or life.

But the midday or nightly rest is intended to fit for effort, and so a second little picture follows in ver. 3, [IPs 229] presenting another aspect of the shepherd's care and of the sheep's course. Out again on to the road, in spite of heat and dust, the flock goes. "Paths of righteousness" is perhaps best taken as "straight paths," as that rendering keeps within the bounds of the metaphor; but since the sheep are men, straight paths for them must needs be paths of righteousness. That guidance is "for His name's sake." God has regard to His revealed character in shepherding His lamb, and will give direction because He is what He is, and in order that He may be known to be what He has declared Himself. The psalmist had learned the purpose of repose and refreshment which, in all regions of life, are intended to prepare for tasks and marches. We are to "drink for strength, and not for drunkenness." A man may lie in a bath till strength is diminished, or may take his plunge and come from it braced for work. In the religious life it is possible to commit an analogous error, and to prize so unwisely peaceful hours of communion, as to waive imperative duty for the sake of them; like Peter with his "Let us make here three tabernacles," while there were devil-ridden sufferers waiting to be healed down on the plain. Moments of devotion, which do not prepare for hours of practical righteousness, are very untrustworthy. But, on the other hand, the paths of righteousness will not be trodden by those who have known nothing of the green pastures and waters where the wearied can rest.

But life has another aspect than these two—rest and toil; and the guidance into danger and sorrow is as tender as its other forms are. The singular word rendered "shadow of death" should probably simply be "gloomy darkness," such, for instance, as in the shaft of a mine (Job xxviii. 3). But, even if the former rendering is [IPs 230] retained, it is not to be interpreted as meaning actual death. No wise forward look can ignore the possibility of many sorrows and the certainty of some. Hope has ever something of dread in her eyes. The road will not be always bright and smooth, but will sometimes plunge down into grim cañons, where no sunbeams reach. But even that anticipation may be calm. "Thou art with me" is enough. He who guides into the gorge will guide through it. It is not a *cul de sac*, shut in with precipices at the far end; but it opens out on shining table-lands, where there is greener pasture. The rod and staff seem to be two names for one instrument, which was used both to beat off predatory animals and to direct the sheep. The two synonyms and the appended pronoun express by their redundancy the full confidence of the psalmist. He will not fear, though there are grounds

enough for terror, in the dark valley; and though sense prompts him to dread, he conquers fear because he trusts. "Comfort" suggests a struggle, or, as Calvin says, "Quorsum enim consolatio ipsa, nisi quia metus eum solicitat?"

The second image of the Divine Host and His guest is expanded in vv. 5, 6. The ideas are substantially the same as in the first part. Repose and provision, danger and change, again fill the foreground; and again there is forecast of a more remote future. But all is intensified, the need and the supply being painted in stronger colours and the hope being brighter. The devout man is God's guest while he marches through foes, and travels towards perpetual repose in the house of Jehovah.

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Jehovah supplies His servants' wants in the midst of conflict. The table spread in the sight of the enemy is a more signal token of care and power than the green pastures are. Life is not only journey and effort, but conflict; and it is possible not only to have seasons of refreshment interspersed in the weary march, but to find a sudden table spread by the same unseen hand which holds back the foes, who look on with grim eyes, powerless to intercept the sustenance or disturb the guests. This is the condition of God's servant—always conflict, but always a spread table. Joy snatched in the face of danger is specially poignant. The flowers that bloom on the brink of a cataract are bright, and their tremulous motion adds a charm. Special experiences of God's sufficiency are wont to come in seasons of special difficulty, as many a true heart knows. It is no scanty meal that waits God's soldier under such circumstances, but a banquet accompanied with signs of festivity, viz., the head anointed with oil and the cup which is "fulness." God's supplies are wont to surpass the narrow limits of need and even to transcend capacity, having a something over which as yet we are unable to take in, but which is not disproportioned or wasted, since it widens desire and thereby increases receptivity.

In the last verse we seem to pass to pure anticipation. Memory melts into hope, and that brighter than the forecast which closed the first part. There the psalmist's trust simply refused to yield to fear, while keenly conscious of evil which might warrant it; but here he has risen higher, and the alchemy of his happy faith and experience has converted evil into something fairer. "*Only* good and mercy shall follow me." There is no evil for the heart wedded to Jehovah; there are no foes to pursue, but two bright-faced angels walk behind him as his rear-guard. It is much when the retrospect of life can, like Jacob on his deathbed, see "the Angel which redeemed me from all evil"; but it is perhaps more when the else fearful heart can look forward and say that not only will it fear no evil, but that nothing but blessings, the outcome of God's mercy, will ever reach it.

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The closing hope of dwelling in the house of Jehovah to length of days rises above even the former verse. The singer knew himself a guest of God's at the table spread before the foe, but that was, as it were, refreshment on the march, while this is continual abiding in the home. Such an unbroken continuity of abode in the house of Jehovah is a familiar aspiration in other psalms, and is always regarded as possible even while hands are engaged in ordinary duties and cares. The psalms which conceive of the religious life under this image are marked by a peculiar depth and inwardness. They are wholesomely mystical. The hope of this guest of God's is that, by the might of fixed faith and continual communion, he may have his life so hid in God that wherever he goes he may still be in His house, and whatever he does he may still be "inquiring in His temple." The hope is here confined to the earthly present, but the Christian reading of the psalm can scarcely fail to transfer the words to a future. God will bring those whom He has fed and guided in journeying and conflict to an unchanging mansion in a home beyond the stars. Here we eat at a table spread with pilgrims' food, manna from heaven and water from the rock. We eat in haste and with an eye on the foe, but we may hope to sit down at another table in the perfected kingdom. The end of the fray is the beginning of the feast. "We shall go no more out."

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PSALM XXIV.

1 Jehovah's is the earth, and what fills it,
The world and the dwellers therein.
2 For He—upon the seas He founded it,
And upon the floods established it.

3 Who may ascend into the hill of Jehovah,
And who may stand in His holy place?

4 The clean-handed and pure-hearted,
Who lifts not his desire to vanity,
And swears not to falsehood.
5 He shall receive blessing from Jehovah
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.
6 This is the generation of them that seek Him,
That seek Thy face; [this is] Jacob. Selah.

7 Lift up, O gates, your heads,
Yea, lift up yourselves, O ancient doors,
That the King of glory may come in.
8 Who then is the King of glory?
Jehovah, strong and a Champion,
Jehovah, a Champion in battle.

9 Lift up, O gates, your heads,
Yea, lift them up, O ancient doors,
That the King of glory may come in.
10 Who is He, then, the King of glory?
Jehovah of hosts,
He is the King of glory. Selah.

Ewald's widely accepted view that this psalm is a composite of two fragments rests on a somewhat exaggerated estimate of the differences in tone and structure of the parts. These are obvious, but do not demand the hypothesis of compilation; and the original author has as good a right to be credited with the uniting thought as the supposed editor has. The usually alleged occasion of the psalm fits its tone so well and gives such appropriateness to some of its phrases that stronger reasons than are forthcoming are required to negative it. The account in 2 Sam. vi. tells of exuberant enthusiasm and joy, of which some echo sounds in the psalm. It is a processional hymn, celebrating Jehovah's entrance to His house; and that one event, apprehended on its two sides, informs the whole. Hence the two halves have the same interchange of question and answer, and the two questions correspond, the one inquiring the character of the men who dare dwell with God, the other the name of the God who dwells with men. The procession is climbing the steep to the gates of the ancient Jebusite fortress, recently won by David. As it climbs, the song proclaims Jehovah as the universal Lord, basing the truth of His special dwelling in Zion upon that of His world-wide rule. The question, so fitting the lips of the climbers, is asked, possibly in solo, and the answer describing the qualifications of true worshippers, and possibly choral (vv. 3-6), is followed by a long-drawn musical interlude. Now the barred gates are reached. A voice summons them to open. The guards within, or possibly the gates themselves, endowed by the poet with consciousness and speech, ask who thus demands entrance. The answer is a triumphant shout from the procession. But the question is repeated, as if to allow of the still fuller reiteration of Jehovah's name, which shakes the grey walls; and then, with clang of trumpets and clash of cymbals, the ancient portals creak open, and Jehovah "enters into His rest, He and the ark of His strength."

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Jehovah's dwelling on Zion did not mean His desertion of the rest of the world, nor did His choice of Israel imply His abdication of rule over, or withdrawal of blessings from, the nations. The light which glorified the bare hilltop, where the Ark rested, was reflected thence over all the world. "The glory" was there concentrated, not confined. This psalm guards against all superstitious misconceptions, and protests against national narrowness, in exactly the same way as Exod. xix. 5 bases Israel's selection from among all peoples on the fact that "all the earth is Mine."

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"Who may ascend?" was a picturesquely appropriate question for singers toning upwards, and "who may stand?" for those who hoped presently to enter the sacred presence. The Ark which they bore had brought disaster to Dagon's temple, so that the Philistine lords had asked in terror, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?" and at Beth-shemesh its presence had been so fatal that David had abandoned the design of bringing it up and said, "How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" The answer, which lays down the qualifications of true dwellers in Jehovah's house, may be compared with the similar outlines of ideal character in Psalm xv. and Isa. xxxiii. 14. The one requirement is purity. Here that requirement is deduced

from the majesty of Jehovah, as set forth in vv. 1, 2, and from the designation of His dwelling as "holy." This is the postulate of the whole Psalter. In it the approach to Jehovah is purely spiritual, even while the outward access is used as a symbol; and the conditions are of the same nature as the approach. The general truth implied is that the character of the God determines the character of the worshippers. Worship is supreme admiration, culminating in imitation. Its law is always "They that make them are like unto them; so is every [1Ps 226] one that trusteth in them." A god of war will have warriors, and a god of lust sensualists, for his devotees. The worshippers in Jehovah's holy place must be holy. The details of the answer are but the echoes of a conscience enlightened by the perception of His character. In ver. 4 it may be noted that of the four aspects of purity enumerated the two central refer to the inward life (*pure heart; lifts not his desire unto vanity*), and these are embedded, as it were, in the outward life of deeds and words. Purity of act is expressed by "clean hands"—neither red with blood, nor foul with grubbing in dunghills for gold and other so-called good. Purity of speech is condensed into the one virtue of truthfulness (*swears not to a falsehood*). But the outward will only be right if the inward disposition is pure, and that inward purity will only be realised when desires are carefully curbed and directed. As is the desire, so is the man. Therefore the prime requisite for a pure heart is the withdrawal of affection, esteem, and longing from the solid-seeming illusions of sense. "Vanity" has, indeed, the special meaning of *idols*, but the notion of earthly good apart from God is more relevant here.

In ver. 5 the possessor of such purity is represented as receiving "a blessing, even righteousness," from God, which is by many taken to mean beneficence on the part of God, "inasmuch as, according to the Hebrew religious view of the world, all good is regarded as reward from God's retributive righteousness, and consequently as that of man's own righteousness or right conduct" (Hupfeld). The expression is thus equivalent to "salvation" in the next clause. But, while the word has this meaning in some places, it does not [1Ps 227] seem necessary to adopt it here, where the ordinary meaning is quite appropriate. Such a man as is described in ver. 4 will have God's blessing on his efforts after purity, and a Divine gift will furnish him with that which he strives after. The hope is not lit by the full sunshine of New Testament truth, but it approximates thereto. It dimly anticipates "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness"; and it feels after the great thought that the highest righteousness is not to be won, but to be accepted, even while it only asserts that man's effort after must precede his possession of righteousness. We can give the words a deeper meaning, and see in them the dawn of the later teaching that righteousness must be "received" from "the God of salvation."

Ver. 6 seems to carry the adumbration of truth not yet disclosed a step further. A great planet is trembling into visibility, and is divined before it is seen. The emphasis in ver. 6 is on "seek," and the implication is that the men who seek find. If we seek God's face, we shall receive purity. There the psalm touches the foundation. The Divine heart so earnestly desires to give righteousness that to seek is to find. In that region a wish brings an answer, and no outstretched hand remains empty. Things of less worth have to be toiled and fought for; but the most precious of all is a gift, to be had for the asking. That thought did not stand clearly before the Old Testament worshippers, but struggles towards expression in many a psalm, as it could not but do whenever a devout heart pondered the problems of conduct. We have abundant warnings against the anachronism of thrusting New Testament doctrine into the Psalms, but it is no less one-sided to ignore anticipations which could not but spring up where there was earnest wrestling with the thoughts of sin and of [1Ps 228] the need for purity.

Are we to adopt the supplement, "O God of," before the abrupt "Jacob"? The clause is harsh in any construction. The preceding "thy" seems to require the addition, as God is not directly addressed elsewhere in the psalm. On the other hand, the declaration that such seekers are the true people of God is a worthy close of the whole description, and the reference to the "face" of God verbally recalls Peniel and that wonderful incident when Jacob became Israel. The seeker after God will have that scene repeated, and be able to say, "I have seen God." The abrupt introduction of "Jacob" is made more emphatic by the musical interlude which closes the first part.

There is a pause, while the procession ascends the hill of the Lord, revolving the stringent qualifications for entrance. It stands before the barred gates, while possibly part of the choir is within. The advancing singers summon the doors to open and receive the incoming Jehovah. Their portals are too low for Him to enter, and therefore they are called upon to lift their lintels. They are grey with age, and round them cluster long memories; therefore they are addressed as "gates of ancient time." The question from within expresses ignorance and hesitation, and dramatically represents the ancient gates as sharing the relation of the former inhabitants to the God of Israel, whose name they did not know, and whose authority they did not own. It heightens the force of the triumphant shout proclaiming His mighty name. He is Jehovah, the self-existent God, who has made a covenant with Israel, and fights for His people, as these grey walls bear witness. His

warrior might had wrested them from their former possessors, and the gates must open for their Conqueror. [Pg 239] The repeated question is pertinacious and animated: "Who then is He, the King of glory?" as if recognition and surrender were reluctant. The answer is sharp and authoritative, being at once briefer and fuller. It peals forth the great name "Jehovah of hosts." There may be reference in the name to God's command of the armies of Israel, thereby expressing the religious character of their wars; but the "hosts" include the angels, "His ministers who do His pleasure," and the stars, of which He brings forth the hosts by number. In fact, the conception underlying the name is that of the universe as an ordered whole, a disciplined army, a cosmos obedient to His voice. It is the same conception which the centurion had learned from his legion, where the utterance of one will moved all the stern, shining ranks. That mighty name, like a charge of explosives, bursts the gates of brass asunder, and the procession sweeps through them amid yet another burst of triumphant music.

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PSALM XXV.

1 (א) Unto Thee, Jehovah, I uplift my soul;
[On Thee I wait all the day, O my God!].
2 (ב) On Thee I hang: let me not be put to shame;
Let not my enemies exult over me.
3 (ג) Yea, all who wait on Thee shall not be put to shame;
Put to shame shall they be who faithlessly forsake Thee without cause.
4 (ד) Thy ways, Jehovah, make me to know,
Thy paths teach Thou me.
5 (ה) Make me walk in Thy troth, and teach me,
For Thou art the God of my salvation.
6 (ו) Remember Thy compassions, Jehovah, and Thy loving-kindnesses,
For from of old are they.
7 (ח) Sins of my youth and my transgression remember not;
According to Thy loving-kindness remember me,
For Thy goodness' sake, Jehovah.
8 (ט) Good and upright is Jehovah;
Therefore He instructs sinners in the way.
9 (י) He will cause the meek to walk in that which is right,
And will teach the meek His way.

10 (כ) All the paths of Jehovah are loving-kindness and troth
To keepers of His covenant and His testimonies.
11 (ל) For Thy name's sake, Jehovah,
Pardon my iniquity, for great is it.
12 (מ) Who, then, is the man who fears Jehovah?
He will instruct him in the way he should choose.
13 (נ) Himself shall dwell in prosperity,
And his seed shall possess the land.
14 (ס) The secret of Jehovah is [told] to them that fear Him,
And His covenant He makes them know.
15 (ע) My eyes are continually toward Jehovah,
For He, He shall bring out my feet from the net. [Pg 241]
16 (פ) Turn Thee unto me, and be gracious to me,
For solitary and afflicted am I.
17 (צ) The straits of my heart do Thou enlarge (?),
And from my distresses bring me out.
18 (ר) Look on my affliction and my travail,
And lift away all my sins.
19 (ר) Look on my enemies, for they are many,

And they hate me with cruel hate.
20 (ש) Keep my soul and deliver me;
Let me not be put to shame, for I have taken refuge in Thee.
21 (ת) Let integrity and uprightness guard me,
For I wait on Thee.
22 Redeem Israel, O God,
From all his straits.

The recurrence of the phrase "lift up the soul" may have determined the place of this psalm next to Psalm xxiv. It is acrostic, but with irregularities. As the text now stands, the second, not the first, word in ver. 2 begins with Beth; Vav is omitted or represented in the "and teach me" of the He verse (ver. 5); Qoph is also omitted, and its place taken by a supernumerary Resh, which letter has thus two verses (18, 19); and ver. 22 begins with Pe, and is outside the scheme of the psalm, both as regards alphabetic structure and subject. The same peculiarities of deficient Vav and superfluous Pe verses reappear in another acrostic psalm (xxxiv.), in which the initial word of the last verse is, as here, "redeem." Possibly the two psalms are connected.

The fetters of the acrostic structure forbid freedom and progress of thought, and almost compel repetition. It is fitted for meditative reiteration of favourite emotions or familiar axioms, and results in a loosely twined wreath rather than in a column with base, shaft, and capital. A slight trace of consecution of parts may be noticed in the division of the verses (excluding ver. 22) into three sevens, of which the first is prayer, the second meditation on the Divine character and the blessings secured by covenant to them who fear Him, and the third is bent round, wreath-like, to meet the first, and is again prayer. Such alternation of petition and contemplation is like the heart's beat of the religious life, now expanding in desire, now closing in possession. The psalm has no marks of occasion or period. It deals with the permanent elements in a devout man's relation to God. [Ps 24:2]

The first prayer-section embraces the three standing needs: protection, guidance, and forgiveness. With these are intertwined their pleas according to the logic of faith—the suppliant's uplifted desires and God's eternal tenderness and manifested mercy. The order of mention of the needs proceeds from without inwards, for protection from enemies is superficial as compared with illumination as to duty, and deeper than even that, as well as prior in order of time (and therefore last in order of enumeration), is pardon. Similarly the pleas go deeper as they succeed each other; for the psalmist's trust and waiting is superficial as compared with the plea breathed in the name of "the God of my salvation"; and that general designation leads to the gaze upon the ancient and changeless mercies, which constitute the measure and pattern of God's working (*according to*, ver. 7), and upon the self-originated motive, which is the deepest and strongest of all arguments with Him (*for Thy goodness' sake*, ver. 7).

A qualification of the guest in God's house was in Psalm xxiv. the negative one that he did not lift up his soul —*i.e.*, set his desires—on the emptinesses of time and sense. Here the psalmist begins with the plea that he has set his on Jehovah, and, as the position of "Unto Thee, Jehovah," at the beginning shows, on Him alone. [Ps 24:3] The very nature of such aspiration after God demands that it shall be exclusive. "All in all or not at all" is the requirement of true devotion, and such completeness is not attained without continual withdrawal of desire from created good. The tendrils of the heart must be untwined from other props before they can be wreathed round their true stay. The irregularity in ver. 2, where the second, not the first, word of the verse begins with Beth, may be attenuated by treating the Divine name as outside the acrostic order. An acute conjecture, however, that the last clause of ver. 5 really belongs to ver. 1 and should include "my God" now in ver. 2, has much in its favour. Its transposition restores to both verses the two-claused structure which runs through the psalm, gets rid of the acrostical anomaly, and emphasises the subsequent reference to those who wait on Jehovah in ver. 3.

In that case ver. 2 begins with the requisite letter. It passes from plea to petition: "Let me not be shamed." Trust that was not vindicated by deliverance would cover the face with confusion. "Hopes that breed not shame" are the treasure of him whose hope is in Jehovah. Foes unnamed threaten; but the stress of the petitions in the first section of the psalm is less on enemies than on sins. One cry for protection from the former is all that the psalmist utters, and then his prayer swiftly turns to deeper needs. In the last section the petitions are more exclusively for deliverance from enemies. Needful as such escape is, it is less needful than the knowledge of God's ways, and the man in extremest peril orders his desires rightly, if he asks holiness first and safety second. The cry in ver. 2 rests upon the confidence nobly expressed in ver. 3, in which the verbs are not optatives, but futures, declaring a truth certain to be realised in the psalmist's experience, [Ps 24:4]

because it is true for all who, like him, wait on Jehovah. True prayer is the individual's sheltering himself under the broad folds of the mantle that covers all who pray. The double confidence as to the waiters on Jehovah and the "treacherous without cause" is the summary of human experience as read by faith. Sense has much to adduce in contradiction, but the dictum is nevertheless true, only its truth does not always appear in the small arc of the circle which lies between cradle and grave.

The prayer for deliverance glides into that for guidance, since the latter is the deeper need, and the former will scarcely be answered unless the suppliant's will docilely offers the latter. The soul lifted to Jehovah will long to know His will and submit itself to His manifold teachings. "Thy ways" and "Thy paths" necessarily mean here the ways in which Jehovah desires that the psalmist should go. "In Thy truth" is ambiguous, both as to the preposition and the noun. The clause may either present God's truth (*i.e.*, faithfulness) as His motive for answering the prayer, or His truth (*i.e.*, the objective revelation) as the path for men. Predominant usage inclines to the former signification of the noun, but the possibility still remains of regarding God's faithfulness as the path in which the psalmist desires to be led, *i.e.* to experience it. The cry for forgiveness strikes a deeper note of pathos, and, as asking a more wondrous blessing, grasps still more firmly the thought of what Jehovah is and always has been. The appeal is made to "*Thy* compassions and loving-kindnesses," as [Ps 2145] belonging to His nature, and to their past exercise as having been "from of old." Emboldened thus, the psalmist can look back on his own past, both on his outbursts of youthful passion and levity, which he calls "failures," as missing the mark, and on the darker evils of later manhood, which he calls "rebellions," and can trust that Jehovah will think upon him *according to His mercy*, and *for the sake of His goodness* or love. The vivid realisation of that Eternal Mercy as the very mainspring of God's actions, and as setting forth, in many an ancient deed, the eternal pattern of His dealings, enables a man to bear the thought of his own sins.

The contemplation of the Divine character prepares the way for the transition to the second group of seven verses, which are mainly meditation on that character and on God's dealings and the blessedness of those who fear Him (vv. 8-14). The thought of God beautifully draws the singer from himself. How deeply and lovingly he had pondered on the name of the Lord before he attained to the grand truth that His goodness and very uprightness pledged Him to show sinners where they should walk! Since there is at the heart of things an infinitely pure and equally loving Being, nothing is more impossible than that He should wrap Himself in thick darkness and leave men to grope after duty. Revelation of the path of life in some fashion is the only conduct consistent with His character. All presumptions are in favour of such Divine teaching; and the fact of sin makes it only the more certain. That fact may separate men from God, but not God from men, and if they transgress, the more need, both in their characters and in God's, is there that He should speak. But while their being sinners does not prevent His utterance, their disposition determines their actual reception of His [Ps 2146] teaching, and "the meek" or lowly of heart are His true scholars. His instruction is not wasted on them, and, being welcomed, is increased. A fuller communication of His will rewards the humble acceptance of it. Sinners are led *in* the way; the meek are taught His way. Here the conception of God's way is in transition from its meaning in ver. 4 to that in ver. 10, where it distinctly must mean His manner of dealing with men. They who accept His teaching, and order their paths as He would have them do, will learn that the impulse and meaning of all which He does to them are "mercy and truth," the two great attributes to which the former petitions appealed, and which the humble of heart, who observe the conditions of God's covenant which is witness of His own character and of their duty, will see gleaming with lambent light even in calamities.

The participators, then, in this blessed knowledge have a threefold character: sinners; humble; keepers of the covenant and testimonies. The thought of these requirements drives the psalmist back on himself, as it will do all devout souls, and forces from him a short ejaculation of prayer, which breaks with much pathos and beauty the calm flow of contemplation. The pleas for forgiveness of the "iniquity" which makes him feel unworthy of Jehovah's guidance are remarkable. "For Thy name's sake" appeals to the revealed character of God, as concerned in the suppliant's pardon, inasmuch as it will be honoured thereby, and God will be true to Himself in forgiving. "For it is great" speaks the boldness of helplessness. The magnitude of sin demands a Divine intervention. None else than God can deal with it. Faith makes the very greatness of sin and extremity [Ps 2147] of need a reason for God's act of pardon.

Passing from self, the singer again recurs to his theme, reiterating in vivid language and with some amplification the former thoughts. In vv. 8-10 the character of Jehovah was the main subject, and the men whom He blessed were in the background. In vv. 12-14 they stand forward. Their designation now is the wide one of "those who fear Jehovah," and the blessings they receive are, first, that of being taught the way, which has been prominent thus far, but here has a new phase, as being "the way that he should choose"; *i.e.*, God's teaching illuminates the path, and tells a man what he ought to do, while his freedom of choice is

uninfringed. Next, outward blessings of settled prosperity shall be his, and his children shall have the promises to Israel fulfilled in their possession of the land. These outward blessings belong to the Old Testament epoch, and can only partially be applied to the present stage of Providence. But the final element of the good man's blessedness (ver. 14) is eternally true. Whether we translate the first word "secret" or "friendship," the sense is substantially the same. Obedience and the true fear of Jehovah directly tend to discernment of His purposes, and will besides be rewarded by whispers from heaven. God would not hide from Abraham what He would do, and still His friend will know His mind better than the disobedient. The last clause of ver. 14 is capable of various renderings. "His covenant" may be in the accusative, and the verb a periphrastic future, as the A.V. takes it, or the former word may be nominative, and the clause be rendered, "And His covenant [is] to make them to know." But the absolute use of the verb without a specification of the [Ps 248] object taught is somewhat harsh, and probably the former rendering is to be preferred. The deeper teaching of the covenant which follows on the fear of the Lord includes both its obligations and blessings, and the knowledge is not mere intellectual perception, but vital experience. In this region life is knowledge, and knowledge life. Whoso "keeps His covenant" (ver. 10) will ever grow in appropriation of its blessings and apprehension of its obligations by his submissive will.

The third heptad of verses returns to simple petition, and that, with one exception (ver. 18 *b*), for deliverance from enemies. This recurrence, in increased intensity, of the consciousness of hostility is not usual, for the psalms which begin with it generally pray themselves out of it. "The peace which passeth understanding," which is the best answer to prayer, has not fully settled on the heaving sea. A heavy ground swell runs in these last short petitions, which all mean substantially the same thing. But there is a beginning of calm; and the renewed petitions are a pattern of that continual knocking of which such great things are said and recorded in Scripture. The section begins with a declaration of patient expectance: "Mine eyes are ever towards Jehovah," with wistful fixedness which does not doubt though it has long to look. Nets are wrapped round his feet, inextricably but for one hand. We can bear to feel our limbs entangled and fettered, if our eyes are free to gaze, and fixed in gazing, upwards. The desired deliverance is thrice presented (ver. 16, "turn unto"; ver. 18, "look upon"; ver. 19, "consider," lit. look upon) as the result of Jehovah's face being directed towards the psalmist.

When Jehovah turns to a man, the light streaming from His face makes darkness day. The pains on which He [Ps 249] "looks" are soothed; the enemies whom He beholds shrivel beneath His eye. The psalmist believes that God's presence, in the deeper sense of that phrase, as manifested partly through delivering acts and partly through inward consciousness, is his one need, in which all deliverances and gladnesses are enwrapped. He plaintively pleads, "For I am alone and afflicted." The soul that has awakened to the sense of the awful solitude of personal being, and stretched out yearning desires to the only God, and felt that with Him it would know no pain in loneliness, will not cry in vain. In ver. 17 a slight alteration in the text, the transference of the final Vav of one word to the beginning of the next, gets rid of the incongruous phrase "are enlarged" as applied to troubles (lit. straits), and gives a prayer which is in keeping with the familiar use of the verb in reference to afflictions: "The troubles of my heart do Thou enlarge [cf. iv. 2; xviii. 36], and from my distresses," etc. Ver. 18 should begin with Qoph, but has Resh, which is repeated in the following verse, to which it rightly belongs. It is at least noteworthy that the anomaly makes the petition for Jehovah's "look" more emphatic, and brings into prominence the twofold direction of it. The "look" on the psalmist's affliction and pain will be tender and sympathetic, as a mother eagle's on her sick eaglet; that on his foes will be stern and destructive, many though they be. In ver. 11 the prayer for pardon was sustained by the plea that the sin was "great"; in ver. 19 that for deliverance from foes rests on the fact that "they are many," for which the verb cognate with the adjective of ver. 11 is used. Thus both dangers without and evils within are regarded as [Ps 250] crying out, by their multitude, for God's intervention. The wreath is twined so that its end is brought round to its beginning. "Let me not be ashamed, for I trust in Thee," is the second petition of the first part repeated; and "I wait on Thee," which is the last word of the psalm, omitting the superfluous verse, echoes the clause which it is proposed to transfer to ver. 1. Thus the two final verses correspond to the two initial, the last but one to the first but one, and the last to the first. The final prayer is that "integrity (probably complete devotion of heart to God) and uprightness" (in relation to men) may preserve him, as guardian angels; but this does not assert the possession of these, but is a petition for the gift of them quite as much as for their preserving action. The implication of that petition is that no harm can imperil or destroy him whom these characteristics guard. That is true in the whole sweep of human life, however often contradicted in the judgment of sense.

Like Psalm xxxiv., this concludes with a supplementary verse beginning with Pe, a letter already represented in the acrostic scheme. This may be a later addition, for liturgical purposes.

PSALM XXVI.

1 Judge me, Jehovah, for I—in my integrity do I walk,
And in Jehovah do I trust unwavering.
2 Test me, Jehovah, and try me,
My reins and my heart.
3 For Thy loving-kindness is before my eyes,
And I walk in Thy troth.

4 I sit not with men of vanity,
And with those who mask themselves do I not go.
5 I hate the congregation of evil-doers,
And with the wicked I do not sit.

6 I will wash my hands in innocence,
That I may compass Thine altar, Jehovah,
7 To cause the voice of praise to be heard,
And to tell forth all Thy wonders.

8 Jehovah, I love the shelter of Thy house,
And the place of the dwelling of Thy glory.
9 Take not away with sinners my soul,
Nor with men of blood my life,
10 In whose hands is outrage,
And their right hand is full of bribery.

11 But I—in my integrity will I walk;
Redeem me, and be gracious to me.
12 My foot stands on level ground;
In the congregations will I bless Jehovah.

The image of "the way" which is characteristic of Psalm xxv. reappears in a modified form in this psalm, which speaks of "walking in integrity" and truth and of "feet standing in an even place." Other resemblances to the preceding psalm are the use of "redeem," "be merciful"; the references to God's loving-kindness and [Ps 252] truth, in which the psalmist walks, and to his own integrity. These similarities may or may not indicate common authorship, but probably guided the compilers in placing the psalm here. It has not clear marks of date or of the writer's circumstances. Its two ground tones are profession of integrity and of revulsion from the society of the wicked and prayer for vindication of innocence by the fact of deliverance. The verses are usually grouped in couples, but with some irregularity.

The two key-notes are both struck in the first group of three verses, in which vv. 2 and 3 are substantially an expansion of ver. 1. The prayer, "Judge me," asks for a Divine act of deliverance based upon a Divine recognition of the psalmist's sincerity and unwavering trust. Both the prayer and its ground are startling. It grates upon ears accustomed to the tone of the New Testament that a suppliant should allege his single-eyed simplicity and steadfast faith as pleas with God, and the strange tone sounds on through the whole psalm. The threefold prayer in ver. 2 courts Divine scrutiny, as conscious of innocence, and bares the inmost recesses of affection and impulse for testing, proving by circumstances, and smelting by any fire. The psalmist is ready for the ordeal, because he has kept God's "loving-kindness" steadily in sight through all the glamour of earthly brightnesses, and his outward life has been all, as it were, transacted in the sphere of God's truthfulness; *i.e.*, the inward contemplation of His mercy and faithfulness has been the active principle of his life. Such self-consciousness is strange enough to us, but, strange as it is, it cannot fairly be stigmatised as Pharisaic self-righteousness. The psalmist knows that all goodness comes from God, and he clings to God in [Ps 253] childlike trust. The humblest Christian heart might venture in similar language to declare its recoil from evil-doers and its deepest spring of action as being trust. Such professions are not inconsistent with consciousness of sin, which is, in fact, often associated with them in other psalms (xxv. 20, 21, and vii. 11, 18). They do

indicate a lower stage of religious development, a less keen sense of sinfulness and of sins, a less clear recognition of the worthlessness before God of all man's goodness, than belong to Christian feeling. The same language when spoken at one stage of revelation may be childlike and lowly, and be swelling arrogance and self-righteous self-ignorance, if spoken at another.

Such high and sweet communion cannot but breed profound distaste for the society of evil-doers. The eyes which have God's loving-kindness ever before them are endowed with penetrative clearness of vision into the true hollowness of most of the objects pursued by men, and with a terrible sagacity which detects hypocrisy and shams. Association with such men is necessary, else we must needs go out of the world, and leaven must be in contact with dough in order to do its transforming work; but it is impossible for a man whose heart is truly in touch with God not to feel ill at ease when brought into contact with those who have no share in his deepest convictions and emotions. "Men of vanity" is a general designation for the ungodly, pronouncing on every such life the sentence that it is devoted to empty unrealities and partakes of the nature of that to which it is given up. One who has Jehovah's loving-kindness before his eyes cannot "sit" with such men in friendly association, as if sharing their ways of thinking, nor "go" with them in their course of conduct. "Those who [Ps 254] mask themselves" are another class, namely hypocrites who conceal their pursuit of vanity under the show of religion. The psalmist's revulsion is intensified in ver. 5 into "hate," because the evil-doers and sinners spoken of there are of a deeper tint of blackness, and are banded together in a "congregation," the opposite and parody of the assemblies of the righteous, whom he feels to be his kindred. No doubt separateness from evil-doers is but part of a godly man's duty, and has often been exaggerated into selfish withdrawal from a world which needs good men's presence all the more the worse it is; but it *is* a part of his duty, and "Come out from among them and be separate" is not yet an abrogated command. No man will ever mingle with "men of vanity," so as to draw them from the shadows of earth to the substance in God, unless his loving association with them rests on profound revulsion from their principles of action. None comes so near to sinful men as the sinless Christ; and if He had not been ever "separate from sinners," He would never have been near enough to redeem them. We may safely imitate His free companionship, which earned Him His glorious name of their Friend, if we imitate His remoteness from their evil.

From the uncongenial companionship of the wicked the psalmist's yearnings instinctively turn to his heart's home, the sanctuary. The more a man feels out of sympathy with a godless world, the more longingly he presses into the depths of communion with God; and, conversely, the more he feels at home in still communion, the more does the tumult of sense-bound crowds grate on his soul. The psalmist, then, in the next group of verses (6, 7), opposes access to the house of God and the solemn joy of thankful praises [Ps 255] sounding there to the loathed consorting with evil. He will not sit with men of vanity because he will enter the sanctuary. Outward participation in its worship may be included in his vows and wishes, but the tone of the verses rather points to a symbolical use of the externalities of ritual. Cleansing the hands alludes to priestly lustration; compassing the altar is not known to have been a Jewish practice, and probably is to be taken as simply a picturesque way of describing himself as one of the joyous circle of worshippers; the sacrifice is praise. The psalmist rises to the height of the true Israelite's priestly vocation, and ritual has become transparent to him. None the less may he have clung to the outwardnesses of ceremonial worship, because he apprehended them in their highest significance and had learned that the qualification of the worshipper was purity, and the best offering praise. Well for those who, like him, are driven to the sanctuary by the revulsion from vanities and from those who pursue them!

Ver. 8 is closely connected with the two preceding, but is perhaps best united with the following verse, as being the ground of the prayer there. Hate of the congregation of evil-doers has love to God's house for its complement or foundation. The measure of attachment is that of detachment. The designations of the sanctuary in ver. 8 show the aspects in which it drew the psalmist's love. It was "the shelter of Thy house," where he could hide himself from the strife of tongues and escape the pain of herding with evil-doers; it was "the place of the dwelling of Thy glory," the abode of that symbol of Divine presence which flamed between the cherubim and lit the darkness of the innermost shrine. Because the singer felt his true home to be there, he [Ps 256] prayed that his soul might not be gathered with sinners, *i.e.* that he might not be involved in their fate. He has had no fellowship with them in their evil, and therefore he asks that he may be separate from them in their punishment. To "gather the soul" is equivalent to taking away the life. God's judgments sort out characters and bring like to like, as the tares are bound in bundles or as, with so different a purpose, Christ made the multitudes sit down by companies on the green sward. General judgments are not indiscriminate. The prayer of the psalmist may not have looked beyond exemption from calamities or from death, but the essence of the faith which it expresses is eternally true: that distinction of attitude towards God and goodness must secure distinction of lot, even though external circumstances are identical. The same things are not the same to men

so profoundly different. The picture of the evil-doers from whom the psalmist recoils is darker in these last verses than before. It is evidently a portrait and points to a state of society in which violence, outrage, and corruption were rampant. The psalmist washed his hands in innocency, but these men had violence and bribes in theirs. They were therefore persons in authority, prostituting justice. The description fits too many periods too well to give a clue to the date of the psalm.

Once more the consciousness of difference and the resolve not to be like such men break forth in the closing couple of verses. The psalm began with the profession that he had walked in his integrity; it ends with the vow that he will. It had begun with the prayer "Judge me"; it ends with the expansion of it into "Redeem me"—*i.e.*, from existing dangers, from evil-doers, or from their fate—and "Be gracious unto me," the positive side of the same petition. He who purposes to walk uprightly has the right to expect God's delivering and giving hand to be extended to him. The resolve to walk uprightly unaccompanied with the prayer for that hand to hold up is as rash as the prayer without the resolve is vain. But if these two go together, quiet confidence will steal into the heart; and though there be no change in circumstances, the mood of mind will be so soothed and lightened that the suppliant will feel that he has suddenly emerged from the steep gorge where he had been struggling and shut up, and stands on the level ground of the "shining table-lands, whereof our God Himself is sun and moon." Such peaceful foretaste of coming security is the forerunner which visits the faithful heart. Gladdened by it, the psalmist is sure that his desire of compassing God's altar with praise will be fulfilled, and that, instead of compulsory association with the "congregation of evil-doers," he will bless Jehovah "in the congregations" where His name is loved and find himself among those who, like himself, delight in His praise.

PSALM XXVII.

1 Jehovah is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?
Jehovah is the fortress of my life; for whom should I tremble?
2 When evil-doers drew near against me, to devour my flesh,
My oppressors and my foes, they stumbled and fell.
3 Though a host encamp against me,
My heart fears not;
Though war rises against me,
Even then am I confident.

4 One thing have I asked from Jehovah; that will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of Jehovah all the days of my life,
To gaze upon the pleasantness of Jehovah and to meditate in His palace.
5 For He will hide me in a bower in the day of evil;
He will secrete me in the secret of His tent;
On a rock will He lift me.
6 And now shall my head be lifted above my foes around me,
And I will sacrifice in His tent sacrifices of joy;
I will sing and I will harp to Jehovah.

7 Hear, Jehovah, when I cry with my voice;
And be gracious to me, and answer me.
8 To Thee hath my heart said, (when Thou saidst) "Seek ye my face";
That face of Thine, Jehovah, will I seek.
9 Hide not Thy face from me:
Repulse not Thy servant in anger;
My help Thou hast been:
Cast me not off, and forsake me not, O God of my salvation
10 For my father and my mother have forsaken me;
But Jehovah will take me up.

11 Show me, Jehovah, Thy way,
And lead me in a level path, because of those who lie in wait for me. [Pg 259]
12 Give me not up to the desire of my oppressors,
For false witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence.
13 If I had not believed that I should see the goodness of Jehovah
In the land of the living——!
14 Wait on Jehovah;
Be strong, and let thine heart take courage, and wait on Jehovah.

The hypothesis that two originally distinct psalms or fragments are here blended has much in its favour. The rhythm and style of the latter half (ver. 7 to end) are strikingly unlike those of the former part, and the contrast of feeling is equally marked, and is in the opposite direction from that which is usual, since it drops from exultant faith to at least plaintive, if not anxious, petition. But while the phenomena are plain and remarkable, they do not seem to demand the separation suggested. Form and rhythm are elastic in the poet's hands, and change in correspondence with his change of mood. The flowing melody of the earlier part is the natural expression of its sunny confidence, and the harsher strains of the later verses fit no less well their contents. Why may not the key change to a minor, and yet the voice be the same? The fall from jubilant to suppliant faith is not unexampled in other psalms (cf. ix. and xxv.), nor in itself unnatural. Dangers, which for a moment cease to press, do recur, however real the victory over fear has been, and in this recrudescence of the consciousness of peril, which yet does not loosen, but tighten, the grasp of faith, this ancient singer speaks the universal experience; and his song becomes more precious and more fitted for all lips than if it had been unmingled triumph. One can better understand the original author passing in swift transition from the one to the other tone, than a later editor deliberately appending to a pure burst of joyous faith and aspiration a [Pg 260] tag which flattened it. The more unlike the two halves are, the less probable is it that their union is owing to any but the author of both. The fire of the original inspiration could fuse them into homogeneousness; it is scarcely possible that a mechanical patcher should have done so. If, then, we take the psalm as a whole, it gives a picture of the transitions of a trustful soul surrounded by dangers, in which all such souls may recognise their own likeness.

The first half (vv. 1-6) is the exultant song of soaring faith. But even in it there sounds an undertone. The very refusal to be afraid glances sideways at outstanding causes for fear. The very names of Jehovah as "Light, Salvation," "the Stronghold of my life," imply darkness, danger, and besetting foes. The resolve to keep alight the fire of courage and confidence in the face of encamping foes and rising wars is much too energetic to be mere hypothetical courage. The hopes of safety in Jehovah's tent, of a firm standing on a rock, and of the head being lifted above surrounding foes are not the hopes of a man at ease, but of one threatened on all sides, and triumphant only because he clasps Jehovah's hand. The first words of the psalm carry it all in germ. By a noble dead-lift of confidence, the singer turns from foes and fears to stay himself on Jehovah, his light and salvation, and then, in the strength of that assurance, bids back his rising fears to their dens. "I will trust, and not be afraid," confesses the presence of fear, and, like our psalm, unveils the only reasonable counteraction of it in the contemplation of what God is. There is much to fear unless He is our light, and they who will not begin with the psalmist's confidence have no right to repeat his courage.

To a devout man the past is eloquent with reasons for confidence, and in ver. 2 the psalm points to a past fact. [Pg 261] The stumbling and falling of former foes, who came open-mouthed at him, is not a hypothetical case, but a bit of autobiography, which lives to nourish present confidence. It is worth notice that the language employed has remarkable correspondence with that used in the story of David's fight with Goliath. There the same word as here is twice employed to describe the Philistine's advance (1 Sam. xvii. 41, 48). Goliath's vaunt, "I will give thy flesh to the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the field," may have supplied the mould for the expression here, and the fall of the giant, with his face to the earth and the smooth stone in his brain, is narrated with the same word as occurs in the psalm. It might well be that when David was a fugitive before Saul the remembrance of his victory over Goliath should have cheered him, just as that of his earlier prowess against bear and lion heartened him to face the Philistine bully; and such recollections would be all the more natural since jealousy of the fame that came to him from that feat had set the first light to Saul's hatred. Ver. 3 is not to be left swinging *in vacuo*, a cheap vow of courage in hypothetical danger. The supposed case is actual fact, and the expressions of trust are not only assertions for the future, but statements of the present temper of the psalmist: "I *do* not fear; I *am* confident."

The confidence of ver. 3 is rested not only on Jehovah's past acts, but on the psalmist's past and present set of soul towards Him. That seems to be the connecting link between vv. 1-3 and 4-6. Such desire, the psalmist is sure, cannot but be answered, and in the answer all safety is included. The purest longing after God, as the [Ps 262]
deepest, most fixed yearning of a heart, was never more nobly expressed. Clearly the terms forbid the limitation of meaning to mere external presence in a material sanctuary. "All the days of my life" points to a continuance inward and capable of accomplishment, wherever the body may be. The exclusiveness and continuity of the longing, as well as the gaze on God which is its true object, are incapable of the lower meaning, while, no doubt, the externals of worship supply the mould into which these longings are poured. But what the psalmist wants is what the devout soul in all ages and stages has wanted: the abiding consciousness of the Divine presence; and the prime good which makes that presence so infinitely and exclusively desirable to him is the good which draws all such souls in yearning, namely the vision of God. The lifelong persistence and exclusiveness of the desire are such as all must cherish if they are to receive its fruition. Blessed are they who are delivered from the misery of multiplied and transient aims which break life into fragments by steadfastly and continually following one great desire, which binds all the days each to each, and in its single simplicity encloses and hallows and unifies the else distracting manifoldness! That life is filled with light, however it may be ringed round with darkness, which has the perpetual vision of God, who is its light. Very beautifully does the psalm describe the occupation of God's guest as "gazing upon the pleasantness of Jehovah." In that expression the construction of the verb with a preposition implies a steadfast and penetrating contemplation, and the word rendered "beauty" or "pleasantness" may mean "friendliness," but is perhaps better taken in a more general meaning, as equivalent to the whole gathered [Ps 263]
delightsomeness of the Divine character, the supremely fair and sweet. "To inquire" may be rendered "to consider"; but the rendering "meditate [or contemplate] in" is better, as the palace would scarcely be a worthy object of consideration; and it is natural that the gaze on the goodness of Jehovah should be followed by loving meditation on what that earnest look had seen. The two acts complete the joyful employment of a soul communing with God: first perceiving and then reflecting upon His uncreated beauty of goodness.

Such intimacy of communion brings security from external dangers. The guest has a claim for protection. And that is a subsidiary reason for the psalmist's desire as well as a ground of his confidence. Therefore the assurance of ver. 5 follows the longing of ver. 4. "A pavilion," as the Hebrew text reads, has been needlessly corrected in the margin into "His pavilion" (A.V.). "It is not God's dwelling, as the following 'tent' is, but a booth ... as an image of protection from heat and inclemency of weather (Isa. iv. 6)" (Hupfeld). God's dwelling is a "tent," where He will shelter His guests. The privilege of asylum is theirs. Then, with a swift change of figure, the psalmist expresses the same idea of security by elevation on a rock, possibly conceiving the tent as pitched there. The reality of all is that communion with God secures from perils and enemies, an eternal truth, if the true meaning of security is grasped. Borne up by such thoughts, the singer feels himself lifted clear above the reach of surrounding foes, and, with the triumphant "now" of ver. 6, stretches out his hand to bring future deliverance into the midst of present distress. Faith can blend the seasons, and transport June and its roses into December's snows. Deliverance suggests thankfulness to a true heart, and its [Ps 264]
anticipation calls out prophetic "songs in the night."

But the very brightness of the prospect recalls the stern reality of present need, and the firmest faith cannot keep on the wing continually. In the first part of the psalm it sings and soars; in the second the note is less jubilant, and it sings and sinks; but in both it is faith. Prayer for deliverance is as really the voice of faith as triumph in the assurance of deliverance is, and he who sees his foes and yet "believes to see the goodness of Jehovah" is not far below him who gazes only on the beauty of the Lord. There is a parallelism between the two halves of the psalm worth noting. In the former part the psalmist's confidence reposed on the two facts of past deliverance and of his past and continuous "seeking after" the one good; in the second his prayers repose on the same two grounds, which occur in inverted order. "That will I seek after" (ver. 4), is echoed by "Thy face will I seek" (ver. 8). To seek the face is the same substantially as to desire to "gaze on the pleasantness of Jehovah." The past experience of the fall of foes (ver. 2) is repeated in "Thou hast been my help." On these two pleas the prayer in which faith speaks itself founds. The former is urged in vv. 8 and 9 with some harshness of construction, which is smoothed over, rightly as regards meaning, in the A.V. and R.V. But the very brokenness of the sentence adds to the earnestness of the prayer: "To Thee my heart has said, Seek ye my face; Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek." The answering heart repeats the invitation which gave it courage to seek before it responds with its resolve. The insertion of some such phrase as "in answer to Thy word" before "seek ye" helps the sense in a translation, but mars the vigour of the original. The invitation is not quoted [Ps 265]
from any Scripture, but is the summary of the meaning of all God's self-revelation. He is ever saying, "Seek ye my face." Therefore He cannot but show it to a man who takes Him at His word and pleads that word as

the warrant for his petition. "I have never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain." The consistency of the Divine character ensures His satisfying the desires which He has implanted. He will neither stultify Himself nor tantalise men by setting them on quests which end in disappointment. In a similar manner, the psalm urges the familiar argument from God's past, which reposes on the confidence of unalterable grace and inexhaustible resources. The psalmist had no cold abstract doctrine of immutability as a Divine attribute. His conception was intensely practical. Since God has helped in the past, He will help in the future, because He is God, and because He is "the God of my salvation." He cannot reverse His action nor stay His hand until His dealings with His servants have vindicated that name by completing the process to which it binds Him.

The prayer "Forsake me not" is based upon a remarkable ground in ver. 10: "For my father and my mother have forsaken me." That seems a singular plea for a mature man, who has a considerably varied experience of life behind him, to urge. It is generally explained as a proverbial expression, meaning no more than the frequent complaints in the Psalter of desertion by friends and lovers. Cheyne (Commentary in loc.) sees in it a clear indication that the speaker is the afflicted nation, comparing itself to a sobbing child deserted by its parents. But it is at least noteworthy that, when David was hard pressed at Adullam, he bestowed his father [Pg 266] and mother for safety with the king of Moab (1 Sam. xxi. 3, 4). It is objected that this was not their "forsaking" him, but it was, at least, their "leaving" him, and might well add an imaginative pang as well as a real loss to the fugitive. So specific a statement as that of the psalm can scarcely be weakened down into proverb or metaphor. The allusion may be undiscoverable, but the words sound uncommonly like the assertion of a fact, and the fact referred to is the only known one which in any degree fits them.

The general petitions of vv. 7-10 become more specific as the song nears its close. As in Psalm xxv., guidance and protection are the psalmist's needs now. The analogy of other psalms suggests an ethical meaning for "the plain path" of ver. 11; and that signification, rather than that of a safe road, is to be preferred, for the sake of preserving a difference between this and the following prayer for deliverance. The figures of his enemies stand out more threateningly than before (ver. 12). Is that all his gain from his prayer? Is it not a faint-hearted descent from ver. 6, where, from the height of his Divine security, he looked down on them far below, and unable to reach him? Now they have "risen up," and he has dropped down among them. But such changes of mood are not inconsistent with unchanged faith, if only the gaze which discerns the precipice at either side is not turned away from the goal ahead and above, nor from Him who holds up His servant. The effect of that clearer sight of the enemies is very beautifully given in the abrupt half-sentence of ver. 13: "If I had not believed to see the goodness of Jehovah in the land of the living!" As he thinks of his foes, he breaks into an exclamation, which he leaves unfinished. The omission is easy to supply. He would have been their victim [Pg 267] but for his faith. The broken words tell of his recoil from the terrible possibility forced on him by the sight of the formidable enemies. Well for us if we are but driven the closer to God, in conscious helplessness, by the sight of dangers and antagonisms! Faith does not falter, though it is keenly conscious of difficulties. It is not preserved by ignoring facts, but should be by them impelled to clasp God more firmly as its only safety.

So the psalm goes back to the major key at last, and in the closing verse prayer passes into self-encouragement. The heart that spoke to God now speaks to itself. Faith exhorts sense and soul to "wait on Jehovah." The self-communing of the psalmist, beginning with exultant confidence and merging into prayer thrilled with consciousness of need and of weakness, closes with bracing him up to courage, which is not presumption, because it is the fruit of waiting on the Lord. He who thus keeps his heart in touch with God will be able to obey the ancient command, which had rung so long before in the ears of Joshua in the plains of Jericho and is never out of date, "Be strong and of a good courage"; and none but those who wait on the Lord will be at once conscious of weakness and filled with strength, aware of the foes and bold to meet them.

[Pg 268]

PSALM XXVIII.

1 Unto Thee, Jehovah, I cry;
My Rock, be not deaf to me,
Lest Thou be silent to me,
And I become as those who go down to the pit.

2 Hear the voice of my supplications in my crying to Thee for help,
In my lifting my hands to Thy holy shrine.

3 Drag me not away with wicked men, and with workers of iniquity,
Speaking peace with their neighbours,
And evil is in their hearts.
4 Give them according to their doings and according to the evil of their deeds;
According to the work of their hands give them;
Return their desert to them.
5 For they pay no heed to the doings of Jehovah
Nor to the work of His hands;
He shall cast them down, and not build them up.

6 Blessed be Jehovah
For He has heard the voice of my supplications.
7 Jehovah is my fortress and my shield;
In Him has my heart trusted, and I am helped;
So my heart leaps [for joy], and by my song will I praise Him.

8 Jehovah is their strength (or the strength of His people),
And a fortress of salvation for His anointed is He.
9 Save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance
And shepherd them, and carry them even for evermore.

The unquestionable resemblances to Psalm xxvi. scarcely require that this should be considered its companion. The differences are as obvious as the likenesses. While the prayer "Draw me not away with the wicked" and the characterisation of these are alike in both, the further emphatic prayer for retribution here [Ps 26]
and the closing half of this psalm have nothing corresponding to them in the other. This psalm is built on the familiar plan of groups of two verses each, with the exception that the prayer, which is its centre, runs over into three. The course of thought is as familiar as the structure. Invocation is followed by petition, and that by exultant anticipation of the answer as already given; and all closes with wider petitions for the whole people.

Vv. 1, 2, are a prelude to the prayer proper, bespeaking the Divine acceptance of it, on the double ground of the psalmist's helplessness apart from God's help and of his outstretched hands appealing to God enthroned above the mercy-seat. He is in such straits that, unless his prayer brings an answer in act, he must sink into the pit of Sheol, and be made like those that lie huddled there in its darkness. On the edge of the slippery slope, he stretches out his hands toward the innermost sanctuary (for so the word rendered, by a mistaken etymology, "oracle" means). He beseeches God to hear, and blends the two figures of deafness and silence as both meaning the withholding of help. Jehovah seems deaf when prayer is unanswered, and is silent when He does not speak in deliverance. This prelude of invocation throbs with earnestness, and sets the pattern for suppliants, teaching them how to quicken their own desires as well as how to appeal to God by breathing to Him their consciousness that only His hand can keep them from sliding down into death.

The prayer itself (vv. 3-5) touches lightly on the petition that the psalmist may be delivered from the fate of the wicked, and then launches out into indignant description of their practices and solemn invocation of [Ps 27]
retribution upon them. "Drag away" is parallel with, but stronger than, "Gather not" in xxvi. 9. Commentators quote Job xxiv. 22, where the word is used of God's dragging the mighty out of life by His power, as a struggling criminal is haled to the scaffold. The shuddering recoil from the fate of the wicked is accompanied with vehement loathing of their practices. A man who keeps his heart in touch with God cannot but shrink, as from a pestilence, from complicity with evil, and the depth of his hearty hatred of it is the measure of his right to ask that he may not share in the ruin it must bring, since God is righteous. One type of evil-doers is the object of the psalmist's special abhorrence: false friends with smooth tongues and daggers in their sleeves, the "dissemblers" of Psalm xxvi.; but he passes to the more general characterisation of the class, in his terrible prayer for retribution, in vv. 4, 5. The sin of sins, from which all specific acts of evil flow, is blindness to God's "deeds" and to "the work of His hands," His acts both of mercy and of judgment. Practical atheism, the indifference which looks upon nature, history, and self, and sees no signs of a mighty hand tender, pure, and strong, ever active in them all, will surely lead the purblind "Agnostics" to do "works of their hands" which, for lack of reference to Him, fail to conform to the highest ideal and draw down righteous judgment. But the blindness to God's work here meant is that of an averted will rather than that of mistaken

understanding, and from the stem of such a thorn the grapes of holy living cannot be gathered. Therefore the psalmist is but putting into words the necessary result of such lives when from suppliant he becomes prophet, and declares that "He shall cast them down, and not build them up." The stern tone of this prayer marks it as belonging to the older type of religion, and its dissimilarity to the New Testament teaching is not to be slurred over. No doubt the element of personal enmity is all but absent, but it is not the prayer which those who have heard "Father, forgive them," are to copy. Yet, on the other hand, the wholesome abhorrence of evil, the solemn certitude that sin is death, the desire that it may cease from the world, and the lowly petition that it may not drag us into fatal associations are all to be preserved in Christian feeling, while softened by the light that falls from Calvary. [Pg 271]

As in many psalms, the faith which prays passes at once into the faith which possesses. This man, when he "stood praying, believed that he had what he asked," and, so believing, had it. There was no change in circumstances, but he was changed. There is no fear of going down into the pit now, and the rabble of evil-doers have disappeared. This is the blessing which every true suppliant may bear away from the throne, the peace which passeth understanding, the sure pledge of the Divine act which answers prayer. It is the first gentle ripple of the incoming tide; high water is sure to come at the due hour. So the psalmist is exuberant and happily tautological in telling how his trusting heart has become a leaping heart, and help has been flashed back from heaven as swiftly as his prayer had travelled thither.

The closing strophe (vv. 8, 9) is but loosely connected with the body of the psalm except on one supposition. What if the singer were king over Israel, and if the dangers threatening him were public perils? That would explain the else singular attachment of intercession for Israel to so intensely personal a supplication. It is most natural that God's "anointed," who has been asking deliverance for himself, should widen his petitions to take in that flock of which he was but the under-shepherd, and should devolve the shepherding and carrying of it on the Divine Shepherd-King, of whom he was the shadowy representative. The addition of one letter changes "their" in ver. 8 into "to His people," a reading which has the support of the LXX. and of some manuscripts and versions and is recommended by its congruity with the context. Cheyne's suggestion that "His anointed" is the high-priest is only conjecture. The reference of the expression to the king who is also the psalmist preserves the unity of the psalm. The Christian reader cannot but think of the true King and Intercessor, whose great prayer before His passion began, like our psalm, with petitions for Himself, but passed into supplication for His little flock and for all the unnumbered millions "who should believe on" Him "through their word." [Pg 272]

PSALM XXIX.

1 Give to Jehovah, ye sons of God,
  Give to Jehovah glory and strength.
2 Give to Jehovah the glory of His name;
  Bow down to Jehovah in holy attire.

3 The voice of Jehovah is upon the waters;
  The God of glory thunders;
  Jehovah is on many waters.
4 The voice of Jehovah is with power;
  The voice of Jehovah is with majesty.

5 The voice of Jehovah shivers the cedars;
  Yea, Jehovah shivers the cedars of Lebanon,
6 And makes them leap like a calf,
  Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox.
7 The voice of Jehovah hews out flames of fire.

8 The voice of Jehovah shakes the wilderness;

Jehovah shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
9 The voice of Jehovah makes the hinds calve, and strips the woods:
And in His palace every one is saying, Glory!

10 Jehovah sat enthroned for the Flood;
And Jehovah sits King for ever.
11 Jehovah will give strength to His people;
Jehovah will bless His people with peace.

The core of this psalm is the magnificent description of the thunderstorm rolling over the whole length of the land. That picture is framed by two verses of introduction and two of conclusion, which are connected, inasmuch as the one deals with the "glory to God in the highest" which is the echo of the tempest in angels' praises, and the other with the "peace on earth" in which its thunders die away.

The invocation in vv. 1, 2, is addressed to angels, whatever may be the exact rendering of the remarkable title by which they are summoned in ver. 1. It is all but unique, and the only other instance of its use (Psalm lxxxix. 6) establishes its meaning, since "holy ones" is there given as synonymous in the verses preceding and following. The most probable explanation of the peculiar phrase (B'ne Elim) is that of Gesenius, Ewald, Delitzsch, and Riehm in his edition of Hupfeld's Commentary: that it is a double plural, both members of the compound phrase being inflected. Similarly "mighty men of valour" (1 Chron. vii. 5) has the second noun in the plural. This seems more probable than the rendering "sons of the gods." The psalmist summons these lofty beings to "give" glory and strength to Jehovah, that is, to ascribe to Him the attributes manifested in His acts, or, as ver. 2 puts it, "the glory of His name," *i.e.*, belonging to His character as thus revealed. The worship of earth is regarded as a type of that of heaven, and as here, so there, they who bow before Him are to be clothed in "holy attire." The thought underlying this ringing summons is that even angels learn the character of God from the exhibitions of His power in the Creation, and as they sang together for joy at first, still attend its manifestations with adoration. The contrast of their praise with the tumult and terror on earth, while the thunder growls in the sky, is surely not unintended. It suggests the different aspects of God's dread deeds as seen by them and by men, and carries a tacit lesson true of all calamities and convulsions. The thunder-cloud hangs boding in its piled blue blackness to those who from beneath watch the slow crumbling away of its torn edges and the ominous movements in its sullen heart or hear the crashes from its depths, but, seen from above, it is transfigured by the light that falls on its upper surface; and it stretches placid before the throne, like the sea of glass mingled with fire. Whatever may be earth's terror, heaven's echo of God's thunders is praise.

Then the storm bursts. We can hear it rolling in the short periods, mostly uniform in structure and grouped in verses of two clauses each, the second of which echoes the first, like the long-drawn roll that pauses, slackens, and yet persists. Seven times "the voice of Jehovah" is heard, like the apocalyptic "seven thunders before the throne." The poet's eye travels with the swift tempest, and his picture is full of motion, sweeping from the waters above the firmament to earth and from the northern boundary of the land to the far south. First we hear the mutterings in the sky (ver. 3). If we understood "the waters" as meaning the Mediterranean, we should have the picture of the storm working up from the sea; but it is better to take the expression as referring to the super-terrestrial reservoirs or the rain flood stored in the thunder-clouds. Up there the peals roll before their fury shakes the earth. It was not enough in the poet's mind to call the thunder the voice of Jehovah, but it must be brought into still closer connection with Him by the plain statement that it is He who "thunders" and who rides on the storm-clouds as they hurry across the sky. To catch tones of a Divine voice, full of power and majesty, in a noise so entirely explicable as a thunderclap, is, no doubt, unscientific; but the Hebrew contemplation of nature is occupied with another set of ideas than scientific, and is entirely unaffected by these. The psalmist had no notion of the physical cause of thunder, but there is no reason why a man who can make as much electricity as he wants by the grinding of a dynamo and then use it to carry his trivial messages should not repeat the psalmist's devout assertion. We can assimilate all that physicists can tell us, and then, passing into another region, can hear Jehovah speaking in thunder. The psalm begins where science leaves off.

While the psalmist speaks the swift tempest has come down with a roar and a crash on the northern mountains, and Lebanon and "Sirion" (a Sidonian name for Hermon) reel, and the firm-boled, stately cedars are shivered. The structure of the verses already noticed, in which the second clause reduplicates, with some specialising, the thought of the first, makes it probable that in ver. 6 *a* the mountains, and not the cedars, are meant by them. The trees are broken; the mountains shake. An emendation has been proposed, by which

"Lebanon" should be transferred from ver. 5 to ver. 6 and substituted for "them" so as to bring out this meaning more smoothly, but the roughness of putting the pronoun in the first clause and the nouns to which it refers in the second is not so considerable as to require the change. The image of the mountains "skipping" sounds exaggerated to Western ears, but is not infrequent in Scripture, and in the present instance is simply a strong way of expressing the violence of the storm, which seems even to shake the steadfast mountains that keep guard over the furthest borders of the land. Nor are we to forget that here there may be some hint of a parable in nature. The heights are thunder-smitten; the valleys are safe. "The day of the Lord shall be upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up, ... and upon all the high mountains" (Isa. ii. 13, 14).

The two-claused verses are interrupted by one of a single clause (ver. 7), the brevity of which vividly [Ps 27]
suggests the suddenness and speed of the flash: "The voice of Jehovah cleaves [or, hews out] fire flames." The thunder is conceived of as the principal phenomenon and as creating the lightning, as if it hewed out the flash from the dark mass of cloud. A corrected accentuation of this short verse divides it into three parts, perhaps representing the triple zigzag; but in any case the one solitary, sudden fork, blazing fiercely for a moment and then swallowed up in the gloom, is marvellously given. It is further to be noted that this single lightning gleam parts the description of the storm into two, the former part painting it as in the north, the latter as in the extreme south. It has swept over the whole length of the land, while we have been watching the flash. Now it is rolling over the wide plain of the southern desert. The precise position of Kadesh is keenly debated, but it was certainly in the eastern part of the desert region on the southern border. It, too, shakes, low-lying as it is; and far and wide over its uninhabited levels the tempest ranges. Its effects there are variously understood. The parallelism of clauses and the fact that nowhere else in the picture is animal life introduced give great probability to the very slight alteration required in ver. 9 *a*, in order to yield the rendering "pierces the oaks" (Cheyne), instead of "makes the hinds calve" which harmonises admirably with the next clause; but, on the other hand, the premature dropping of the young of wild animals from fear is said to be an authentic fact, and gives a defensible trait to the picture, which is perhaps none the less striking for the introduction of one small piece of animated nature. In any case the next clause paints the dishevelled [Ps 27]
forest trees, with scarred bark, broken boughs, and strewn leaves, after the fierce roar and flash, wind and rain, have swept over them. The southern border must have been very unlike its present self, or the poet's thoughts must have travelled eastwards, among the oaks on the other side of the Arabah, if the local colouring of ver. 9 is correct.

While tumult of storm and crash of thunder have been raging and rolling below, the singer hears "a deeper voice across the storm," the songs of the "sons of God" in the temple palace above, chanting the praise to which he had summoned them. "In His temple every one is saying, Glory!" That is the issue of all storms. The clear eyes of the angels see, and their "loud uplifted trumpets" celebrate, the lustrous self-manifestation of Jehovah, who rides upon the storm, and makes the rush of the thunder minister to the fruitfulness of earth.

But what of the effects down here? The concluding strophe (vv. 10, 11) tells. Its general sense is clear, though the first clause of ver. 10 is ambiguous. The source of the difficulty in rendering is twofold. The preposition may mean "for"—*i.e.*, in order to bring about—or, according to some, "on," or "above," or "at." The word rendered "flood" is only used elsewhere in reference to the Noachic deluge, and here has the definite article, which is most naturally explained as fixing the reference to that event; but it has been objected that the allusion would be far-fetched and out of place, and therefore the rendering "rain-storm" has been suggested. In the absence of any instance of the word's being used for anything but the Deluge, it is safest to retain that meaning here. There must, however, be combined with that rendering an allusion to the torrents of thunder [Ps 27]
rain, which closed the thunderstorm. These could scarcely be omitted. They remind the singer of the downpour that drowned the world, and his thought is that just as Jehovah "sat"—*i.e.*, solemnly took His place as King and Judge—in order to execute that act of retribution, so, in all subsequent smaller acts of an analogous nature, He "will sit enthroned for ever." The supremacy of Jehovah over all transient tempests and the judicial punitive nature of these are the thoughts which the storm has left with him. It has rolled away; God, who sent it, remains throned above nature and floods: they are His ministers.

And all ends with a sweet, calm word, assuring Jehovah's people of a share in the "strength" which spoke in the thunder, and, better still, of peace. That close is like the brightness of the glistening earth, with freshened air, and birds venturing to sing once more, and a sky of deeper blue, and the spent clouds low and harmless on the horizon. Beethoven has given the same contrast between storm and after-calm in the music of the Pastoral Symphony. Faith can listen to the wildest crashing thunder in quiet confidence that angels are saying, "Glory!" as each peal rolls, and that when the last, low mutterings are hushed, earth will smile the brighter, and deeper peace will fall on trusting hearts.

PSALM XXX.

1 Thee will I exalt, Jehovah, for me hast Thou lifted up,
And not made my foes rejoice over me.
2 Jehovah, my God,
I cried loudly to Thee, and Thou healedst me.
3 Jehovah, Thou hast brought up from Sheol my soul;
Thou hast revived me from among those who descend to the pit.

4 Make music to Jehovah, ye who are favoured by Him;
And thank His holy Name.
5 For a moment passes in His anger,
A life in His favour;
In the evening comes weeping as a guest,
And at morn [there is] a shout of joy.

6 But I—I said in my security,
I shall not be moved for ever.
7 Jehovah, by Thy favour Thou hadst established strength to my mountain;
Thou didst hide Thy face: I was troubled.

8 To Thee, Jehovah, I cried;
And to the Lord I made supplication.
9 "What profit is in my blood when I descend to the pit?
Can dust thank Thee? can it declare Thy faithfulness?
10 Hear, Jehovah, and be gracious to me;
Jehovah, be my Helper!"

11 Thou didst turn for me my mourning to dancing;
Thou didst unloose my sackcloth and gird me with gladness,
12 To the end that [my] glory should make music to Thee, and not be silent:
Jehovah, my God, for ever will I thank Thee.

The title of this psalm is apparently a composite, the usual "Psalm of David" having been enlarged by the awkward insertion of "A Song at the Dedication of the House," which probably indicates its later liturgical [Pg 281] use, and not its first destination. Its occasion was evidently a deliverance from grave peril; and, whilst its tone is strikingly inappropriate if it had been composed for the inauguration of temple, tabernacle, or palace, one can understand how the venerable words, which praised Jehovah for swift deliverance from impending destruction, would be felt to fit the circumstances and emotions of the time when the Temple, profaned by the mad acts of Antiochus Epiphanes, was purified and the ceremonial worship restored. Never had Israel seemed nearer going down to the pit; never had deliverance come more suddenly and completely. The intrusive title is best explained as dating from that time and indicating the use then found for the song.

It is an outpouring of thankfulness, and mainly a leaf from the psalmist's autobiography, interrupted only by a call to all who share Jehovah's favour to help the single voice to praise Him (vv. 4, 5). The familiar arrangement in pairs of verses is slightly broken twice, vv. 1-3 being linked together as a kind of prelude and vv. 8-10 as a repetition of the singer's prayer. His praise breaks the barrier of silence and rushes out in a flood. The very first word tells of his exuberant thankfulness, and stands in striking relation to God's act which evokes it. Jehovah has raised him from the very sides of the pit, and therefore what shall he do but exalt Jehovah by praise and commemoration of His deeds? The song runs over in varying expressions for the one deliverance, which is designated as lifting up, disappointment of the malignant joy of enemies, healing, rescue from Sheol and the company who descend thither, by restoration to life. Possibly the prose fact was recovery from sickness, but the metaphor of healing is so frequent that the literal use of the word here is questionable. As Calvin remarks, sackcloth (ver. 11) is not a sick man's garb. These glad repetitions of the [Pg 282] one thought in various forms indicate how deeply moved the singer was, and how lovingly he brooded over

his deliverance. A heart truly penetrated with thankfulness delights to turn its blessings round and round, and see how prismatic lights play on their facets, as on revolving diamonds. The same warmth of feeling, which glows in the reiterated celebration of deliverance, impels to the frequent direct mention of Jehovah. Each verse has that name set on it as a seal, and the central one of the three (ver. 2), not content with it only, grasps Him as "my God," manifested as such with renewed and deepened tenderness by the recent fact that "I cried loudly unto Thee, and Thou healedst me." The best result of God's goodness is a firmer assurance of a personal relation to Him. "This is an enclosure of a common without damage: to make God mine own, to find that all that God says is spoken to me" (Donne). The stress of these three verses lies on the reiterated contemplation of God's fresh act of mercy and on the reiterated invocation of His name, which is not vain repetition, but represents distinct acts of consciousness, drawing near to delight the soul in thoughts of Him. The psalmist's vow of praise and former cry for help could not be left out of view, since the one was the condition and the other the issue of deliverance, but they are slightly touched. Such claiming of God for one's own and such absorbing gaze on Him are the intended results of His deeds, the crown of devotion, and the repose of the soul.

True thankfulness is expansive, and joy craves for sympathy. So the psalmist invites other voices to join his song, since he is sure that others there are who have shared his experience. It has been but one instance of a [Ps 283]
universal law. He is not the only one whom Jehovah has treated with loving-kindness, and he would fain hear a chorus supporting his solo. Therefore he calls upon "the favoured of God" to swell the praise with harp and voice and to give thanks to His "holy memorial," *i.e.* the name by which His deeds of grace are commemorated. The ground of their praise is the psalmist's own case generalised. A tiny mirror may reflect the sun, and the humblest person's history, devoutly pondered, will yield insight into God's widest dealings. This, then, is what the psalmist had learned in suffering, and wishes to teach in song: that sorrow is transient and joy perennial. A cheerful optimism should be the fruit of experience, and especially of sorrowful experience. The antitheses in ver. 5 are obvious. In the first part of the verse "anger" and "favour" are plainly contrasted, and it is natural to suppose that "a moment" and "life" are so too. The rendering, then, is, "A moment passes in His anger, a life [*i.e.*, a lifetime] in His favour." Sorrow is brief; blessings are long. Thunderstorms occupy but a small part of summer. There is usually less sickness than health in a life. But memory and anticipation beat out sorrow thin, so as to cover a great space. A little solid matter, diffused by currents, will discolour miles of a stream. Unfortunately we have better memories for trouble than for blessing, and the smart of the rose's prickles lasts longer in the flesh than its fragrance in the nostril or its hue in the eye. But the relation of ideas here is not merely that of contrast. May we not say that just as the "moment" is included in the "life," so the "anger" is in the "favour"? Probably that application of the thought was not present to the psalmist, but it is an Old Testament belief that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," [Ps 284]
and God's anger is the aversion of holy love to its moral opposite. Hence comes the truth that varying and sometimes opposite Divine methods have one motive and one purpose, as the same motion of the earth brings summer and winter in turn. Since the desire of God is to make men partakers of His holiness, the root of chastisement is love, and hours of sorrow are not interruptions of the continuous favour which fills the life.

A like double antithesis moulds the beautiful image of the last clause. Night and morning are contrasted, as are weeping and joy; and the latter contrast is more striking, if it be observed that "joy" is literally a "joyful shout," raised by the voice that had been breaking into audible weeping. The verb used means to lodge for a night, and thus the whole is a picture of two guests, the one coming, sombre-robed, in the hour befitting her, the other, bright-garmented, taking the place of the former, when all things are dewy and sunny, in the morning. The thought may either be that of the substitution of joy for sorrow, or of the transformation of sorrow into joy. No grief lasts in its first bitterness. Recuperative forces begin to tell by slow degrees. "The low beginnings of content" appear. The sharpest-cutting edge is partially blunted by time and what it brings. Tender green drapes every ruin. Sorrow is transformed into something not undeserving of the name of joy. Griefs accepted change their nature. "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." The man who in the darkness took in the dark guest to sit by his fireside finds in the morning that she is transfigured, and her name is Gladness. Rich vintages are gathered on the crumbling lava of the quiescent volcano. Even for irremediable [Ps 285]
losses and immedicable griefs, the psalmist's prophecy is true, only that for these "the morning" is beyond earth's dim dawns, and breaks when this night which we call life, and which is wearing thin, is past. In the level light of that sunrise, every raindrop becomes a rainbow, and every sorrow rightly—that is, submissively—borne shall be represented by a special and particular joy.

But the thrilling sense of recent deliverance runs in too strong a current to be long turned aside, even by the thought of others' praise; and the personal element recurs in ver. 6, and persists till the close. This latter part falls into three well-marked minor divisions: the confession of self-confidence, bred of ease and shattered by

chastisement, in vv. 6, 7; the prayer of the man startled into renewed dependence in vv. 8-10; and the closing reiterated commemoration of mercies received and vow of thankful praise, which echoes the first part, in vv. 11, 12.

In ver. 6 the psalmist's foolish confidence is emphatically contrasted with the truth won by experience and stated in ver. 5. "The law of God's dealings is so, but I—I thought so and so." The word rendered "prosperity" may be taken as meaning also security. The passage from the one idea to the other is easy, inasmuch as calm days lull men to sleep, and make it hard to believe that "to-morrow shall" not "be as this day." Even devout hearts are apt to count upon the continuance of present good. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." The bottom of the crater of Vesuvius had once great trees growing, the produce of centuries of quiescence. It would be difficult to think, when looking at them, that they would ever be torn up and whirled aloft in flame by a new outburst. While continual peril and change may not foster remembrance of God, [Ps 286] continuous peace is but too apt to lull to forgetfulness of Him. The psalmist was beguiled by comfort into saying precisely what "the wicked said in his heart" (Psalm x. 6). How different may be the meaning of the same words on different lips! The mad arrogance of the godless man's confidence, the error of the good man rocked to sleep by prosperity, and the warranted confidence of a trustful soul are all expressed by the same words; but the last has an addition which changes the whole: "*Because He is at my right hand*, I shall not be moved." The end of the first man's boast can only be destruction; that of the third's faith will certainly be "pleasures for evermore"; that of the second's lapse from dependence is recorded in ver. 7. The sudden crash of his false security is graphically reproduced by the abrupt clauses without connecting particles. It was the "favour" already celebrated which gave the stability which had been abused. Its effect is described in terms of which the general meaning is clear, though the exact rendering is doubtful. "Thou hast [or hadst] established strength to my mountain" is harsh, and the proposed emendation (Hupfeld, Cheyne, etc.), "hast set me on strong mountains," requires the addition to the text of the pronoun. In either case, we have a natural metaphor for prosperity. The emphasis lies on the recognition that it was God's work, a truth which the psalmist had forgotten and had to be taught by the sudden withdrawal of God's countenance, on which followed his own immediate passage from careless security to agitation and alarm. The word "troubled" is that used for Saul's conflicting emotions and despair in the witch's house at Endor, and for the agitation of Joseph's brethren when they heard that the man who had their lives in his hand was their wronged brother. Thus alarmed and [Ps 287] filled with distracting thoughts was the psalmist. "Thou didst hide Thy face," describes his calamities in their source. When the sun goes in, an immediate gloom wraps the land, and the birds cease to sing. But the "trouble" was preferable to "security," for it drove to God. Any tempest which does that is better than calm which beguiles from Him; and, since all His storms are meant to "drive us to His breast," they come from His "favour."

The approach to God is told in vv. 8-10, of which the two latter are a quotation of the prayer then wrung from the psalmist. The ground of this appeal for deliverance from a danger threatening life is as in Hezekiah's prayer (Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19), and reflects the same conception of the state of the dead as Psalm vi. 5. If the suppliant dies, his voice will be missed from the chorus which sings God's praise on earth. "The dust" (*i.e.*, the grave) is a region of silence. Here, where life yielded daily proofs of God's "truth" (*i.e.*, faithfulness), it could be extolled, but there dumb tongues could bring Him no "profit" of praise. The boldness of the thought that God is in some sense advantaged by men's magnifying of His faithfulness, the cheerless gaze into the dark realm, and the implication that to live is desired not only for the sake of life's joys, but in order to show forth God's dealings, are all remarkable. The tone of the prayer indicates the imperfect view of the future life which shadows many psalms, and could only be completed by the historical facts of the Resurrection and Ascension. Concern for the honour of the Old Testament revelation may, in this matter, be stretched to invalidate the distinctive glory of the New, which has "brought life and immortality to light."

With quick transition, corresponding to the swiftness of the answer to prayer, the closing pair of verses tells [Ps 288] of the instantaneous change which that answer wrought. As in the earlier metaphor weeping was transformed into joy, here mourning is turned into dancing, and God's hand unties the cord which loosely bound the sackcloth robe, and arrays the mourner in festival attire. The same conception of the sweetness of grateful praise to the ear of God which was presented in the prayer recurs here, where the purpose of God's gifts is regarded as being man's praise. The thought may be construed so as to be repulsive, but its true force is to present God as desiring hearts' love and trust, and as "seeking such to worship Him," because therein they will find supreme and abiding bliss. "My glory," that wonderful personal being, which in its lowest debasement retains glimmering reflections caught from God, is never so truly glory as when it "sings praise to Thee," and never so blessed as when, through a longer "for ever" than the psalmist saw stretching before him, it "gives thanks unto Thee."

PSALM XXXI.

1 In Thee, Jehovah, have I taken refuge: let me never be ashamed;
In Thy righteousness deliver me.
2 Bend down Thine ear to me: speedily extricate me;
Be to me for a refuge-rock, for a fortress-house, to save me.
3 For my rock and my fortress art Thou,
And for Thy name's sake wilt guide me and lead me.
4 Thou wilt bring me from the net which they have hidden for me,
For Thou art my defence.

5 Into Thy hand I commend my spirit;
Thou hast redeemed me, Jehovah, God of faithfulness.
6 I hate the worshippers of empty nothingnesses;
And I—to Jehovah do I cling.
7 I will exult and be joyful in Thy loving-kindness,
Who hast beheld my affliction,
[And] hast taken note of the distresses of my soul,
8 And hast not enclosed me in the hand of the enemy;
Thou hast set my feet at large.

9 Be merciful to me, Jehovah, for I am in straits;
Wasted away in grief is my eye,—my soul and my body.
10 For my life is consumed with sorrow,
And my years with sighing;
My strength reels because of mine iniquity,
And my bones are wasted.
11 Because of all my adversaries I am become a reproach
And to my neighbours exceedingly, and a fear to my acquaintances;
They who see me without flee from me.
12 I am forgotten, out of mind, like a dead man;
I am like a broken vessel.
13 For I hear the whispering of many,
Terror on every side;
In their consulting together against me,
To take away my life do they scheme.

14 And I—on Thee I trust, Jehovah;
I say, My God art Thou.
15 In Thy hand are my times;
Rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my pursuers.
16 Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant;
Save me in Thy loving-kindness.
17 Jehovah, I shall not be shamed, for I cry to Thee;
The wicked shall be shamed, shall be silent in Sheol.
18 Dumb shall the lying lips be made,
That speak arrogance against the righteous,
In pride and contempt.

19 How great is Thy goodness which Thou dost keep in secret for them who fear Thee,
Dost work before the sons of men for them who take refuge in Thee.
20 Thou dost shelter them in the shelter of Thy face from the plots of men;
Thou keepest them in secret in an arbour from the strife of tongues.
21 Blessed be Jehovah,
For He has done marvels of loving-kindness for me in a strong city!

22 And I—I said in my agitation, I am cut off from before Thine eyes,
But truly Thou didst hear the voice of my supplication in my crying aloud to Thee.
23 Love Jehovah, all His beloved;
Jehovah keeps faithfulness,
And repays overflowingly him that practises pride.
24 Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
All ye that wait on Jehovah.

The swift transitions of feeling in this psalm may seem strange to colder natures whose lives run smoothly, but reveal a brother-soul to those who have known what it is to ride on the top of the wave and then to go down into its trough. What is peculiar to the psalm is not only the inclusion of the whole gamut of feeling, but the force with which each key is struck and the persistence through all of the one ground tone of cleaving to Jehovah. The poetic temperament passes quickly from hope to fear. The devout man in sorrow can sometimes look away from a darkened earth to a bright sky, but the stern realities of pain and loss again force themselves in upon him. The psalm is like an April day, in which sunshine and rain chase each other across the plain. [Ps 31]

"The beautiful uncertain weather,
Where gloom and glory meet together,"

makes the landscape live, and is the precursor of fruitfulness.

The stream of the psalmist's thoughts now runs in shadow of grim cliffs and vexed by opposing rocks, and now opens out in sunny stretches of smoothness; but its source is "In Thee, Jehovah, do I take refuge" (ver. 1): and its end is "Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all ye that wait for Jehovah" (ver. 24).

The first turn of the stream is in vv. 1-4, which consist of petitions and their grounds. The prayers reveal the suppliant's state. They are the familiar cries of an afflicted soul common to many psalms, and presenting no special features. The needs of the human heart are uniform, and the cry of distress is much alike on all lips. This sufferer asks, as his fellows have done and will do, for deliverance, a swift answer, shelter and defence, guidance and leading, escape from the net spread for him. These are the commonplaces of prayer, which God is not wearied of hearing, and which fit us all. The last place to look for originality is in the "sighing of such as be sorrowful." The pleas on which the petitions rest are also familiar. The man who trusts in Jehovah has a right to expect that his trust will not be put to shame, since God is faithful. Therefore the first plea is the psalmist's faith, expressed in ver. 1 by the word which literally means to flee to a refuge. The fact that he has done so makes his deliverance a work of God's "righteousness." The metaphor latent in "flee for refuge" comes into full sight in that beautiful plea in ver. 3, which unsympathetic critics would call illogical, "*Be* for me a refuge-rock, for ... Thou *art* my rock." Be what Thou art; manifest Thyself in act to be what Thou art in nature: be what I, Thy poor servant, have taken Thee to be. My heart has clasped Thy revelation of Thyself and fled to this strong tower. Let me not be deceived and find it incapable of sheltering me from my foes. "Therefore for Thy name's sake," or because of that revelation and for its glory as true in men's sight, deliver me. God's nature as revealed is the strongest plea with Him, and surely that cannot but be potent and acceptable prayer which says, Be what Thou art, and what Thou hast taught me to believe Thee. [Ps 31]

Vv. 5-8 prolong the tone of the preceding, with some difference, inasmuch as God's past acts are more specifically dwelt on as the ground of confidence. In this turn of the stream, faith does not so much supplicate as meditate, plucking the flower of confidence from the nettle of past dangers and deliverances, and renewing its acts of surrender. The sacred words which Jesus made His own on the cross, and which have been the last utterance of so many saints, were meant by the psalmist to apply to life, not to death. He laid his spirit as a precious deposit in God's hand, assured that He was able to keep that which was committed to Him. Often had he done this before, and now he does it once more. Petitions pass into surrender. Resignation as well as confidence speaks. To lay one's life in God's hand is to leave the disposal of it to Him, and such absolute submission must come as the calm close and incipient reward of every cry for deliverance. Trust should not be hard to those who can remember. So Jehovah's past redemptions—*i.e.*, deliverances from temporal dangers—are its ground here; and these avail as pledges for the future, since He is "the God of truth," who can never falsify His past. The more nestlingly a soul clings to God, the more vehemently will it recoil from other trust. Attraction and repulsion are equal and contrary. The more clearly it sees God's faithfulness and living power as a reality operating in its life, the more penetrating will be its detection of the falseness of other helpers. "Nothingnesses of emptiness" are they all to one who has felt the clasp of that great, tender [Ps 31]

hand; and unless the soul feels them to be such, it will never strongly clutch or firmly hold its true stay. Such trust has its crown in joyful experience of God's mercy even before the actual deliverance comes to pass, as wind-borne fragrance meets the traveller before he sees the spice gardens from which it comes. The cohortative verbs in ver. 7 may be petition ("Let me exult"), or they may be anticipation of future gladness, but in either case some waft of joy has already reached the singer, as how could it fail to do, when his faith was thus renewing itself, and his eyes gazing on God's deeds of old? The past tenses in vv. 7, 8, refer to former experiences. God's sight of the psalmist's affliction was not idle contemplation, but implied active intervention. To "take note of the distresses of my soul" (or possibly, "of my soul in distresses") is the same as to care for it. It is enough to know that God sees the secret sorrows, the obscure trials which can be told to none. He loves as well as knows, and looks on no griefs which He will not comfort nor on any wounds which [Pg 294] He is not ready to bind up. The psalmist was sure that God had seen, because he had experienced His delivering power, as he goes on joyfully to tell. The figure in ver. 8 *a* points back to the act of trust in ver. 5. How should God let the hand of the enemy close round and crush the spirit which had been entrusted to His own hand? One sees the greedy fingers of the foe drawing themselves together on their prey as on a fly, but they close on nothing. Instead of suffering constraint the delivered spirit walks at liberty. They who are enclosed in God's hand have ample room there; and unhindered activity, with the ennobling consciousness of freedom, is the reward of trust.

Is it inconceivable that such sunny confidence should be suddenly clouded and followed, as in the third turn of thought (vv. 9-13), by plaintive absorption in the sad realities of present distress? The very remembrance of a brighter past may have sharpened the sense of present trouble. But it is to be noted that these complaints are prayer, not aimless, self-pitying wailing. The enumeration of miseries which begins with "Have mercy upon me, for——," has a hidden hope tinging its darkness, like the faint flush of sunrise on clouds. There is no such violent change of tone as is sometimes conceived; but the pleas of the former parts are continued in this section, which adds the psalmist's sore need to God's past and the suppliant's faith, as another reason for Jehovah's help. He begins with the effects of his trouble on himself in body and soul; thence he passes to its consequences on those around him, and finally he spreads before God its cause: plots against his life. The resemblances to Psalm vi. and to several parts of Jeremiah are unmistakable. In vv. 9, 10, the physical and [Pg 295] mental effects of anxiety are graphically described. Sunken eyes, enfeebled soul, wasted body, are gaunt witnesses of his distress. Cares seem to him to have gnawed his very bones, so weak is he. All that he can do is to sigh. And worse than all, conscience tells him that his own sin underlies his trouble, and so he is without inward stay. The picture seems exaggerated to easy-going, prosperous people; but many a sufferer has since recognised himself in it as in a mirror, and been thankful for words which gave voice to his pained heart and cheered him with the sense of companionship in the gloom.

Vv. 11, 12, are mainly the description of the often-repeated experience of friends forsaking the troubled. "Because of all my adversaries" somewhat anticipates ver. 13 in assigning the reason for the cowardly desertion. The three phrases "neighbours," "acquaintance," and "those who see me without" indicate concentric circles of increasing diameter. The psalmist is in the middle; and round him are, first, neighbours, who pour reproach on him, because of his enemies, then the wider range of "acquaintances," afraid to have anything to do with one who has such strong and numerous foes, and remotest of all, the chance people met on the way who fly from Him, as infected and dangerous. "They all forsook Him and fled." That bitter ingredient mingles in every cup of sorrow. The meanness of human nature and the selfishness of much apparent friendship are commonplaces, but the experience of them is always as painful and astonishing, as if nobody besides had ever suffered therefrom. The roughness of structure in ver. 11 *b*, "and unto my neighbours exceedingly," seems to fit the psalmist's emotion, and does not need the emendation of "exceedingly" into "burden" (Delitzsch) or "shaking of the head" (Cheyne). [Pg 296]

In ver. 12 the desertion is bitterly summed up, as like the oblivion that waits for the dead. The unsympathising world goes on its way, and friends find new interests and forget the broken man, who used to be so much to them, as completely as if he were in his grave, or as they do the damaged cup, flung on the rubbish heap. Ver. 13 discloses the nature of the calamity which has had these effects. Whispering slanders buzz round him; he is ringed about with causes for fear, since enemies are plotting his death. The use of the first part of the verse by Jeremiah does not require the hypothesis of his authorship of the psalm, nor of the prophet's priority to the psalmist. It is always a difficult problem to settle which of two cases of the employment of the same phrase is original and which quotation. The criteria are elastic, and the conclusion is very often arrived at in deference to preconceived ideas. But Jeremiah uses the phrase as if it were a proverb or familiar expression, and the psalmist as if it were the freshly struck coinage of his own experience.

Again the key changes, and the minor is modulated into confident petition. It is the test of true trust that it is deepened by the fullest recognition of dangers and enemies. The same facts may feed despair and be the fuel of faith. This man's eyes took in all surrounding evils, and these drove him to avert his gaze from them and fix it on Jehovah. That is the best thing that troubles can do for us. If they, on the contrary, monopolise our sight, they turn our hearts to stone; but if we can wrench our stare from them, they clear our vision to see our Helper. In vv. 14-18 we have the recoil of the devout soul to God, occasioned by its recognition of need and helplessness. This turn of the psalm begins with a strong emphatic adversative: "But I—I trust in Jehovah." We see the man flinging himself into the arms of God. The word for "trust" is the same as in ver. 6, and means to *hang* or *lean upon*, or, as we say, to *depend on*. He utters his trust in his prayer, which occupies the rest of this part of the psalm. A prayer, which is the voice of trust, does not begin with petition, but with renewed adherence to God and happy consciousness of the soul's relation to Him, and thence melts into supplication for the blessings which are consequences of that relation. To feel, on occasion of the very dreariness of circumstances, that God is mine, makes miraculous sunrise at midnight. Built on that act of trust claiming its portion in God, is the recognition of God's all-regulating hand, as shaping the psalmist's "times," the changing periods, each of which has its definite character, responsibilities, and opportunities. Every man's life is a series of crises, in each of which there is some special work to be done or lesson to be learned, some particular virtue to be cultivated or sacrifice made. The opportunity does not return. "It might have been once; and we missed it, lost it for ever."

But the psalmist is thinking rather of the varying complexion of his days as bright or dark; and looking beyond circumstances, he sees God. The "hand of mine enemies" seems shrivelled into impotence when contrasted with that great hand, to which he has committed his spirit, and in which are his "times"; and the psalmist's recognition that it holds his destiny is the ground of his prayer for deliverance from the foes' paralysed grasp. They who feel the tender clasp of an almighty hand need not doubt their security from hostile assaults. The petitions proper are three in number: for deliverance, for the light of God's face, and for "salvation." The central petition recalls the priestly blessing (Num. vi. 25). It asks for consciousness of God's friendship and for the manifestation thereof in safety from present dangers. That face, turned in love to a man, can "make a sunshine in a shady place," and brings healing on its beams. It seems best to take the verbs in vv. 17, 18, as futures and not optatives. The prayer passes into assurance of its answer, and what was petition in ver. 1 is now trustful prediction: "I shall not be ashamed, for I cry to Thee." With like elevation of faith, the psalmist foresees the end of the whispering defamers round him: shame for their vain plots and their silent descent to the silent land. The loudest outcry against God's lovers will be hushed some day, and the hands that threatened them will be laid motionless and stiff across motionless breasts. He who stands by God and looks forward, can, by the light of that face, see the end of much transient bluster, "with pride and contempt," against the righteous. Lying lips fall dumb; praying lips, like the psalmist's, are opened to show forth God's praise. His prayer is audible still across the centuries; the mutterings of his enemies only live in his mention of them.

That assurance prepares the way for the noble burst of thanksgiving, as for accomplished deliverance, which ends the psalm, springing up in a joyous outpouring of melody, like a lark from a bare furrow. But there is no such change of tone as to warrant the supposition that these last verses (19-24) are either the psalmist's later addition or the work of another, nor do they oblige us to suppose that the whole psalm was written after the peril which it commemorates had passed. Rather the same voice which triumphantly rings out in these last verses has been sounding in the preceding, even in their saddest strains. The ear catches a twitter hushed again and renewed more than once before the full song breaks out. The psalmist has been absorbed with his own troubles till now, but thankfulness expands his vision, and suddenly there is with him a multitude of fellow-dependants on God's goodness. He hungers alone, but he feasts in company. The abundance of God's "goodness" is conceived of as a treasure stored, and in part openly displayed, before the sons of men. The antithesis suggests manifold applications of the contrast, such as the inexhaustibleness of the mercy which, after all revelation, remains unrevealed, and, after all expenditure, has not perceptibly diminished in its shining mass, as of bullion in some vault; or the varying dealings of God, who sometimes, while sorrow is allowed to have its scope, seems to keep His riches of help under lock and key, and then again flashes them forth in deeds of deliverance; or the difference between the partial unfolding of these on earth and the full endowment of His servants with "riches in glory" hereafter. All these carry the one lesson that there is more in God than any creature or all creatures have ever drawn from Him or can ever draw. The repetition of the idea of hiding in ver. 20 is a true touch of devout poetry. The same word is used for laying up the treasure and for sheltering in a pavilion from the jangle of tongues. The wealth and the poor men who need it are stored together, as it were; and the place where they both lie safe is God Himself. How can they be poor who are

dwelling close beside infinite riches? The psalmist has just prayed that God would make His face to shine upon him; and now he rejoices in the assurance of the answer, and knows himself and all like-minded men to be hidden in that "glorious privacy of light," where evil things cannot live. As if caught up to and "clothed with the sun," he and they are beyond the reach of hostile conspiracies, and have "outsoared the shadow of" earth's antagonisms. The great thought of security in God has never been more nobly expressed than by that magnificent metaphor of the light inaccessible streaming from God's face to be the bulwark of a poor man. [Pg 300]

The personal tone recurs for a moment in vv. 21, 22, in which it is doubtful whether we hear thankfulness for deliverance anticipated as certain and so spoken of as past, since it is as good as done, or for some recently experienced marvel of loving-kindness, which heartens the psalmist in present trouble. If this psalm is David's, the reference may be to his finding a city of refuge, at the time when his fortunes were very low, in Ziklag, a strange place for a Jewish fugitive to be sheltered. One can scarcely help feeling that the allusion is so specific as to suggest historical fact as its basis. At the same time it must be admitted that the expression may be the carrying on of the metaphor of the hiding in a pavilion. The "strong city" is worthily interpreted as being God Himself, though the historical explanation is tempting. God's mercy makes a true man ashamed of his doubts, and therefore the thanksgiving of ver. 21 leads to the confession of ver. 22. Agitated into despair, the psalmist had thought that he was "cut off from God's eyes"—*i.e.*, hidden so as not to be helped—but the event has showed that God both heard and saw him. If alarm does not so make us think that God is blind to our need and deaf to our cry as to make us dumb, we shall be taught the folly of our fears by His answers to our prayers. These will have a voice of gentle rebuke, and ask us, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" He delivers first, and lets the deliverance stand in place of chiding. [Pg 301]

The whole closes with a summons to all whom Jehovah loves to love Him for His mercy's sake. The joyful singer longs for a chorus to join his single voice, as all devout hearts do. He generalises his own experience, as all who have for themselves experienced deliverance are entitled and bound to do, and discerns that in his single case the broad law is attested that the faithful are guarded whatever dangers assail, and "the proud doer" abundantly repaid for all his contempt and hatred of the just. Therefore the last result of contemplating God's ways with His servants is an incentive to courage, strength, and patient waiting for the Lord.

[Pg 302]

PSALM XXXII.

1 Blessed he whose transgression is taken away, whose sin is covered,
2 Blessed the man to whom Jehovah reckons not iniquity,
In whose spirit is no guile.

3 When I kept silence, my bones rotted away,
Through my roaring all the day.
4 For day and night Thy hand weighed heavily upon me;
My sap was turned [as] in droughts of summer. Selah.

5 My sin I acknowledged to Thee, and my iniquity I covered not,
I said, I will confess because of my transgressions to Jehovah,
And Thou—Thou didst take away the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

6 Because of this let every one beloved [of Thee] pray to Thee in a time of finding;
Surely when great waters are in flood, to him they shall not reach.
7 Thou art a shelter for me; from trouble wilt Thou preserve me,
[With] shouts of deliverance wilt encircle me. Selah.

8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shouldest go;
I will counsel thee, [with] mine eye upon thee.
9 Be not ye like horse, like mule, without understanding,
Whose harness to hold them in is bit and bridle,

Else no coming near to thee.
10 The wicked has many sorrows,
And he who trusts in Jehovah—with loving-kindness will He encircle him.

11 Rejoice in Jehovah, and exult, ye righteous;
And shout joyfully, all ye upright of heart.

One must have a dull ear not to hear the voice of personal experience in this psalm. It throbs with emotion, and is a burst of rapture from a heart tasting the sweetness of the new joy of forgiveness. It is hard to believe [IPL303] that the speaker is but a personification of the nation, and the difficulty is recognised by Cheyne's concession that we have here "principally, though not exclusively, a national psalm." The old opinion that it records David's experience in the dark time when, for a whole year, he lived impenitent after his great sin of sense, and was then broken down by Nathan's message and restored to peace through pardon following swiftly on penitence, is still defensible, and gives a fit setting for this gem. Whoever was the singer, his song goes deep down to permanent realities in conscience and in men's relations to God, and therefore is not for an age, but for all time. Across the dim waste of years, we hear this man speaking our sins, our penitence, our joy; and the antique words are as fresh, and fit as close to our experiences, as if they had been welled up from a living heart to-day. The theme is the way of forgiveness and its blessedness; and this is set forth in two parts: the first (vv. 1-5) a leaf from the psalmist's autobiography, the second (ver. 6 to end) the generalisation of individual experience and its application to others. In each part the prevailing division of verses is into strophes of two, each containing two members, but with some irregularity.

The page from the psalmist's confessions (vv. 1-5) begins with a burst of rapturous thankfulness for the joy of forgiveness (vv. 1, 2), passes to paint in dark colours the misery of sullen impenitence (vv. 3, 4), and then, in one longer verse, tells with glad wonder how sudden and complete was the transition to the joy of forgiveness by the way of penitence. It is a chart of one man's path from the depths to the heights, and avails to guide all.

The psalmist begins abruptly with an exclamation (Oh, the blessedness, etc.). His new joy wells up [IPL304] irrepressibly. To think that he who had gone so far down in the mire, and had locked his lips in silence for so long, should find himself so blessed! Joy so exuberant cannot content itself with one statement of its grounds. It runs over in synonyms for sin and its forgiveness, which are not feeble tautology. The heart is too full to be emptied at one outpouring, and though all the clauses describe the same things, they do so with differences. This is true with regard to the words both for sin and for pardon. The three designations of the former present three aspects of its hideousness. The first, rendered ("transgression,") conceives of it as rebellion against rightful authority, not merely breach of an impersonal law, but breaking away from a rightful king. The second ("sin") describes it as missing a mark. What is in regard to God rebellion is in regard to myself missing the aim, whether that aim be considered as that which a man is, by his very make and relations, intended to be and do, or as that which he proposes to himself by his act. All sin tragically fails to hit the mark in both these senses. It is a failure as to reaching the ideal of conduct, "the chief end of man," and not less so as to winning the satisfaction sought by the deed. It keeps the word of promise to the ear, and breaks it to the hope, ever luring by lying offers; and if it gives the poor delights which it holds out, it ever adds something that embitters them, like spirits of wine methylated and made undrinkable. It is always a blunder to do wrong. The last synonym ("iniquity") means crookedness or distortion, and seems to embody the same idea as our words "right" and "wrong," namely the contrast between the straight line of duty and the [IPL305] contorted lines drawn by sinful hands. What runs parallel with law is right; what diverges is wrong. The three expressions for pardon are also eloquent in their variety. The first word means taken away or lifted off, as a burden from aching shoulders. It implies more than holding back penal consequences; it is the removal of sin itself, and that not merely in the multitudinousness of its manifestations in act, but in the depth of its inward source. This is the metaphor which Bunyan has made so familiar by his picture of the pilgrim losing his load at the cross. The second ("covered") paints pardon as God's shrouding the foul thing from His pure eyes, so that His action is no longer determined by its existence. The third describes forgiveness as God's not reckoning a man's sin to him, in which expression hovers some allusion to cancelling a debt. The clause "in whose spirit is no guile" is best taken as a conditional one, pointing to sincerity which confesses guilt as a condition of pardon. But the alternative construction as a continuation of the description of the forgiven man is quite possible; and if thus understood, the crowning blessing of pardon is set forth as being the liberation of the forgiven spirit from all "guile" or evil. God's kiss of forgiveness sucks the poison from the wound.

Retrospect of the dismal depth from which it has climbed is natural to a soul sunning itself on high. Therefore on the overflowing description of present blessedness follows a shuddering glance downwards to past unrest. Sullen silence caused the one; frank acknowledgment brought the other. He who will not speak his sin to God has to groan. A dumb conscience often makes a loud-voiced pain. This man's sin had indeed missed its aim; [Ps 306] for it had brought about three things: rotting bones (which may be but a strong metaphor or may be a physical fact), the consciousness of God's displeasure dimly felt as if a great hand were pressing him down, and the drying up of the sap of his life, as if the fierce heat of summer had burned the marrow in his bones. These were the fruits of pleasant sin, and by reason of them many a moan broke from his locked lips. Stolid indifference may delay remorse, but its serpent fang strikes soon or later, and then strength and joy die. The Selah indicates a swell or prolongation of the accompaniment, to emphasise this terrible picture of a soul gnawing itself.

The abrupt turn to description of the opposite disposition in ver. 5 suggests a sudden gush of penitence. As at a bound, the soul passes from dreary remorse. The break with the former self is complete, and effected in one wrench. Some things are best done by degrees; and some, of which forsaking sin is one, are best done quickly. And as swift as the resolve to crave pardon, so swift is the answer giving it. We are reminded of that gospel compressed into a verse, "David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin." Again the three designations of sin are employed, though in different order; and the act of confession is thrice mentioned, as that of forgiveness was. The fulness and immediateness of pardon are emphatically given by the double epithet "the iniquity of thy sin" and by the representation that it follows the resolve to confess, and does not wait for the act. The Divine love is so eager to forgive that it tarries not for actual confession, but anticipates it, as the father interrupts the prodigal's acknowledgment with gifts and welcome. The Selah at the end of ver. 5 is as triumphant as that at the close [Ps 307] of ver. 4 had been sad. It parts the autobiographical section from the more general one which follows.

In the second part the solitary soul translates its experience into exhortations for all, and woos men to follow on the same path, by setting forth in rich variety the joys of pardon. The exhortation first dwells on the positive blessings associated with penitence (vv. 6, 7), and next on the degradation and sorrow involved in obstinate hard-heartedness (vv. 8-10). The natural impulse of him who has known both is to beseech others to share his happy experience, and the psalmist's course of thought obeys that impulse, for the future "shall pray" (R.V.) is better regarded as hortatory "let ... pray." "Because of this" does not express the contents of the petitions, but their reason. The manifestation of God as infinitely ready to forgive should hearten to prayer; and, since God's beloved need forgiveness day by day, even though they may not have fallen into such gross sin as this psalmist, there is no incongruity in the exhortation being addressed to them. "He that is washed" still needs that feet fouled in muddy ways should be cleansed. Every time of seeking by such prayer is a "time of finding"; but the phrase implies that there is a time of not finding, and, in its very graciousness, is heavy with warning against delay. With forgiveness comes security. The penitent, praying, pardoned man is set as on a rock islet in the midst of floods, whether these be conceived of as temptation to sin or as calamities. The hortatory tone is broken in ver. 7 by the recurrence of the personal element, since the singer's heart was too full for silence; but there is no real interruption, for the joyous utterance of one's own faith is [Ps 308] often the most winning persuasive, and a devout man can scarcely hold out to others the sweetness of finding God without at the same time tasting what he offers. Unless he does, his words will ring unreal. "Thou art a shelter for me" (same word as in xxvii. 5, xxxi. 20), is the utterance of trust; and the emphasis is on "my." To hide in God is to be "preserved from trouble," not in the sense of being exempt, but in that of not being overwhelmed, as the beautiful last clause of v. 7 shows, in which "shouts of deliverance" from trouble which had pressed are represented by a bold, but not harsh, metaphor as ringing the psalmist round. The air is filled with jubilant voices, the echoes of his own. The word rendered "songs" or preferably "shouts" is unusual, and its consonants repeat the last three of the preceding word ("shalt preserve me"). These peculiarities have led to the suggestion that we have in it a "dittograph." If so, the remaining words of the last clause would read, "Thou wilt compass me about with deliverance," which would be a perfectly appropriate expression. But probably the similarity of letters is a play upon words, of which we have another example in the preceding clause where the consonants of the word for "trouble," reappear in their order in the verb "wilt preserve." The shout of joy is caught up by the Selah.

But now the tone changes into solemn warning against obstinate disregard of God's leading. It is usual to suppose that the psalmist still speaks, but surely "I will counsel thee, with mine eye upon thee," does not fit human lips. It is to be observed, too, that in ver. 8 a single person is addressed, who is most naturally taken to be the same as he who spoke his individual faith in ver. 7. In other words, the psalmist's confidence evokes a [Ps 309] Divine response, and that brief interchange of clinging trust and answering promise stands in the midst of the

appeal to men, which it scarcely interrupts. Ver. 9 may either be regarded as the continuance of the Divine voice, or perhaps better, as the resumption by the psalmist of his hortatory address. God's direction as to duty and protection in peril are both included in the promise of ver. 8. With His eye upon His servant, He will show him the way, and will keep him ever in sight as he travels on it. The beautiful meaning of the A.V., that God guides with a glance those who dwell near enough to Him to see His look, is scarcely contained in the words, though it is true that the sense of pardon binds men to Him in such sweet bonds that they are eager to catch the faintest indications of His will, and "His looks command, His lightest words are spells."

Vv. 9, 10, are a warning against brutish obstinacy. The former verse has difficulties in detail, but its drift is plain. It contrasts the gracious guidance which avails for those made docile by forgiveness and trust with the harsh constraint which must curb and coerce mulish natures. The only things which such understand are bits and bridles. They will not come near to God without such rough outward constraint, any more than an unbroken horse will approach a man unless dragged by a halter. That untamableness except by force is the reason why "many sorrows" must strike "the wicked." If these are here compared to "bit" and "bridle," they are meant to drive to God, and are therefore regarded as being such mercies as the obstinate are capable of receiving. Obedience extorted by force is no obedience, but approach to God compelled by sorrows that restrain unbridled licence of tempers and of sense is accepted as a real approach and then is purged into [Pg 310] access with confidence. They who are at first driven are afterwards drawn, and taught to know no delight so great as that of coming and keeping near God.

The antithesis of "wicked" and "he that trusteth in Jehovah" is significant as teaching that faith is the true opposite of sinfulness. Not less full of meaning is the sequence of trust, righteousness, and uprightness of heart in vv. 10, 11. Faith leads to righteousness, and they are upright, not who have never fallen, but who have been raised from their fall by pardon. The psalmist had thought of himself as compassed with shouts of deliverance. Another circle is cast round him and all who, with him, trust Jehovah. A ring of mercies, like a fiery wall, surrounds the pardoned, faithful soul, without a break through which a real evil can creep. Therefore the encompassing songs of deliverance are continuous as the mercies which they hymn, and in the centre of that double circle the soul sits secure and thankful.

The psalm ends with a joyful summons to general joy. All share in the solitary soul's exultation. The depth of penitence measures the height of gladness. The breath that was spent in "roaring all the day long" is used for shouts of deliverance. Every tear sparkles like a diamond in the sunshine of pardon, and he who begins with the lowly cry for forgiveness will end with lofty songs of joy and be made, by God's guidance and Spirit, righteous and upright in heart.

[Pg 311]

PSALM XXXIII.

1 Rejoice aloud, ye righteous, in Jehovah,
For the upright praise is seemly.
2 Give thanks to Jehovah with harp;
With ten-stringed psaltery play unto Him.
3 Sing to Him a new song,
Strike well [the strings] with joyful shouts.

4 For upright is the word of Jehovah,
And all His work is in faithfulness.
5 He loves righteousness and judgment,
Of Jehovah's loving-kindness the earth is full.
6 By the word of Jehovah the heavens were made,
And all their host by the breath of His mouth.
7 Who gathereth as an heap the waters of the sea,
Who layeth up the deeps in storehouses.
8 Let all the earth fear Jehovah,
Before Him let all inhabitants of the world stand in awe.

9 For He, He spoke and it was;
He, He commanded and it stood.
10 Jehovah has brought to nothing the counsel of the nations,
He has frustrated the designs of the peoples.
11 The counsel of Jehovah shall stand for ever,
The designs of His heart to generation after generation.

12 Blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah,
The people He has chosen for an inheritance for Himself.
13 From heaven Jehovah looks down,
He beholds all the sons of men.
14 From the place where He sits, He gazes
On all the inhabitants of earth:—
15 Even He who forms the hearts of them all,
Who marks all their works.
16 A king is not saved by the greatness of [his] army,
A hero is not delivered by the greatness of [his] strength. [Pg 312]
17 A horse is a vain thing for safety;
And by the greatness of its strength it does not give escape.
18 Behold the eye of Jehovah is on them who fear Him,
On them who hope for His loving-kindness,
19 To deliver their soul from death,
And to keep them alive in famine.

20 Our soul waits for Jehovah,
Our help and our shield is He.
21 For in Him shall our heart rejoice,
For in His holy name have we trusted.
22 Let Thy loving-kindness, Jehovah, be upon us,
According as we have hoped for Thee.

This is the last of the four psalms in Book I. which have no title, the others being Psalms i., ii., which are introductory, and x. which is closely connected with ix. Some have endeavoured to establish a similar connection between xxxii. and xxxiii.; but, while the closing summons to the righteous in the former is substantially repeated in the opening words of the latter, there is little other trace of connection, except the references in both to "the eye of Jehovah" (xxxii. 8, xxxiii. 18); and no two psalms could be more different in subject and tone than these. The one is full of profound, personal emotion, and deals with the depths of experience; the other is devoid of personal reference, and is a devout, calm contemplation of the creative power and providential government of God. It is kindred with the later type of psalms, and has many verbal allusions connecting it with them. It has probably been placed here simply because of the similarity just noticed between its beginning and the end of the preceding. The reasons for the arrangement of the psalter were, so far as they can be traced, usually such merely verbal coincidences. To one who has been travelling through the heights and depths, the storms and sunny gleams of the previous psalms, this impersonal didactic [Pg 313] meditation, with its historical allusions and entire ignoring of sins and sorrows, is indeed "a new song." It is apparently meant for liturgical use, and falls into three unequal parts; the first three verses and the last three being prelude and conclusion, the former summoning the "righteous" to praise Jehovah, the latter putting words of trust and triumph and prayer into their mouths. The central mass (vv. 4-19) celebrates the creative and providential work of God, in two parts, of which the first extends these Divine acts over the world (vv. 4-11) and the second concentrates them on Israel (vv. 12-19).

The opening summons to praise takes us far away from the solitary wrestlings and communings in former psalms. Now

> "The singers lift up their voice,
> And the trumpets make endeavour,
> Sounding, 'In God rejoice!
> In Him rejoice for ever!'"

But the clear recognition of purity as the condition of access to God speaks in this invocation as distinctly as in any of the preceding. "The righteous" whose lives conform to the Divine will, and only they can shout aloud their joy in Jehovah. Praise fits and adorns the lips of the "upright" only, whose spirits are without twist of self-will and sin. The direction of character expressed in the word is horizontal rather than vertical, and is better represented by "straight" than "upright." Praise gilds the gold of purity and adds grace even to the beauty of holiness. Experts tell us that the *kinnor* (harp, A.V. and R.V.) and *nebel* (psaltery) were both stringed instruments, differing in the position of the sounding board, which was below in the former and above in the latter, and also in the covering of the strings (*v.* Delitzsch, Eng. transl. of latest ed., I. 7, n.). The [Ps. 33:1-5]
"new song" is not necessarily the psalm itself, but may mean other thanksgivings evoked by God's meditated-on goodness. But, in any case, it is noteworthy that the occasions of the new song are very old acts, stretching back to the first creation and continued down through the ages. The psalm has no trace of special recent mercies, but to the devout soul the old deeds are never antiquated, and each new meditation on them breaks into new praise. So inexhaustible is the theme that all generations take it up in turn, and find "songs unheard" and "sweeter" with which to celebrate it. Each new rising of the old sun brings music from the lips of Memnon, as he sits fronting the east. The facts of revelation must be sung by each age and soul for itself, and the glowing strains grow cold and archaic, while the ancient mercies which they magnify live on bright and young. There is always room for a fresh voice to praise the old gospel, the old creation, the old providence.

This new song is saturated with reminiscences of old ones, and deals with familiar thoughts which have come to the psalmist with fresh power. He magnifies the moral attributes manifested in God's self-revelation, His creative Word, and His providential government. "The word of Jehovah," in ver. 4, is to be taken in the wide sense of every utterance of His thought or will ("non accipi pro doctrina, sed pro mundi gubernandi ratione," Calvin). It underlies His "works," as is more largely declared in the following verses. It is "upright," the same word as in ver. 1, and here equivalent to the general idea of morally perfect. The acts which flow from it are "in faithfulness," correspond to and keep His word. The perfect word and works have for source the deep [Ps. 33:5]
heart of Jehovah, which loves "righteousness and judgment," and therefore speaks and acts in accordance with these. Therefore the outcome of all is a world full of God's loving-kindness. The psalmist has won that "serene and blessed mood" in which the problem of life seems easy, and all harsh and gloomy thoughts have melted out of the sky. There is but one omnipotent Will at work everywhere, and that is a Will whose law for itself is the love of righteousness and truth. The majestic simplicity and universality of the cause are answered by the simplicity and universality of the result, the flooding of the whole world with blessing. Many another psalm shows how hard it is to maintain such a faith in the face of the terrible miseries of men, and the more complex "civilisation" becomes, the harder it grows; but it is well to hear sometimes the one clear note of gladness without its chord of melancholy.

The work of creation is set forth in vv. 6-9, as the effect of the Divine word alone. The psalmist is fascinated not by the glories created, but by the wonder of the process of creation. The Divine will uttered itself, and the universe was. Of course the thought is parallel with that of Genesis, "God said, Let there be ... and there was...." Nor are we to antedate the Christian teaching of a personal Word of God, the agent of creation. The old versions and interpreters, followed by Cheyne, read "as in a bottle" for "as an heap," vocalising the text differently from the present pointing; but there seems to be an allusion to the wall of waters at the passage of the Red Sea, the same word being used in Miriam's song; with "depths" in the next clause, there as here (Exod. xv. 8). What is meant, however, here, is the separation of land and water at first, and possibly the [Ps. 33:6-11]
continuance of the same power keeping them still apart, since the verbs in ver. 7 are participles, which imply continued action. The image of "an heap" is probably due to the same optical delusion which has coined the expression "the high seas," since, to an eye looking seawards from the beach, the level waters seem to rise as they recede; or it may merely express the gathering together in a mass. Away out there, in that ocean of which the Hebrews knew so little, were unplumbed depths in which, as in vast storehouses, the abundance of the sea was shut up, and the ever-present Word which made them at first was to them instead of bolts and bars. Possibly the thought of the storehouses suggested that of the Flood when these were opened, and that thought, crossing the psalmist's mind, led to the exhortation in ver. 8 to fear Jehovah, which would more naturally have followed ver. 9. The power displayed in creation is, however, a sufficient ground for the summons to reverent obedience, and ver. 9 may be but an emphatic repetition of the substance of the foregoing description. It is eloquent in its brevity and juxtaposition of the creative word and the created world. "It stood,"—"the word includes much: first, the coming into being (*Entstehen*), then, the continued subsistence (*Bestehen*), lastly, attendance (*Dastehen*) in readiness for service" (Stier).

From the original creation the psalmist's mind runs over the ages between it and him, and sees the same mystical might of the Divine Will working in what we call providential government. God's bare word has

power without material means. Nay, His very thoughts unspoken are endowed with immortal vigour, and are at bottom the only real powers in history. God's "thoughts stand," as creation does, lasting on through all men's fleeting years. With reverent boldness the psalm parallels the processes (if we may so speak) of the Divine mind with those of the human; "counsel" and "thoughts" being attributed to both. But how different the issue of the solemn thoughts of God and those of men, in so far as they are not in accordance with His! It unduly narrows the sweep of the psalmist's vision to suppose that he is speaking of a recent experience when some assault on Israel was repelled. He is much rather linking the hour of creation with to-day by one swift summary of the net result of all history. The only stable, permanent reality is the will of God, and it imparts derived stability to those who ally themselves with it, yielding to its counsels and moulding their thoughts by its. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever," but the shore of time is littered with wreckage, the sad fragments of proud fleets which would sail in the teeth of the wind and went to pieces on the rocks. [Pg 317]

From such thoughts the transition to the second part of the main body of the psalm is natural. Vv. 12-19 are a joyous celebration of the blessedness of Israel as the people of so great a God. The most striking feature of these verses is the pervading reference to the passage of the Red Sea which, as we have already seen, has coloured ver. 7. From Miriam's song come the designation of the people as God's "inheritance," and the phrase "the place of His habitation" (Exod. xv. 17). The "looking upon the inhabitants of the earth," and the thought that the "eye of Jehovah is upon them that fear Him, to deliver their soul in death" (vv. 14, 18), remind us of the Lord's looking from the pillar on the host of Egyptians and the terrified crowd of fugitives, and of the same glance being darkness to the one and light to the other. The abrupt introduction of the king not saved by his host, and of the vanity of the horse for safety, are explained if we catch an echo of Miriam's ringing notes, "Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea.... The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea" (Exod. xv. 4, 21). [Pg 318]

If this historical allusion be not recognised, the connection of these verses is somewhat obscure, but still discernible. The people who stand in special relation to God are blessed, because that eye, which sees all men, rests on them in loving-kindness and with gracious purpose of special protection. This contrast of God's universal knowledge and of that knowledge which is accompanied with loving care is the very nerve of these verses, as is shown by the otherwise aimless repetition of the thought of God's looking down on men. There is a wide all-seeingness, characterised by three words in an ascending scale of closeness of observance, in vv. 13, 14. It is possible to God as being Creator: "He fashions their hearts individually," or "one by one," seems the best interpretation of ver. 15 *a*, and thence is deduced His intimate knowledge of all His creatures' doings. The sudden turn to the impotence of earthly might, as illustrated by the king and the hero and the battle-horse, may be taken as intended to contrast the weakness of such strength both with the preceding picture of Divine omniscience and almightiness, and with the succeeding assurance of safety in Jehovah. The true reason for the blessedness of the chosen people is that God's eye is on them, not merely with cold omniscience nor with critical considering of their works, but with the direct purpose of sheltering them from surrounding evil. But the stress of the characterisation of these guarded and nourished favourites of heaven is now laid not upon a Divine act of choice, but upon their meek looking to Him. His eye meets with love the upturned patient eye of humble expectance and loving fear. [Pg 319]

What should be the issue of such thoughts, but the glad profession of trust, with which the psalm fittingly ends, corresponding to the invocation to praise which began it? Once in each of these three closing verses do the speakers profess their dependence on God. The attitude of waiting with fixed hope and patient submission is the characteristic of God's true servants in all ages. In it are blended consciousness of weakness and vulnerability, dread of assault, reliance on Divine Love, confidence of safety, patience, submission and strong aspiration.

These were the tribal marks of God's people, when this was "a new song"; they are so to-day, for, though the Name of the Lord be more fully known by Christ, the trust in it is the same. A threefold good is possessed, expected and asked as the issue of this waiting. God is "help and shield" to those who exercise it. Its sure fruit is joy in Him, since He will answer the expectance of His people, and will make His name more fully known and more sweet to those who have clung to it, in so far as they knew it. The measure of hope in God is the measure of experience of His loving-kindness, and the closing prayer does not allege hope as meriting the answer which it expects, but recognises that desire is a condition of possession of God's best gifts, and knows it to be most impossible of all impossibilities that hope fixed on God should be ashamed. Hands, lifted empty to heaven in longing trust, will never drop empty back and hang listless, without a blessing in their grasp.

PSALM XXXIV.

1 (א) I will bless Jehovah at all times,
Continually shall His praise be in my mouth.
2 (ב) In Jehovah my soul shall boast herself,
The humble shall hear and rejoice.
3 (ג) Magnify Jehovah with me,
And let us exalt His name together.

4 (ד) I sought Jehovah and He answered me,
And from all my terrors did He deliver me.
5 (ה) They looked to Him and were brightened,
(ו) And their faces did not blush.
6 (ז) This afflicted man cried and Jehovah heard,
And from all his distresses saved him.
7 (ח) The angel of Jehovah encamps round them that fear Him,
And delivers them.
8 (ט) Taste and see that Jehovah is good;
Happy the man that takes refuge in Him.
9 (י) Fear Jehovah, ye His holy ones;
For there is no want to them that fear Him.
10 (כ) Young lions famish and starve,
But they that seek Jehovah shall not want any good.

11 (ל) Come [my] sons, hearken to me;
I will teach you the fear of Jehovah.
12 (מ) Who is the man who desires life,
Who loves [many] days, in order to see good?
13 (נ) Keep thy tongue from evil,
And thy lips from speaking deceit.
14 (ס) Depart from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.
15 (ע) The eyes of Jehovah are toward the righteous,
And His ears are towards their loud cry.
16 (פ) The face of Jehovah is against the doers of evil
To cut off their remembrance from the earth. [Pg 321]
17 (צ) The righteous cry and Jehovah hears;
And from all their straits He rescues them.
18 (ק) Jehovah is near to the broken in heart,
And the crushed in spirit He saves.
19 (ר) Many are the afflictions of the righteous;
But from them all Jehovah delivers him.
20 (ש) He keeps all his bones,
Not one of them is broken.
21 (ת) Evil shall slay the wicked;
And the haters of the righteous shall be held guilty.
22 (פ) Jehovah redeems the soul of His servants;
And not held guilty shall any be who take refuge in Him.

The occasion of this psalm, according to the superscription, was that humiliating and questionable episode, when David pretended insanity to save his life from the ruler of Goliath's city of Gath. The set of critical opinion sweeps away this tradition as unworthy of serious refutation. The psalm is acrostic, therefore of late date; there are no references to the supposed occasion; the careless scribe has blundered "blindly" (Hupfeld) in the king's name, mixing up the stories about Abraham and Isaac in Genesis with the legend about David at Gath; the didactic, gnomical cast of the psalm speaks of a late age. But the assumption that acrostic structure

is necessarily a mark of late date is not by any means self-evident, and needs more proof than is forthcoming; the absence of plain allusions to the singer's circumstances cuts both ways, and suggests the question, how the attribution to the period stated arose, since there is nothing in the psalm to suggest it; the blunder of the king's name is perhaps not a blunder after all, but, as the Genesis passages seem to imply, "Abimelech" (the father of the King) may be a title, like Pharaoh, common to Philistine "kings," and Achish may have been the name of the reigning Abimelech; the proverbial style and somewhat slight connection and progress of thought are necessary results of acrostic fetters. If the psalm be David's, the contrast between the degrading expedient which saved him and the exalted sentiments here is remarkable, but not incredible. The seeming idiot scrabbling on the gate is now saint, poet, and preacher; and, looking back on the deliverance won by a trick, he thinks of it as an instance of Jehovah's answer to prayer! It is a strange psychological study; and yet, keeping in view the then existing standard of morality as to stratagems in warfare, and the wonderful power that even good men have of ignoring flaws in their faith and faults in their conduct, we may venture to suppose that the event which evoked this song of thanksgiving and is transfigured in ver. 4 is the escape by craft from Achish. To David his feigning madness did not seem inconsistent with trust and prayer. [Ps 322]

Whatever be the occasion of the psalm, its course of thought is obvious. There is first a vow of praise in which others are summoned to unite (vv. 1-3); then follows a section in which personal experience and invocation to others are similarly blended (vv. 4-10); and finally a purely didactic section, analysing the practical manifestations of "the fear of the Lord" and enforcing it by the familiar contrast of the blessedness of the righteous and the miserable fate of the ungodly. Throughout we find familiar turns of thought and expression, such as are usual in acrostic psalms.

The glad vow of unbroken praise and undivided trust, which begins the psalm, sounds like the welling over of a heart for recent mercy. It seems easy and natural while the glow of fresh blessings is felt, to "rejoice in the Lord always, and again to say Rejoice." Thankfulness which looks forward to its own cessation, and takes into account the distractions of circumstance and changes of mood which will surely come, is too foreseeing. Whether the vow be kept or no, it is well that it should be made; still better is it that it should be kept, as it may be, even amid distracting circumstances and changing moods. The incense on the altar did not flame throughout the day, but, being fanned into a glow at morning and evening sacrifice, it smouldered with a thread of fragrant smoke continually. It is not only the exigencies of the acrostic which determine the order in ver. 2: "In Jehovah shall my soul boast,"—*in Him*, and not in self or worldly ground, of trust and glorying. The ideal of the devout life, which in moments of exaltation seems capable of realisation, as in clear weather Alpine summits look near enough to be reached in an hour, is unbroken praise and undivided reliance on and joy in Jehovah. But alas—how far above us the peaks are! Still to see them ennobles, and to strive to reach them secures an upward course. [Ps 323]

The solitary heart hungers for sympathy in its joy, as in its sorrow; but knows full well that such can only be given by those who have known like bitterness and have learned submission in the same way. We must be purged of self in order to be glad in another's deliverance, and must be pupils in the same school in order to be entitled to take his experience as our encouragement, and to make a chorus to his solo of thanksgiving. The invocation is so natural an expression of the instinctive desire for companionship in praise that one needs not to look for any particular group to whom it is addressed; but if the psalm be David's, the call is not inappropriate in the mouth of the leader of his band of devoted followers.

The second section of the psalm (vv. 4-10) is at first biographical, and then generalises personal experience into broad universal truth. But even in recounting what befell himself, the singer will not eat his morsel alone, but is glad to be able at every turn to feel that he has companions in his happy experience. Vv. 4, 5 are a pair, as are vv. 6, 7, and in each the same fact is narrated first in reference to the single soul, and then in regard to all the servants of Jehovah. "This poor man" is by most of the older expositors taken to be the psalmist, but by the majority of moderns supposed to be an individualising way of saying, "poor men." The former explanation seems to me the more natural, as preserving the parallelism between the two groups of verses. If so, the close correspondence of expression in vv. 4 and 6 is explained, since the same event is subject of both. In both is the psalmist's appeal to Jehovah presented; in the one as "seeking" with anxious eagerness, and in the other as "crying" with the loud call of one in urgent need of immediate rescue. In both, Divine acceptance follows close on the cry, and in both immediately ensues succour. "He delivered me from all my fears," and "saved him out of all his troubles," correspond entirely, though not verbally. In like manner vv. 5 and 7 are alike in extending the blessing of the unit so as to embrace the class. The absence of any expressed subject of the verb in ver. 5 makes the statement more comprehensive, like the French "*on*," or English "they." To "look unto Him" is the same thing as is expressed in the individualising verses by the two [Ps 324]

phrases, "sought," and "cried unto," only the metaphor is changed into that of silent, wistful directing of beseeching and sad eyes to God. And its issue is beautifully told, in pursuance of the metaphor. Whoever turns his face to Jehovah will receive reflected brightness on his face; as when a mirror is directed sunwards, the dark surface will flash into sudden glory. Weary eyes will gleam. Faces turned to the sun are sure to be radiant. [Ps 325]

The hypothesis of the Davidic authorship gives special force to the great assurance of ver. 7. The fugitive, in his rude shelter in the cave of Adullam, thinks of Jacob, who, in his hour of defenceless need, was heartened by the vision of the angel encampment surrounding his own little band, and named the place "Mahanaim," the two camps. That fleeting vision was a temporary manifestation of abiding reality. Wherever there is a camp of them that fear God, there is another, of which the helmed and sworded angel that appeared to Joshua is Captain, and the name of every such place is Two Camps. That is the sight which brightens the eyes that look to God. That mysterious personality, "the Angel of the Lord," is only mentioned in the Psalter here and in Psalm xxxv. In other places, He appears as the agent of Divine communications, and especially as the guide and champion of Israel. He is "the angel of God's face," the personal revealer of His presence and nature. His functions correspond to those of the Word in John's Gospel, and these, conjoined with the supremacy indicated in his name, suggest that "*the* Angel of the Lord" is, in fact, the everlasting Son of the Father, through whom the Christology of the New Testament teaches that all Revelation has been mediated. The psalmist did not know the full force of the name, but he believed that there was a Person, in an eminent and singular sense God's messenger, who would cast his protection round the devout, and bid [Ps 326] inferior heavenly beings draw their impregnable ranks about them. Christians can tell more than he could, of the Bearer of the name. It becomes them to be all the surer of His protection.

Just as the vow of ver. 1 passed into invocation, so does the personal experience of vv. 4-7 glide into exhortation. If such be the experience of poor men, trusting in Jehovah, how should the sharers in it be able to withhold themselves from calling on others to take their part in the joy? The depth of a man's religion may be roughly, but on the whole fairly, tested by his irrepressible impulse to bring other men to the fountain from which he has drunk. Very significantly does the psalm call on men to "taste and see," for in religion experience must precede knowledge. The way to "taste" is to "trust" or to "take refuge in" Jehovah. "Crede et manducasti," says Augustine. The psalm said it before him. Just as the act of appealing to Jehovah was described in a threefold way in vv. 4-6, so a threefold designation of devout men occurs in vv. 8-10. They "trust," are "saints," they "seek." Faith, consecration and aspiration are their marks. These are the essentials of the religious life, whatever be the degree of revelation. These were its essentials in the psalmist's time, and they are so to-day. As abiding as they, are the blessings consequent. These may all be summed up in one—the satisfaction of every need and desire. There are two ways of seeking for satisfaction: that of effort, violence and reliance on one's own teeth and claws to get one's meat; the other that of patient, submissive trust. Were there lions prowling round the camp at Adullam, and did the psalmist take their growls as typical of all vain [Ps 327] attempts to satisfy the soul? Struggle and force and self-reliant efforts leave men gaunt and hungry. He who takes the path of trust and has his supreme desires set on God, and who looks to Him to give what he himself cannot wring out of life, will get first his deepest desires answered in possessing God, and will then find that the One great Good is an encyclopædia of separate goods. They that "seek Jehovah" shall assuredly find Him, and in Him everything. He is multiform, and His goodness takes many shapes, according to the curves of the vessels which it fills. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God ... and all these things shall be added unto you."

The mention of the "fear of the Lord" prepares the way for the transition to the third part of the psalm. It is purely didactic, and, in its simple moral teaching and familiar contrast of the fates of righteous and ungodly, has affinities with the Book of Proverbs; but these are not so special as to require the supposition of contemporaneousness. It is unfashionable now to incline to the Davidic authorship; but would not the supposition that the "children," who are to be taught the elements of religion, are the band of outlaws who have gathered round the fugitive, give appropriateness to the transition from the thanksgiving of the first part to the didactic tone of the second? We can see them sitting round the singer in the half-darkness of the cave, a wild group, needing much control and yet with faithful hearts, and loyal to their leader, who now tells them the laws of his camp, at the same time as he sets forth the broad principles of that morality, which is the garment and manifestation among men of the "fear of the Lord." The relations of religion and morals were never more clearly and strikingly expressed than in the simple language of this psalm, which puts the [Ps 328] substance of many profound treatises in a nutshell, when it expounds the "fear of Jehovah" as consisting in speaking truth, doing good, abhorring evil and seeking peace even when it seems to flee from us. The primal virtues are the same for all ages and stages of revelation. The definition of good and evil may vary and become more spiritual and inward, but the dictum that it is good to love and do good shines unalterable. The

psalmist's belief that doing good was the sure way to enjoy good was a commonplace of Old Testament teaching, and under a Theocracy was more distinctly verified by outward facts than now; but even then, as many psalms show, had exceptions so stark as to stir many doubts. Unquestionably good in the sense of blessedness is inseparable from good in the sense of righteousness, as evil which is suffering is from evil which is sin, but the conception of what constitutes blessedness and sorrow must be modified so as to throw most weight on inward experiences, if such necessary coincidence is to be maintained in the face of patent facts.

The psalmist closes his song with a bold statement of the general principle that goodness is blessedness and wickedness is wretchedness; but he finds his proof mainly in the contrasted relation to Jehovah involved in the two opposite moral conditions. He has no vulgar conception of blessedness as resulting from circumstances. The loving-kindness of Jehovah is, in his view, prosperity, whatever be the aspect of externals. So with bold symbols, the very grossness of the letter of which shields them from misinterpretation, he declares this as the secret of all blessedness, that Jehovah's eyes are towards the righteous and His ears open to their cry. The individual experiences of vv. 5 and 6 are generalised. The eye of [Ps 329] God—*i.e*. His loving observance—rests upon and blesses those whose faces are turned to Him, and His ear hears the poor man's cry. The grim antithesis, which contains in itself the seeds of all unrest, is that the "face of Jehovah"—*i.e*. His manifested presence, the same face in the reflected light of which the faces of the righteous are lit up with gladness and dawning glory—is against evil doers. The moral condition of the beholder determines the operation of the light of God's countenance upon him. The same presence is light and darkness, life and death. Evil and its doers shrivel and perish in its beams, as the sunshine kills creatures whose haunt is the dark, or as Apollo's keen light-arrows slew the monsters of the slime. All else follows from this double relationship.

The remainder of the psalm runs out into a detailed description of the joyful fate of the lovers of good broken only by one tragic verse (21), like a black rock in the midst of a sunny stream, telling how evil and evil-doers end. In ver. 17, as in ver. 5, the verb has no subject expressed, but the supplement of A.V. and R.V., "the righteous," is naturally drawn from the context and is found in the LXX., whether as part of the original text, or as supplement thereto, is unknown. The construction may, as in ver. 6, indicate that whoever cries to Jehovah is heard. Hitzig and others propose to transpose vv. 15 and 16, so as to get a nearer subject for the verb in the "righteous" of ver. 15, and defend the inversion by referring to the alphabetic order in Lam. ii., iii., iv., where similarly Pe precedes Ayin; but the present order of verses is better as putting the principal theme of this part of the psalm—the blessedness of the righteous—in the foreground, and the opposite [Ps 330] thought as its foil. The main thought of vv. 17-20 is nothing more than the experience of vv. 4-7 thrown into the form of general maxims. They are the commonplaces of religion, but come with strange freshness to a man, when they have been verified in his life. Happy they who can cast their personal experience into such proverbial sayings, and, having by faith individualised the general promises, can re-generalise the individual experience! The psalmist does not promise untroubled outward good. His anticipation is of troubled lives, delivered because of crying to Jehovah. "Many are the afflictions," but more are the deliverances. Many are the blows and painful is the pressure, but they break no bones, though they rack and wrench the frame. Significant, too, is the sequence of synonyms—righteous, broken-hearted, crushed in spirit, servants, them that take refuge in Jehovah. The first of these refers mainly to conduct, the second to that submission of will and spirit which sorrow rightly borne brings about, substantially equivalent to "the humble" or "afflicted" of vv. 2 and 6, the third again deals mostly with practice, and the last touches the foundation of all service, submission, and righteousness, as laid in the act of faith in Jehovah.

The last group of vv. 21, 22, puts the teaching of the psalm in one terrible contrast, "Evil shall slay the wicked." It were a mere platitude if by "evil" were meant misfortune. The same thought of the inseparable connection of the two senses of that word, which runs through the context, is here expressed in the most terse fashion. To do evil is to suffer evil, and all sin is suicide. Its wages is death. Every sin is a strand in the hangman's rope, which the sinner nooses and puts round his own neck. That is so because every sin brings [Ps 331] guilt, and guilt brings retribution. Much more than "desolate" is meant in vv. 21 and 22. The word means *to be condemned* or *held guilty*. Jehovah is the Judge; before His bar all actions and characters are set: His unerring estimate of each brings with it, here and now, consequences of reward and punishment which prophesy a future, more perfect judgment. The redemption of the soul of God's servants is the antithesis to that awful experience; and they only, who take refuge in Him, escape it. The full Christian significance of this final contrast is in the Apostle's words, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

PSALM XXXV.

1 Plead my cause, Jehovah, with those who plead against me;
Fight with those who fight with me.
2 Grasp target and shield,
And stand up in my help,
3 And unsheathe lance and battle-axe (?) against my pursuers;
Say to my soul, Thy salvation am I.

4 Be the seekers after my life put to shame and dishonoured;
Be the plotters of my hurt turned back and confounded
5 Be they as chaff before the wind,
And the angel of Jehovah striking them down!
6 Be their path darkness and slipperiness,
And the angel of Jehovah pursuing them!

7 For without provocation have they hidden for me their net;
Without provocation have they dug a pit for my life.
8 May destruction light on him unawares,
And his net which he hath hidden snare him;
Into destruction (the pit?)—may he fall therein!

9 And my soul shall exult in Jehovah,
Shall rejoice in His salvation.
10 All my bones shall say, Jehovah, who is like Thee,
Delivering the afflicted from a stronger than he,
Even the afflicted and poor from his spoiler?

11 Unjust witnesses rise up;
Of what I know not they ask me.
12 They requite me evil for good—
Bereavement to my soul!
13 But I—in their sickness my garment was sackcloth,
I afflicted my soul by fasting,
And my prayer—may it return again (do thou return?) to my own bosom.
14 As [for] my friend or brother, I dragged myself about (bowed myself down?);
As one mourning for a mother, I bowed down (dragged myself about?) in squalid attire. [Pg 333]
15 And at my tottering they rejoice and assemble themselves;
Abjects and those whom I know not assemble against me;
They tear me, and cease not,
16 Like the profanest of buffoons for a bit of bread,
Gnashing their teeth at me.

17 Lord, how long wilt Thou look on?
Bring back my soul from their destructions,
My only one from the young lions.
18 I will praise Thee in the great congregation;
Among people strong [in number] will I sound Thy praise.

19 Let not my enemies wrongfully rejoice over me,
Nor my haters without provocation wink the eye.
20 For it is not peace they speak,
And against the quiet of the land they plan words of guile.
21 And they open wide their mouth against me;

They say, Oho! Oho! our eyes have seen.

22 Thou hast seen, Jehovah: be not deaf;
Lord, be not far from me!
23 Arouse Thyself, and awake for my judgment,
My God and my Lord, for my suit!
24 Judge me according to Thy righteousness, Jehovah, my God,
And let them not rejoice over me.

25 Let them not say in their hearts, Oho! our desire!
Let them not say, We have swallowed him.
26 Be those who rejoice over my calamity put to shame and confounded together!
Be those who magnify themselves against me clothed in shame and dishonour!

27 May those who delight in my righteous cause sound out their gladness and rejoice,
And say continually, Magnified be Jehovah,
Who delights in the peace of His servant.
28 And my tongue shall meditate Thy righteousness,
All day long Thy praise.

The psalmist's life is in danger. He is the victim of ungrateful hatred. False accusations of crimes that he never dreamed of are brought against him. He professes innocence, and appeals to Jehovah to be his [Ps 34] Advocate and also his Judge. The prayer in ver. 1 a uses the same word and metaphor as David does in his remonstrance with Saul (1 Sam. xxiv. 15). The correspondence with David's situation in the Sauline persecution is, at least, remarkable, and goes far to sustain the Davidic authorship. The distinctly individual traits in the psalm are difficulties in the way of regarding it as a national psalm. Jeremiah has several coincidences in point of expression and sentiment, which are more naturally accounted for as reminiscences by the prophet than as indications that he was the psalmist. His genius was assimilative, and liked to rest itself on earlier utterances.

The psalm has three parts, all of substantially the same import, and marked off by the conclusion of each being a vow of praise and the main body of each being a cry for deliverance, a characterisation of the enemy as ungrateful and malicious, and a profession of the singer's innocence. We do not look for melodious variations of note in a cry for help. The only variety to be expected is in its shrill intensity and prolongation. The triple division is in accordance with the natural feeling of completeness attaching to the number. If there is any difference between the three sets of petitions, it may be observed that the first (vv. 1-10) alleges innocence and vows praise without reference to others; that the second (vv. 11-18) rises to a profession not only of innocence, but of beneficence and affection met by hate, and ends with a vow of public praise; and that the final section (vv. 19-28) has less description of the machinations of the enemy and more prolonged appeal to Jehovah for His judgment, and ends, not with a solo of the psalmist's gratitude, but with a chorus of his friends, praising God for his "prosperity."

The most striking features of the first part are the boldness of the appeal to Jehovah to fight for the psalmist [Ps 35] and the terrible imprecations and magnificent picture in vv. 5, 6. The relation between the two petitions of ver. 1, "Plead with those who plead against the" and "Fight with them that fight against me," may be variously determined. Both may be figurative, the former drawn from legal processes, the latter from the battle-field. But more probably the psalmist was really the object of armed attack, and the "fighting" was a grim reality. The suit against him was being carried on, not in a court, but in the field. The rendering of the R.V. in ver. 1, "Strive with ... who strive against me," obscures the metaphor of a lawsuit, which, in view of its further expansion in vv. 23, 24 (and in "witnesses" in ver. 11?), is best retained. That is a daring flight of reverent imagination which thinks of the armed Jehovah as starting to His feet to help one poor man. The attitude anticipates Stephen's vision of "the Son of man standing," not throned in rest, but risen in eager sympathy and intent to succour. But the panoply in which the psalmist's faith arrays Jehovah, is purely imaginative and, of course, has nothing parallel in the martyr's vision. The "target" was smaller than the "shield" (2 Chron. ix. 15, 16). Both could not be wielded at once, but the incongruity helps to idealise the bold imagery and to emphasise the Divine completeness of protecting power. It is the psalmist, and not his heavenly Ally, who is to be sheltered. The two defensive weapons are probably matched by two offensive ones in ver. 3. The word rendered in the A.V. "stop" ("the way" being a supplement) is more probably to be taken as the name of a weapon, a battle-axe according to some, a dirk or dagger according to others. The [Ps 35]

ordinary translation gives a satisfactory sense, but the other is more in accordance with the following preposition, with the accents, and with the parallelism of target and shield. In either case, how beautifully the spiritual reality breaks through the warlike metaphor! This armed Jehovah, grasping shield and drawing spear, utters no battle shout, but whispers consolation to the trembling man crouching behind his shield. The outward side of the Divine activity, turned to the foe, is martial and menacing; the inner side is full of tender, secret breathings of comfort and love.

The previous imagery of the battle-field and the Warrior God moulds the terrible wishes in vv. 4-6, which should not be interpreted as having a wider reference than to the issue of the attacks on the psalmist. The substance of them is nothing more than the obverse of his wish for his own deliverance, which necessarily is accomplished by the defeat of his enemies. The "moral difficulty" of such wishes is not removed by restricting them to the special matter in hand, but it is unduly aggravated if they are supposed to go beyond it. However restricted, they express a stage of feeling far beneath the Christian, and the attempt to slur over the contrast is in danger of hiding the glory of midday for fear of not doing justice to the beauty of morning twilight. It is true that the "imprecations" of the Psalter are not the offspring of passion, and that the psalmists speak as identifying their cause with God's; but when all such considerations are taken into account, these prayers against enemies remain distinctly inferior to the code of Christian ethics. The more frankly the fact is recognised, the better. But, if we turn from the moral to the poetic side of these verses, what stern beauty there is in that awful picture of the fleeing foe, with the angel of Jehovah pressing hard on their broken ranks! [Ps 337] The hope which has been embodied in the legends of many nations, that the gods were seen fighting for their worshippers, is the psalmist's faith, and in its essence is ever true. That angel, whom we heard of in the previous psalm as defending the defenceless encampment of them that fear Jehovah, fights with and scatters the enemies like chaff before the wind. One more touch of terror is added in that picture of flight in the dark, on a slippery path, with the celestial avenger close on the fugitives' heels, as when the Amorite kings fled down the pass of Beth-horon, and "Jehovah cast great stones from heaven upon them." Æschylus or Dante has nothing more concentrated or suggestive of terror and beauty than this picture.

The psalmist's consciousness of innocence is the ground of his prayer and confidence. Causeless hatred is the lot of the good in this evil world. Their goodness is cause enough; for men's likes and dislikes follow their moral character. Virtue rebukes, and even patient endurance irritates. No hostility is so hard to turn into love as that which has its origin, not in the attitude of its object, but in instinctive consciousness of contrariety in the depths of the soul. Whoever wills to live near God and tries to shape his life accordingly may make up his mind to be the mark for many arrows of popular dislike, sometimes lightly tipped with ridicule, sometimes dipped in gall, sometimes steeped in poison, but always sharpened by hostility. The experience is too uniform to identify the poet by it, but the correspondence with David's tone in his remonstrances with Saul is, at least, worthy of consideration. The familiar figures of the hunter's snare and pitfall recur here, as expressing crafty [Ps 338] plans for destruction, and pass, as in other places, into the wish that the lex talionis may fall on the would-be ensnarer. The text appears to be somewhat dislocated and corrupted in vv. 7, 8. The word "pit" is needless in ver. 7 *a*, since snares are not usually spread in pits, and it is wanted in the next clause, and should therefore probably be transposed. Again, the last clause of ver. 8, whether the translation of the A.V. or of the R.V. be adopted, is awkward and feeble from the repetition of "destruction," but if we read "pit," which involves only a slight change of letters, we avoid tautology, and preserve the reference to the two engines of craft: "Let his net which he spread catch him; in the pit—let him fall therein!" The enemy's fall is the occasion of glad praise, not because his intended victim yields to the temptation to take malicious delight in his calamity (*Schadenfreude*). His own deliverance, not the other's destruction, makes the singer joyful in Jehovah, and what he vows to celebrate is not the retributive, but the delivering, aspect of the Divine act. In such joy there is nothing unworthy of the purest forgiving love to foes. The relaxation of the tension of anxiety and fear brings the sweetest moments, in the sweetness of which soul and body seem to share, and the very bones, which were consumed and waxed old (vi. 3, xxxii. 3), are at ease, and, in their sense of well-being, have a tongue to ascribe it to Jehovah's delivering hand. No physical enjoyment surpasses the delight of simple freedom from long torture of pain, nor are there many experiences so poignantly blessed as that of passing out of tempest into calm. Well for those who deepen and hallow such joy by turning it into praise, and see even in the experiences of their little lives tokens of the incomparable greatness and unparalleled love of their [Ps 339] delivering God!

Once more the singer plunges into the depths, not because his faith fails to sustain him on the heights which it had won, but because it would travel the road again, in order to strengthen itself by persistent prayers which are not "vain repetitions." The second division (vv. 11-18) runs parallel with the first, with some differences. The reference to "unjust witnesses" and their charges of crimes which he had never dreamed of

may be but the reappearance of the image of a lawsuit, as in ver. 1, but is more probably fact. We may venture to think of the slanders which poisoned Saul's too jealous mind, just as in "They requite me evil for good" we have at least a remarkable verbal coincidence with the latter's burst of tearful penitence (1 Sam. xxiv. 17): "Thou art more righteous than I, for thou hast rendered unto me good, whereas I have rendered unto thee evil." What a wail breaks the continuity of the sentence in the pathetic words of ver. 12 *b*! —"Bereavement to my soul!" The word is used again in Isa. xlviii. 7, 8, and there is translated "loss of children." The forlorn man felt as if all whom he loved were swept away, and he left alone to face the storm. The utter loneliness of sorrow was never more vividly expressed. The interjected clause sounds like an agonised cry forced from a man on the rack. Surely we hear in it not the voice of a personified nation, but of an individual sufferer, and if we have been down into the depths ourselves, we recognise the sound. The consciousness of innocence marking the former section becomes now the assertion of active sympathy, met by ungrateful hate. The power of kindness is great, but there are ill-conditioned souls which resent it. There is too much truth in the cynical belief that the sure way to make an enemy is to do a kindness. It is all too common an experience that the more abundantly one loves, the less he is loved. The highest degree of unrequited participation in others' sorrows is seen in Him who "Himself took our sicknesses." This psalmist so shared in those of his foes that in sackcloth and with fasting he prayed for their healing. Whether the prayer was answered to them or not, it brought reflex blessing to him, for self-forgetting sympathy is never waste, even though it does not secure returns of gratitude. "Your peace shall return to you again," though it may not bring peace to nor with a jangling household. Riehm (in Hupfeld) suggests the transposition of the verbs in 14 *a* and *b*: "I *bowed down* as though he had been my friend or brother; I *went* in mourning," etc., the former clause painting the drooping head of a mourner, the latter his slow walk and sad attire, either squalid or black. [Ps 34:0]

The reverse of this picture of true sympathy is given in the conduct of its objects when it was the psalmist's turn to sorrow. Gleefully they flock together to mock and triumph. His calamity was as good as a feast to the ingrates. Vv. 15 and 16 are in parts obscure, but the general sense is clear. The word rendered "abjects" is unique, and consequently its meaning is doubtful, and various conjectural emendations have been proposed —*e.g.*, "foreigners," which, as Hupfeld says, is "as foreign to the connection as can be," "smiting," and others —but the rendering "abjects," or men of low degree, gives an intelligible meaning. The comparison in ver. 16 *a* is extremely obscure. The existing text is harsh; "profane of mockers for a cake" needs much explanation to be intelligible. "Mockers for a cake" are usually explained to be hangers-on at feasts who found wit for dull guests and were paid by a share of good things, or who crept into favour and entertainment by slandering the objects of the host's dislike. Another explanation, suggested by Hupfeld as an alternative, connects the word rendered "mockers" with the imagery in "tear" (ver. 15) and "gnash" (ver. 16) and "swallow" (ver. 25), and by an alteration of one letter gets the rendering "like profane cake-devourers," so comparing the enemies to greedy gluttons, to whom the psalmist's ruin is a dainty morsel eagerly devoured. [Ps 34:1]

The picture of his danger is followed, as in the former part, by the psalmist's prayer. To him God's beholding without interposing is strange, and the time seems protracted; for the moments creep when sorrow-laden, and God's help seems slow to tortured hearts. But the impatience which speaks of itself to Him is soothed, and, though the man who cries, *How long?* may feel that his life lies as among lions, he will swiftly change his note of petition into thanksgiving. The designation of the life as "my only one," as in xxii. 20, enhances the earnestness of petition by the thought that, once lost, it can never be restored. A man has but one life; therefore he holds it so dear. The mercy implored for the single soul will be occasion of praise before many people. Not now, as in vv. 9, 10, is the thankfulness a private soliloquy. Individual blessings should be publicly acknowledged, and the praise accruing thence may be used as a plea with God, who delivers men that they may "show forth the excellencies of Him who hath called them out of" trouble into His marvellous peace.

The third division (ver. 18 to end) goes over nearly the same ground as before, with the difference that the prayer for deliverance is more extended, and that the resulting praise comes from the great congregation, joining in as chorus in the singer's solo. The former references to innocence and causeless hatred, lies and plots, open-mouthed rage, are repeated. "Our eyes have seen," say the enemies, counting their plots as good as successful and snorting contempt of their victim's helplessness; but he bethinks him of another eye, and grandly opposes God's sight to theirs. Usually that Jehovah sees is, in the Psalter, the same as His helping; but here, as in ver. 17, the two things are separated, as they so often are, in fact, for the trial of faith. God's inaction does not disprove His knowledge, but the pleading soul presses on Him His knowledge as a plea that He would not be deaf to its cry nor far from its help. The greedy eyes of the enemy round the psalmist gloat on their prey; but he cries aloud to his God, and dares to speak to Him as if He were deaf and far off, inactive [Ps 34:2]

and asleep. The imagery of the lawsuit reappears in fuller form here. "My cause" in ver. 23 is a noun cognate with the verb rendered "plead" or "strive" in ver. 1; "Judge me" in ver. 24 does not mean, Pronounce sentence on my character and conduct, but, Do me right in this case of mine *versus* my gratuitous foes.

Again recurs the prayer for their confusion, which clearly has no wider scope than concerning the matter in hand. It is no breach of Christian charity to pray that hostile devices may fail. The vivid imagination of the poet hears the triumphant exclamations of gratified hatred: "Oho! our desire!" "We have swallowed him," and sums up the character of his enemies in the two traits of malicious joy in his hurt and self-exaltation in their hostility to him.

[Pg 343] At last the prayer, which has run through so many moods of feeling, settles itself into restful contemplation of the sure results of Jehovah's sure deliverance. One receives the blessing; many rejoice in it. In significant antithesis to the enemies' joy is the joy of the rescued man's lovers and favourers. Their "saying" stands over against the silenced boastings of the losers of the suit. The latter "magnified themselves," but the end of Jehovah's deliverance will be that true hearts will "magnify" Him. The victor in the cause will give all the praise to the Judge, and he and his friends will unite in self-oblivious praise. Those who delight in his righteousness are of one mind with Jehovah, and magnify Him because He "delights in the peace of His servant." While they ring out their praises, the humble suppliant, whose cry has brought the Divine act which has waked all this surging song, "shall musingly speak in the low murmur of one entranced by a sweet thought" (Cheyne), or, if we might use a fine old word, shall "croon" over God's righteousness all the day long. That is the right end of mercies received. Whether there be many voices to join in praise or no, one voice should not be silent, that of the receiver of the blessings, and, even when he pauses in his song, his heart should keep singing day-long and life-long praises.

[Pg 344]

PSALM XXXVI.

1 The wicked has an Oracle of Transgression within his heart;
  There is no fear of God before his eyes.
2 For it speaks smooth things to him in his imagination (eyes)
  As to finding out his iniquity, as to hating [it].

3 The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit;
  He has ceased being wise, doing good.
4 He plots mischief upon his bed;
  He sets himself firmly in a way [that is] not good;
  Evil he loathes not.

5 Jehovah, Thy loving-kindness is in the heavens,
  Thy faithfulness is unto the clouds.
6 Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God,
  Thy judgments a mighty deep;
  Man and beast preservest Thou, Jehovah.

7 How precious is Thy loving-kindness, Jehovah, O God!
  And the sons of men in the shadow of Thy wings take refuge.
8 They are satisfied from the fatness of Thy house,
  And [of] the river of Thy delights Thou givest them to drink.
9 For with Thee is the fountain of life;
  In Thy light do we see light.

10 Continue Thy loving-kindness to those who know Thee,
  And Thy righteousness to the upright in heart.
11 Let not the foot of pride come against me,

And the hand of the wicked—let it not drive me forth.

12 There the workers of iniquity are fallen;
They are struck down, and are not able to rise.

The supposition that the sombre picture of "the wicked" in vv. 1-4 was originally unconnected with the glorious hymn in vv. 5-9 fails to give weight to the difference between the sober pace of pedestrian prose and [Ps 345] the swift flight of winged poetry. It fails also in apprehending the instinctive turning of a devout meditative spectator from the darkness of earth and its sins to the light above. The one refuge from the sad vision of evil here is in the faith that God is above it all, and that His name is Mercy. Nor can the blackness of the one picture be anywhere so plainly seen as when it is set in front of the brightness of the other. A religious man, who has laid to heart the miserable sights of which earth is full, will scarcely think that the psalmist's quick averting of his eyes from these to steep them in the light of God is unnatural, or that the original connection of the two parts of this psalm is an artificial supposition. Besides this, the closing section of prayer is tinged with references to the first part, and derives its *raison d'être* from it. The three parts form an organic whole.

The gnarled obscurity of the language in which the "wicked" is described corresponds to the theme, and contrasts strikingly with the limpid flow of the second part. "The line, too, labours" as it tries to tell the dark thoughts that move to dark deeds. Vv. 1, 2, unveil the secret beliefs of the sinner, vv. 3, 4, his consequent acts. As the text stands, it needs much torturing to get a tolerable meaning out of ver. 1, and the slight alteration, found in the LXX. and in some old versions, of "his heart" instead of "my heart" smooths the difficulty. We have then a bold personification of "Transgression" as speaking in the secret heart of the wicked, as in some dark cave, such as heathen oracle-mongers haunted. There is bitter irony in using the sacred word which stamped the prophets' utterances, and which we may translate "oracle," for the godless lies muttered in the sinner's heart. This is the account of how men come to do evil: that there is a voice within [Ps 346] whispering falsehood. And the reason why that bitter voice has the shrine to itself is that "there is no fear of God before" the man's "eyes." The two clauses of ver. 1 are simply set side by side, leaving the reader to spell out their logical relation. Possibly the absence of the fear of God may be regarded as both the occasion and the result of the oracle of Transgression, since, in fact, it is both. Still more obscure is ver. 2. Who is the "flatterer"? The answers are conflicting. The "wicked," say some, but if so, "in his own eyes" is superfluous; "God," say others, but that requires a doubtful meaning for "flatters"—namely, "treats gently"—and is open to the same objection as the preceding in regard to "in his own eyes." The most natural supposition is that "transgression," which was represented in ver. 1 as speaking, is here also meant. Clearly the person in whose eyes the flattery is real is the wicked, and therefore its speaker must be another. "Sin beguiled me," says Paul, and therein echoes this psalmist. Transgression in its oracle is one of "those juggling fiends that palter with us in a double sense," promising delights and impunity. But the closing words of ver. 2 are a crux. Conjectural emendations have been suggested, but do not afford much help. Probably the best way is to take the text as it stands, and make the best of it. The meaning it yields is harsh, but tolerable: "to find out his sin, to hate" (it?). Who finds out sin? God. If He is the finder, it is He who also "hates"; and if it is sin that is the object of the one verb, it is most natural to suppose it that of the other also. The two verbs are infinitives, with the preposition of purpose or of reference prefixed. Either meaning is allowable. If the preposition is taken as [Ps 347] implying reference, the sense will be that the glosing whispers of sin deceive a man in regard to the discovery of his wrong-doing and God's displeasure at it. Impunity is promised, and God's holiness is smoothed down. If, on the other hand, the idea of purpose is adopted, the solemn thought emerges that the oracle is spoken with intent to ruin the deluded listener and set his secret sins in the condemning light of God's face. Sin is cruel, and a traitor. This profound glimpse into the depths of a soul without the fear of God is followed by the picture of the consequences of such practical atheism, as seen in conduct. It is deeply charged with blackness and unrelieved by any gleam of light. Falsehood, abandonment of all attempts to do right, insensibility to the hallowing influences of nightly solitude, when men are wont to see their evil more clearly in the dark, like phosphorus streaks on the wall, obstinate planting the feet in ways not good, a silenced conscience which has no movement of aversion to evil—these are the fruits of that oracle of Transgression when it has its perfect work. We may call such a picture the idealisation of the character described, but there have been men who realised it, and the warning is weighty that such a uniform and all-enwrapping darkness is the terrible goal towards which all listening to that bitter voice tends. No wonder that the psalmist wrenches himself swiftly away from such a sight!

The two strophes of the second division (vv. 5, 6, and 7-9) present the glorious realities of the Divine name in contrast with the false oracle of vv. 1, 2, and the blessedness of God's guests in contrast with the gloomy picture of the "wicked" in vv. 3, 4. It is noteworthy that the first and last-named "attributes" are the same. [Ps 348]

"Loving-kindness" begins and ends the glowing series. That stooping, active love encloses, like a golden circlet, all else that men can know or say of the perfection whose name is God. It is the white beam into which all colours melt, and from which all are evolved. As science feels after the reduction of all forms of physical energy to one, for which there is no name but energy, all the adorable glories of God pass into one, which He has bidden us call love. "Thy loving-kindness is in the heavens," towering on high. It is like some Divine æther, filling all space. The heavens are the home of light. They arch above every head; they rim every horizon; they are filled with nightly stars; they open into abysses as the eye gazes; they bend unchanged and untroubled above a weary earth; from them fall benedictions of rain and sunshine. All these subordinate allusions may lie in the psalmist's thought, while its main intention is to magnify the greatness of that mercy as heaven-high.

But mercy standing alone might seem to lack a guarantee of its duration, and therefore the strength of "faithfulness," unalterable continuance in a course begun, and adherence to every promise either spoken in words or implied in creation or providence, is added to the tenderness of mercy. The boundlessness of that faithfulness is the main thought, but the contrast of the whirling, shifting clouds with it is striking. The realm of eternal purpose and enduring act reaches to and stretches above the lower region where change rules.

But a third glory has yet to be flashed before glad eyes, God's "righteousness," which here is not merely nor mainly punitive, but delivering, or, perhaps in a still wider view, the perfect conformity of His nature with the [Ps 349] ideal of ethical completeness. Right is the same for heaven as for earth, and "whatsoever things are just" have their home in the bosom of God. The point of comparison with "the mountains of God" is, as in the previous clauses, their loftiness, which expresses greatness and elevation above our reach; but the subsidiary ideas of permanence and sublimity are not to be overlooked. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but His righteousness endures for ever." There is safe hiding there, in the fastnesses of that everlasting hill. From character the psalmist passes to acts, and sets all the Divine dealings forth under the one category of "judgments," the utterances in act of His judicial estimate of men. Mountains seem highest and ocean broadest when the former rise sheer from the water's edge, as Carmel does. The immobility of the silent hills is wonderfully contrasted with the ever-moving sea, which to the Hebrew was the very home of mystery. The obscurity of the Divine judgments is a subject of praise, if we hold fast by faith in God's loving-kindness, faithfulness, and righteousness. They are obscure by reason of their vast scale, which permits the vision of only a fragment. How little of the ocean is seen from any shore! But there is no arbitrary obscurity. The sea is "of glass mingled with fire"; and if the eye cannot pierce its depths, it is not because of any darkening impurity in the crystal clearness, but simply because not even light can travel to the bottom. The higher up on the mountains men go, the deeper down can they see into that ocean. It is a hymn, not an indictment, which says, "Thy judgments are a great deep." But however the heights tower and the abysses open, there is a strip of green, solid earth on which "man and beast" live in safe plenty. The plain blessings of an all-embracing [Ps 350] providence should make it easier to believe in the unmingled goodness of acts which are too vast for men to judge and of that mighty name which towers above their conceptions. What they see is goodness; what they cannot see must be of a piece. The psalmist is in "that serene and blessed mood" when the terrible mysteries of creation and providence do not interfere with his "steadfast faith that all which he beholds is full of blessings." There are times when these mysteries press with agonising force on devout souls, but there should also be moments when the pure love of the perfectly good God is seen to fill all space and outstretch all dimensions of height and depth and breadth. The awful problems of pain and death will be best dealt with by those who can echo the rapture of this psalm.

If God is such, what is man's natural attitude to so great and sweet a name? Glad wonder, accepting His gift as the one precious thing, and faith sheltering beneath the great shadow of His outstretched wing. The exclamation in ver. 8, "How precious is Thy loving-kindness!" expresses not only its intrinsic value, but the devout soul's appreciation of it. The secret of blessedness and test of true wisdom lie in a sane estimate of the worth of God's loving-kindness as compared with all other treasures. Such an estimate leads to trust in Him, as the psalmist implies by his juxtaposition of the two clauses of ver. 7, though he connects them, not by an expressed "therefore," but by the simple copula. The representation of trust as taking refuge reappears here, with its usual suggestions of haste and peril. The "wing" of God suggests tenderness and security. And the reason for trust is enforced in the designation "sons of men," partakers of weakness and mortality, and [Ps 351] therefore needing the refuge which, in the wonderfulness of His loving-kindness, they find under the pinions of so great a God.

The psalm follows the refugees into their hiding-place, and shows how much more than bare shelter they find there. They are God's guests, and royally entertained as such. The joyful priestly feasts in the Temple colour

the metaphor, but the idea of hospitable reception of guests is the more prominent. The psalmist speaks the language of that true and wholesome mysticism without which religion is feeble and formal. The root ideas of his delineation of the blessedness of the fugitives to God are their union with God and possession of Him. Such is the magical might of lowly trust that by it weak dying "sons of men" are so knit to the God whose glories the singer has been celebrating that they partake of Himself and are saturated with His sufficiency, drink of His delights in some deep sense, bathe in the fountain of life, and have His light for their organ and medium and object of sight. These great sentences beggar all exposition. They touch on the rim of infinite things, whereof only the nearer fringe comes within our ken in this life. The soul that lives in God is satisfied, having real possession of the only adequate object. The variety of desires, appetites, and needs requires manifoldness in their food, but the unity of our nature demands that all that manifoldness should be in One. Multiplicity in objects, aims, loves, is misery; oneness is blessedness. We need a lasting good and an ever-growing one to meet and unfold the capacity of indefinite growth. Nothing but God can satisfy the narrowest human capacity.

Union with Him is the source of all delight, as of all true fruition of desires. Possibly a reference to Eden may [IPs 352] be intended in the selection of the word for "pleasures," which is a cognate with that name. So there may be allusion to the river which watered that garden, and the thought may be that the present life of the guest of God is not all unlike the delights of that vanished paradise. We may perhaps scarcely venture on supposing that "Thy pleasures" means those which the blessed God Himself possesses; but even if we take the lower and safer meaning of those which God gives, we may bring into connection Christ's own gift to His disciples of His own peace, and His assurance that faithful servants will "enter into the joy of their Lord." Shepherd and sheep drink of the same brook by the way and of the same living fountains above. The psalmist's conception of religion is essentially joyful. No doubt there are sources of sadness peculiar to a religious man, and he is necessarily shut out from much of the effervescent poison of earthly joys drugged with sin. Much in his life is inevitably grave, stern, and sad. But the sources of joy opened are far deeper than those that are closed. Surface wells (many of them little better than open sewers) may be shut up, but an unfailing stream is found in the desert. Satisfaction and joy flow from God, because life and light are with Him; and therefore he who is with Him has them for his. "With Thee is the fountain of life" is true in every sense of the word "life." In regard to life natural, the saying embodies a loftier conception of the Creator's relation to the creature than the mechanical notion of creation. The fountain pours its waters into stream or basin, which it keeps full by continual flow. Stop the efflux, and these are dried up. So the great mystery of life in all its forms is as a spark [IPs 353] from a fire, a drop from a fountain, or, as Scripture puts it in regard to man, a breath from God's own lips. In a very real sense, wherever life is, there God is, and only by some form of union with Him or by the presence of His power, which is Himself, do creatures live. But the psalm is dealing with the blessings belonging to those who trust beneath the shadow of God's wing; therefore life here, in this verse, is no equivalent to mere existence, physical or self-conscious, but it must be taken in its highest spiritual sense. Union with God is its condition, and that union is brought to pass by taking refuge with Him. The deep words anticipated the explicit teaching of the Gospel in so far as they proclaimed these truths, but the greatest utterance still remained unspoken: that this life is "in His Son."

Light and life are closely connected. Whether knowledge, purity, or joy is regarded as the dominant idea in the symbol, or whether all are united in it, the profound words of the psalm are true. In God's light we see light. In the lowest region "the seeing eye is from the Lord." "The inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding." Faculty and medium of vision are both of Him. But hearts in communion with God are illumined, and they who are "in the light" cannot walk in darkness. Practical wisdom is theirs. The light of God, like the star of the Magi, stoops to guide pilgrims' steps. Clear certitude as to sovereign realities is the guerdon of the guests of God. Where other eyes see nothing but mists, they can discern solid land and the gleaming towers of the city across the sea. Nor is that light only the dry light by which we know, but it means purity and joy also; and to "see light" is to possess these too by derivation from the purity and joy of God [IPs 354] Himself. He is the "master light of all our seeing." The fountain has become a stream, and taken to itself movement towards men; for the psalmist's glowing picture is more than fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who has said, "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

The closing division is prayer, based both upon the contemplation of God's attributes in vv. 5, 6, and of the wicked in the first part. This distinct reference to both the preceding sections is in favour of the original unity of the psalm. The belief in the immensity of Divine loving-kindness and righteousness inspires the prayer for their long-drawn-out (so "continue" means literally) continuance to the psalmist and his fellows. He will not separate himself from these in his petition, but thinks of them before himself. "Those who know Thee" are

those who take refuge under the shadow of the great wing. Their knowledge is intimate, vital; it is acquaintanceship, not mere intellectual apprehension. It is such as to purge the heart and make its possessors upright. Thus we have set forth in that sequence of trust, knowledge, and uprightness stages of growing Godlikeness closely corresponding to the Gospel sequence of faith, love, and holiness. Such souls are *capaces Dei*, fit to receive the manifestations of God's loving-kindness and righteousness; and from such these will never remove. They will stand stable as His firm attributes, and the spurning foot of proud oppressors shall not trample on them, nor violent hands be able to stir them from their steadfast, secure place. The prayer of the psalm goes deeper than any mere deprecation of earthly removal, and is but prosaically understood, if thought to refer to exile or the like. The dwelling-place from which it beseeches that the [Pg 355] suppliant may never be removed is his safe refuge beneath the wing, or in the house, of God. Christ answered it when He said, "No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." The one desire of the heart which has tasted the abundance, satisfaction, delights, fulness of life, and clearness of light that attend the presence of God is that nothing may draw it thence.

Prayer wins prophetic certitude. From his serene shelter under the wing, the suppliant looks out on the rout of battled foes, and sees the end which gives the lie to the oracle of transgression and its flatteries. "They are struck down," the same word as in the picture of the pursuing angel of the Lord in Psalm xxxv. Here the agent of their fall is unnamed, but one power only can inflict such irrevocable ruin. God, who is the shelter of the upright in heart, has at last found out the sinners' iniquity, and His hatred of sin stands ready to "smite once, and smite no more."

[Pg 356]

PSALM XXXVII.

1 (א) Heat not thyself because of the evil-doers;
Be not envious because of the workers of perversity
2 For like grass shall they swiftly fade,
And like green herbage shall they wither.

3 (ב) Trust in Jehovah, and do good;
Inhabit the land, and feed on faithfulness.
4 And delight thyself in Jehovah,
And He shall give thee the desires of thy heart.

5 (ג) Roll thy way upon Jehovah,
And trust in Him, and He shall do [all that thou dost need].
6 And He shall bring forth as the light thy righteousness,
And thy judgment as the noonday.

7 (ד) Be silent to Jehovah, and wait patiently for Him;
Heat not thyself because of him who makes his way prosperous,
Because of the man who carries out intrigues.

8 (ה) Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Heat not thyself: [it leads] only to doing evil.
9 For evil-doers shall be cut off;
And they who wait on Jehovah—they shall inherit the land.

10 (ו) And yet a little while, and the wicked is no more,
And thou shalt take heed to his place, and he is not [there].
11 And the meek shall inherit the land,
And delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

12 (ז) The wicked intrigues against the righteous,

And grinds his teeth at him.
13 The Lord laughs at him,
For He sees that his day is coming.

14 (ח) The wicked draw sword and bend their bow,
To slay the afflicted and poor,
To butcher the upright in way;
15 Their sword shall enter into their own heart,
And their bows shall be broken. [Pg 357]

16 (ט) Better is the little of the righteous
Than the abundance of many wicked.
17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
And Jehovah holds up the righteous.

18 (י) Jehovah has knowledge of the days of the perfect,
And their inheritance shall be for ever;
19 They shall not be put to shame in the time of evil,
And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

20 (כ) For the wicked shall perish,
And the enemies of Jehovah shall be like the beauty of the pastures;
They melt away in smoke: they melt away.

21 (ל) The wicked borrows, and does not pay;
And the righteous deals generously, and gives.
22 For His blessed ones shall inherit the earth,
And His cursed ones shall be cut off.

23 (מ) From Jehovah are a man's steps established,
And He delighteth in his way;
24 If he falls, he shall not lie prostrate,
For Jehovah holds up his hand.

25 (נ) A youth have I been, now I am old,
And I have not seen a righteous man forsaken,
Or his seed begging bread.
26 All day long he is dealing generously and lending,
And his seed is blessed.

27 (ס) Depart from evil, and do good;
And dwell for evermore.
28 For Jehovah loves judgment,
And forsakes not them whom He favours.

(ע) They are preserved for ever
(The unrighteous are destroyed for ever?),
And the seed of the wicked is cut off.
29 The righteous shall inherit the land,
And dwell thereon for ever.

30 (פ) The mouth of the righteous meditates wisdom,
And his tongue speaks judgment.
31 The law of his God is in his heart;
His steps shall not waver. [Pg 358]

32 (צ) The wicked watches the righteous,
And seeks to slay him;

33 Jehovah will not leave him in his hand,
And will not condemn him when he is judged.

34 (ק) Wait for Jehovah, and keep His way,
And He will exalt thee to inherit the land;
When the wicked is cut off, thou shalt see [it].

35 (ר) I have seen the wicked terror-striking
And spreading himself abroad like [a tree] native to the soil [and] green.
36 And he passed (I passed by?), and lo, he was not [there];
And I sought for him, and he was not to be found.

37 (ש) Mark the perfect, and behold the upright;
For there is a posterity to the man of peace.
38 And apostates are destroyed together;
The posterity of the wicked is cut off.

39 (ת) And the salvation of the righteous is from Jehovah,
Their stronghold in time of trouble.
40 And Jehovah helps them and rescues them;
He rescues them from the wicked, and saves them,
Because they take refuge in Him.

There is a natural connection between acrostic structure and didactic tone, as is shown in several instances, and especially in this psalm. The structure is on the whole regular, each second verse beginning with the required letter, but here and there the period is curtailed or elongated by one member. Such irregularities do not seem to mark stages in the thought or breaks in the sequence, but are simply reliefs to the monotony of the rhythm, like the shiftings of the place of the pause in blank verse, the management of which makes the difference between a master and a bungler. The psalm grapples with the problem which tried the faith of the Old Testament saints—namely, the apparent absence of correlation of conduct with condition—and solves it by the strong assertion of the brevity of godless prosperity and the certainty that well-doing will lean to well- being. The principle is true absolutely in the long run, but there is no reference in the psalm to the future life. Visible material prosperity is its promise for the righteous, and the opposite its threatening for the godless. No doubt retribution is not wholly postponed till another life, but it does not fall so surely and visibly as this psalm would lead us to expect. The relative imperfection of the Old Testament revelation is reflected in the Psalms, faith's answer to Heaven's word. The clear light of New Testament revelation of the future is wanting, nor could the truest view of the meaning and blessedness of sorrow be adequately and proportionately held before Christ had taught it by His own history and by His words. The Cross was needed before the mystery of righteous suffering could be fully elucidated, and the psalmist's solution is but provisional. His faith that infinite love ruled and that righteousness was always gain, and sin loss, is grandly and eternally true. Nor is it to be forgotten that he lived and sang in an order of things in which the Divine government had promised material blessings as the result of spiritual faithfulness, and that, with whatever anomalies, modest prosperity did, on the whole, attend the true Israelite. The Scripture books which wrestle most profoundly with the standing puzzle of prosperous evil and afflicted goodness are late books, not merely because religious reflectiveness was slowly evolved, but because decaying faith had laid Israel open to many wounds, and the condition of things which accompanied the decline of the ancient order abounded with instances of triumphant wickedness.

But though this psalm does not go to the bottom of its theme, its teaching of the blessedness of absolute trust in God's providence is ever fresh, and fits close to all stages of revelation; and its prophecies of triumph for the afflicted who trust and of confusion to the evil-doer need only to be referred to the end to be completely established. As a theodicy, or vindication of the ways of God with men, it was true for its age, but the New Testament goes beneath it. As an exhortation to patient trust and an exhibition of the sure blessings thereof, it remains what it has been to many generations: the gentle encourager of meek faith and the stay of afflicted hearts.

Marked progress of thought is not to be looked for in an acrostic psalm. In the present instance the same ideas are reiterated with emphatic persistence, but little addition or variation. To the didactic poet "to write the same things is not grievous," for they are his habitual thoughts; and for his scholars "it is safe," for there

is no better aid to memory than the cadenced monotony of the same ideas cast into song and slightly varied. But a possible grouping may be suggested by observing that the thought of the "cutting off" of the wicked and the inheritance of the land by the righteous occurs three times. If it is taken as a kind of refrain, we may cast the psalm into four portions, the first three of which close with that double thought. Vv. 1-9 will then form a group, characterised by exhortations to trust and assurances of triumph. The second section will then be vv. 10-22, which, while reiterating the ground tone of the whole, does so with a difference, inasmuch as its main thought is the destruction of the wicked, in contrast with the triumph of the righteous in the preceding verses. A third division will be vv. 23-29, of which the chief feature is the adduction of the psalmist's own [Ps 361] experience as authenticating his teaching in regard to the Divine care of the righteous, and that extended to his descendants. The last section (vv. 30-40) gathers up all, reasserts the main thesis, and confirms it by again adducing the psalmist's experience in confirmation of the other half of his assurances, namely the destruction of the wicked. But the poet does not wish to close his words with that gloomy picture, and therefore this last section bends round again to reiterate and strengthen the promises for the righteous, and its last note is one of untroubled trust and joy in experienced deliverance.

The first portion (vv. 1-9) consists of a series of exhortations to trust and patience, accompanied by assurance of consequent blessing. These are preceded and followed by a dehortation from yielding to the temptation of fretting against the prosperity of evil-doers, based upon the assurance of its transitoriness. Thus the positive precepts inculcating the ideal temper to be cultivated are framed in a setting of negatives, inseparable from them. The tendency to murmur at flaunting wrong must be repressed if the disposition of trust is to be cultivated; and, on the other hand, full obedience to the negative precepts is only possible when the positive ones have been obeyed with some degree of completeness. The soul's husbandry must be busied in grubbing up weeds as well as in sowing; but the true way to take away nourishment from the baser is to throw the strength of the soil into growing the nobler crop. "Fret not thyself" (A.V.) is literally, "Heat not thyself," and "Be not envious" is "Do not glow," the root idea being that of becoming fiery red. The one word expresses the kindling emotion, the other its visible sign in the flushed face. Envy, anger, and any other violent and God- [Ps 362] forgetting emotion are included. There is nothing in the matter in hand worth getting into a heat about, for the prosperity in question is short-lived. This leading conviction moulds the whole psalm, and, as we have pointed out, is half of the refrain. We look for the other half to accompany it, as usual, and we find it in one rendering of ver. 3, which has fallen into discredit with modern commentators, and to which we shall come presently; but for the moment we may pause to suggest that the picture of the herbage withering as soon as cut, under the fierce heat of the Eastern sun, may stand in connection with the metaphors in ver. 1. Why should we blaze with indignation when so much hotter a glow will dry up the cut grass? Let it wave in brief glory, unmeddled with by us. The scythe and the sunshine will soon make an end. The precept and its reason are not on the highest levels of Christian ethics, but they are unfairly dealt with if taken to mean, Do not envy the wicked man's prosperity, nor wish it were yours, but solace yourself with the assurance of his speedy ruin. What is said is far nobler than that. It is, Do not let the prosperity of unworthy men shake your faith in God's government, nor fling you into an unwholesome heat, for God will sweep away the anomaly in due time.

In regard to the positive precepts, the question arises whether ver. 3 *b* is command or promise, with which is associated another question as to the translation of the words rendered by the A.V., "Verily thou shalt be fed," and by the R.V., "Follow after faithfulness." The relation of the first and second parts of the subsequent verses is in favour of regarding the clause as promise, but the force of that consideration is somewhat weakened by the non-occurrence in ver. 3 of the copula which introduces the promises of the other verses. Still its omission [Ps 363] does not seem sufficient to forbid taking the clause as corresponding with these. The imperative is similarly used as substantially a future in ver. 27: "and dwell for evermore." The fact that in every other place in the psalm where "dwelling in the land" is spoken of it is a promise of the sure results of trust, points to the same sense here, and the juxtaposition of the two ideas in the refrain leads us to expect to find the prediction of ver. 2 followed by its companion there. On the whole, then, to understand ver. 3 *b* as promise seems best. (So LXX., Ewald, Grätz, etc.) What, then, is the meaning of its last words? If they are a continuation of the promise, they must describe some blessed effect of trust. Two renderings present themselves, one that adopted in the R.V. margin, "Feed securely," and another "Feed on faithfulness" (*i.e.*, of God). Hupfeld calls this an "arbitrary and forced" reference of "faithfulness"; but it worthily completes the great promise. The blessed results of trust and active goodness are stable dwelling in the land and nourishment there from a faithful God. The thoughts move within the Old Testament circle, but their substance is eternally true, for they who take God for their portion have a safe abode, and feed their souls on His unalterable adherence to His promises and on the abundance flowing thence.

The subsequent precepts bear a certain relation to each other, and, taken together, make a lovely picture of the inner secret of the devout life: "Delight thyself in Jehovah; roll thy way on Him; trust in Him; be silent to Jehovah." No man will commit his way to God who does not delight in Him; and unless he has so committed his way, he cannot rest in the Lord. The heart that delights in God, finding its truest joy in Him and being well [Ps 364] and at ease when consciously moving in Him as an all-encompassing atmosphere and reaching towards Him with the deepest of its desires, will live far above the region of disappointment. For it desire and fruition go together. Longings fixed on Him fulfil themselves. We can have as much of God as we wish. If He is our delight, we shall wish nothing contrary to nor apart from Him, and wishes which are directed to Him cannot be in vain. To delight in God is to possess our delight, and in Him to find fulfilled wishes and abiding joys. "Commit thy way unto Him," or "Roll it upon Him" in the exercise of trust; and, as the verse says with grand generality, omitting to specify an object for the verb, "He will do"—all that is wanted, or will finish the work. To roll one's way upon Jehovah implies subordination of will and judgment to Him and quiet confidence in His guidance. If the heart delights in Him, and the will waits silent before Him, and a happy consciousness of dependence fills the soul, the desert will not be trackless, nor the travellers fail to hear the voice which says, "This is the way; walk ye in it." He who trusts is led, and God works for him, clearing away clouds and obstructions. His good may be evil spoken of, but the vindication by fact will make his righteousness shine spotless; and his cause may be apparently hopeless, but God will deliver him. He shall shine forth as the sun, not only in such earthly vindication as the psalmist prophesied, but more resplendently, as Christian faith has been gifted with long sight to anticipate, "in the kingdom of my Father." Thus delighting and trusting, a man may "be silent." Be still before Jehovah, in the silence of a submissive heart, and let not that stillness be [Ps 365] torpor, but gather thyself together and stretch out thy hope towards Him. That patience is no mere passive endurance without murmuring, but implies tension of expectance. Only if it is thus occupied will it be possible to purge the heart of that foolish and weakening heat which does no harm to any one but to the man himself. "Heat not thyself; it only leads to doing evil." Thus the section returns upon itself and once more ends with the unhesitating assurance, based upon the very essence of God's covenant with the nation, that righteousness is the condition of inheritance, and sin the cause of certain destruction. The narrower application of the principle, which was all that the then stage of revelation made clear to the psalmist, melts away for us into the Christian certainty that righteousness is the condition of dwelling in the true land of promise, and that sin is always death, in germ or in full fruitage.

The refrain occurs next in ver. 22, and the portion thus marked off (vv. 10-22) may be dealt with as a smaller whole. After a repetition (vv. 10, 11) of the main thesis slightly expanded, it sketches in vivid outline the fury of "the wicked" against "the just" and the grim retribution that turns their weapons into agents of their destruction. How dramatically are contrasted the two pictures of the quiet righteous in the former section and of this raging enemy, with his gnashing teeth and arsenal of murder! And with what crushing force the thought of the awful laughter of Jehovah, in foresight of the swift flight towards the blind miscreant of the day of his fall, which has already, as it were, set out on its road, smites his elaborate preparations into dust! Silently the good man sits wrapped in his faith. Without are raging, armed foes. Above, the laughter of God [Ps 366] rolls thunderous, and from the throne the obedient "day" is winging its flight, like an eagle with lightning bolts in its claws. What can the end be but another instance of the solemn lex talionis, by which a man's evil slays himself?

Various forms of the contrast between the two classes follow, with considerable repetition and windings. One consideration which has to be taken into account in estimating the distribution of material prosperity is strongly put in vv. 16, 17. The good of outward blessings depends chiefly on the character of their owner. The strength of the extract from a raw material depends on the solvent applied, and there is none so powerful to draw out the last drop of most poignant and pure sweetness from earthly good as is righteousness of heart. Naboth's vineyard will yield better wine, if Naboth is trusting in Jehovah, than all the vines of Jezreel or Samaria. "Many wicked" have not as much of the potentiality of blessedness in all their bursting coffers as a poor widow may distil out of two mites. The reasons for that are manifold, but the prevailing thought of the psalm leads to one only being named here. "For," says ver. 17, "the arms of the wicked shall be broken." Little is the good of possessions which cannot defend their owners from the stroke of God's executioners, but themselves pass away. The poor man's little is much, because, among other reasons, he is upheld by God, and therefore needs not to cherish anxiety, which embitters the enjoyments of others. Again the familiar thought of permanent inheritance recurs, but now with a glance at the picture just drawn of the destruction coming to the wicked. There are days and days. God saw that day of ruin speeding on its errand, and He has loving [Ps 367] sympathetic knowledge of the days of the righteous (i. 6), and holds their lives in His hand; therefore continuance and abundance are ensured.

The antithetical structure of vv. 16-22 is skilfully varied, so as to avoid monotony. It is elastic within limits. We note that in the Teth strophe (vv. 16, 17) each verse contains a complete contrast, while in the Yod strophe (vv. 18, 19) one half only of the contrast is presented, which would require a similar expansion of the other over two verses. Instead of this, however, the latter half is compressed into one verse (20), which is elongated by a clause. Then in the Lamed strophe (vv. 21, 22) the briefer form recurs, as in vv. 16, 17. Thus the longer antithesis is enclosed between two parallel shorter ones, and a certain variety breaks up the sameness of the swing from one side to the other, and suggests a pause in the flow of the psalm. The elongated verse (20) reiterates the initial metaphor of withering herbage (ver. 2) with an addition, for the rendering "fat of lambs" must be given up as incongruous, and only plausible on account of the emblem of smoke in the next clause. But the two metaphors are independent. Just as in ver. 2, so here, the gay "beauty of the pastures," so soon to wilt and be changed into brown barrenness, mirrors the fate of the wicked. Ver. 2 shows the grass fallen before the scythe; ver. 20 lets us see it in its flush of loveliness, so tragically unlike what it will be when its "day" has come. The other figure of smoke is a stereotype in all tongues for evanescence. The thick wreaths thin away and melt. Another peculiar form of the standing antithesis appears in the Lamed strophe (vv. 21, 22), which sets forth the gradual impoverishment of the wicked and prosperity as well as beneficence of the [Pg 368] righteous, and, by the "for" of ver. 22, traces these up to the "curse and blessing of God, which become manifest in the final destiny of the two" (Delitzsch). Not dishonesty, but bankruptcy, is the cause of "not paying again"; while, on the other hand, the blessing of God not only enriches, but softens, making the heart which has received grace a well-spring of grace to needy ones, even if they are foes. The form of the contrast suggests its dependence on the promises in Deut. xii. 44, xv. 6, 28. Thus the refrain is once more reached, and a new departure taken.

The third section is shorter than the preceding (vv. 23-29), and has, as its centre, the psalmist's confirmation from his own experience of the former part of his antithesis, the fourth section similarly confirming the second. All this third part is sunny with the Divine favour streaming upon the righteous, the only reference to the wicked being in the refrain at the close. The first strophe (vv. 23, 24) declares God's care for the former under the familiar image of guidance and support to a traveller. As in vv. 5, 7, the "way" is an emblem of active life, and is designated as "his" who treads it. The intention of the psalm, the context of the metaphor, and the parallelism with the verses just referred to, settle the reference of the ambiguous pronouns "he" and "his" in ver. 23 *b*. God delights in the good man's way (i. 6), and that is the reason for His establishing his goings. "Quoniam Deo grata est piorum via, gressus ipsum ad lætum finem adducit" (Calvin). That promise is not to be limited to either the material or moral region. The ground tone of the psalm is that the two regions coincide in so far as prosperity in the outer is the infallible index of rightness in the inner. The dial has two [Pg 369] sets of hands, one within and one without, but both are, as it were, mounted on the same spindle, and move accurately alike. Steadfast treading in the path of duty and successful undertakings are both included, since they are inseparable in fact. True, even the fixed faith of the psalmist has to admit that the good man's path is not always smooth. If facts had not often contradicted his creed, he would never have sung his song; and hence he takes into account the case of such a man's falling, and seeks to reduce its importance by the considerations of its recoverableness and of God's keeping hold of the man's hand all the while.

The Nun strophe brings in the psalmist's experience to confirm his doctrine. The studiously impersonal tone of the psalm is dropped only here and in the complementary reference to the fall of the wicked (vv. 35, 36). Observation and reflection yield the same results. Experience seals the declarations of faith. His old eyes have seen much; and the net result is that the righteous may be troubled, but not abandoned, and that there is an entail of blessing to their children. In general, experience preaches the same truths to-day, for, on the whole, wrong-doing lies at the root of most of the hopeless poverty and misery of modern society. Idleness, recklessness, thriftlessness, lust, drunkenness, are the potent factors of it; and if their handiwork and that of the subtler forms of respectable godlessness and evil were to be eliminated, the sum of human wretchedness would shrink to very small dimensions. The mystery of suffering is made more mysterious by ignoring its patent connection with sin, and by denying the name of sin to many of its causes. If men's conduct were judged by God's standard, there would be less wonder at God's judgments manifested in men's suffering. [Pg 370]

The solidarity of the family was more strongly felt in ancient times than in our days of individualism, but even now the children of the righteous, if they maintain the hereditary character, do largely realise the blessing which the psalmist declares is uniformly theirs. He is not to be tied down to literality in his statement of the general working of things. What he deals with is the prevailing trend, and isolated exceptions do not destroy his assertion. Of course continuance in paternal virtues is presupposed as the condition of succeeding to paternal good. In the strength of the adduced experience, a hortatory tone, dropped since ver. 8, is resumed, with reminiscences of that earlier series of counsels. The secret of permanence is condensed into two

antithetical precepts, to depart from evil and do good, and the key-note is sounded once more in a promise, cast into the guise of a commandment (compare ver. 3), of unmoved habitation, which is, however, not to be stretched to refer to a future life, of which the psalm says nothing. Such permanent abiding is sure, inasmuch as Jehovah loves judgment and watches over the objects of His loving-kindness.

The acrostic sequence fails at this point, if the Masoretic text is adhered to. There is evident disorder in the division of verses, for ver. 28 has four clauses instead of the normal two. If the superfluous two are detached from it and connected as one strophe with ver. 29, a regular two-versed and four-claused strophe results. Its first word (L'olam = "for ever") has the Ayin, due in the alphabetical sequence, in its second letter, the first being a prefixed preposition, which may be passed over, as in ver. 39 the copula Vav is prefixed to the initial letter. Delitzsch takes this to be the required letter; but if so, another irregularity remains, inasmuch as the first couplet of the strophe should be occupied with the fate of the wicked, as antithetical to that of the righteous in ver. 29. "They are preserved for ever" throws the whole strophe out of order. Probably, therefore, there is textual corruption here, which the LXX. helps in correcting. It has an evidently double rendering of the clause, as is not unfrequently the case where there is ambiguity or textual difficulty, and gives side by side with "They shall be preserved for ever" the rendering "The lawless shall be hunted out," which can be returned into Hebrew so as to give the needed initial Ayin either in a somewhat rare word, or in one which occurs in ver. 35. If this correction is adopted, the anomalies disappear, and strophe, division, acrostic, and antithetical refrain are all in order. [Ps 37]

The last section (ver. 30 to end), like the preceding, has the psalmist's experience for its centre, and traces the entail of conduct to a second generation of evil-doers, as the former did to the seed of the righteous. Both sections begin with the promise of firmness for the "goings or steps" of the righteous, but the later verses expand the thought by a fuller description of the moral conditions of stability. "The law of his God is in his heart." That is the foundation on which all permanence is built. From that as centre there issue wise and just words on the one hand and stable deeds on the other. That is true in the psalmist's view in reference to outward success and continuance, but still more profoundly in regard to steadfast progress in paths of righteousness. He who orders his footsteps by God's known will is saved from much hesitancy, vacillation, and stumbling, and plants a firm foot even on slippery places. [Ps 37]

Once more the picture of the enmity of the wicked recurs, as in vv. 12-14, with the difference that there the emphasis was laid on the destruction of the plotters, and here it is put on the vindication of the righteous by acts of deliverance (vv. 32, 33).

In ver. 34 another irregularity occurs, in its being the only verse in a strophe and being prolonged to three clauses. This may be intended to give emphasis to the exhortation contained in it, which, like that in ver. 27, is the only one in its section. The two key words "inherit" and "cut off" are brought together. Not only are the two fates set in contrast, but the waiters on Jehovah are promised the sight of the destruction of the wicked. Satisfaction at the sight is implied. There is nothing unworthy in solemn thankfulness when God's judgments break the teeth of some devouring lion. Divine judgments minister occasion for praise even from pure spirits before the throne, and men relieved from the incubus of godless oppression may well draw a long breath of relief, which passes into celebration of His righteous acts. No doubt there is a higher tone, which remembers ruth and pity even in that solemn joy; but Christian feeling does not destroy but modify the psalmist's thankfulness for the sweeping away of godless antagonism to goodness.

His assurance to those who wait on Jehovah has his own experience as its guarantee (ver. 35), just as the complementary assurance in ver. 24 had in ver. 25. The earlier metaphors of the green herbage and the beauty of the pastures are heightened now. A venerable, wide-spreading giant of the forests, rooted in its native soil, is grander than those humble growths; but for lofty cedars or lowly grass the end is the same. Twice the psalmist stood at the same place; once the great tree laid its large limbs across the field, and lifted a firm bole: again he came, and a clear space revealed how great had been the bulk which shadowed it. Not even a stump was left to tell where the leafy glory had been. [Ps 37]

Vv. 37, 38, make the Shin strophe, and simply reiterate the antithesis which has moulded the whole psalm, with the addition of that reference to a second generation which appeared in the third and fourth parts. The word rendered in the A.V. and R.V. "latter end" here means posterity. The "perfect man" is further designated as a "man of peace."

The psalm might have ended with this gathering together of its contents in one final emphatic statement, but the poet will not leave the stern words of destruction as his last. Therefore he adds a sweet, long-drawn-out

close, like the calm, extended clouds, that lie motionless in the western sky after a day of storm, in which he once more sings of the blessedness of those who wait on Jehovah. Trouble will come, notwithstanding his assurances that righteousness is blessedness; but in it Jehovah will be a fortress home, and out of it He will save them. However the teaching of the psalm may need modification in order to coincide with the highest New Testament doctrine of the relation between righteousness and prosperity, these confidences need none. For ever and absolutely they are true: in trouble a stronghold, out of trouble a Saviour, is God to all who cling to Him. Very beautifully the closing verse lingers on its theme, and wreathes its thoughts together, with repetition that tells how sweet they are to the singer: "Jehovah helps them, and *rescues* them; He *rescues* them, ... and saves them." So the measure of the strophe is complete, but the song flows over in an additional clause, which points the path for all who seek such blessedness. Trust is peace. They who take refuge in Jehovah are safe, and their inheritance shall be for ever. That is the psalmist's inmost secret of a blessed life.

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PSALM XXXVIII.

1 Jehovah, not in Thine indignation do Thou rebuke me,
  Nor in Thy hot anger chastise me.
2 For Thine arrows are come down into me,
  And down upon me comes Thy hand.

3 There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thy wrath
  There is no health in my bones because of my sin.
4 For my iniquities have gone over my head;
  As a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

5 My bruises smell foully, they run with matter,
  Because of my folly.
6 I am twisted [with pain]; I am bowed down utterly;
  All the day I drag about in squalid attire.

7 For my loins are full of burning,
  And there is no soundness in my flesh.
8 I am exhausted and crushed utterly;
  I roar for the sighing of my heart.

9 Lord, present to Thee is all my desire,
  And my sighing is not hid from Thee.
10 My heart flutters, my strength has left me,
  And the light of my eyes—even it is no more with me.

11 My lovers and friends stand aloof from my stroke,
  And my near [kin] stand far off.
12 And they who seek after my life set snares [for me],
  And they who desire my hurt speak destruction,
  And meditate deceits all the day.

13 And I, like a deaf man, do not hear,
  And am like one dumb, who opens not his mouth.
14 Yea, I am become like a man who hears not,
  And in whose mouth are no counter-pleas.

15 For for Thee, Jehovah, do I wait;
  Thou, Thou wilt answer, O Lord, my God.
16 For I said, Lest they should rejoice over me,

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[And] when my foot slips, should magnify themselves over me

17 For I am ready to fall,
And my sorrow is continually present to me.
18 For I must declare my guilt,
Be distressed for my sin.

19 And my enemies are lively, they are strong,
(And my enemies without cause are strong?)
And they who wrongfully hate me are many;
20 And, requiting evil for good,
They are my adversaries because I follow good.

21 Forsake me not, Jehovah;
My God, be not far from me.
22 Haste to my help,
O God, my salvation.

This is a long-drawn wail, passionate at first, but gradually calming itself into submission and trust, though never passing from the minor key. The name of God is invoked thrice (vv. 1, 9, 15), and each time that the psalmist looks up his burden is somewhat easier to carry, and some "low beginnings of content" steal into his heart and mingle with his lament. Sorrow finds relief in repeating its plaint. It is the mistake of cold-blooded readers to look for consecution of thought in the cries of a wounded soul; but it is also a mistake to be blind to the gradual sinking of the waves in this psalm, which begins with deprecating God's wrath, and ends with quietly nestling close to Him as "my salvation."

The characteristic of the first burst of feeling is its unbroken gloom. It sounds the depths of darkness, with which easy-going, superficial lives are unfamiliar, but whoever has been down into them will not think the picture overcharged with black. The occasion of the psalmist's deep dejection cannot be gathered from his words. He, like all poets who teach in song what they learn in suffering, translates his personal sorrows into [Ps 377] language fitting for others' pains. The feelings are more important to him and to us than the facts, and we must be content to leave unsettled the question of his circumstances, on which, after all, little depends. Only, it is hard for the present writer, at least, to believe that such a psalm, quivering, as it seems, with agony, is not the genuine cry of a brother's tortured soul, but an utterance invented for a personified nation. The close verbal resemblance of the introductory deprecation of chastisement in anger to Psalm vi. 1 has been supposed to point to a common authorship, and Delitzsch takes both psalms, along with Psalms xxxii., and li. as a series belonging to the time of David's penitence after his great fall from purity. But the resemblance in question would rather favour the supposition of difference of authorship, since quotation is more probable than self-repetition. Jer. x. 23 is by some held to be the original, and either Jeremiah himself or some later singer to have been the author of the psalm. The question of which of two similar passages is source and which is copy is always ticklish. Jeremiah's bent was assimilative, and his prophecies are full of echoes. The priority, therefore, probably lies with one or other of the psalmists, if there are two.

The first part of the psalm is entirely occupied with the subjective aspect of the psalmist's affliction. Three elements are conspicuous: God's judgments, the singer's consciousness of sin, and his mental and probably physical sufferings. Are the "arrows" and crushing weight of God's "hand," which he deprecates in the first verses, the same as the sickness and wounds, whether of mind or body, which he next describes so pathetically? They are generally taken to be so, but the language of this section and the contents of the [Ps 378] remainder of the psalm rather point to a distinction between them. It would seem that there are three stages, not two, as that interpretation would make them. Unspecified calamities, recognised by the sufferer as God's chastisements, have roused his conscience, and its gnawing has superinduced mental and bodily pain. The terribly realistic description of the latter may, indeed, be figurative, but is more probably literal. The reiterated synonyms for God's displeasure in vv. 1, 3, show how all the aspects of that solemn thought are familiar. The first word regards it as an outburst, or explosion, like a charge of dynamite; the second as "glowing, igniting"; the third as effervescent, bubbling like lava in a crater. The metaphors for the effects of this anger in ver. 2 deepen the impression of its terribleness. It is a fearful fate to be the target for God's "arrows," but it is worse to be crushed under the weight of His "hand." The two forms of representation refer to the same facts, but make a climax. The verbs in ver. 2 are from one root, meaning to come down, or to lie upon. In 2 *a* the word is reflexive, and represents the "arrows" as endowed with volition, hurling themselves

down. They penetrate with force proportionate to the distance which they fall, as a meteoric stone buries itself in the ground. Such being the wounding, crushing power of the Divine "anger," its effects on the psalmist are spread out before God, in the remaining part of this first division, with plaintive reiteration. The connection which a quickened conscience discerns between sorrow and sin is strikingly set forth in ver. 3, in which "thine indignation" and "my sin" are the double fountain-heads of bitterness. The quivering frame first felt the power of God's anger, and then the awakened conscience turned inwards and discerned the occasion [Ps 379] of the anger. The three elements which we have distinguished are clearly separated here, and their connection laid bare.

The second of these is the sense of sin, which the psalmist feels as taking all "peace" or well-being out of his "bones," as a flood rolling its black waters over his head, as a weight beneath which he cannot stand upright, and again as foolishness, since its only effect has been, to bring to him not what he hoped to win by it, but this miserable plight.

Then, he pours himself out, with the monotonous repetition so natural to self-pity, in a graphic accumulation of pictures of disease, which may be taken as symbolic of mental distress, but are better understood literally. With the whole, Isa. i. 5, 6, should be compared, nor should the partial resemblances of Isa. liii. be overlooked. No fastidiousness keeps the psalmist from describing offensive details. His body is scourged and livid with parti-coloured, swollen weals from the lash, and these discharge foul-smelling matter. With this compare Isa. liii. 5, "His stripes" (same word). Whatever may be thought of the other physical features of suffering, this must obviously be figurative. Contorted in pain, bent down by weakness, dragging himself wearily with the slow gait of an invalid, squalid in attire, burning with inward fever, diseased in every tortured atom of flesh, he is utterly worn out and broken (same word as "bruised," Isa. liii. 5). Inward misery, the cry of the heart, must have outward expression, and, with Eastern vehemence in utterance of emotions which Western reticence prefers to let gnaw in silence at the roots of life, he "roars" aloud because his heart groans.

This vivid picture of the effects of the sense of personal sin will seem to superficial modern Christianity, [Ps 380] exaggerated and alien from experience; but the deeper a man's godliness, the more will he listen with sympathy, with understanding and with appropriation of such piercing laments as his own. Just as few of us are dowered with sensibilities so keen as to feel what poets feel, in love or hope, or delight in nature, or with power to express the feelings, and yet can recognise in their winged words the heightened expression of our own less full emotions, so the truly devout soul will find, in the most passionate of these wailing notes, the completer expression of his own experience. We must go down into the depths and cry to God out of them, if we are to reach sunny heights of communion. Intense consciousness of sin is the obverse of ardent aspiration after righteousness, and that is but a poor type of religion which has not both. It is one of the glories of the Psalter that both are given utterance to in it in words which are as vital to-day as when they first came warm from the lips of these long dead men. Everything in the world has changed, but these songs of penitence and plaintive deprecation, like their twin bursts of rapturous communion, were "not born for death." Contrast the utter deadness of the religious hymns of all other nations with the fresh vitality of the Psalms. As long as hearts are penetrated with the consciousness of evil done and loved, these strains will fit themselves to men's lips.

Because the psalmist's recounting of his pains was prayer and not soliloquy or mere cry of anguish, it calms him. We make the wound deeper by turning round the arrow in it, when we dwell upon suffering without thinking of God; but when, like the psalmist, we tell all to Him, healing begins. Thus, the second part (vv. 9- [Ps 381] 14) is perceptibly calmer, and though still agitated, its thought of God is more trustful, and silent submission at the close takes the place of the "roaring," the shrill cry of agony which ended the first part. A further variation of tone is that, instead of the entirely subjective description of the psalmist's sufferings in vv. 1-8, the desertion by friends and the hostility of foes, are now the main elements of trial. There is comparative peace for a tortured heart in the thought that all its desire and sighing are known to God. That knowledge is prior to the heart's prayer, but does not make it needless, for by the prayer the conviction of the Divine knowledge has entered the troubled soul, and brought some prelude of deliverance and hope of answer. The devout soul does not argue "Thou knowest, and I need not speak," but "Thou knowest, therefore I tell Thee"; and it is soothed in and after telling. He who begins prayer, by submitting to chastisement and only deprecating the form of it inflicted by "wrath," will pass to the more gracious thought of God as lovingly cognisant of both his desire and his sighing, his wishes and his pains. The burst of the storm is past, when that light begins to break through clouds, though waves still run high.

How high they still run is plain from the immediate recurrence of the strain of recounting the singer's sorrows. This recrudescence of woe after the clear calm of a moment is only too well known to us all in our sorrows. The psalmist returns to speak of his sickness in ver. 10, which is really a picture of syncope or fainting. The heart's action is described by a rare word, which in its root means to go round and round, and is here in an intensive form expressive of violent motion, or possibly is to be regarded as a diminutive rather than an intensive, expressive of the thinner though quicker pulse. Then come collapse of strength and failure of sight. But this echo of the preceding part immediately gives place to the new element in the psalmist's sorrow, arising from the behaviour of friends and foes. The frequent complaint of desertion by friends has to be repeated by most sufferers in this selfish world. They keep far away from his "stroke," says the psalm, using the same word as is employed for leprosy, and as is used in the verb in Isa. liii. 4 ("stricken"). There is a tone of wonder and disappointment in the untranslatable play of language in ver. 11 *b*. "My near relations stand far off." Kin are not always kind. Friends have deserted because foes have beset him. Probably we have here the facts which in the previous part are conceived of as the "arrows" of God.

[Ps 38:2]

Open and secret enemies laying snares for him, as for some hunted wild creature, eagerly seeking his life, speaking "destructions" as if they would fain kill him with their words, and perpetually whispering lies about him, were recognised by him as instruments of God's judgment, and evoked his consciousness of sin, which again led to actual disease. But the bitter schooling led to something else more blessed—namely, to silent resignation. Like David, when he let Shimei shriek his curses at him from the hillside and answered not, the psalmist is deaf and dumb to malicious tongues. He will speak to God, but to man he is silent, in utter submission of will.

Isaiah liii. 7 gives the same trait in the perfect Sufferer, a faint foreshadowing of whom is seen in the psalmist; and 1 Peter ii. 23 bids all who would follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, like Him open not their mouths when reviled, but commit themselves to the righteous Judge.

[Ps 38:3]

Once more the psalmist lifts his eyes to God, and the third invocation of the Name is attended by an increase of confidence. In the first part, "Jehovah" was addressed; in the second the designation "Lord" was used; in the third, both are united and the appropriating name "my God" is added. In the closing invocation (v. 22-3) all three reappear, and each is the plea of a petition. The characteristics of these closing verses are three: humble trust, the marshalling of its reasons, and the combination of acknowledgment of sin and professions of innocence. The growth of trust is very marked, if the first part, with its synonyms for God's wrath and its deprecation of unmeasured chastisement and its details of pain, be compared with the quiet hope and assurance that God will answer, and with that great name "my Salvation." The singer does not indeed touch the heights of triumphant faith; but he who can grasp God as his, and can be silent because he is sure that God will speak by delivering deeds for him and can call Him his Salvation, has climbed far enough to have the sunshine all round him, and to be clear of the mists among which his song began. The best reason for letting the enemy speak on unanswered is the confidence that a mightier voice will speak. "But thou wilt answer, Lord, for me" may well make us deaf and dumb to temptations and threats, calumnies and flatteries.

How does this confidence spring in so troubled a heart? The fourfold "For" beginning each verse from 15 to 18 weaves them all into a chain. The first gives the reason for the submissive silence as being quiet confidence; and the succeeding three may be taken as either dependent on each other, or, as is perhaps better, as co-ordinate and all-assigning reasons for that confidence. Either construction yields worthy and natural meanings. If the former be adopted, trust in God's undertaking of the silent sufferer's cause is based upon the prayer which broke his silence. Dumb to men, he had breathed to God his petition for help, and had buttressed it with this plea "Lest they rejoice over me," and he had feared that they would, because he knew that he was ready to fall and had ever before him his pain, and that because he felt himself forced to lament and confess his sin. But it seems to yield a richer meaning, if the "For's" be regarded as co-ordinate. They then become a striking and instructive example of faith's logic, the ingenuity of pleading which finds encouragements in discouragements. The suppliant is sure of answer because he has told God his fear, and yet again because he is so near falling and therefore needs help so much, and yet again because he has made a clean breast of his sin. Trust in God's help, distrust of self, consciousness of weakness, and penitence make anything possible rather than that the prayer which embodies them should be flung up to an unanswering God. They are prevalent pleas with Him in regard to which He will not be "as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth there is no reply." They are grounds of assurance to him who prays.

[Ps 38:4]

The juxtaposition of consciousness of sin in ver. 18 with the declaration that love of good was the cause of being persecuted, brings out the twofold attitude, in regard to God and men, which a devout soul may

permissibly and sometimes must necessarily assume. There may be the truest sense of sinfulness, along with a clear-hearted affirmation of innocence in regard to men, and a conviction that it is good and good will to them, not evil in the sufferer, which makes him the butt of hatred. Not less instructive is the double view of the same facts presented in the beginning and end of this psalm. They were to the psalmist first regarded as God's chastisement in wrath, His "arrows" and heavy "hand," because of sin. Now they are men's enmity, because of his love of good. Is there not an entire contradiction between these two views of suffering, its cause and source? Certainly not, but rather the two views differ only in the angle of vision, and may be combined, like stereoscopic pictures, into one rounded, harmonious whole. To be able so to combine them is one of the rewards of such pleading trust as breathes its plaintive music through this psalm, and wakes responsive notes in devout hearts still.

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